



By Shimesaba  
Illustrated by Booota  
Translated by yuNS

# I Shaved. Then I Brought a High School Girl Home.





"How does it  
taste?"

吉田  
YOSHIDA

26 year old salaryman  
working for a big IT  
company.

沙優  
SAYU

A runaway high school  
girl. After meeting  
Yoshida, they began  
living together.



"Say, Yoshida-kun—  
Haven't you been going home on time recently?  
Did you find a girlfriend or something?"



後藤愛依梨  
GOTO AIRI

Yoshida superior.  
Her refined manners and care for  
others make her a character who  
is idolized within the company.  
The subject of Yoshida's  
unrequited love of 5 years.



"I wouldn't want anyone other than you,  
Yoshida-senpai, to be in charge of my training."

## 三島柚葉

MISHIMA YUZUHA

A fresh recruit who Yoshida is responsible for training. She often makes mistakes, but always manages to slip away from trouble with a smile that people find hard to dislike.



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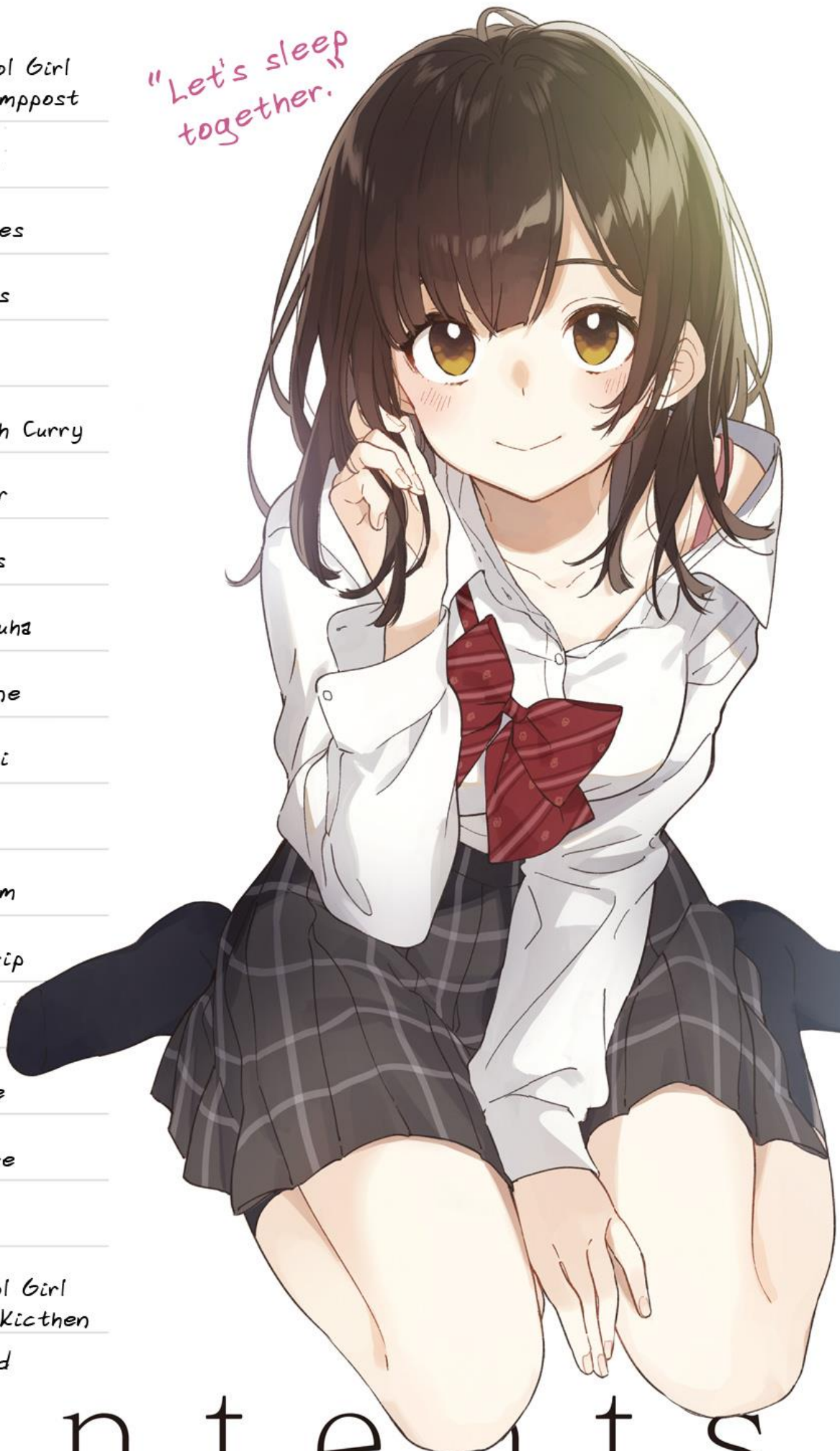
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# c o n t e n t s

Illust: Boota  
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@ [www.crimsonmagic.me](http://www.crimsonmagic.me)

Office worker Yoshida has been crushing on his coworker, Airi Gotou, for five years. Despite finally scoring a date with her, his confession is promptly rejected. Drunk and disappointed, he stumbles home, only to find a high school girl sitting on the side of the road. The girl, needing a place to stay the night, attempts to seduce Yoshida. Despite rejecting her advances, he nevertheless invites her into his apartment.

The next morning, the girl, introducing herself as Sayu Ogiwara, reveals that she has run away from Hokkaido all the way to Tokyo. During her six-month spree, she continually traded sexual favors for a roof over her head. Yoshida, however, remains unswayed by her seduction. Instead, he has her do a different kind of work — one that entails washing dishes and doing laundry. And so, a touching relationship between a heartbroken adult and a runaway high school girl begins.

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# PROLOGUE

I was heartbroken.

There's this female coworker two years older than me, Gotou-san.

Gotou-san is a very caring person. She had treated me well during my training period. Her smile was graceful and her considerate personality was a great mental boon for a corporate slave like myself.

"If she already had a boyfriend, she should've said so at the beginning..."

I already lost count of how many beers I've had. Hashimoto, who sat across from me, smiled as if it were someone else's problem.

Yes, we had gone on a date; Gotou-san and I, just the two of us. After five years of working together, I finally worked up the courage to ask her for a date. She quickly accepted, and I went on the date filled with hopes and dreams. *This might work out!* I had thought. We had went to the zoo together. To be honest, I spent more time looking at Gotou-san from the side than I did animals, with the occasional glance at her chest.

Anyway, in a burst of vigor and enthusiasm, I convinced myself that I could not let this chance slip by. After our zoo date, I brought her to a fancy French restaurant for dinner. I don't remember the taste of the food.

Then, after a long wait, I asked her:

“Would you like to come to my place after this?”

Since we’re both adults, she should have immediately understood what I meant. As I looked at her with a mix of anticipation and unease, she showed an awkward smile.

Then she shook her head.

“Keep this a secret from everyone else at the company. Actually, I have a boyfriend.”

Translated by yuNS @ [www.crimsonmagic.me](http://www.crimsonmagic.me)

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==If you can see this you’re reading on a rehosted version of this translation!

“THEN WHY THE HELL DID YOU COME ON THE DATE!!!”

“Calm down Yoshida, that’s the sixth time today.”

“I’ll say it a thousand times if I have to...”

“I don’t want to hear that a thousand times.”

Hashimoto forced a smile on his face as he watched me gulp down another beer.

“You should really stop.”

“How am I supposed to calm down if I don’t drink!?”

“You only snapped after you drank. You’re not really making any progress this way.”



It's only because it's someone else's problem that Hashimoto could say that. I wouldn't be able to take it anymore if I didn't drink.

Immediately after I was rejected, I sat down on a bench in a small park, stupefied, with my head hung low.

From what she told me, it seemed like she had a boyfriend since five years ago.

Basically, she already had a boyfriend even before I knew her.

"This is so stupid..."

For five years, I had a crush on a girl with a boyfriend.

"I was fooled... Give me back my feelings..."

I hung my head even lower after half-heartedly pushing the responsibility on someone else for this incident. I could feel anger, more so than sorrow, beginning to simmer over inside my chest.

Noticing that, I gave Hashimoto a call.

"I thought it was urgent business, but you just wanted someone to complain to."

"It's fine isn't it? I always listen to you bragging about your wife."

"I wasn't really bragging. It's more like grumbling."

"That's not what it sounded like to me!!"

After a few words, Hashimoto came out to meet me and started listening to my idle complaints.

"Agh... I really thought it would work out, you know?"

“Not with her boyfriend around. Plus it has been five years for them already.”

“I really wanted to stroke those soft looking boobs too!”

“You’re being loud, dumbass.”

I could see the forced smile of the office lady drinking next to me in the corner of my vision. I briefly felt her gaze on me, but who cares? Due to the alcohol, I couldn’t feel any shame at all.

“To think that those hands that patted my shoulders, and that mouth that told me ‘good work today’ have all already been used really burns my heart...”

“Your delusions are bit too defined, aren’t they?”

“If I was going to be dumped anyway, I’d have liked to have had done it at least once.”

“I feel like it’d have been even more shocking for you then.”

After drinking and chatting, I’ve become thoroughly aware that I’ve been thinking of Gotou-san in a rather perverse manner. However, it really can’t be helped. No matter how hard I try, at my age, it’s impossible for me separate my feelings of love and lust. That’s more or less the gist of it.

“Well, it’s quite a nice feeling to have one of my long-term suspicions cleared up.”

“Suspicious?”

“I mean, I thought it was impossible for someone as pretty as Gotou-san to not have a boyfriend. Not to mention, she’s already 28, isn’t



she? It's around the age where women start to get concerned about marriage."

"That's right. It's why I thought that if I gave it a little push it would all work out... I didn't know that she already had a boyfriend... Ah, lady! I'd like a beer refill!"

As I rose my hand and ordered another drink, Hashimoto let out a sigh.

"You're drinking too much. I'm only keeping you company till the last train okay?"

"I know already."

"No matter how cruddy you feel I'm not going to stay and look after you alright?"

"Of course, of course."

I brushed off Hashimoto's warning and continued to drown myself in beer. I could feel myself being temporarily released from the suffering of being heartbroken.

\*

"Ouf... Gah... U-Ueeeghh..."

I leaned my head over the roadside gutter and barfed.

I was feeling fine when I had parted with Hashimoto and jumped on the taxi, but the peculiar smell of the taxi coupled with my intoxication quickly made my stomach wrench. I wanted to throw up.

Moments after I got off the taxi, I hurled. The meat and vegetables which I had stuffed down my stomach came through.

After a few steps, I threw up again. This time, fluid that reeked of alcohol came out.

Then, when I arrived at an alley near my house, I threw up one more time. This time, some sort of yellow fluid came out. This sucks.

“Damn... Gotou....”

It’s all her fault.

I wobbly rose to my feet. After I took a few steps, I quickly felt the urge to throw up once again. However, I didn’t feel like there was anything more in my stomach to expunge. So I didn’t drop on my knees.

I continued to walk while resisting the urge to throw up. Soon, a lamppost at an intersection came into view. A right turn here and I’ll be almost home.

I absentmindedly stared at the lamppost as I walked. Soon, I noticed that something felt out of place. It wasn’t the lamppost itself, but beneath it. There was a person squatting there.

...A drunkard?

It’s fairly common to see people lying on the ground outside the stations in the city area but this is the first time that I’ve seen someone squatting on the road outside my home.

On a closer look, it became evident that the person was female; not to mention, they appeared to be a high-school girl. Why? It’s because this person was wearing a ‘school uniform’ consisting of a navy-blue blazer and gray checkered-skirt. With the way she was sitting on the floor with her hands around her knees, I could see her underwear. It’s black.

...It doesn't seem like cosplay.

I quickly came to that judgment. In 'certain streets' in the city, I often see girls dressed as high schoolers trying to pull customers. Compared to that though, this girl seemed too 'wholesome'.

I took a glance at my watch. It's already one past midnight. What's a high school girl doing out here at this time?

"Hey, you. JK."[1]

The high-school girl with her head buried between her knees and her chest looked up and stared at me with a vacant gaze.

"What the heck are you doing out here. Go home already."

Hearing what I said, the high-school girl blinked a few times, before saying:

"The trains have stopped for today anyway."

"So you're planning to stay here till morning?"

"Well, I guess it might be a little cold out."

"So what's your plan?"

The high-school girl groaned and tilted her head.

Now that I look closely, she has a fairly cute face. Her hair is a shade of brown close to black and her eyes have long slits. Her nose line is quite pretty as well, with a round tip. Her face was somewhere between 'beautiful' and 'cute'. She's cute, but she's not my type.

The high-school girl straightened her head and looked straight at me.



“Uncle, let me stay at your place for the night.”

“Uncle... You—”

It was somewhat revolting to be called ‘uncle’ by a high-school girl in such a lighthearted manner. I raised my voice.

“In what world is there a high-school girl that follows someone they call ‘uncle’ home!?”

“Well it’s not like I have anywhere else to go tonight.”

“If you go to the station then there’s karaoke or internet café rooms where you can stay, aren’t there?”

“I don’t have any money.”

“So you want me to let you stay at my place without compensation?”

Hearing what I said, the girl went “Ahh—” before nodding her head in some sort of understanding.

“You can do *that* to me if you let me stay.”

I was left at a loss for words.

Are high-school girls these days all like this? No, absolutely not. This girl is just strange.

“If you meant that as a joke, it’s not funny.”

“I’m not joking. It’s fine by me.”

“Then allow me to tell you that I have no interest in brats.”

“Hmm?”

The girl nodded, then said with a wide smile.

“Then, just let me stay.”

“...”

I was again left at a loss for words.





“Sorry for intruding~”

In the end, I let her come. If I had decided to dilly-dally on the street and someone saw me, I’d probably have found myself in hot water. I can just chase her out tomorrow morning.

“Listen. It’s you that said you wanted to stay, got it?”

“Yup. That’s right.”

“I didn’t kidnap you or anything, okay!?”

“Haha, that’s hilarious. I got it.”

This is no laughing matter. In this time and age, if there’s trouble between a man and a woman, the man will be the one viewed in the wrong most of the time. Even if I had taken this girl under my custody under a mutual agreement, it might end up being treated as an abduction. There have been examples of this in the past.

“Your room is kind of dirty.”

“How clean can a single-man’s room be?”

“I’ve seen some before.”

Hearing what the high school girl said, I hurriedly turned around to face her.

She looked rather indifferent as she tilted her head in puzzlement.

“What?”

“...Nothing.”

That has nothing to do with me.

No matter what kind of life this girl has been leading until now, what kind of experiences she's had, it has nothing to do with me. I'll chase her out come tomorrow morning. That's all I have to do.

I laid down on the bed with my outdoor clothes still on.

Too much has happened today. My body is already at its limit. With the added help of alcohol, I can already feel my consciousness fading.

"Ah, are you going to sleep already?"

"Yeah... Do whatever you want."

I mumbled in reply. The high-school girl sat down on the bed.

"You don't want to do it?"

"Don't make me say this too many times but... I have no interest in brats."

"That so?"

I could feel the drowsiness settling in. As I closed my eyes and let go of my consciousness, the high-school girl's voice struck my eardrums once again.

"Is there something you want?"

If I had to say, I want you to be quiet. Also, spare me from the fate of my wallet disappearing when I wake up.

However, I didn't manage to say that.

I'm feeling too sleepy. Neither my body nor my mouth had any desire to move.

However, in my fuddled mind, there was one thing that I strongly desired.

“Miso soup.”

By the time I realized it, those words had already slipped from my mouth.

“I want to drink miso soup made by a girl.”

With that, my consciousness finally faded.

# VOLUME 1 – CHAPTER 1

A delicious scent tickled my nostrils.

“Hm...?”

I sluggishly opened my eyes. It was already quite bright outside. Not only that, judging by the sheer amount of light flowing in from the south, it appeared to be well past the morning hours.

“What time is it...”

I repeatedly blinked my blurry eyes and peeked at the watch on my left arm which I had left on the night before.

“Oh god, it’s already 2 o’clock...”

Scrunching my brows, I sat up from the bed.

I don’t remember at what time I got home, but judging from my clothes I must’ve been too tired to change before going to sleep.

Thank god it’s a rest day. If I had overslept this much on a work day, it’d have been no laughing matter.

...Anyway, what’s that delicious smell? I turned my eyes towards the source to investigate.

In my vision appeared a high-school girl.

It was all too sudden. My mind froze over.



The high-school girl in question stared at me for a brief moment, before waving a hand.

“Good mornin’”

“What the hell are you!!?”

I flew out of the bed and yelled. The high-school girl blankly stared at me for a moment and blinked a few times.

“Even if you ask that... I’m nothing else but a high-school girl.”

“What’s a JK doing in my house!?”

The high-school girl forced a smile.

“I got the go-ahead to stay so I stayed.”

“And who said you could stay?”

“You did, uncle.”

“I’m not an uncle.”

This time, she let out an inappropriate laugh.

“Of course you’re an uncle. That’s hilarious.”

“No it’s not. Anyway, what’s that smell? What are you making?”

The high-school girl standing in the room’s kitchen stepped aside, revealing the steaming pot on the stove behind her. I opened the lid, and found miso soup in-progress.

“... Miso soup.”

“I made it.”

“Don’t go around making miso soup in other people’s houses, would you.”

Hearing what I said, the high-school girl let out a long sigh.

“What? The heck are you sighing for?”

“Didn’t you tell me to make this uncle?”

“I’m not an uncle.”

Shrugging her shoulders in annoyance, the high-school girl replied in a somewhat demanding tone.

“If you’re not an uncle then what am I supposed to call you?”

“Call me whatever you want, just get out of here.”

How can she be so shameless when she’s in someone else’s home? Not to mention, why the heck is she making miso soup without so much as my permission?

“Do you not remember anything? I was in a pinch yesterday night under the lamppost when you called out to me, uncle.”

“Like I said, I’m not an unc... Wait, lamppost? Yesterday night?”

Saying that, memories of yesterday seemed to rise to the surface. I remember the long barfing trek. After that, under the lamppost near my house was...

“Ah, black panties was it?”

“What’s with that way of remembering? That’s kinda gross, just saying.”

“You were the JK sitting with your arms around your knees, weren’t you?”

“Yup.” Chapter from [www. crimsonmagic.me](http://www.crimsonmagic.me)

My memories were gradually returning to me.

I drank with Hashimoto without any regard for what came afterward. Then, I found this girl on my way home.

After that... What the heck happened after that?

I don’t really remember anything after I brought this high-school girl home. I could feel the cold sweat forming on my back.

“... I didn’t assault you or anything, did I?”

In response, the high-school girl merely stared in my direction with a somewhat graven expression.

No reply. I could feel the sweat gushing from my body.

It wouldn’t be wrong to say that yesterday was the most drunken moment in the entirety of my life. I was in absolute despair. It wouldn’t be all that strange if something did end up happening.

“...Hey, say something would you.”

As the cold sweat began to trickle, the high-school girl suddenly went “Pfft” and burst into a laugh.

“Ahaha, no no, of course not.”

“What the heck was that pause for then! I was gonna crap myself!”

“I just wanted to tease you a lil’ bit, hehe.”

With her shoulders shaking in laughter, the high-school girl continued.

“You know, I intended to let you do whatever you wanted in exchange for a place to stay, but you were the one who said ‘I’ve got no interest in brats’, you see?”

“Shit really?” Translated by yuNS @ yuNS Translations

Well done, yesterday’s me.

If I had gone with the flow and laid my hands on this high-school girl, myself from 24 hours ago would’ve turned my current self into minced meat. Despite how drunk I was, I seem to have managed to keep some level of prudence.

“That’s why I asked you ‘Is there something you want?’”

With that, she went ‘pfft’ and burst into inappropriate laughter again.

“And then you said ‘I want you to make me miso soup everyday’, you know?”

“Isn’t that the same as proposing!?”

I’m absolutely certain. No matter how drunk I was, I would never say that.

Judging by the high-school girl’s comical laughter, it seems that I’ve been played.

“Hey uncle.”

“I’m not an uncle.”

“What’s your name?”

“... It’s Yoshida.”

The high-school girl let out an audible ‘hmm—’.

“Yoshida-san... Mm, that’s sorta fitting.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Your face has a very ‘Yoshida-san’ feel to it, is what I mean.”

A very ‘Yoshida-san’ feel? That’s the first time I’ve heard such a thing. Is it some sense unique to high-school girls? To be honest though, I don’t really feel like going along with that.

“Are you not gonna ask for mine?”

“Not really interested.”

“Ehh~, ask wouldn’t you?”

I’ve been completely caught in this high-school girl’s pace.

To be fair though, it’s kind of tiring to keep calling her ‘high-school girl’ even in my mind. I suppose it’s fine to ask her for her name.

“Okay, then what is it?”

Hearing that, the high-school girl nodded her head in satisfaction, and revealed her name.



“It’s Sayu.”

“Sayu.” Translated by yuNS @ [www.crimsonmagic.me](http://www.crimsonmagic.me)

“In kanji, that would be the ‘Sa’ from ‘Bishamon’[1] and the ‘Yu’ from ‘Yasashii’[2]”

“This is the first time I’ve heard someone use Bishamon to describe the kanji.”

Sayu revealed an innocent smile. Using a ladle, she scooped the miso soup from the pot and filled a bowl that she had taken from somewhere without asking.

“Hey, how long are you planning to keep this up?”

“Hmm—”

Hearing that, she pressed the bowl of miso soup in her hands in my direction.

“Well, just chow down for now. We can talk after that.”

“Why are you the one in control here?”

At about the same time as I answered, my stomach released a loud growl.

Now that I think about it, I threw up everything that I ate last night. I also slept past noon, so my stomach is completely empty.

Hearing the echoes from my stomach, Sayu’s lips curled knowingly.

“Aren’t you gonna eat?”

“... Alright.”

I reluctantly received the bowl from Sayu.

Expectedly, I couldn't bring myself to say 'I'll eat, so get out of here.'

# VOLUME 1 – CHAPTER 2

“You got rejected, Yoshida-san? Poor you~”

As I took a sip of the miso soup, Sayu said that as if it had nothing to do with her. Wait, actually, that does have nothing to do with her.

I had intended to drive her away as soon as possible, but for some reason she began prying into what had happened yesterday, and for some reason I answered honestly.

“There’s no way that that’s how you actually feel.”

“Of course I do! Being rejected sucks, doesn’t it? Not like I would know though.”

“I see...”

I took another sip of the miso soup that Sayu made as we chatted idly.

Now that I think about it, it’s been a while since I drank non-instant miso soup. It’s strangely delicious. The salty flavor of the soup was spot-on and the fact that this was ‘homemade’ left a stinging sensation in my chest.

Ah, I really wanted to drink Gotou-san’s homemade miso soup.

“How does it taste?” Sayu asked, interrupting my train of thought about Gotou-san.

“A-Ahh... Well.”

“Well?”

“All things considered, it’s great.”

“All things considered hm?”

Sayu cracked up a little, before glancing at me mischievously.

“Uhm, Gotou-san, was it? You wanted to eat miso soup made by her, right?”

“...No, not really.”

It’s uncomfortable to be seen through so easily. I hastily turned my eyes away from her, to which she once again laughed out loud.

“Bulleye. You’re so easy to understand.”

“You really are a troublesome JK.”

I scowled in a conspicuous manner, but Sayu seemed to have found that funny as well. Her shoulder trembled as she started giggling.

In any case, talking to her was somewhat nauseating, or perhaps embarrassing? I don’t really understand.

She had full control of the conversation. I merely followed along. Letting her seize the initiative didn’t make me feel too good.

“Hey, Yoshida-san.”

“Woah-“

The voice had come from right beside my ear, causing me to jump in surprise. While I was lost in thought, Sayu had somehow managed to

put her head right beside mine. She stared into my eyes and brought her face closer.

“Do you want me to comfort you?”

I could feel her breath on my skin as she said that. Goosebumps rose from my body.

“Didn’t I tell you to cut that out already?”

Her lips scrunched as I pushed her away from me.

“Ehh~, you’re not being honest at all.”

“Idiot. I’d have to be a crazy and miserable man to be comforted by a high-school girl with a scrawny body like yours.”

Hearing what I said, Sayu went “ehh~” and suddenly started unbuttoning her blazer, which she then abruptly threw aside.

“I think my boobs are pretty big though.” She said as she puffed out her chest.

Although my mind objected against looking at it with all it’s might, my eyes found themselves fixated on what was being presented under the shirt. I’m a guy, after all.

“W-Well, you might be pretty big for a high-school girl... But Gotou-san is even more impressive.”

“Haha, more impressive you say.”

Sayu giggled and contracted her chest, returning to her previous hunchbacked position.

“What cup is she then?” the girl asked as if it were nothing special.

W-What cup... That's, what cup is she...?

"I-I don't really know, but around F probably."

"F? That's the same as me then."

"Hah!? You're also an F!?"

"Yup. If it looks even bigger than these then it's got to be a G or H, right?"

H-cup... What's an H-cup?

Images of gravure models and their supposed cup sizes flashed through in my mind. 'Just once is fine, I'd like to grab an H-cup'. That, I won't say.

"But you know~"

Sayu opened her mouth.

"Isn't an F that you can touch better than an H that you can't?"

Saying that, she once again stuck out her chest and tilted her head.





I sighed as naturally as breathing.

“Hey, what do you get out of seducing me? What are you gonna do if I really pushed you down?”

“Eh? Then we can just do it normally. I think you’re pretty good looking, so I’m not really against it.”

“...You want to do it with me?”

Hearing that, Sayu blinked her eyes a few times.

“No, that’s not really what I meant.”

“THEN WHAT THE HELL DO YOU WANT!!”

I exclaimed from my seat without thinking. I just couldn’t understand the reasoning behind her irregular behavior.

“If you don’t want to do it then don’t press it! There are guys out there that would go for it you know?”

Sayu raised her eyebrows and tilted her head.

“Isn’t it the opposite?”

“What is?”

“There’s a girl who’s fine with doing it right before your eyes. Why won’t you do it?”

“Huh...?”

A breath that couldn’t be called a sigh nor a confused yelp escaped my throat. Were our ages too far apart for me to understand what she meant? No, that’s not quite it.

I looked at Sayu as if looking at an alien. She showed a wry smile in response.

“What’s the matter? You’re the weird one aren’t you? All this time, no one has treated me this considerately without some demand.”

“...”

Her declaration left me speechless. I thought she was just a typical small-scale high-school runaway, but judging by what she just said, she hasn’t gone home for months?

As for how she managed to find shelter all this time, the thought alone was distasteful enough.

“...God, how stupid can you be.”

I muttered under my breath. I squatted down in front of Sayu, level with her eyes.

“Where did you come from? Show me your student ID.”

Hearing that, Sayu’s expression turned gloomy for a brief moment.

In the next moment though, she bore a bright smile. She stuck a hand in her skirt pocket and retrieved a foldable wallet. Opening it, she took out her student ID and presented it to me. I took it from her.

“Ah, Asahikawa...”

My mouth gaped in surprise.

The ID wrote ‘Asahikawa 6th High School, 2nd Year’.

“You came all the way from Hokkaido? Alone?”

“Yup.”

“When did you leave Hokkaido?”

“About half a year ago I guess?”

“You haven’t gone home for half a year?”

This was the center of Tokyo, way too far for a lone high-schooler from Hokkaido.

“Did you tell your parents?”

“Nope.”

“Then hurry up and go home stupid...”

After that, I stopped.

Sayu, who had been acting quite frivolous until now, bore a rather gloomy expression.

Her gaze seemed settle on somewhere far away.

“It’s alright, they’re probably better off without me.”

“How do you know that?”

“I just do.”

As she answered, I could see a muddle of loneliness and resignation surface in her gaze.

I felt a prickling sensation in my chest.

“I’m out of money you see? So I have to do what I can to stay in someone else’s home. That’s why I—”

“What do you mean by ‘What I can’?”

“...”

Sayu hesitated to continue.

I could feel my stomach curl in anger, which was directed to no one in particular.

“What the hell do you take me for huh?”

I found myself blurting out.

“I don’t know about the assholes you’ve met until now, but I don’t have a speck of interest in your body.”

“Then...” TL from [www . crimsonmagic. me](http://www.crimsonmagic.me)

“You don’t want to go home, you don’t want to go to school. Just what are you living for then?”

Hearing what I said, her eyebrows scrunched in distress.

“That’s why I’ll find someone who’ll let me stay...”

“What are you planning to do if I chased you out?”

“I-I’ll somehow find the next person.”

“‘Somehow’, what do you mean by somehow?”

“That’s...” TL by yuNS

Taking in my words, Sayu seemed to have arrived at an impasse as her own words came to a halt.

I don't think that there's any normal thought process that would make one arrive at the conclusion of seducing simple and unknown men. No, at this point, it's impossible for me to tell what 'normal' really is.

A feeling that I couldn't differentiate into anger or sadness whirled within my chest. To shake this feeling off, I resolutely declared.

"Then work."

"Work??"

"You heard me. You're a kid that dropped out from school, right? Everyone lives by working and earning their wages."

"B-but—"

Sayu then said in a soft voice that was unimaginable from her carefree attitude moments earlier.

"What I can earn from a part-time job isn't enough to pay rent."

Well, she's right on that point. Anyhow, there's no place that would allow her to stay for a few months until she can afford to pay up, but it's not like she can live out on the streets either.

"Then you can stay here while you work that out."

"Eh?"

"I said you can stay here."

Hearing what I said, Sayu repeatedly blinked her eyes in disbelief.

“B-but I haven’t given you anything Yoshida-san.”

“Don’t give me such nonsense. I don’t want anything that you have. “

I grimaced and continued.

“‘I don’t have any money! I don’t have anywhere to stay! Then let’s seduce a man!’ That’s what you’ve been thinking, right? Listen, I’m gonna knock some sense into that downright retarded brain of yours, you hear me?”

“Why do you keep calling me stupid—”

“It’s ‘cause you’re stupid, stupid! You’re just a spoiled brat without a sense of value.”

Sayu gulped as she took in what I said.

Looking head on, she really is cute.

Why did such a thought go round and round in my mind? Is it because I never had a proper youth? Because I never properly fell in love?

“You don’t have anywhere to stay, right?”

“Mm.”

“Then you can stay here.”

“...Mm.”

“Okay then. First off, you can do all the chores in the house. That’ll be your job for now.”

Hearing that, Sayu’s eyes seemed to pop in surprise.



“Hey, I was thinking that I could go get a part-time job.”

“You can do that in the future. For now, adjusting the paces of our lives to one another’s comes first. Letting you run rampant will be troubling.”

Sayu’s mouth opened and closed a few times, as she tried to say something.

After waiting a while in this manner, she finally spoke.

“So it’s okay for me to stay forever?”

“Forever is a bit much. You can stay until you’ve had enough of being a runaway.”

“... So you mean I can stay until then?”

I was unsure as to how to answer that.

Based on our last few minutes of conversation, I could tell that this girl was spoiled beyond belief.

She seduced men and lived in their homes, wandering from place to place. Although it may have been even harder than that, there must’ve been a more wholesome path that she could’ve taken.

To be used in lecherous acts by men she didn’t even like. Personally, I think that is much, much harder than mere physical labor, but perhaps such feelings had become jaded after all this time.

If I tell her that ‘you can stay as long as you like’, won’t she possibly end up staying for several years?

Choosing my words carefully, I finally replied.

“At the very least, I’ll leave you be until that spoilt nature of yours is fixed up.”

Sayu, somewhat taken aback, meekly nodded her head.

“O-Okay...”

I exhaled loudly and sat down.

It’s been a while since I’ve gotten so hot-headed. To be honest, I have no right to be lecturing others.

I grasped the bowl of miso soup on the table and took another sip.

“Man, it’s already cold.”

Even though it’s cold, the miso soup Sayu made is still quite tasty.

“Ah, that’s right.”

I raised my head and looked in Sayu’s direction.

“W-What.”

Saying replied whilst avoiding my gaze.

Her commanding attitude a while ago had completely dissipated.

I pointed a finger at her and declared.

“Next time you try to seduce me, I’m kicking you out.”

“I-I won’t try that anymore...”

Thus began the strange cohabitation of a 26 year old salaryman and a runaway high school girl.

Thinking back on it, my thoughts on how hard it would be to live together with a 'high school girl' had been far too naïve.

# VOLUME 1 – CHAPTER 3

“Eh, that’s pretty bad, isn’t it?” Hashimoto asked me.

Well, that was a normal reaction.

“Can’t say I was expecting otherwise.”

“Yeah, it’s pretty bad.” Hashimoto repeated.

Hashimoto called out to me during my afternoon break after I bought a drink. Going with the flow, I talked to him about what happened with Sayu.

I couldn’t help but feel that this was too big of a problem to be keeping to myself.

Despite his attitude, Hashimoto was quite tight-lipped. I doubt he would disclose this to anyone else.

“Did she show up in the missing persons list?”

I shook my head in response.

“I was curious about that too. So, after she went to sleep I secretly searched her name up.”

“And?”

“There was nothing on her.”

“I see...”

Hashimoto placed a hand on his chin and twisted his head.

“So in short, she’s a high school girl whose circumstances are completely unknown...”

“After giving this some thought, I think I have gotten myself into a really bad situation, haven’t I ?”

“You don’t need to think to know that this is pretty bad.”

“Oh, what’s pretty bad?”

I jumped out of my seat in surprise.

While the two of us were wrenching our necks about the problem at hand, a voice suddenly interrupted us from behind. Turning around, I saw Gotou-san, who carried a gleeful smile.

“Aah, Gotou-san...”

She had flat-out rejected me a few days ago. Despite that though, her smile when she looked at me was no different from before.

“It’s nothing serious, really.”

Since I couldn’t find the words to reply, Hashimoto bit the bullet in my place.

“I ordered something fairly expensive online, but I made a mistake and ordered two of it instead. I’ve heard that it’s possible to cancel the order, but I don’t know how to do so, so it’s somewhat troubling.”

He casually and calmly told a lie.

Hashimoto really is a shrewd and capable person.

“That’s quite concerning indeed. The two of you looked rather worried so I was wondering what was up.”

With a chuckle, Gotou-san casually waved goodbye to the two of us.

“Don’t forget to get lunch, you two. If you two don’t head out soon, afternoon break will end before you two can get back.”

“Roger that, we’ll head out soon.”

Hashimoto waved back with a smile.

As for me, I merely saw Gotou-san off with a forced smile.

“...Can’t say I expected you to speak up.”

“What’s that supposed to mean! What am I supposed to say to someone who just rejected me anyway!?”

“You could try to greet her properly at the very least.”

Hashimoto sighed and rose from his seat.

“Let’s get going.”

“Alright...”

Following Hashimoto, I rose from my seat.

Ah, how was Gotou-san able to call out to me so naturally?

Even though I just got rejected, I couldn’t help but admire her.

The combination of black skirt and jacket suited her well and the vertical-striped blue shirt was not only stylish, but rather lascivious.

Her slightly wavy brown hair and the mild application of lip-gloss gave her a somewhat sophisticated appeal.

Hot damn. To be honest, I don't think I'll be getting over her anytime soon.

Most of all—

“Her boobs are huge, aren't they...”

“Yoshida, you're thinking out loud.”

\*

I ended up clocking two hours of overtime.

By the time I had arrived at the station closest to my home, it was already 9pm.

“Did she eat already...?”

Sayu, who was currently at home, came to mind.

She didn't have any money, so I gave her 1000 yen, which should've been enough for lunch. She might be feeling hungry around now if she hadn't eaten dinner yet.

On my way home, I stopped by the convenience store and bought two suitable meals.

As I quickly paced towards home, I recalled the advice that Hashimoto gave me this afternoon.

*“Don’t get too invested in her circumstances, alright? Before something bad happens, it’d be best you return her to her guardians.”*

I get what he meant, but—

*“It’s alright, they’re probably happy that I’m gone.”*

The expression of having given up on everything that Sayu bore when she said that was etched into my mind.

“You’re still a high school brat. Don’t make such a face.”

While murmuring that, I rushed home.

Translated by yuNS

\*

Site: [www . crimsonmagic . me](http://www.crimsonmagic.me)

I unlocked and opened the door.

A delicious aroma drifted through the air.

In the kitchen, a small space in the corridor leading to the living room, Sayu quickly turned and thrust the ladle in her hand towards me.[1]

“Ah.” Translated by yuNS

Realizing that it was just me, she opened her mouth and said:

“Welcome home, daddy?”

“Please don’t, that’s kinda revolting.”



To be honest, I'm a bit relieved.

I had been a tad bit worried that she might've passed out from hunger, but she was energetic enough to crack a few jokes.

"Do you normally come back this late?"

"No, just had some overtime today."

"And do you have overtime once in a while?"

"No, every day."

"So you normally do come back this late."

I took off my shoes whilst I chatted with Sayu. Then I went down the corridor and peeked into the pot, finding miso soup inside. The pot was bubbling and steaming. By the looks of it, it seemed freshly cooked.

"Miso soup again?"

"I mean, you like it don't you?"

"Did I ever say that?"

As I tilted my head in puzzlement, Sayu cackled a few times and answered.

"Just before you nodded off yesterday, you said 'I want to drink miso soup...' remember? You must like it a lot, is what I thought."

"Did I really say that?"

I can't recall.

“But sorry, I didn’t make anything else.”

“I bought some meals. You’re gonna eat it, right?”

As I opened up the plastic bag in my hand to show the contents, Sayu smiled in delight and happily nodded.

Moving on to the living room, I saw that she had hung the laundry to dry on the side. The wrinkles and creases on my spare shirts had also been properly stretched out. She ironed all the laundry? I never asked her to do it though.

Glancing at the bed, I noticed that the dust and hair on it were now gone. I turned to look at where the vacuum cleaner was placed. It was different from where I usually kept it.

She even went as far as to vacuum the place huh.

I cast a sideways glance at Sayu and saw her filling the bowls with miso soup whilst humming happily.

I did tell her to do the household chores, but I never once thought that she’d do it this thoroughly. She might be unexpectedly dexterous. Not to mention, this meant that she at least felt some sense of responsibility.

I took off my suit and quickly switched into my indoor clothes.

Then, I reached into my pocket and retrieved my pack of ‘Red Malls’, my favorite, and my zippo lighter.

“Hm?”

It was then that I noticed that the ashtray that was on the living room table was gone.

“Sayu.”

“What’s up?”

“Where’s the ashtray?”

After a short moment, Sayu clapped her hands in eureka and retrieved the now-shiny ashtray from the cupboard.

“Sorry, I thought that I should clean this along with the dishes and utensils.”

“I see, thanks.”

“Ah, mm.”

Taking the ashtray from her hands, I headed towards the veranda.

“Hm?”

Turning around, I saw Sayu looking at me with her mouth wide open in surprise.

“What is it?”

“I just wanted to say that it’s fine to smoke inside.”

I grimaced.

“Why do you say that?”

“I mean, don’t you usually smoke inside?”

“That’s right.”

“Then why are you going to the veranda now?”

I don't understand what she meant.

"You're here, aren't you?"

Sayu's eyes seem to widened in surprise too.

What's so surprising?

I can smoke wherever I want when I'm alone, but I can't bring myself to smoke without some reservations when someone else's around. Well, isn't this just common etiquette?

"What's that expression of yours supposed to mean?"

"Nothing really..."

Sayu cast her gaze downwards as if pondering something.

After a brief moment, she raised her eyes to meet my gaze and put on a bright smile.

"I just thought that you're really kind."

"Hah?"

An irritated questioning response reflexively flew from my mouth, to which I quickly put a hand over it.

Just a bad habit of mine. I wasn't one who would intimidate children.

"What's so kind about that?"

"I mean, uhm,ahaha."

Sayu smiled as if to gloss over the severity of what was about to come. She grouped her hands behind her and fidgeted with her fingers.

“You know, the people whom I’ve stayed with until now... didn’t really care if I was there or not since I didn’t belong there...”

Hearing that, a feeling that I couldn’t describe as either anger or sadness whirled within my chest once again. In this instance too, her sense of virtue had been twisted by nothing but unfortunate adults.

“People who would have sexual relations with a JK and smoke in front of a minor really are something else.”

I spat out, filled with anger that I couldn’t find an outlet for.

I pointed towards Sayu with the hand holding the cigarette box.

“Listen up, I’m not kind at all, it’s just that those were shitty people. Don’t misunderstand.”

“Eh...”

“Don’t have such low standards. Look at things from the right perspective.”

“...Mm, okay.”

After hearing her reply, I walked out onto the veranda and closed the shutter behind me.

Glancing back into the room, I saw Sayu scratching the back of her head whilst forming an awkward smile.

I took a cigarette out of the box and flicked the lid of the lighter open with my thumb. After lighting the cigarette, I shut the lid. The clink of the lid is a sound that I often hear in the dead of the night.

I took a whiff from the cigarette and then exhaled.

“...Haaaah.”

At the same time, I released a long sigh.

I’m starting to feel old.

In any case, I see myself being a guardian when I look at a high school girl. I don’t understand people who have a lust for such girls.

Sayu’s indescribable smile came to mind.

To be honest, I thought she was cute. I’m sure that an honest smile better suits her.

To think that people out there have driven this girl’s sense of values and virtues this far.

Of course, the person in question also has a rather spoilt disposition, but-, no, that’s probably the biggest reason. However, this is proof that adults, environments that so wrongfully guide a person definitely exist. Knowing that makes me fume a little.

“Pieces of shit, really.”

I murmured, and took another whiff from the cigarette.

Though I say that—

I’m also just a piece of shit. One that pardoned a high school girl’s naivety and gave her a place to run away to.

Every damned last one of them, myself included, are just living however the hell we want.

As I slowly exhausted the cigarette in my hands, I began to think about the meaning behind my actions.

# VOLUME 1 – CHAPTER 4

Saturday.

I lied down on the living room floor whilst reading the newspaper. My home didn't have a television, so the only way for me to keep up with current events was through the newspaper.

“Male suspect for the rape of a middle-school girl arrested’, hm...”

I skimmed through the articles in the newspaper whilst noisily scratching my butt.

It's not like I didn't understand the charm of young women, but I just couldn't bring myself to look at them in a sexual light. Surely, I thought that this was the standard for most people, but keeping in mind the frequent reports of sexual assault of minors, it seems that there are an unexpected amount of men out there with a desire to do such things to underage girls.

“I prefer older women though.”

I murmured as I turned the page.

“Hey, isn't that a bit rude—”

Sayu commented as she passed right over my limp body, carrying a pile of laundry in her hands.

It was all so sudden, that I ended up with a clear view of what lay under her skirt. A light blue fabric that seemed a bit too thin. Upon realizing that her underwear was more adult-like than what I had



expected, I couldn't help but feel embarrassed. I quickly worked my mouth in an attempt to gloss over these feelings.

"Just so you know, I can see your panties."

"I'm wearing a skirt, so there's not much I can do about it."

I took a quick glance at Sayu, who was wearing her usual uniform while doing the household chores.

"Well, now that I think about it you're always wearing your uniform, aren't you?"

"It's not like I have anything else to wear. Either way, it doesn't really get dirty if I wash it properly."

"It's kind of weird for you to be wearing your uniform indoors though."

I got up from the floor.

Sticking my hand into my business bag, I retrieved my wallet and took a look inside. Ahh, there's more than I thought. I took out a bill with the face of Fukuzawa Yukichi printed on it.[1](#)

"Here. Go out and buy some clothes for yourself. If you go to Uniqlo you could probably buy a full set of clothes with this."

"Eh, I'd feel bad if I did that."

"I don't really enjoy being flashed with your panties every single day."

Sayu pondered with a loud "Hmmm" for a moment, before audibly snapping her fingers .

“Then let’s go together.”

“Ehhh...”

My expression scrunched up.

I imagined for a moment what it would look like if I went shopping for clothes together with Sayu.

“Uhh, I don’t really want to be suspected of being a sugar daddy, though.”

“Haha, yeah, I guess.”

“You can buy clothes on your own. I’ll go buy your futon in the meantime.” [2]

Sayu seemed to suddenly overreact to the word ‘Futon’.

“Nonono, its fine! The carpet is comfortable enough for me.”

“Your body aches when you wake up, doesn’t it?”

“Not in the slightest.”

Why was she being so reserved?

I said that I’d buy it for her already, so she should just take it and say thanks.

“Every time you get up you say ‘Ow ow ow’, don’t you remember?”

“Eh, I never said that.”

“Sure you did.”

Did she say it unconsciously?

“Plus, I don’t feel too good about letting a girl sleep on the floor, when I get to have a bed.”

“But—”

“I’m just buying it because I want to, so no buts okay?”

“Mm...”

Well, I suppose that this also begs the question of whether or not a member of society should have a futon for guests.

The reason being that, besides gathering the guys and drinking with them through the night, it was unlikely that there’ll be someone staying the night at my place. Perhaps that was a gross underestimation. Secondly, if I were to supposedly bring a lover to stay the night at my place, we would be sharing the bed, wouldn’t we?

“Anyway, go out and buy your clothes today.”

“Gotcha’.”

“You can keep the rest as an allowance or something.”

“Eh.”

An expression of bewilderment washed over her face.

“I don’t need it.”

“You don’t have any money on you, right? Isn’t it boring for you to just sit at home every day with nothing to play around with?”

“Just letting me stay here is more than enough.”

She must have a tendency of being reserved around adults.

I don't know whose homes she's been to up till now, but at the very least, it's clear that those had the sort of environment where such an attitude was necessary.

I sighed as naturally as breathing.

“I said it's fine already, just take it. If you really don't want to use it then don't; save it for when you need to use it or something.”

“But you know...”

Sayu's gaze drifted across the floor, unable to understand what I just said.

“If I take this from you... I don't know how I would ever be able to pay you back.”

For a moment, I was left at a loss for words. What she said was all too honest.

It wasn't just that she was hesitant to receive it, but rather, she would always ponder on how to repay the favor. She would refuse a favor that she knew she won't be able to pay back. So that's what it was, huh.

I scratched my head, brainstorming.

Why did it come down to this...? I mean, she's just a kid.

“To be honest—”

I choose my words carefully. How do I get the message across?

“I’m really busy all the time, so I don’t really have much time to do the household chores.”

With difficulty and hesitation mixed in my voice, I continued.

Sayu looked on with full attention.

“But you’ve been doing all of them ever since you’ve come. In the week or so that you’ve been here, I’ve been able to enjoy myself a lot more than before... Is that not enough of a reason?”

I returned Sayu’s gaze, to which she quickly averted her eyes .

Then, she muttered in reply.

“If you’re okay with it... Then it’s fine.”

“Alright, then we’re both okay with it.”

With a nod, I rose to my feet.

It’s not like I could go out in my tattered sleepwear. I opened the closet and retrieved a suitable change of clothes.

“Yoshida-san.”

Sayu called out to me whilst I noisily removed my shirt.

“What’s up?”

I glanced towards Sayu, whose lips pursed in response.

Then, with a wide but gentle smile—

“Thanks.”

“...Right.”

I put on a t-shirt whilst exhaling loudly from my nose.

That’s better, as it should be.[3]

I thought to myself.

\*

“Wow—! It’s soo fluffy—”

Sayu rolled back and forth on her futon.

She had changed out of her school uniform into a set of snug gray sweater top and bottoms. As I had expected, this set of clothes fits much better with the atmosphere of the room. Not to mention, it was clearly more comfortable.

“You’re going to get dust all over it, you know?”

I gently scolded her with a half-smile on my face. Sayu only lifted her head to look at me.

“I vacuum the floor every day so how could it get dusty?”

“... Well, you’re not wrong.”

Nodding in agreement, I opened the can of beer in my hands. The fizzling sound was music to my ears.

“It was a good idea to get a futon, wasn’t it?”

I asked her, taking a gulp of beer.

“Yup. I feel like I can sleep a ton tonight.”

“That’s good to hear.”

“Yoshida-san.”

Sayu stared into my eyes.

“Let’s sleep together.”

“G-pff”

I was completely prepared to hear a ‘Thanks’, so I ended up choking on the beer out of surprise. I barely managed to avoid spraying beer all over the place by closing my mouth as tightly as I could.

“Ack-”

After swallowing the beer, I had a brief coughing fit.

“A-Are you okay?”

“Hey...”

I pointed towards Sayu.

“Didn’t I already tell you that if you try to seduce me, I’m gonna chase you out?”

Throughout what I said, Sayu had an expression of ‘I knew you would say that’ as her lips curled up in satisfaction.

“But it’s not like I said anything about doing any lewd things, did I?”

“Huh? ...Ah, well, I see.”

“Yoshida-san, you were totally thinking that sleeping with a high-school girl would lead to lewd things, weren’t you?”

“I don’t have any interest in that sort of thing, stupid.”

“Eh~, really now?”

Sayu happily giggled as she pointlessly rolled around on her futon.

Glancing sideways at the scene, I took another sip of beer. It tasted better than when I drank it alone, but perhaps that was just me.

“So? Wanna sleep together?”

Sayu stopped rolling around and cast a strong gaze at me.

“I’ll pass. I’ll sleep on my own bed.”

“Oh, are you scared~~?”

“I just don’t like sleeping in narrow spaces.”

Hearing that, Sayu looked at me with a mischievous smile, and upturned eyes.

“I think I’m pretty soft. Do you need something to hug?”

She said as she pointing to herself.

I snorted and said.

“I’m really gonna chase you out.”

“Aw come on, I was just kidding~~”



Looking at Sayu, whose shoulders rocked as she cackled, I thought back to how Sayu was this morning.

Her clear expression of discomfort which showed her unfamiliarity with the kindness from adults, and the soft voice and mild mannerisms that accompanied it.

I felt a little empty inside as I thought about it.

“Hey.”

I took another gulp of beer and said.

Sayu looked at me.

“I think you’re cuter when you smile.”

Sayu stared on in puzzlement for a brief moment, but soon after, her cheeks became a little flushed.

“What, are you trying to hit on me?”

“Like I said, I’m not interested in that sort of thing.”

I frivolously said. Sayu turned her back towards me.

Oh-ho, feeling embarrassed now?

I’d been thinking about this a lot recently, but I really didn’t like letting girls lead me on in a conversation. I chuckled internally and took another sip from my beer.

It’s better for kids to be smiling, after all.

That’s what I thought.

Rather than shrinking away in discomfort, I prefer that she smile without burdens in her heart and mind; it's much cuter that way.

Though, regardless, kids aren't my type.

I walked to the fridge with a now empty can of beer.

Opening the fridge, I took out another can.

"Are you still gonna drink?"

"It's a rest day tomorrow, so it's fine."

I replied whilst opening the can.

Then, a fleeting thought rushed to my mind.

Unexpectedly, having someone to talk to at home is not too bad.



# VOLUME 1 – CHAPTER 5

My living conditions have noticeably improved since Sayu arrived.

First, the food will always be there before I leave for work, as well as when I get back. This was quite a significant change already.

Previously, I couldn't even be bothered to cook most of the time. When I really wanted something to eat, I would at most, just follow some random simple recipe that I found online using my smartphone. Other than that, I would more or less just eat convenience store bought food; although on most days, I wouldn't bother to eat breakfast at all.

Furthermore, the laundry which I grudgingly did every weekend, was now being done by Sayu every single day, which was a drastic change in the quality of my life. Since I also found it too bothersome to clean and iron my shirts on a work day, I had bought a total of 7 shirts, with 5 worn regularly and 2 extra just in case. However, the shirts were now being cleaned and even ironed pretty much every day. I never once thought that not having to do the laundry myself would give me such a pleasant and comfortable feeling.

With the change in my living standard's at home, my condition at work also noticeably improved.

I feel like my mind has been much sharper during the morning shift, perhaps due to the breakfast that I have been having. Since I wasn't assaulted by a strong sense of hunger whenever it neared lunchtime, I was able to maintain my concentration all the way until the afternoon break period began. Lastly, although I strongly believe that this might be my own opinion at best, but wearing a nicely straightened and ironed shirt made me feel strangely energetic.

Did people with wives always work with such a refreshing presence of mind...?

I thought of such things as my fingers clacked on the keyboard.

“What do you mean by a ‘refreshing presence of mind’?”

Hashimoto suddenly spoke up from the seat beside me, his eyes still locked to his screen.

“Huh? What do you mean by that?”

Hearing my reply, Hashimoto glanced sideways at me with a chuckle.

“Did you not notice it yourself? You just murmured ‘Did people with wives~’ something something you know?”

“Uh... Huh? Really?”

Hashimoto in a hurry covered his mouth to stifle his laughter.

“You’re thankful that you now have someone to do the housework for you, aren’t you?”

Hashimoto said with a shrug, as if reading my mind.

“To be honest, I can’t really remember how tiring the housework was when I was still living alone anymore.”

“You’re the kind that forgets what it’s like when the worst has come to pass after all.”

“Maybe. Though, I have to say that your case isn’t quite the same as mine. It’s not like that girl can stay at your place forever.”

Although what Hashimoto said was reasonable, the condescending tone in his voice made me feel a bit queasy.

“Well, it’s not like your wife will always be there either.”

In response to my desperate reply, Hashimoto chuckled and waved his hand dismissively.

“No way. I’m pretty sure we’ll be together till death.”

“I see...”

I knew that Hashimoto was quite a devoted husband, but I really couldn’t muster a reply to such fond words.

“I do have to say though, she does have a strong handle on housework, doesn’t she?”

Hashimoto’s hands never stopped waving, but there was a surprising weight in his voice.

In the workplace, Hashimoto was the only one who knew of the details regarding Sayu and he is the only person I’ve confided to about Sayu staying at my place. I haven’t told anyone else about it.

“She’s done more than I have ever asked for.”

“When I hear ‘runaway girl’, I have an image of a happy-go-lucky and irresponsible girl in mind, but she seems surprisingly dependable.”

I nodded my head several times in agreement.

In all honesty, Sayu has taken housework a lot more seriously than I had expected her to. At first I thought that she simply had a burst of enthusiasm and vigor, but that was not the case. She continued to

maintain the same level of work done day in and day out. Her actions did not match my mental image of a 'runaway girl' in the slightest.

While I was impressed by her hard working personality, my understanding of her background seemed to blur even more with each passing day. Her appearance might not quite be my type, but I have to admit that it was quite good. She could do housework and was easy to get along with. Why did she run away from her home and come this far? The reason was beyond my imagination.

"You're scrunching your brows pretty hard there."

I returned to my senses when Hashimoto called out to me.

"I was a bit startled when your expression changed so quickly."

"Ah... Sorry about that."

After my half-hearted reply, Hashimoto exhaled loudly through his nose and peeked at the clock on the wall.

"Let's go eat?"

Looking at the clock, I found out that it was already a bit past 1pm. Everyone should be leaving to get lunch around this time.

"Sure... Let me finish this up real quick and then we can go." I said whilst typing.

After I wrapped up the program I was working on, I saved it, made a backup, and finally put my computer into sleep mode.

Taking a look at Hashimoto's workstation, it seemed that he had also finished up his work for now and had already put on his jacket. With a light nod, he got up from his seat.

“I’m heading out to lunch.” Hashimoto announced with a flat tone-of-voice.

“Okay, take care.” Our coworkers replied indifferently.

Repeating after Hashimoto, I caught the gaze of Gotou-san, who sat a short distance away.

Gotou-san opened her mouth as if to say something, before rising from her seat quickly.

“I’m also heading out.”

I left the office whilst feeling a slight sense of discomfort towards Gotou-san, who had rose from her seat, purse in hand. She usually started her afternoon break a little later, but maybe she was feeling extra hungry today?

“Do you want to go out or just eat at the dining hall?”

“There’s nothing that I want to eat in particular, so let’s just eat at the dining hall.”

Hashimoto nodded in reply and gave me an unnatural, playful salute.

I could hear the clicking of heeled shoes from behind us. From the haste and intensity of the sound, it was clear that the source of the sound was trying to catch up to us. Turning around, I found myself face-to-face with Gotou-san at a distance far closer than expected and I reflexively jumped back in response.

“Woah, Gotou-san.”

“‘Woah?’ What’s up?”



The tendrils of her hair shook in tandem as she giggled at my reaction.

“You’re going to eat, right?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Are you fine with me joining you two?”

“Huh.”

My mouth flapped wordlessly. Unable to muster a reply, I turned my eyes towards Hashimoto to signal for help. He chuckled to himself and gave me a slap to the back.

“Of course it’s okay! Are you okay with eating at the dining hall though?” Hashimoto energetically replied.

Gotou-san smiled happily and quickly nodded.

“Sure!”

“Then let’s go... Hey Yoshida, snap out of it already.”

“Ah, yeah...”

Hashimoto slapped my back again, hoping to bring me back to my senses after my mind went blank from the rapid sequence of events.

“...This is a good chance to talk to her.”

Hashimoto whispered so that only I could hear. I nodded in agreement.

It’s true that I haven’t talked to her even once since I was rejected. This is a chance that Hashimoto managed to salvage.

Prepared for what was to come, I headed towards the dining hall.



“Pork cutlet with curry? That’s unexpected of you...” Hashimoto commented with a forced smile as Gotou-san put the pork cutlet with curry set on the table.

Gotou-san playfully tilted her head in a joking manner.

“Isn’t this fairly normal? I’m just feeling extra hungry today.”

“...Normally, you just grab a small salad from the convenience store.”

Hashimoto showed an unabashed grin as I butted into the conversation.

“Oh? You’ve been paying attention, haven’t you, Yoshida-kun.”

“I-It’s hard not to when you eat nothing but salad for lunch. Even our coworkers who are concerned about their weight at least eat a rice ball or something like that.”

“Hehe, you seem to pay a lot of attention to what others are eating.”

“Um...”

My cheeks began to feel a little hot by her comment. It was as if I was being accused of some shady activity.

In this awkward moment, I took a slurp from my bowl of Chinese noodles. Its flavor matched its cheap price, but, although I couldn’t quite put my finger on why, I actually quite liked its cheap taste. The soup seemed to be screaming ‘this is soy sauce soup!’ as I slowly chewed on the noodles and savored the unnatural flavors spreading through my mouth.

“Say, Yoshida-kun—”

Gotou-san, who happily devoured a piece curried pork cutlet, shifted her gaze towards me and spoke.

“Haven’t you been going home on time recently?”

Although she had said that in a casual tone, I couldn’t help but be a bit shocked. The fact that she noticed the change in my schedule recently made me feel quite elated, but on the other hand, the reason for this change made me feel a little guilty. A variety of thoughts mixed together in my mind.

“I guess, well, I’ve been feeling pretty good at work recently... so I’m getting all my tasks done quickly and smoothly, after which I’m free to go home.” I mumbled while avoiding her gaze.

Gotou-san chuckled at my response.

“A while back, you would help others with their work once you were done, so you would end up staying past normal office hours most of the time either way.”

“Um... Why do you know that?”

It’s true that that’s what I did in the past. To be honest, I’m quite proud of my ability to finish a day’s worth of task every day without fail. However, due to the nature of the project that the company was working on and the differences in knowledge and skills, there was quite a bit of disparity in the volume of work from individual to individual. That was why I would offer to help out my coworkers who appeared to be busier than myself.

However, the reason I haven’t done that recently was solely due to the high school girl staying at my house.

It needn’t be said that I couldn’t leave during work hours, but the thought that there was no one but her at home, piled on top of the

fact that she was only a minor, made me feel a strange sense of duty along the lines of 'I have to hurry home just in case'. As a result, I would finish my work quickly, check up on the progress of the coworkers whose projects were under my supervision, and head home on-time after that.

Though, the fact that Gotou-san had noticed this fine detail about my departure timing was surprising in many ways. Well, it's true that she's my boss, so she might be paying close attention to the workload situation of her subordinates, but the idea that she had been paying considerable attention to me made me feel awkwardly pleased.

"You seem to go home in a hurry, so I was just a little curious." She said before stuffing her mouth with curry once again.

The way she licked her lips of the curry roux was oddly captivating, to which I hurriedly turned my gaze away. I could see Hashimoto, who was sitting beside me, laughing a little in the corner of my vision.

"I suppose it is a bit eye-catching for me to go home on time every day before my superiors do."

"I wouldn't really say that. I think that the fact that you can go home on time without having to make some excuse is proof that you can do your job well."

I was ecstatic when I heard that. It's nice to be commended by my superior, not to mention, it felt rather nice to be recognized by the girl I adored in such a straightforward manner. However, that was why I was caught defenseless by the question I should have been the most wary of."

"More importantly, I'm more interested in your reason... Did you find a girlfriend or something?"

I choked immediately. Feeling a strong urge to spit out the noodles that I had just slurped, I chewed it with all my might before gulping all the noodles down. Then, I took a long and deep breath of air.

“Of course I don’t have a girlfriend! I mean, I...”

‘I just confessed to you’, is what I wanted to say, but I stopped myself right there. I realized that I had replied much louder than I had intended. Feeling the sidelong gazes of my coworkers sitting in the neighboring tables on me, I coughed to reset.

“You... what?”

Gotou-san smiled mischievously and tilted her head. It was obvious that she was playing dumb.

“Give me a break...”

I could hear suppressed chuckles coming from Hashimoto beside me.

Although Gotou-san laughed along, it was clear that she had no intention of stopping here.

“If it’s not a girlfriend, then what’s your reason for going home on time?”

She asked in pursuit. I didn’t reply immediately.

No matter how I think about it, “I’m sheltering a high school girl...” was the honest but wrong answer. Actually, I shouldn’t have even considered such an answer.

However, there’s no cover to hide the truth behind if I simply tell her that a single man with no particular hobbies such as myself wanted to go home early.

“...I-Its cause of sleep.” I said in desperation. “Recently, I’ve been trying to get a lot more sleep.”

“Hmmm... Sleep?”

Gotou-san nodded in a somewhat doubtful manner.

“I didn’t think that my efficiency would improve if I come to work exhausted... So I decided to make a change for the better.”

I couldn’t find the words to continue, so I stopped there. It was then that Hashimoto gave a timely helping hand.

“Well, he’s been looking a lot healthier recently and has been working much faster too. I’d say that all that extra sleep has been working out well for him.”

Hashimoto was truly reliable in times like these. His words flowed smoothly as he guided the conversation to his desired course. It was a skill I could never hope to pick up.

Gotou-san stared at me throughout Hashimoto’s interjection.

“Well, it’s true that you look a little less pale. And you seem a lot tidier in general too. You’ve even ironed out the wrinkles on your shirt.”

“You’ve even checked my shirt... hearing that is a little embarrassing really.”

“Don’t worry too much about that, I wouldn’t reject a raise just because your shirt is wrinkled.” Gotou-san replied jokingly.

I forced a smile in response.



But really, who would've thought that she would go as far as to check my shirt? As much as I'd love to believe that I was the only one she observed this closely, it was probably the opposite. It must be a lot of work to keep tabs on each and every subordinate down to their clothing. My awe for her abilities as a boss was renewed.

"Since I go to sleep earlier nowadays, I've also started to wake up earlier as well, so I've found time to iron out my shirts in the morning."

I'm not very good at lying, so it was a relief that the topic shifted to something relatively natural. That said, I don't really do any housework whatsoever so what I just stated was undoubtedly a lie. My unease was definitely showing in my gaze, but Gotou-san was looking down at her curry at the moment, so I lucked-out this time.

"Oh I see. Well, if that's the case then I can sort of understand."

Gotou-san nodded with a sweet smile, before stuffing her mouth with curry once again.

I desperately held back a sigh of relief. It really is hard to keep secrets. I could feel my breath getting shorter and shorter as the deceitful exchange went on.

Regardless, there was no way I could tell anyone other than Hashimoto about this. This incident involves more than just myself, so I have to stay cautious.

"Well, my junior whose been working the same way for 5 years now suddenly changed their habits, so it came as a bit of a shock. I was just curious really, so don't worry too much about it." Gotou-san answered as if she had already known what I was about to ask.

She munched down on her curry, one gulp after another. In short order, Gotou-san had already finished over half of her curry set. In

contrast, I had barely moved my chopsticks, so my noodles were already soggy. As I hurriedly began to eat, a question came to mind.

Would someone who usually has nothing but salad for lunch suddenly eat a pork cutlet with curry set this quickly just because they were a little hungry?

There was a period of time where I wanted to focus more on work so I ate less and worked during afternoon break, but the feeling of hunger only persisted for the first few days. Maybe my stomach and appetite got smaller, but after I got used to it, it became the standard from thereon out. Rather, I remember times where I ate a lot too quickly and started to feel bad instead.

Shortly after that period of time though, Hashimoto began to scold me on my eating habits so I began to gradually eat more again. As of now, I eat as much as I did before for lunch.

With that in mind, Gotou-san's portion seemed even more questionable.

Given that she usually eats nothing but a small salad, she might be forcing herself quite considerably to be eating that much.

I felt a gaze on me as I slurped on my noodles, and raised my head in response. Immediately following that, Gotou-san matched my gaze.

Startled, I turned my gaze away.

"W-What is it...?" I weakly asked while looking down at my bowl of noodles.

Gotou-san sighed from her nose and smiled.

"Not much really, you were just making the same face as when you worry about others, that's all."

Hearing that, I raised my head to match her gaze once again. She tilted her head slightly with a mischievous smile.

“Bullseye?”

“Ah, not really...”

I could feel the heat rising on my face.

Why does she keep commenting on things that I would rather she not notice? Was she trying to tease me or make me feel awkward?

“Yoshida-kun, there really is someone that you’ve come to like, isn’t there?”

“Eh?”

Gotou-san’s question was rather straightforward, which caused me to respond in a rather unsightly manner.

“The person you were thinking so seriously about just now is really important to you, isn’t she?”

“That’s, uhm...”

I wasn’t going to say that ‘the person I was thinking about is you’, but I didn’t know how to reply either. Then, Gotou-san took a quick glance at her watch, to which she suddenly jumped out of her seat.

“Oh no I forgot! The meeting was moved forward into lunch period today!”

Saying that, Gotou-san hurriedly stuffed her mouth with the remaining curry and waved goodbye to Hashimoto and me.

“Sorry for leaving all of a sudden, let’s talk again sometime.”

“Ah, okay.”

“Alright, see you.”

I let out a sigh as I saw her off.

I felt really tired for some reason.

“So what did she want anyway...?” I murmured.

Hashimoto snickered and patted my shoulder.

“She just wanted to have a chat with you, didn’t she?”

“Don’t play dumb. Who the heck would talk with a guy they just rejected for fun?”

“Wasn’t she just concerned about you though?”

Hashimoto said with an indifferent smile as he set his chopsticks down on his tray.

“She seemed like she was having fun. Let’s not forget to mention that she was only talking about you all the way through.”

Thinking back, he wasn’t wrong. Gotou-san had indeed only talked about me. Hashimoto had only entered the conversation to help me out or to tease me a little.

“As surprising as this may seem, I feel like you still have a chance.”

“Like hell I do.”

I wasn’t the type to allow myself to have outlandish hopes, much less something as far-fetched as getting together with someone who just rejected me.

Hashimoto grinned at my rebuttal.

“I was rejected by my current wife four times, you know?”

“I know that... but you’re special.”

“If you’re gonna say that, there’s no guarantee that you’re not special as well.”

“...”

I didn’t know what to say.

“Yoshida”

Hashimoto patted my shoulder again.

“Getting rejected is the true beginning.”

“Geez, you’re trying too hard...”

I couldn’t help but regret having told him about my heartbroken self a little. Back then, I felt that I had to vent about this to someone and the only person who I could talk to about this was Hashimoto. With that in mind, there really wasn’t a better way to have gone about doing it.

“Why don’t we go for a smoke before we go back in?”

I was startled by his suggestion.

“Didn’t you quit smoking?”

“I did, but I was thinking that you seemed a little pitiful, so I was going to keep you company.”

Saying that, Hashimoto took out a box of cheap candy cigarettes from his suit pocket. I reflexively gushed.

“You, really...”

“It’s better than smoking alone, isn’t it?”

“...Alright, let’s go then.”

We got out of our seats and headed towards the smoking room on the same floor.

I didn’t really like being teased by him, but one way or another, I had to admit that he saves me all the time. I vexingly thought.

# VOLUME 1 – CHAPTER 6

“Yoshida-san, your facial hair is growing out a little.” Sayu pointed to my jawline as I was sitting down for breakfast.

“What about it?”

“Are you fine with not shaving it?”

“It’s fine it’s fine. It’s a pain to shave anyway.” I answered as I poked my chopsticks into the yolk of the fresh sunny-side up made by Sayu.

“Ah, I see.”

Sayu sipped her miso soup.

“Quick question Yoshida-san, there are days where you shave and days where you don’t. Is there any special reason behind it?”

“Nope. I just shave when it gets long.”

“So your facial hair doesn’t count as ‘long’ yet?”

Sayu chuckled while picking up a roast wiener with her chopsticks.

Somewhat bothered by her comment, I ran a finger across my chin. There was a dull scratching noise as I did so. Based on the odd sensation I felt on my fingertip afterwards, it was hard to say if whether the stray hairs on my chin were hard or sharp.

“Maybe I really should shave.”

“What’s with the change of heart?”

I placed an egg in my mouth as the yolk spilled over the white.

“Hmm. You could say that I’m feeling a little old.”

Sayu tilted her head puzzled.

“Why’s that?”

“Cause of facial hair.”

“Because it’s growing?”

“No, that’s not it.”

I thought my answer through again as I carefully chewed the rice before swallowing it.

Around the time I turned twenty, I would become really concerned when my facial hair grew out even just a little bit. When I did shave, I would also double check to make sure that there wasn’t a spot that I missed.

But over time, the arrangement had become what it is now.

As long as it didn’t look dirty, I would be fine with letting it grow out.

I thought ‘facial hair’ was something like a symbol of being old, but I’m getting the feeling that I was wrong all along.”

I took a sip of the miso soup before continuing. As always, her miso soup was delicious.

“Thinking ‘it’s too much of a hassle to shave’ is the true symbol of growing old.”



“Haha, but there are people way younger than you who think it’s a hassle to shave, aren’t there?”

“You’re probably right.”

Sayu had already finished her meal while I was talking.

Oddly enough, I’ve grown used to the sight of seeing her put her hands together and say ‘thanks for the meal’.

“If you don’t hurry it up, you’re gonna be late for work.”

“Guess so.”

I agreed with a nod and stuffed the rest of the egg into my mouth. The mix between the mellow flavor of the half-cooked yolk and the soy sauce was a perfect treat for the taste buds.

Ever since Sayu started living here, I’ve been enjoying a hearty breakfast every morning.

I finished the side dishes and rice, then gulped down the little bit of miso soup left in my bowl.

“Thanks for the meal.”

“Glad you enjoyed it.”

Sayu, who was waiting for me to finish, showed a slack smile from ear-to-ear.

“I’ll wash the plates. Go and brush your teeth before you go.”

“Alright, thanks a bunch.”

Then, as I was headed to the bathroom.

“Ah, I almost forgot.” Sayu called out.

“Hm?”

“You know—”

She glanced at me as she was stacking the plates on the table.

“Facial hair really doesn’t suit you. I think it’s better if you to shave.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

“Hehe.” Sayu giggled, her shoulders rocking along.

I headed back towards the bathroom whilst scratching an itch on my back.

My reflection in the mirror seemed oddly lethargic.

When I first moved into this apartment, I remember saying stuff like ‘let’s do our best today too’ to the mirror in the morning. I would shave, wash my face, and pump myself up each morning for work.

“Hmm.” I grumbled to myself as I picked up the electric shaver.

“I’ve really become an old man, haven’t I?” I murmured as I flipped the switch on.

*Translated by yuNS*

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*from www. crimsonmagic. me*

“You again, Mishima? ...How many times does this make it?”

“Ah! Good morning Yoshida-senpai.”

“Don’t ‘good morning’ me. You should be starting with ‘I’m sorry’ instead.”

“Ah! I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.”

Since the moment I checked in this morning, I’ve been in a constant mood where I feel like I might burst a vein any moment.

“Did you not read the manual or something? Hm?”

“No, of course I went through it carefully, but...”

“It’s because you didn’t read it carefully that you ended up making such a mistake!”

When I raised my voice, I noticed Gotou-san, who sat quite a distance away, turned to glance to see what was happening.

Startled, I cleared my throat with a cough to reset.

“Oh, I really am sorry about everything.”

My subordinate, Mishima Yuzuha, bowed her head apologetically but with a frivolous smile on her face that suggested otherwise. She joined the company this year and I was made to look after her as her superior, but unfortunately, she was a rather slow learner. Of course there were others who were slow on the uptake too, but even amongst them, she was an exception.

The last straw, however, was her attitude. No matter how much I scolded her, in the end she would show that frivolous smile of hers, without looking apologetic in the least. ‘I’m a newbie so it’s normal for me to make mistakes’, is what I felt like she was saying from her actions.

“Uhm—...”

She looked at me with upturned eyes as she squirmed a little.

“Did I do something bad?”

I sighed.

“I have to start from there, huh.”

“First of all, you’ve been using the wrong programming language.”

“But I don’t know how to use anything else.”

“If you don’t know how to then learn it! I gave you the manual for it, didn’t I!?”

“That takes time to learn though, hehe.”

This expression of hers. A deceitful smile to gloss it all over.

This is what is driving me mad.

“Whatever. I’ll handle this case and give you something else to do.”

At this point, it’d be faster to just do this myself.

“I’m really sorry.”

“If you really are then try to learn from it.”

“Hehe, I’ll try.”

Mishima nodded with a smile.

I clicked my tongue and turned around.

“Ah, Yoshida-senpai.”

“What is it now?”

When I turned around again, I saw Mishima with a carefree smile, as if she had already forgotten that I had scolded her a moment ago.

“I think you look a lot cooler when you shave.”

My brain froze up for a brief moment.

I ran my hand over the slippery surface of my recently shaven chin.

Then, I realized that I’d just been teased.

“How about you worry about yourself before commenting on my facial hair!”

“Hehe, sorry.”

I quickly paced back to my seat and sat down.

“Tough morning.”

My neighbor Hashimoto commented wryly.

“She really is nothing but trouble. You want to take her under your wing?”

“No thanks, she’s all yours.”

Hashimoto chuckled as his fingers clicked and clacked on the keyboard.

My time had been taken by newbies the entire morning, but I still had not only my work, but also Mishima’s part to do.

I pressed the power button on my PC.

My face was reflected on the still black screen.

“...Does facial hair really not suit me that much?”

Hashimoto let out a puff as I touched my chin.

“What?”

“It’s nothing.”

Hashimoto turned over and gazed into my eyes.

“I was wondering how long it would take for you to notice.”

“Goddamn.”

So it seems my face really isn’t suited to facial hair.

I’ll shave every day now. This is the resolution of an old man.



# VOLUME 1 – CHAPTER 7

Today was a rest day.

As I laid atop my untidy sheets, I turned on my PC to check my email. As I was doing so, an advertisement popped up in the corner of my screen.

*“Good news for JKs everywhere who use makeup! Cosmetics are on sale at up to 70% off!”*

The vigor of the ad caught my attention, but the contents caused a question to pop up in my mind.

“Eh, do high-school girls even use cosmetics...?”

“Eh?”

Sayu, who was cleaning the table, turned to look at me. It seems like she wanted to say something.

“Ah, no, it’s nothing really. The ad just said ‘JKs who use makeup’, so I was just a little curious...”

“I see... Well, personally, I think there are a lot of high school girls that use makeup.”

“Seriously...? Really now...”

Thinking back on it, the high school that I went to banned cosmetics, didn’t it? Though, there were still a few of the so-called ‘Gals’ that continued to use cosmetics time and time again, which eventually



caught the attention of the counselors. Even counting those in, the ones that used makeup were far and few between. I would've never thought that there would come a time where high school girls using makeup would be a given. Have the times changed? Or was my high school just too strict? I couldn't really tell, but regardless, I felt a little out of place.

"What about you?"

"Hm?"

"I mean, do you use makeup as well? I haven't really seen you do it at all in the time that you've been here."

Hearing my question, Sayu groaned a little and tilted her head in thought.

"I can't really say that I didn't use it, but I only used it when I felt like it."

"So you did?"

"Just lightly."

Well, that's what I thought. Her face didn't really seem to be suited to heavy makeup... Actually, her face was already quite well-ordered to begin with, so just a light touch up should work fine. Rather, as a man, I couldn't quite help myself from thinking that it would be fine even if she did not use any makeup at all.

"...So you left it all behind when you came here?"

Sayu tilted her head again.

"What do you mean?"

“I meant your cosmetics. You don’t do makeup here, right?””

“Ohh... Yeah, I think I left it all back there.”

“Isn’t it inconvenient?”

“Inconvenient...? It’s not like I ever leave home, so I don’t really need it.”

“Well, you do have a point there...”

To start with, even the most ingrained habits might stop with changes in the levels of stress and the surroundings.

Clicking on the ad, I scanned through the page’s contents and paused when I came across a certain product.

“Skin toner...”

“What about it?”

“Did you ever use things like skin toner?”

Written clearly in big words on the page was ‘Skin care is the problem before makeup!’. To be honest, I wasn’t at all informed on this topic, but I do remember Hashimoto mentioning that his skin dries up easily, so he applies toner every night before he goes to bed. If even grown men were concerned about such a thing, then it wouldn’t be at all strange for high school girls to hold it in high importance either, would it?

Sayu’s hard stare seemed to confirm my suspicions.

“So?”

“Y-Yeah... I did...”

“Often?”

“... Just before going to bed.”

“I see.”

Scratching my head, I closed the advertisement and turned off my PC.

“Let’s go out for a bit then.”

“Eh, where to?”

Sayu looked at me with surprise as I walked to the bathroom while trying to fix my bedhead.

As I combed my horrifying bedhead into shape in front of the mirror, I announced.

“We’re going to buy some skin toner.”

“Huh?”

Translated by yuNS @ [www.crimsonmagic.me](http://www.crimsonmagic.me)

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I walked with a slouch towards the cosmetics store located on the first floor of the departmental store across the station. This was probably the first time in my life that I’ve been to a cosmetics store.

“So what happened to ‘not wanting to look like a sugar daddy’?”

I somehow managed to drag Sayu all the way here. Although she didn't verbally protest, she puckered her lips to one side to express her reluctance.

"Seems like the section with skin toner is over there." I said as I pointed to the signboard that hung from the ceiling.

Sayu glanced at me briefly as if wanting to say something, but then let out a short sigh and walked towards the toners area.

I followed behind her, taking my time to glance at my surroundings.

The shelves were filled with gaudy bottles of various shapes and sizes. On the walls were advertisements featuring famous actresses alongside their respective signatures. The scene before my eyes was far different from my mundane life, and I never once thought that there would come a day where I would actually come to such a place.

"Yoshida-san." Sayu called out to me with a wave.

After hurrying to her side, she glanced at me repeatedly.

"What is it?"

"Uhm... so this is the skin toner section..."

"Yeah I know that already. Just choose what you like."

"I really don't need it though... it's not like I'll die if I don't use it."

"It's too late to refuse now, isn't it? I mean, we've already come all the way here."

"But it's not like you asked for my opinion on the matter, that's how it felt to me at least..."

Certainly, I can't deny that I did somewhat force her to come all the way here.

"Well don't sweat it, just choose what you like. I said I'd buy it for you so just take it, okay?" I said, matching Sayu's protesting gaze and dealing with it appropriately.

Although Sayu turned her gaze towards the shelves, her chagrin was apparent in her expression.

Seeing that, I began to absentmindedly ponder.

Sayu isn't my daughter, relative, or anything like that. It's not like I have a duty to look after her.

My conjectures might just be me barking up the wrong tree, if not plain presumptuous. Despite that though, I can't help but feel a little bothered by it.

Sayu probably has a lot of spare time, but even with all the time in the world, there's honestly nothing for her to do at home. Of course she has chores to do, but it's not like it takes until evening to finish.

It would be a lot better if there was a TV at home, but I didn't watch a whole lot of TV during my childhood so there was no reason for me to ever get one. I lived alone till now after all.

Not to mention, based on the times where I tried to buy her a futon and indoor clothes, she was strongly opposed to me buying her anything. Even if I gave her the go-ahead, she would undoubtedly refuse.

Heck, even if I give her the money and order her to buy something for herself, she would most definitely come back saying something like 'there was nothing good,' or choose something that was

remarkably cheap. So today, I decided that I would be the one to take her outside, I don't care what others think about me.

"Hey, Yoshida-san..."

Sayu called out in a low volume, her eyes focused on the display cases. Her hair covered her eyes, so I couldn't quite see her expression though.

"What?"

The unusual tone of my reply seemed to have interrupted Sayu's train of thought. Her shoulders jumped in surprise and she quickly raised her head.

"Ah..." she muttered.

Then, she suddenly turned towards me, and grinned.

"So Yoshida-san, what sort of smell do you like?"

"Huh? What's this about?"

Sayu's unnatural bright smile and the sudden question left me a little perplexed. I don't think she would call out to me in such a manner only to ask this question.

"Smell, huh... I don't really care too much about that."

"Then are there any smells that you don't like?"

"Why are you even asking me such a thing?"

"But I mean..." Sayu murmured before trailing off. She continued in a whispering tone.

“I’ll be using this at your house, so I don’t want what I choose one that has a smell that you don’t like. If there’s a choice, I want to choose one that you would like... What’s wrong with that?”

“Hah...” I reflexively sighed.

“Aren’t you worrying too much?”

“Why shouldn’t I worry!? You’re buying this for me after all! I’d rather not trouble you any further if I can help it.”

“There really isn’t a smell that I dislike, just choose what you want already.”

“No, there has to be something! There’s not a single person who doesn’t have a smell that they dislike!”

Why is she being so assertive about it? Well, given how adamant she is, I guess it’s fair to give it a little thought.

“Hmm... a smell I dislike...”

A sudden thought came to mind.

“Like garbage?”

Sayu burst into laughter.

“How can there be a skin toner that smells like garbage?”

“Then what about the smell of sweat?”

“Ahaha, stop stop, I’m dying.”

Sayu heartily laughed while shaking her head around.

“That’s not what I meant... Like what kind of perfume do you dislike?”

“Perfume? Even if you say that, it’s not like I would know...”

“Oh right, imagine you’re on a subway train!”

“Train?”

“You know, when the trains are packed and you’re pressed against other people. You must have smelt somebody’s perfume right?”

“...That’s right.”

The rather specific scenario helped me recall a time where I smelt a rather unbearable scent on the train.

“If I had to say, it would be the scent of an old man’s cologne?”

“Ahh... I see... I get it, but there probably aren’t any skin toners with a smell that’s close to cologne.”

Saying that, she picked a bottle from the display and checked the ingredients list. She muttered “this is...” and “this doesn’t have a strong scent...” as she turned some other bottles over. The clear proficiency at which she examined the contents of each bottle confirmed my earlier suspicions.

‘Thought so’ I ruminated as I let out a short sigh.

Back when she was still in her hometown, she was probably involved enough to choose her own products with some level of scrutiny. However, due to her circumstances here, she had to give up on such interests. Of course, what she said about ‘not dying without this’ still holds true, but unlike before, she no longer had to worry about the



basic necessities. I think it's okay for her to enjoy 'entertainment', or at least something close to it.

Whenever I thought about Sayu, my train of thought would always lead to this one single question.

Just what had happened to have pushed such a normal high school girl into abandoning her former lifestyle, into sacrificing everything besides her life just to run away from home?

As my thoughts settled down on that, Sayu suddenly called out to me.

"Yoshida-san, what sort of fruits do you like?"

"Eh, ahh..."

The sudden change in topic threw me for a loop and I couldn't gather the presence of mind to immediately answer. Sayu looked at me in mild puzzlement.

"What's wrong?"

"Oh, it's nothing... It's just that I haven't eaten any fruits recently."

"Eh-... Then was there a fruit that you liked when you were a kid?"

"When I was a kid...?"

Thinking back, I don't think my parents ate a whole lot of fruits either. At the very least, we weren't a household that ate fruits as snack or dessert.

However, one phrase did come to mind.

‘I want to eat this when we bring the kotatsu out...’ I remember saying that to my mom every winter.

“I guess I quite liked mandarins....”

“Mandarins, hmm...”

Sayu nodded a few times, before saying with a smile.

“Did your house have a kotatsu?”

“Yep.”

I affirmed with a weak smile. Sayu giggled in response.

“So a citrus-scented one would be good...”

Saying that, she picked out a bottle from the display.

“How about an orange-scented one?”

“Huh...”

“Don’t ‘huh’ me.” Sayu responded unamused.

“I mean, I already told you to pick whatever you preferred, didn’t I?”

“And I prefer to pick one with a smell that you like.”

“It’s fine as long as it isn’t something like cologne.”

Sayu brazenly scowled, unwilling to accept my answer. Then, in what seemed like a burst of inspiration, she stopped and looked at me, her eyes slightly upturned.

“What are you u-... Woah.”

Before I could finish, Sayu pressed against me as if trying to bury herself in my chest.

“T-The heck are you up to now?”

“Yoshida-san.”

Sayu gazed into my eyes with a mischievous smile.

“Does the scent of oranges from me make your heart throb...?”

“O-”

My reflexive denial came to a sudden halt.

Her body was quite slender, but in contrast, her features were rather well defined – her chest in particular was large for a high school girl. My senses grew sharper and seemed to be playing tricks on me as I felt the supple sensation of Sayu’s body against mine.

Goosebumps rose all over my body as I hurriedly jumped away from Sayu.

“Of course not...”

“Ahaha, of course~” Sayu said with a playful smile.

It was clear that what she did was only to mess around with me.

“You’re surprisingly innocent despite being an adult, Yoshida-san.”

“Shush.” I rebutted her with a frown.

Sayu happily giggled in response.

Then, she nudged me on the chest with her elbow.

“Yoshida-san.”

“Hm?”

“...Thanks.” She said as she handed over the bottle of toner.

“No problem. Are you sure this is enough?”

“Yep. I don’t need anything else, and it’ll take a while to go through the entire bottle anyway.”

“Okay, but what about makeup? Do you not need that?” I asked.

After a brief forced smile, Sayu smirked and said teasingly.

“Do you want to see me wearing makeup that badly?”

“Not really.”

“Then I don’t need it.”

I took the bottle from her and headed towards the register.

“That will be 1578 yen.”

That’s quite a lot... I thought as I took out two bills from my wallet and placed it on the register plate.

“High school girls sure are a lot of work.”

I whispered to Sayu. She replied after a brief chuckle.

“You don’t say?”

She said that as if it was someone else’s business, as if she wasn’t a high school girl herself. ‘Just because you aren’t going to school

doesn't mean you aren't a high school girl' is what I wanted to say, but I decided against it.

"Since we're out already, why don't we go buy something else?"

I said as I handed the plastic bag containing the toner to Sayu. She sent a dubious stare in my direction.

"What do you mean by something?"

It was clear as day that she was concerned that I might be planning on buying something else for her. Forcing a smile as best as I could, I shrugged.

"Something."

Saying that, I began to look around for an escalator heading upstairs.

"If you're just gonna stand there, then I'm leaving you behind."

"Hey, wait up."

Sayu hurriedly chased after me.

For now, I should find something that would help her kill time at home.

That said though, I couldn't help but think that this was a lot better than going shopping on my own.

I glanced towards Sayu, who tilted her head.

"What's up?"

"Nothing really..."

It might be a bit odd for me to say this, but I feel like I've been enjoying myself a little more ever since Sayu came.

I'm not a person with many hobbies. On rest days, I tend to just sleep in and surf the net. The only exercise I do is the occasional run on a treadmill. As such, it's not all that surprising that the only times I do go out, is for shopping for food and the bare minimum of clothes. That said, I don't usually go to the departmental store at the station closest to my home. Even if I do, it's simply to buy what I need in a robotic manner and go home.

Now that I think about it, it's been a while since I've gone out shopping in such a leisurely manner.

The reason for all these changes is Sayu.

Out of all these changes, the biggest is probably the idle thoughts that I have during my commute home.

Prior to meeting her, all I would ever think about during the commute would be the work I had done that day as well as the tasks that I had to complete in the upcoming days. Once I got home, I would usually just take a bath and go to sleep. I would never feel any particular rush to reach home.

Recently though, my thoughts have been revolving around Sayu. 'Was she having any problems while I was out at work?', 'She didn't suddenly leave, did she?' and other similar thoughts would always fill my mind as I hurried home. As if it was absolutely necessary, I would leave work on-time and rush on the earliest train I could catch. Getting off at the station nearest to home, I would walk as quickly as I could without tiring myself out.

That was just how big of an impact Sayu had made in my life.

Even though she was a complete stranger who just happened to tumble into my home out of mere circumstances, I found myself incapable of leaving her alone.

Was it because she was just a high school girl? Was it because I found her situation pitiable? Or was it something else? I honestly don't know. It's just that...

"Yoshida-san?"

My shoulder jumped in surprise.

"O-Oh... What's up?"

"That's what I was about to ask you. You're scrunching your eyebrows really hard right now."

"Eh? Uhuh..."

It seems like I have a habit of scrunching my eyebrows when I'm thinking deeply about something.

"Sorry, I was just thinking about something."

"And this 'something' is?"

"Don't worry about it."

I tried my best to smile in hopes of glossing it over. Sayu smiled stiffly in response and nodded.

Ah, there it is.

Sayu was a girl who changes her expressions quickly and frequently. Though, what bothered me the most was that it felt like most of her expressions were merely 'suitable responses' to her surroundings.

Whenever I see her smile, I can't help but wonder whether she really means it.

"Sayu."

"What's up?"

As we got on the escalator, I turned to look at Sayu, who returned my gaze when she followed suit.

"...You can, uhm..."

I couldn't actually say the words.

'You can rely on me a little more.'

There was no doubt that that was what I had meant to say.

But after thinking about the implications behind those words, it seemed all too absurd.

"Actually, never mind..."

"Eh?"

"I forgot what I was going to say."

"Eh—, what the heck."

She can only rely on me if her conscience allows her to, but that would mean that I'm not dependable enough.

Saying that to her in that moment would only be superficial. It would have only served to bother her more rather than provide reassurance.



There's no need to rush this. Establish a secure line of communication between us little by little, and wait until she's ready to open up to me.

"Hey Yoshida-san."

When we arrived on the second floor, Sayu called out to me.

"Hm?"

"Uhm... Erm..."

Sayu avoided my gaze, mumbling in a somewhat grumbling manner.

"What is it?"

After asking one more time, Sayu replied with a slight blush.

"My stomach err... feels a little empty."

I was completely taken aback. For a moment there, I didn't even know what to think. However, the next second, I burst out into laughter.

"'My stomach feels a little empty', you say?" [1]

"Well, what I mean is..."

"I got it I got it, you're hungry right? Then why don't we go grab something to eat?"

I got on another escalator while trying to hold back my laughter.

"I think there are some restaurants upstairs."

"Mm."

Sayu followed shortly behind me with slight relief in her voice.

I gradually steadied my breathing, finishing with an audible exhalation from the nose.

I've noticed that Sayu had given up on trying to convince me. Knowing that, I'll do what I can to give her as much leeway as possible.

"Since you make all the food at home, why don't you choose what you want to eat now that we are out?"

Hearing what I said, Sayu smiled bashfully and shook her head a few times.

"Mm... I guess it's okay every once in a while."

Her little ritual had an innocent charm to it.

It's moments like these that remind me that she has a really nice smile. The more I see it, the more I want her to smile more often. That's what I honestly believed.

"So what do you want to eat?"

"Something that we don't get to eat at home might be good... How about an omelet over rice?"

"Can't we eat that at home?"

"It just isn't the same at home! The eggs only get that soft and fluffy part at stores!!"

"I-I see..."

As we headed towards the restaurant with silly banter, I could feel the vague sense of unease I've held regarding Sayu being washed away.

At the same time, I felt a little ashamed of my faint-heartedness that made a girl so much younger than myself put my needs before hers.

Translated by yuNS @ [www.crimsonmagic.me](http://www.crimsonmagic.me)

\*

"It's so heavyyy..."

"Come on, you're almost there."

I unlocked and opened the front door to the apartment, drenched in sweat. Sayu entered ahead of me with a plastic bag in each hand.

"Haaaah... It wasa so heavy I thought I was gonna die."

"Aren't you exaggerating a little much there...? Also, can you hurry it up? It's not like my bags are any lighter than yours."

"Isn't this what people would call 'reaping what you sow'...? Heave-ho."

Resisting the urge to complain, I picked up my set of plastic bags off the ground and followed after Sayu as I took off my shoes and entered the living room.

On my shoulders were paper bags filled with volumes of manga and other miscellaneous paperback books. The gripping space of the paper bags were already unexpectedly cramped, so there was not

much I could do about the pain as the bags were wedged into my shoulders.

It's the first time in my life that I've bought enough books to request for a paper bag to hold them in.

"Are you sure that you even have the time to read these many books? Usually you just eat, take a bath, and go straight to sleep."

"I can take my time going through them on rest days."

After eating a rather expensive omelet over rice, we strolled around the department store, where we soon came across a bookstore. We entered on a whim, but it ended up in a bit of a shopping spree.

There had been a time where I would read manga or buy the weekly shounen magazines during my commute. However, after realizing how hard it was to read a book in a packed train, I gave up after a month of persistence. It seemed like a few of the manga that I thought were rather interesting were still actively being published. Since I was there already, I thought that I might as well buy them all for later reading.

Well, that was just the ostensible reason. Of course, there was a part of me that genuinely wanted to read it, but I thought it would be best for Sayu to have something tangible to spend time on during her free time. Thus, in addition to manga, I also bought few books with advertisement labels like 'Exploding in popularity amongst youths!' as well as, in a somewhat unnatural whim, a literature book titled '*The Reason I Ran Away*', written by a girl who left home for an extended time during her school years.

If I had offered to buy the books for her, she would've certainly refused, so in the end, I had decided to buy it under the pretext of wanting it for myself. It was only when I had finished the purchase

that I realized that the pile of books was heavier than I had imagined. As a result, I was drenched in sweat by the time I arrived home.

“Hey... about all this...”

The plastic bags in Sayu’s hands contained an enormous amount of groceries.

‘Why don’t we eat a little more luxuriously at home too?’ I had offhandedly suggested, but when I asked Sayu what she liked to eat, it turned out that she liked to eat dishes with mellow, softer flavors. On the other hand, I preferred dishes with stronger, more pronounced flavors.

In order to make those dishes, we ended up buying every ingredient we could possibly need, which resulted in this huge volume of groceries.

“Do you think that this will fit in the fridge?”

“...Uh.”

I hadn’t thought that far ahead.

It goes without saying that the size of the fridge for a single man with no desire to cook is small. To start with, given the dimensions of my home, the size of my appliances had to be considerably small regardless of whether or not I cooked for myself.

I hurriedly opened up the fridge and gazed inside. Then, I turned my eyes towards the bags at Sayu’s sides.

“...Well, it should be fine if you shove it in.”

“Ahaha, let’s do that then.”

With a giggle, she moved to the fridge and put the bags down.

“Hmm, let’s spend this day making some pre-made food. You know, like bitter-melon chanpurū. It’ll also make some space to put the Tupperware.” Sayu said as she took the contents of the plastic bags and placed it into the fridge.

Given how efficiently she was doing it, I felt like I would actually be in the way if I tried to help, so I moved along to the living room.

Placing the paper bag on the living room desk, I took out the books and sprawled them across my bed. I seldom read books, so I didn’t have any bookshelves to keep them.

“About the manga and the books.”

Hearing my loud voice, Sayu temporarily closed the refrigerator and peeked in my direction.

“Hm?”

“If you’re free during the daytime, feel free to read through them.”

Despite the distance between us, I could see her gaze waver. Her pupils were cast slightly downward, but she quickly recollected her thoughts.

“Sure. If I’m free, I’ll do just that okay?”

“Oh, but whatever you do, don’t spoil me.”

“I won’t do that, geez.”

Sayu giggled as she put her hands back into a plastic bag. I thought she would resume her task of unloading the contents into the fridge, but instead she came to an abrupt halt.

“Huh, what’s up?”

I called out to the Sayu, who had come to a sudden standstill. The plastic bag had been placed away from the corridor, so I couldn’t see her expression.

“Hey Yoshida-san... why are you so-”

Sayu once again came to a halt.

“So...?”

I questioned, curious. Sayu turned to face me, a smile on her face.

“On second thought, nevermind.”

“Hey come on, don’t leave me hanging like that.”

“It’s really not anything important. Don’t worry about it.”

“Geez...”

With a loud ‘Ahaha’, Sayu once again opened the fridge and began unloading the contents of the plastic bags.

To be honest, I’m incredibly pissed.

Though, it was not at the vague conversation we had just a moment ago.

Well, I couldn’t completely say that without a shadow of doubt, but regardless, what I took the most offense to was that ‘smile’ of hers.

There was nothing to laugh about, but yet she laughed. She smiled, but for no concrete purpose at that.

It was commonplace amongst adults. Being able to smile was a necessity, be it in the business realm or the social realm. There was no fault in having such a skill; on the contrary, I'm inclined to believe that not having such a skill would be a cause for hardship for an adult like myself.

Despite that though, I couldn't help but get a wrenching feeling in my gut knowing that a high school girl like herself was adept at such a shrewd trick.

Isn't it fine for children to laugh when they please? Shouldn't children not have any obligation to laugh when they didn't want to?

"Stop forcing yourself to laugh already."

I finally spoke up, having scrutinized my words carefully.

Sayu came to a screeching halt.

"Laugh when you want to laugh. I don't need you to be all sunshine and rainbows around me all the time."

Sayu turned towards me as I continued. Her expression was a mess of surprise and confusion. Perhaps I was troubling her greatly, but I couldn't stop at this point.

"You don't need to be so considerate around me. This might not be your home, but..."

In any case, she wouldn't be able to return to where she came from until she was internally sorted out. I definitely wouldn't chase her out either.

"At the very least, you can stay here. As long as you hold out on your promise to me, you can live here as long as you like. That's why... you don't need to make such deceitful smiles."



After I finished all that I had to say, Sayu's gaze seemed to wander across the room. She let out a long breath to relax her troubled mind and timidly nodded a few times.

"Mm... I'm sorry."

Saying that, Sayu gazed into my eyes.

"Yoshida-san."

"What."

"Earlier, I meant to ask you... 'Why are you so kind to me?'."

The edges of her lips raised a little as she said that, but it was soon followed with a sigh.

"But I thought that asking that would be pointless, so I stopped."

"Pointless?"

"Yoshida-san, if I asked you that right now, would you be able to answer?"

Her question left me at a loss for words.

"No... to start with, I don't think of myself as being kind."

"See? And that's why-"

Sayu's words slowed to a pause. Then, she smiled.

This time, her smile was truly becoming of herself. Surely, this is how Sayu would smile for real.

“I’m sure that you’re kind without reason. There’s really no point in asking.”

“Eh, that’s can’t be right-“

“Of course it is. I’ve never met anyone as kind as you before, Yoshida-san.”

Sayu silenced my protest as she moved next to me and took a seat.

“So if you don’t like it, then I’ll stop.”

“...Stop?”

Sayu became sullen at my response, lightly jabbing my side as she continued.

“‘You don’t need to be so considerate around me.’ ‘You don’t need to make such deceitful smiles.’ Isn’t that what you said?”

“Ahh...”

“I’ll try my best to stop being overly considerate and stop with those deceitful smiles, okay...?”

She gazed straight into my eyes. Her slightly upturned eyes as a result of our differences in height startled me a little.

“Yeah, let’s do just that.” I said as I averted my gaze.

Sayu who was beside me nodded a few, firm times.

“But... about those smiles of mine... It’s already become a habit, so stopping immediately might be a little...”

“It’s alright. I get it.” I said as I nodded, feeling her gaze.

That expression is a habit that was ingrained within her. It doesn't take much to understand that it isn't something that can be changed in the course of a day.

At the very least, I'm sure that it was a habit borne of necessity. Just knowing that she had been in such a situation made me seethe with anger.

"Habit's aren't that easy to correct. Just take your time with it."

"...You really are kind."

"Hey, I've told you this before, but don't have such low standards..."

"I don't. I'm sure about this." Sayu interrupted me.

Then, she took my hand into hers.

"It's not as easy as you think to tolerate others. I don't think that anyone in my life has been as tolerant of me as you have. Yoshida-san... you are really kind."

There was an odd weight behind her words. Even though I felt discomfort from being called kind, I couldn't bring myself to rebut.

"I... I'm not sure if I can properly express this with words..."

Sayu continued, her hands still grasping mine.

"But I've always thought to myself that 'I shouldn't bother you', even though the fact that I'm staying here should already be a great bother for you."

"Haha, you don't say." I said, exhaling loudly from my nose.

Sayu softly giggled, and continued.

“That’s why I’ll stop thinking that way. From now on...”

Sayu squeezed my hand tightly.

“I’ll do my best to make you think ‘thank goodness she’s here’... Sounds good?”

I couldn’t help but burst into a fit of chuckles upon hearing that. I could see Sayu’s surprise in the corner of my vision.

“W-, What! Did I say something weird?”

“Not really, it’s more like...”

She’s also quite principled isn’t she?

Honestly, I wanted her to be more self-centered, more indulgent. I would be fine with that, but for one reason or another, it doesn’t seem like she’ll settle down until she’s returned the favor in full.

“You’re also pretty kind too, I guess.”

“Huh? H-, How so...?”

“N-Not tellin’”

“The heck is that supposed to mean~?”

Sayu openly sulked at my reply. Her childish behavior was endearing in a way.

With a smile, I patted Sayu’s shoulder and said.

“Alright then, I’ll be expecting even greater things from here on out. I’ll be expecting delicious meals every day.”

Sayu seemed to go blank for a moment, smiling bashfully as the realization struck.

“Sure, look forward to it!”

Her heartfelt smile and relaxed mood, befitting of her age, seemed much more natural.

I want her to always have such an expression.

The reason I would think that was surely due to my ego, but I couldn't help but think so anyway.

That was just how fascinating her natural smile was

8 話 三島 柚葉



# VOLUME 1 – CHAPTER 8

“Mishimaaaa!!” I shouted at the top of my lungs.

Hashimoto who was beside me jumped in his chair, surprised. The office returned to its usual silence a moment later. A few of my coworkers turned their gazes’ towards me.

The person in question however casually turned to face me, tilting her head in confusion.

“What’s up-?”

“Don’t you ‘what’s up’ me!!”

I jumped out of my seat and walked towards her. The coworkers spectating the situation had expressions of ‘oh, it’s that again’ and returned to their work.

I raised my voice, ready to jump at Mishima’s throat as she stared on vacantly.

“I don’t know how many times I’ve told you this already, but check your work before sending it off.”

“But I did?”

“Because you checked your work, made sure all the system’s functions were working, and sent it off for the first time?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Don’t you ‘uh-huh’ me!! Your code is full of errors! How is it supposed to even qualify as a finished product!?”

Owing to the bluntness of my interrogation; it seems that Mishima has finally realized that I won’t stop pressing until I get an answer for her mistakes.

She opened her mouth in surprise, and then said.

“Eh, really? That sounds kind of bad, doesn’t it?”

“Don’t treat it like someone else’s problem!!”

“What should I do then?”

“Fix it. Get it done by today.”

“That’s just asking for the impossible though~”

I could feel a vein about to burst.

How did HR even manage to hire this incredible mess? Unskilled, irresponsible, and to be completely honest, not even worth considering.

“The product is due tomorrow so isn’t it obvious that you have to get it done by today? Don’t forget that I’m the one who has to clean up after you.”

“...Yoshida-senpai, will you be fired if I don’t finish by today?”

“Ah? Well, I doubt they would go that far, it’s just that...”

I put a hand to my chin, and continued.



“I might be removed from this project. At the same time, the responsibility of training you will probably be passed off to someone else.”

Passing off the responsibility for her training to someone else would be heaven on earth, but this project was something that I started, involving many of my coworkers in the process. I just couldn't allow myself to drop out halfway through.

“Eh, you wouldn't be training me anymore?”

“That might happen if you don't fix this by today.”

Hearing what I said, Mishima, who usually bore an ever-present lazy smile, showed a stern expression.

“I'll fix it right now.”

“Ah, hey...” Translated by yuNS

Mishima turned and hurried back to her seat.

She usually moved about the office as if it was a stroll in the park, so it was unusual for her to hurry back to her desk.

“What's up with her...?”

Given that my interactions with her generally involved me chewing her out and nagging her, wouldn't it actually be convenient for her if someone else was training her instead?

So why did she become so concerned when I told her that someone else might be assigned to her?

Well, if that's what it takes to get her to do work seriously, then I guess it's for the best. I returned to my seat, my head tilted slightly in doubt.

"Trouble again?" from [www.crimsonmagic.me](http://www.crimsonmagic.me)

"The basis of the system that I made became something else entirely, somehow."

"Quite impressive, isn't she?" Hashimoto teased.

Despite his comments, Hashimoto was buried in the work I had passed along to him as well as the work he already had, so he didn't take his eyes away from the screen even as we conversed.

"That said, Mishima-chan seems to be taking her work seriously now."

"How are you even able to notice all this while you're working?"

"Even if I'm looking at the PC, I can still vaguely tell what's going on in the office in the corner of my eye. If a boss I don't like comes in, I'll head out to the bathroom."

"That's pretty deft of you."

So that's why he's never around when I'm confronted by our bosses about something. I should try that too. Let's practice grasping the situation in the office in the corner of my eye.

While opening my programming tools, I took a peek at Mishima.

Usually, she would be turning her head about, doing some stretches, or all-in-all not focusing on her work, but she seemed awfully serious today.

“...What the heck is up with her?” I murmured as I went back to my own work.

It’s good that she’s taking her work seriously, but she was still lacking in terms of skills

Although the assumption that her code might not be useable in any way weighed on my mind, I had to finish my part of the work.

With a light sigh, I began tapping away at the keyboard.

\*

“Hehe, good work today.”

“Mhm...”

In a noisy and busy uniform-price pub, Mishima and I clanked our glasses together.

After work, one thing led to another and I ended up coming here to drink together with Mishima.

Mishima tipped her glass of Cassis-Orange towards her lips and downed the drink in one go. As I downed my glass of draft beer, the sensation of my clenching throat against the flow of liquid brought about a refreshing euphoria that rushed to my head.

“Really though, it’s great that we managed to deliver it in time.”

“That’s right.”

I took another gulp from my beer with a strained smile.

A few hours ago.

In a surprising turn of events, Mishima had passed along a data file that didn't require any revision on my part.

I had already accepted that I would have to stay late into the night to perform revisions and touch-ups to her code, so I had waited for her to turn in her part without any real expectations. However, completely defying my expectations, what she turned in had caused my eyes to go wide in surprise.

Thanks to Mishima prompt debugging of her own code, I was able to focus on my own work, and so we were able to leave work sooner than expected.

Then, as we were leaving, Mishima suddenly asked me:

“Yoshida-senpai, do you want to go for a drink?”

Who would've thought that my junior, with whom my interactions consisted of mostly me shouting at her, would invite me to go drinking?

I was briefly worried about what Sayu would do for dinner, but she can probably make something for herself. I also left some money in case of emergencies.

Thinking that this should be fine once in a while, I readily accepted my junior's invitation with a firm nod.

“Really, to think that you’d be capable of all that if you’d just focus. Why don’t you do that normally?”

“Fweh.”

Mishima responded as she stuffed her mouth with grilled chicken.

“fwis fresaus ge krant”

“Hey-, swallow your food before speaking.”

Mishima spoke incoherently as she was gobbling down on the chicken.

As the somewhat pleasant feeling of lightheadedness surged through my body thanks to the alcohol, I gazed at Mishima, who was chewing desperately.

Her chestnut-brown hair ended slightly short of her shoulders. The ends of her hair wrapped and curled towards her neck. Her eyes were large and bright while her nose and mouth were rather small. If I had to say, she belonged to the ‘cute’ archetype.

Her appearance seemed to be highly valued by the ‘old-timers’ amongst my superiors, at least, enough that her name came up several times during one of my drinking-parties with them.<sup>[1]</sup> I’m pretty sure that her appearance was a key factor in her hiring.

With the surprising amount of new-graduates with a similar level of skill as hers, it might not be that strange for appearance to be the deciding factor for employment. Perhaps the old-timers at the company desired some eye-candy.

“W-, What’s up?”

In the time that I was staring at Mishima, she had finished gobbling the food in her mouth, and was now looking around restlessly and fidgeting with the ends of her hair in a somewhat distressed manner.

“Oh, sorry about that.”

Putting myself in her shoes, I would probably find it hard to stay calm if someone kept staring at me so fixedly while I was eating.

“I was just thinking that you would probably be better received if you could do your work well.”

“Eh, *really*~?”

Mishima said with a slight lisp.

“But the company seems to show favoritism for people who can’t work.”

“Wha-?”

Mishima giggled as I scowled with bafflement.

“Seriously, it’s the truth. To be completely honest, Yoshida-senpai, you’re the only one who ever actually scolds me!”

“What in the world? What about the other old-farts? Do they not say anything at all?”

Hearing me, Mishima made a somewhat sharp yet cool expression and said in an audacious and deep voice.

“‘Alright, don’t worry about it then. Let me handle the rest.’ Is what he said with a smug look on his face.”

“Woah, who said what? Hearing it already makes me feel kind of nasty. So who said it?”

“It was department head Onozaka.”

“What the heck! That’s amazing!”

I burst into uncontrollable laughter, slamming the table repeatedly.

Department head Onozaka was ‘well-known’ as the ‘2D closet barcode’[2]. There was an instance where his work-PC had frozen and he had passed it to Hashimoto to fix. It was then that we had found that the reason that the computer had frozen was because the PC had caught a virus upon accessing a file named ‘You will absolutely get off to this! A collection of carefully-selected anime’. This incident, combined with his hairstyle, gave rise to this nickname.

I had heard that he tried to make a move on some of the new hires, but I didn’t know that Mishima was also one of the victims.

“I see, so it was Mr. Barcode...”

“Hey, I’d feel bad calling him that.”

Despite what she said, her chuckling suggested otherwise.

“So what are you up to really? Should I take it that you’re purposely doing sloppy work so that your superiors pay attention to you?” I asked her with a stern expression.

Mishima looked at me perplexedly and shook her head.

“No way. I couldn’t care less about them paying attention to me.”

“Then what’s your plan? If you can do good work then why won’t you?”

“Mhm, I tried to tell you this earlier you see.”

Mishima took a sip from her glass of cassis-orange, and exhaled loudly from her nose.

“What are people who are normally hardworking supposed to do when they’re put in a situation where they have to work even harder?”

“...Hm?”

I don’t really get the point of what she said.

“Then they work even harder, don’t they?”

“Then what if they have to work even harder than that?”

“Then they work even harder than that.”

“Ahaha, come on, then they’ll die from all that work eventually, won’t they?”[\[3\]](#)

Mishima waved her hand dismissively as she put the onion part of her grilled chicken skewer into her mouth.

“Wits jecuuz I nomelly tok wit wezzy-“

“Do you mind just swallowing before you speak already!?”

I scolded her with a slight-smile. Mishima hastily chewed on the onion in a panic.

After swallowing it with a loud gulp, she let out a breath of air.

“It’s because I normally take it easy, that I can put in real effort when the time comes.”



“As someone from the same workplace, you should know that we’re always pressed for time given the schedule and deadlines at our company. You say that you’ll do it when the time comes, but honestly speaking, that’s every day.”

“Eh, that can’t be right.”

Mishima grunted as she raised her index finger in refusal.

“I mean, nothing would change at work if I was gone right?”

“Well, that’s cause you’re just a newbie though.”

“Hm, you’re not wrong but...”

Mishima squinted her eyes with a mischievous smile and continued.

“I don’t think anything would change even if Yoshida-senpai was gone though.”

“What...”

I wanted to object, but I couldn’t quite find the right words to respond yet.

I’ve never once considered whether or not work would still go on as usual if I wasn’t present.

To be honest, I think that I’m someone who’s often relied upon at work. In the 5 years that I’ve been at this company, I’ve garnered quite a few accomplishments. Plus, any project that I’ve been involved in has been profitable for the company.

‘The workplace won’t function without me!’ is what I’d like to think, but I’ve never once thought of the contrary.

“Hehe, well, I think it would still be problematic if you suddenly disappeared.”

“...Uh-huh.”

“I think that it’d probably be problematic, but not to the extent that the others won’t know what to do.”

Mishima nodded to herself as she continued.

“That’s why, in a way, I think that there is a need for people who stay on standby for when the people who normally work hard are exhausted.”

“...And that would be you?”

“That’s right~”

Mishima made a ‘peace’ sign with her right hand and grinned.

I could only sigh in response to her innocent gestures.

“As your superior, I’m inclined to say that you should do your work properly if you can though...”

“But I did my work properly today, didn’t I?”

“Well, you’re not wrong.”

I showed a strained smile and emptied my glass.

I didn’t feel like scolding her in a pub. Just knowing that she can at least do it if she tries is good enough for now.

“But you really are a kind guy, Yoshida-senpai.”

I scowled in response to her statement.

“Me?”

“Yup. I mean, you’re the only one who seriously scolds me.”

Mishima then continued with a hard stare.

“I mean, it must be tiring to scold someone who won’t do it even if you tell them to.”

“If you get it then don’t make me do it, would you?”

“Normally, people would just give up and judge that ‘they can’t do it after all’ after seeing someone fail several times. Even the superiors who act kind towards me do what they do because they want the ‘merit’ of me liking them better, you know.”

Mishima didn’t have her usual flippant and frivolous air to her anymore.

It was more philosophic, distant, if not somewhat cold. She can make this sort of expression as well, huh.

“But Yoshida-senpai, you always give it your all to be angry at me.”

“That’s cause you never learn.”

“Aww, you’re making me blush.”

“That wasn’t a compliment.”

Mishima giggled and emptied her glass.

“Ah, I’d like another glass of this, thanks.” Mishima called out to the pub employee.

She also grabbed my empty glass as she asked for another.

“Are you still going to drink?”

“Are you not going to?”

“Well, I guess I can keep you company if you are.”

“Hehe, please do.”

Unexpectedly, she can hold her liquor.

If I remember correctly, weren't cocktails on the higher-side in terms of alcohol content? If she's ready to order a second glass this quickly, it probably means she has confidence in her drinking capacity.

“Ah, continuing where I left off.”

Mishima fidgeted with the ends of her hair as she continued.

“Erm... How should I say this...?”

She seems awfully restless. What's wrong with her all of a sudden? Maybe she's drunk?

As I looked at her quizzically, she cast her gaze diagonally downward and her cheeks seemed to have flushed red.

“I wouldn't want anyone other than you, Yoshida-senpai, to be in charge of my training.”

“Oh, okay...”

Why was she so bashful about it? The way in which she said that is making me feel embarrassed too for some reason, so I'd honestly want it to end.

“So! When it comes down to it, I’ll do my best!”

“No, do your best normally, would you!?”

As I raised my voice in response, Mishima burst out giggling.

I guess I shouldn’t expect her to normally give it her all at work from here on out either.

But, well, regardless-

I took a glance at Mishima, who began gulping down her drink again.

Well, getting to know her better and learning that she was sandbagging on purpose might be better, compared to just continuing the cycle where I would get irritated by her without being aware of anything.

Slackening my lips, I took a gulp from my freshly refilled bubbling beer.

“Oh, by the way-” Mishima said.

“Yoshida-senpai, you’ve been shaving every day recently, haven’t you?”

“Yeah? What about it?”

“Oh, I was thinking that you might’ve gotten yourself a girlfriend or something.”

“Say what...?”

Noticing my forehead warp in disbelief, Mishima waved her hands back and forth in front of her.

“I mean, I mean like, you used to shave once every three days right? But all of a sudden you started to shave every day instead. So I was just curious as to whether or not you’ve found yourself a girlfriend or something.”

“You pay that much attention to my facial hair?”

Mishima seemed to leap in surprise, her face quickly turning red.

“O-, Of course not! Don’t make me sound like a facial hair fetishist or whatever!!”

“Hey, I didn’t go as far as to call you a fetishist or anything like that.”

“It’s because you spend so much time scolding me! So I spend a lot of time looking at your mouth! I don’t have any weird feeling or anything like that!”

“What’s this about weird feelings regarding my facial hair?”

She really has a fetish for facial hair, doesn’t she?

I sighed loudly from the nose, and answered her curiosity.

“I don’t have a girlfriend or anything like that. I mean, I just got rejected not too long ago.”

Mishima’s eyes went wide in surprise, her mouth gaping open.

What’s with that face?

“Eh, you got rejected? By who?”

“It was Gotou-san.”

“It was Gotou-san!?” Mishima cried out loud.

The trio of salarymen sitting beside us shot a glance towards Mishima. Noticing their gazes, Mishima loudly cleared her throat and resumed.

“...Do you like them like that?”

“Is that wrong?”

“So you prefer the ones that are like ‘Boom! Bang! Slam!’?”

“Uh-huh.”

“I see-...”

Mishima squinted her eyes and her expression seemed to grow a little grim; Even though my preferences should have nothing to do with her.

“But you were rejected, right? Well, don’t fret too much about it I guess.”

“Shush, I don’t need your cheap sympathy.”

“What? But I’m not sympathizing with you though.”

Mishima’s grim expression seemed to make a sudden 180 as it became a bright smile.

“Rather, I consider this to be quite lucky!”

“Huh?”

I asked in response, but Mishima dodged the question by gulping down her drink.

“Excuse me~ Can I get another?”

“Hey, slow down would you?”

“I can still drink a lot more.”

“Ah, okay...”

I said that I would keep her company, so I can't be the one not drinking.

Well, I least I came with deep pockets. Sighing to myself, I upped my pace and gulped down my glass beer.

When Mishima had said 'girl', the image of Sayu came to mind. [4]

Now that I think about it, I had started shaving because of what she said.

I fleetingly thought, but these thoughts quickly disappeared from my mind with another gulp of beer.

\*

“You're lateeeeeeee...” Sayu groaned as she rolled on her futon.

“Uh, sorry about that.”

“And I even made dinnerrrrr”

“I'm sorry.”



I could only earnestly apologize.

When I returned home, Sayu was in an incredibly bad mood.

Mishima was quite the heavy drinker.

I had planned to stay until Mishima was satisfied, but we had continued drinking at the same pace for more than 2 hours.

In the end, I didn't drink along with her, and instead devoted myself to finishing up what was left of her side dishes.

So, even though I left work on time, it wasn't until 10pm that I arrived home.

Sayu raised her head from the futon to look at me, as I sat down on my heels.

"...Was it a girl?"

"...Well, you could say so."

I added later that it was a junior at the company who won't do her work properly.

Although she was the one who asked, she seemed to be taken aback in surprise. Then, she exhaled heavily from her nose and continued.

"Hmpf, I see how it is. You'd rather go out to eat with another girl than eat the dinner that I cooked."

"I'm really sorry about that."

“Was it fun to go drinking with a girl?”

Stop being such a pain in the ass already!

Well, I couldn't actually say that out loud though. It was true that she had made dinner.

Noticing that I stayed silent apologetically, Sayu began to tremble uncontrollably.

I raised my head to see what was happening, only to see her covering her mouth with her hands.

“He...Heheh-...”

So it seems like she was just teasing me.

Sayu tried her best to prevent herself from bursting into comical laughter.

“Ahaha, ahh, that's funny. Hey, I'm not angry at you or anything.”

“Geez... Don't tease me like that would you.”

“I mean, Yoshida-san, it was just sort of funny to hear you say 'sorry about that' and 'I'm so sorry' and stuff like that.”

Sayu lifted her upper body off the futon while chuckling.

“But make sure you eat breakfast tomorrow, okay?”

“Yeah, sure thing.”

After that, she returned to rolling around on her futon with a lighthearted smile.

“Hmm, say, you don’t seem drunk at all, Yoshida-san.”

“Well, I have work tomorrow, so I won’t drink enough to get that drunk.”

“You were in total shambles on the day we met though.”

“Well... I was heartbroken back then. Plus the day after that was a paid vacation.” I said with a bitter expression on my face.

Sayu chuckled and asked.

“Did you like her that much?”

“...Guess so.”

As I nodded in response, Sayu showed a smug expression and continued.

“What part of her exactly did you like?”

What part...?

The first thing that came to mind was-

“Her boobs.”

“You’re so straightforward!” Sayu cried out as she started laughing again.

She really manages to laugh at everything, doesn’t she? And I was being as serious as I could be.

Be it Sayu or Mishima, I’m not really good at dealing with girls that can control the pace of the conversation.

# VOLUME 1 – CHAPTER 9

“Hey.”

The one on the receiving end of my frigid gaze was none other than Mishima.

“Ah, Yoshida-senpai, do you want to go out for lunch with me?”

“That’s not what I came here for, you idiot. Do you have a sort-of quota of messing up at least once a day or something?”

Mishima tilted her head in puzzlement.

‘What do you mean?’ her gestures seemed to ask as she tried to play dumb. Come on, don’t act like I don’t already know that you’re just sandbagging.

“Fix it, now.”

“W-, Which part?”

“I don’t think I need to tell you that, do I?” I said as I leaned closer towards Mishima.

I could feel my veins about to burst in frustration. Mishima frantically surveyed her surroundings, brought her face closer, and whispered into my ear.

“I did tell you yesterday that I would slack off as-appropriate...”

How can she be so optimistic? I put an arm around her shoulder and stared her directly in the eyes.

This way, the people around us shouldn't be able to overhear.

"Listen. Just because I didn't say anything yesterday when we were drinking, doesn't mean that I approve of your way of doing things. Don't misunderstand."

"No way! Does that mean that you'll force me to work hard?"

"Do you even need to ask? Everyone but you is already working hard."

"Geh..."

Mishima didn't even attempt to hide her dismay.

I looked away from Mishima for a moment, only to find my gaze meeting with that of Gotou-sans.

In a bout of embarrassment, I hurriedly withdrew my arm away from Mishima's shoulder and cleared my throat.

"Anyway, finish before the afternoon break."

"Whatttt? But there's only one hour left till the break."

I only smiled in response to Mishima's protest.

"Do it." Translated by yuNS

"Ueeegh..." @ [www .crimsonmagic .me](http://www.crimsonmagic.me)

She knew what she needed to do, so I will make her do it. If she didn't at least do more work than a bench-warmer, she won't be the only one with a problem.

After shooting a glance at Mishima, who reluctantly started her work, I headed back towards my own seat.

But-

“Yoshida-kun! Do you have a moment?” A voice called out to me from faraway.

I quickly turned around, startled. The voice belonged to Gotou-san.

“Yes?”

As I tilted my head in puzzlement, Gotou-san nodded upwards a few times, gesturing me to come to her desk.

Eh, what is it now? Did I do something wrong?

I broke into a cold sweat.

Of course, it was still a bit awkward for me since she just rejected me not too long ago, but at the same time, she was also my boss.

Gotou-san, who also held a position in Human Resources, hasn't really intervened with my work recently, so to be suddenly called out by her, my superior, is a bit of a nerve-wracking experience.

While I was internally sweating bullets, I slowly made my way towards her desk. She simply smiled and typed something on the keyboard.

Then, she pointed towards her computer screen and smiled again. You want me to look at the screen? What for?

Following her gesture, I timidly peeked at the screen.

‘Do you have some time to meet after work tomorrow?’

That was what was written on the otherwise empty Word document.

“Huh, tomorrow?”

Gotou-san quickly returned a ‘Shhh’ gesture when I asked.

“Contact me about this later.”

Whispering that, Gotou-san faced her screen again as if nothing in particular had happened.

What? What’s the meaning of this? This definitely wasn’t the atmosphere of a ‘let’s go for a drink!’ kind of invitation.

A date? No, why would someone suddenly ask to go on a date with someone who they literally just rejected?

As I stood there rigid, Gotou-san gave me a sidelong glance.

“You can go now.”

“Ah, well excuse me then.”

She basically told me to go away without stating it directly. I turned heel and headed back to my seat.

So it turns out that I have to go somewhere with Gotou-san after work tomorrow.

I would like to say that I feel happy, but that’s not really the case. It’s an odd feeling.

Looking around the office as I headed towards my seat, my gaze met Mishima’s.

She seemed to be purposely avoiding my gaze, opting to clatter the keyboard as a distraction of sorts.

Quit rubbernecking and get back to work. Although I cursed internally, my thoughts quickly returned to the matter regarding Gotou-san.

What did she call me out for? My mind was in a constant state of suspense.

\*

“Hmm, so Gotou-san asked you out for dinner.”

While she continued her work on the homemade meat and potato stew, Sayu blinked a few times in surprise.

As I was rocking along on the train, I got a mail of confirmation from Gotou-san.

‘Sorry about earlier. Would you like to have dinner together after work tomorrow?’, it wrote.

“Isn’t it good for you then?”

“It’s not good at all... Like, the heck does she mean by that?”

“Isn’t she just inviting you for dinner?”

“No way in hell! Of course it’s not that simple!”



At my protest, Sayu went “ehh” with a halfhearted smile and she resumed doing her thing.

A child might not be able to understand, but amongst working adults, there are a lot of implications hidden behind things like ‘dinner’ and ‘drinking’.

For example, it might be a time to talk about an incoming promotion without hesitation, or perhaps it could also be the complete opposite.

When I had first joined the company, one of my superiors at the time once brought me to a pub to gently scold me about work and talk about other sensitive issues, saying things like ‘that was pretty bad wasn’t it?’ to smooth it over.

Unless I had an indisputably amicable relationship with a superior, it was hard to not feel nervous about having a meal with them.

“Well, don’t worry about it. Hurry up and eat the stew, it going to get cold.”

“Oh... Thanks for the meal.”

At Sayu’s beckoning, I started eating the stew still steaming hot. I picked up a golden-brown piece of potato with the chopsticks and carefully put it into my mouth.

“It’s delicious.”

“Really? Good!”

Sayu nodded with satisfaction. She took a piece of potato from her bowl of stew and gave it a try.

“Mmm, it’s good~”

“You’re honestly pretty good at cooking.”

Hearing what I said, Sayu smiled bashfully.

“Feel free to praise me more.”

“Sure thing, Japan’s No. 1 chef.”

“You got that right!”

Sayu giggled as she ate a piece of meat along with rice.

I have to admit that Sayu really is incredible at cooking. It’s easy to tell that she cooked often back at home.

...Did her parents teach her how to cook? When that question popped into my mind, I shook my head so as to dismiss it. Nothing good will come out of pondering over such a question.

“What’s wrong?”

“No, it’s nothing.”

Sayu tilted her head to one side in concern, but I stuffed my mouth with rice, as if nothing had happened.

She didn’t delve into it any further and went back to eating.

“So, are you going?”

“Hm?”

“Dinner with Gotou-san.”

Sayu stopped moving her chopsticks and stared hard at me.

I nodded.

“Well, this isn’t something I can refuse.”

“Why? Because you like her?”

“It’s cause she’s my boss.”

Sayu’s lips curved into a  $\wedge$  shape, unable to comprehend my reasoning.

“Come on, it’s cause you really like her isn’t it?”

“It’s not that.”

“So you don’t like her?”

“Well... This and that are different.”

Sayu made a loud ‘hmpf’ noise with her nose, as if dodging my answer.

“So either way, you still like her.”

“...It’s not that easy to let it go okay? I had a crush on her for a whole 5 years.” I said, feeling an aching in my chest.

Sayu expression seemed to go ‘shoot’, and she turned her eyes away apologetically.

“Sorry.”

“Don’t sweat it. It’s fine to think of me as a miserable old man, really.”

“Not at all.”

Sayu shook her head.

“Yoshida-san, I think you’re really cool. If Gotou-san didn’t have a boyfriend, there’s no doubt that you would’ve gotten the ok.”

“Haha, you don’t need to console me like that.”

“I’m telling the truth.”

Honestly, the more she tried to console me, the more wretched I felt.

I let out a dry smile.

“Anyway, I’ll go with her to dinner tomorrow. I can’t refuse an invitation from a superior, much less someone like Gotou-san.”

“Alright. So I take it that I don’t need to make dinner for you tomorrow?”

Sayu nodded and asked.

Right, I wasted her dinner yesterday when I went drinking with Mishima. It makes sense for her to confirm that along with whether or not I’ll be accepting Gotou-san’s invitation tomorrow.

Understanding her intentions, I nodded.

“Yeah, I won’t be here.”

“Okay.”

After that, a thought suddenly came to mind.

“By the way, you don’t have a phone, do you?”

“A phone...”

Sayu showed a strained smile and shook her head.

“No, I don’t.”

Even considering her circumstances, I was quite surprised.

In a time and age where even elementary schoolers carried smartphones, I would’ve never thought that a blossoming JK wouldn’t carry one

“Did you leave it at home?”

Sayu shook her head.

“When I was around Chiba, my friends... I mean, my classmates from my time in Hokkaido kept calling me nonstop.”

Sayu glossed over the question, going ‘heheh’ with a smile.

“So I threw it into the ocean.”

“Hey, don’t throw your trash into the ocean.”

What a girl. Although I couldn’t quite approve of her throwing her phone into the ocean, her decisiveness was really something else.

“So you didn’t carry a phone from that point onward?”

“Yup.”

“Seriously...”

“Unexpectedly though, it wasn’t really a problem.”

Well, I can see the reason why. If she planned on severing her ties to everyone from her past, then her phone was something that she didn't need.

"So why do you ask?"

'Why did you ask about that?' the tilt of her head seemed to say.

"Well, you know, there might be times where I suddenly wouldn't be able to make it home, so it'd be better to have some way of contacting you so your food doesn't go to waste."

"Oh, I see..." Sayu nodded in sudden understanding.

The next moment however, she seemed to grow a bit embarrassed, her gaze restlessly moving about.

"What?"

"Well, uhm."

Sayu squirmed about and said in a whispering tone.

"You know, the stuff we're talking about kind of makes us seem like newlyweds."

"What the...?"

"I-, It's just a joke! Don't make such a scary face, geez!"

As my expression warped into a scowl, Sayu exasperatedly waved her hands in front of her.

"I mean, even if I make too much I can just eat the rest for breakfast or something."

“But wouldn’t it be more convenient to have a cell phone?”

Sayu feverishly shook her head.

“I don’t want it! I don’t want it! I really don’t!”

“Come on, don’t be shy.”

“No, I really don’t think I need one. Plus, it’s not like I can sign the contract on my own.”

Now that she mentions it...

If I remember correctly, there was a rule where high schoolers aren’t able to sign the contract for a mobile phone without their parents, wasn’t there? Well, it’s not like I had a phone when I was a high schooler, so I don’t really know the details about it.

“Well, regardless, I’d like to have a way to contact you if it comes down to it.”

So I said, but Sayu stubbornly refused to budge.

“It’s okay! It’s okay!”

Her habit of holding back is surfacing again.

Taking a sidelong glance at Sayu, I showed a strained smile.

Sayu’s not the only one who’ll be troubled by this.

Honestly speaking, it’s pretty uncomfortable to have no way of contacting a high school girl who’s staying alone at my place. At the very least, I’d like to have some means of contacting her.

A mobile phone huh.

Is there really no way for me to get one?

I went to sleep with that fleeting question in my mind.

\*

“Eh, can’t you just register for a second phone under your name and hand it along to Sayu-chan?”

“Oh, that’s right.”

Upon consulting with Hashimoto before today’s work began in earnest, I was immediately given a solution.

I see, so I can just make another contract under my own name. It never even crossed my mind.

“Well, I guess I’ll go and buy one on the next rest day.” I murmured as I turned on my work PC.

Well, I can take my time to think about the phone later.

First off, I have to get through tonight’s events.

Peering at Gotou-sans’ desk, the owner of which still hasn’t checked-in for today, I could feel the sweat forming on my back.



# VOLUME 1 – CHAPTER 10

“Eh, you’re going out for dinner with Gotou-san?”

“Uh-huh...”

As I nodded to her, the piece of grilled salmon that Mishima held between her chopsticks fell back on to her plate.

“Ah.”

With a slightly delayed eep, Mishima finally came back to her senses. She picked up the piece of salmon once again.

Mishima was eating a salmon set meal. She had ordered it from the staff dining area as she vocally declared to me that ‘this is what I like’. The set meal consisted of grilled salmon, stir-fry vegetables, a bowl of soup, and slices of pickled vegetables served along with white rice. Although simple, it was a staple of the menu.

On the other hand, I ordered a bowl of Chinese noodles. By the time I moved it to my seat and took a mouthful, it had already gone a bit soggy. It wasn’t particularly delectable.

“Eh? Eh? So were you the one who invited her, Yoshida-senpai?”  
Mishima asked while waving her chopsticks around.

“No, Gotou-san was the one who invited me.”

“Ehhhhh.... I don’t get it!” She said before she started gnawing down on another piece of salmon.

“I don’t get it at all!!” She cried out again.

I grunted and waved my head in response.

“Trust me, I don’t get it either.”

“If you don’t get it then why are you going!?”

“Is there anyone who would refuse an invitation from their superior though?”

“I mean, I usually refuse.”

I took another mouthful of my bowl of noodles.

“Well, no one would mind if you did that, ‘cause you’re you.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Mishima said with a pout.

Opting to remain silent, I took yet another mouthful of my bowl of Chinese noodles.

There was no need for me to go out of my way to tell her that ‘It’s because you’re both good looking and a female employee whom the superiors are fond of, so they wouldn’t mind’.

Mishima frowned as she placed the last piece of salmon in her mouth.

“Fats shuninwitre a grap.”

“Don’t talk with your mouth full, seriously.”

Young girls shouldn't be doing such things.

It had been weighing on my mind since the time we went out drinking a few days ago. Whatever the case, it seems that, despite her age, no one has ever warned her before of her poor habit of speaking while eating. Isn't this something that her parents should have warned her about? Even if her parents didn't, her close friends, or at least someone along those lines should have.

Perhaps young people these days didn't care about such things? I don't get it at all.

After swallowing with a loud gulp, Mishima spoke up again.

"That's definitely a trap."

"What the heck do you mean by a 'trap'?"

"What I mean is that she's trying to swindle you, Yoshida-senpai. It would better for you if you don't go."

"And why would she be trying to swindle me?"

At my response, Mishima made an 'umm' sound and her eyes drifted around, as if searching for a good reason.

So she said all that without giving it any thought?

"A-, Anyway" Mishima said as she pointed at me with her chopsticks. "It would definitely be better for you to not go."

"Don't point chopsticks at others."

Just where are her table manners?

\*

“Yoshida-kun, you can go ahead and start grilling the meat.”

“Ah, right.”

“Remember the time when department Head Onozaka said that ‘Yoshida-kun will be the meat-magistrate~’?”

“Haha...”

That damn old man running his mouth at his own convenience.

On occasions such as these, he would spend his time chatting up with the new female hires, so he had never helped grill the meat. Thus, I always ended up being the one stuck with this job. With a forced smile, I carefully placed the plate of salt-and-onion marinated ribs onto the grill mesh.

Gotou-san sat in the seat across me.

“Ah, what a wonderful aroma!”

“Mhm...”

That aside, it was hard for me to hold a proper conversation with her.

‘Why did she invite me out for dinner today?’ My mind was stuck on this particular question.

“That piece is ready, feel free to grab it.”

“Oh really? Thanks, I’ll do just that then.”

With a bright smile, Gotou-san picked up the piece of meat and moved it to her plate.

Then, she slowly sunk her teeth into the juicy barbecue rib. Opting to not eat the entire long and slender piece of meat in one go, she decided to slowly chew off about half of it. The sight of her lips squeezing down on the piece of meat as she tried to separate it with her front teeth was strangely erotic.

...I shouldn't be doing this. It's rude for me to be so fixedly staring at someone else eating.

I quickly averted my gaze from Gotou-san and moved a piece of nicely-cooked rib from the grill to my plate. After dipping it in sauce, I shoved it into my mouth in one go. As I crunched on the meat with my molars, the meat's juices filled my mouth.

"...Mmm"

Although the atmosphere was slightly awkward, the meat was as delicious as ever.

Now that I think about it, Sayu doesn't cook meat-heavy dishes very often. I ate enough chicken to get tired of it when I went to the pub with Mishima the other day, but it has been a while since I last had pork. I slowly chewed on the oddly delicious pork, savoring its flavor.

Allowing my gaze to wander to the front, my gaze met Gotou-san's. I was startled.

"You ate it all in one go?"

"Eh, is there something wrong with that?"

"Not at all. I was just thinking that you really are a man."

Saying that, Gotou-san let out a chuckle.

...Ahh, why does everything you do seem so erotic? Give me a break.

“I mean, I am a guy.” I quickly replied, though it didn’t amount to much.

I tried to hide my embarrassment by quickly stuffing my mouth with another piece of meat.

What the heck is ‘I’m a guy’ supposed to even mean. Anyone with eyes can tell that I’m a guy.

Perhaps it was due to the heat from the charcoal flames, but I could feel my face getting hotter by the moment.

“Are you nervous?”

As if trying to peer at my face, Gotou-san slightly lowered her head and gazed at me with upturned eyes.

“Well, of course.”

“Why?”

“Uhh... If someone who had just rejected you suddenly asked you out for dinner, wouldn’t you feel kind of awkward?”

“Ahaha, so that’s what it was?”

Gotou-san laughed heartily before taking another bite from her barbecue rib.

I hastily turned away from Gotou-san. I couldn’t allow myself to gaze upon that sight again.

If I end up doing something weird again, I'll just make an idiot of myself.

"Alright then, how about we play a game to relax?" Gotou-san suggested after swallowing her piece of barbecue rib.

"A game?"

"Yup. We'll be asking each other three questions that the other must answer. Sound okay?"

"...Can I ask anything?"

Hearing me say that, Gotou-san made a playful grunt. *'fufu'*.

"What do you plan on asking?"

How sly of her. She already foresaw what I wanted to ask, but she wouldn't admit to that. In the end, I would be the one forced to do the 'asking'.

I had trouble dealing with this aspect of hers, however, at the same time I also found it to be very charming.

As I solemnly searched for an appropriate answer, Gotou-san giggled and waved her chopsticks about.

"Feel free to ask me anything... Even if it's something perverted."

"No, it's not like I am planning on asking such things."

I shook my head in denial.

It was a lie. There was something that I really, really wanted to ask her – her cup size.

“Well let’s get started then! Go ahead!”

Gotou-san happily declared as she stared at me.

I was a little worried.

In all honesty, I wanted to first ask her ‘why did you invite me to dinner?’ I wanted to ask her that right this moment, but I was equally afraid of what her answer might be.

I didn’t have the courage to strike at the core on my first go.

“...Why barbecue?”

“Eh, what the heck is with that question? You can only ask three questions you know?”

“It’s fine, just answer me.”

Gotou-san was the one to suggest barbecue.

To be honest, I was surprised. Never once in my wildest dreams would I have thought that she was the type that would take the person for barbecue when they invited a man out for dinner.

My instincts were telling me that there was perhaps a reason for choosing barbecue in particular.

“Well, it’s because I’m eating with you, Yoshida-kun.” Gotou-san answered indifferently.

Although I was taken aback, I quickly replied.

“Because of me?”

“That’s right. Because of you.”



“What do you mean by that?”

“Excuse me waiter, could I get an additional plate of ox heart?”

Gotou-san evaded my question by placing an order of meat with the waiter who passed by.

“What about you?”

“Ah, I’ll have a plate of salted ox tongue.”

“A plate of ox heart and a plate of salted ox tongue. Ah, we’d like another two glasses of beer as well.” Gotou-san gleefully told the waiter.

“Understood.” Replied the waiter as he placed the order into his handheld console.

As he did, I caught him taking a glance at her chest. I see you man. I see it all.

“So, what were we talking about?”

“Uhm... You said that it was ‘because of me’.”

“That’s right! It’s all because of you, Yoshida-kun.”

Gotou-san nodded. She then grabbed her glass of beer, which was still half-full, and started chugging it down.

I stared on blankly. Her drinking form was quite good.

After several seconds, Gotou-san, who had drained the glass, let out a long “Puha~” as she lowered the glass. That simple gesture felt strangely immoral and I couldn’t help but look away.

“How’s that?”

“Eh?”

“I drained half the glass in one go.”

“Your form was quite good, I guess.” I stated whilst tilting my head in confusion.

Gotou-san let out a shrill laugh in response.

“That. That’s what I like about you.”

“...Uh-huh?”

I showed a forced smile, unable to understand what she meant by that. Gotou-san waved her hand in a flutter.

“Back when we were still associates, before I became your boss, I couldn’t take the initiative to go out for barbecue or drinking, you know? I mean, everyone expects me to act ‘ladylike’.”

“Uh-huh... That’s...”

There was no denying that she had a rather mature appearance. Even when she became a superior, she was, evidently, extremely popular. To be frank though, I only saw her in a perverted light.

Despite that though, I could sort of understand why she never suggested to go out for ‘barbecue’ or ‘drinking’. As someone in her position, there weren’t really any situations where she could suggest to go out for activities that were commonly suggested by middle-aged men.

“So, why is it okay to invite me for a barbecue?”

“I mean, it’s because you wouldn’t judge me for it or anything like that, Yoshida-kun.”

“Well, barbecue and beer are pretty tasty after all.”

“Fufu, and you didn’t care when I ate that pork cutlet with curry set either.”

Saying that, Gotou-san squinted her eyes slightly and shook her shoulders.

Then, she rested her chin on one hand and looked directly at me.

“That’s why you’re the only one, Yoshida-kun. The only one I can ask out for barbecue and beer.”

“Haha, should I be happy about that?”

“Hmm-, I wonder? It might feel a little funny though, fufu.”

Gotou-san’s nose trembled a little as she laughed, as if she were exhaling gently from the nose.

That laugh of hers tickled my heart a little. That laugh of hers was one that I hadn’t ever been able to overcome, starting all the way from 5 years ago.

“Well, what will you be asking next?”

Gotou-san pressed on, her chin still resting upon her hand. She look at me with upturned eyes, as if testing me. Are you still not going to ask about that? Her gaze seemed to be saying that.

I let out a small sigh.

“Why did you invite me out for dinner today?” I asked without any pretenses, staring back at her.

“Well, there was something that I wanted to ask you, you see?”

Gotou-san’s lips slowly curled upwards.

‘I was waiting for you to ask that’, her attitude clearly showed that that was what she wanted to say.

So it really was about this. I clenched my teeth.

I found it extremely difficult to deal with her. Yet, I couldn’t help but be fascinated by her at the same time. Even now, my heart is beating as fast and loud as an alarm bell.

Hurry up and answer.

“Well you see...” Gotou-san said slowly.

Then, she pointed her index finger at me.

With a hearty smile—

Translated by yuNS

“You’ve got yourself a girlfriend, haven’t you, Yoshida-kun?”

Edited by yuuki & xyi

She asked.

The affirmative implications she placed behind her question made my mind go blank for a brief moment.

After I recovered, I quickly shook my head in firm denial.

“No, I don’t have a girlfriend.”

“Liar. How am I supposed to believe that?”

“Why don’t you believe it!?”

When I asked, Gotou-san eyes drifted about in a rare display of speechlessness.

Then, she said in a soft voice.

“I-, I mean, it’s weird.”

“What is?”

Gotou-san put down her chopsticks and scrunched her back a little before answering.

“I’ve known you for five whole years. In *all* of these 5 years, you were passionate about your work and never thought twice before doing overtime, but now suddenly, and I mean *suddenly*, you started going home on time.”

“Like I said...”

“You wanted to get more sleep? Am I supposed to believe that? If you were someone who would go home on time for a reason like that, you would’ve done so a long time ago.”

I was at a loss for words.

My answer when Gotou-san had last asked this, ‘I wanted to get more sleep’, had been a makeshift answer in order to hide the matter regarding Sayu. Since I did in fact say that, I couldn’t make any more excuses.

“Also... haven’t you been rather friendly with Mishima-san lately?”

“...Say what?”

“Mishima-san is a girl who almost always goes home on time and I can tell that she’s quite attached to you, Yoshida-kun. Didn’t the two of you leave work together a while back? That’s what got me thinking.”

“Hey, hey wait a second.”

Once it was clear to me that the conversation was taking a weird turn, I forcefully interrupted her.

“What’s wrong?”

“Could it be... that you think Mishima and I are dating?”

“Am I wrong!?”

“Of course you are!”

Rather, I had no idea why she would be thinking that. Well, she did state the reasons, but I don’t think that any of them were concrete enough for her to come to such a conclusion.

Also, Mishima is attached to me? No, that’s not true.

Not to mention, the only time we left together was that time when we went drinking. For her to have such suspicions after having seen us leave together just once; did Mishima and I really seem that close?

“You don’t have to lie to me. I won’t tell anyone.”

“Really though, there’s nothing between us.”

“...R-, Really?” Gotou-san nervously asked.

“Of course... Did you forget that I had just confessed to you not that long ago?”

Hearing that, Gotou-san grew a little red as she cleared her throat.

“How could I forget... But, back then... I clearly rejected you. So I don’t think it would be strange for you to get together with someone else soon after...”

Gotou-san is acting really odd today. She’s acting strangely suspicious and her attitude right now was completely different from her carefree attitude moments earlier. It felt as if I was dealing with someone younger than me.

“Uhm.” site @ [www.crimsonmagic . me](http://www.crimsonmagic.me)

After taking a gulp from my beer, I assertively called out.

“W-, What?”

Gotou-san seemed startled as she turned to look at me.

I would rather not let the misunderstanding continue, so I thought that I should take this opportunity tell it to her straight.

“In... In the 5 years that I’ve known you, I’ve always had a crush on you.”

“Eh?”

“From the time I had joined the company all the way until now, I’ve always been in love with you. I was serious about confessing to you, so it’s a little upsetting to be thought of as someone who would

quickly move on to the next one right after being rejected.” I said while looking at her straight in the eye.

Gotou-san’s face flushed red in the blink of an eye. She hurriedly shook her head.

“No, of course not! I have never ever thought of you as an insincere person, Yoshida-kun, it’s just that...”

Gotou-san abruptly stopped. Her slouched back seemed to be growing smaller. She then continued in a soft voice.

“I think that rather than someone like me, someone younger would suit you better...”

“Hah...”

I reflexively let out a long sigh.

“...I’m still in love with you, even now, Gotou-san.”

As the conversation wasn’t getting anywhere, I resorted to telling it to her straight. Since I’d already been rejected by her once already, I didn’t feel too shy about saying it again.

“To be honest, I’ve never even considered anyone else... That’s just how special you are to me, Gotou-san.”

It was still embarrassing though, so I was looking slightly downward as I said all that.

After several seconds had passed, Gotou-san still hadn’t said anything, so I shifted my gaze back up towards her. Even with just a quick glance, it was clear that Gotou-san’s face was flushed as red as a tomato.



“What’s wrong?”

“Ah, no, it’s nothing....”

Gotou-san quickly shook her head and took a gulp from her beer to hide her embarrassment.

“T-, Then... it’s true that there’s nothing between you and Mishima-san?”

“Yup.” Translated by yuNS

More importantly, however—

I had been taken aback by her outrageous questions earlier, so I hadn’t had the presence of mind to ask about the key factor behind her questions. Now that I was calm though, my suspicions quickly rose to the surface of my mind.

“Why do you care so much anyway?”

“Huh?” site @ [www.crimsonmagic . me](http://www.crimsonmagic.me)

Gotou-san came to a complete halt.

“I mean, I’m someone you just rejected, aren’t I? This might sound a little rude, but personally, I think that whoever a guy whom you don’t like gets together with afterwards should be none of your business, really.”

“No, that’s...”

Her expression revealed her bewilderment for a brief moment, but she seemed to have quickly recollected herself as she stuffed her mouth with the piece of meat that had been on her plate.

I reflexively turned my gaze away.

Once it was clear that she had finished chewing, I shifted my gaze back to her. She let out an audible sigh from her nose before saying.

“I guess it would be a little irritating for a man who just confessed to me to be stolen away by a younger girl.”

“I-, Is that so...?”

“Yup, that’s right.” She affirmed before taking another gulp of the beer.

Honestly, today’s her is a bit of an enigma. While I still have doubts to clear up, she’s definitely not the type to be convinced into talking about something she doesn’t want to talk about. Given that it’s a matter of 5 years, I can understand why she wouldn’t want to talk too much about it.

“Well, anyway, there’s nothing between Mishima and I, and I don’t have a girlfriend either.”

It would be pointless to delve any further into the topic, so I simply repeated what I said in a clear manner.

It felt strangely humiliating to say ‘I don’t have a girlfriend’ in front of the girl I liked. I felt a little angry, but it wasn’t directed at anyone in particular.

“Alright... If that’s all there is to it, then that’s good.”

After clearing her throat with a cough, Gotou-san seemed to have regained her usual composure and nodded.

“Eh.”

“Eh?”

“Is that all?”

“What do you mean?”

Gotou-san seemed to be a little confused by my question, but I was the one who should’ve been confused.

“You went out of your way to invite me to dinner and that’s all you wanted to ask?” I inquired again.

Gotou-san nodded her head in an indifferent manner and replied.

“That’s right...”

“...Seriously?”

I let out a long sigh as I slackened and leaned my whole body against the chair.

“I was sure that this was about something more... important.”

“But this is important!”

Her heavy-handed tone startled me.

“And why would this be important?”

Gotou-san seemed to go blank for a brief moment. She quickly coughed to clear her throat once again and continued in a defiant manner.

“That’s a secret.”

“A secret... huh.”

This doesn't make any damn sense, but it's probably pointless to inquire any further on this given her firm answer.

"Now then."

Gotou-san, who had finally regained her bearings, inclined her head and spoke in her usual manner-of-speaking.

"You're still allowed to ask one more question. Is there something you want to ask? Or are you done?" She asked as she set her glass on the table.

She didn't mince her words to hide the connotation behind her words; 'You've already asked everything you've wanted to ask, haven't you?' Still, it was clear that this question was also a scheme to dismiss the earlier conversation, which was strangely vexing to me.

"...Then."

I can feel the alcohol running through my system. Perhaps there was also a desire to get rid of this murky and confused feelings in my mind.

So I boldly asked.

"What's your cup size?"

Gotou-san let out a loud laugh.

Then, she covered a side of her mouth with her palm, a pose that implied that this would be a secret between us, and said in a small voice.

“...It’s an I-cup.”

I-cup? What cup is that?

I began to count on my fingers.

Seeing that, Gotou-san broke into another giggle.

\*

I absentmindedly stared out the window of the rocking train compartment.

It had been a rather turbulent meal of grilled meat.

After my last question, it was Gotou-san’s turn, all her questions were about Mishima. ‘Even if I wasn’t dating her, was I interested in her?’, ‘Have I taken a special liking to her?’ and other questions like that.

In any case, when I persistently asked her about it, she explained that she had been startled by the rapidly shortening distance between Mishima and I, after which, in a flustered bout, she decided to invite me out for dinner.

After hearing how it came down to this, I couldn’t help but think that she had a strangely cute side to her as well.

I had to repeatedly explain to her that Mishima was merely my junior. I had explained it so many times that it was hard to keep count.

Perhaps due to the influence of alcohol, Gotou-san had been incredibly insistent about hounding me with questions regarding Mishima. 'A younger girl would probably be better for you, wouldn't she?', 'Mishima-chan has a great figure doesn't she? Don't you like that sort of figure?', and all sort of questions of similar nature. To sum it all up, it had been a nuisance.

My only thoughts regarding Mishima was that I want her to 'work seriously'.

I didn't think that my thoughts and actions could be misinterpreted.

However...

I let out a long sigh. This situation really is over my head.

Gotou-san had rejected me. My heartfelt confession had been rejected.

Yet, why was Gotou-san so bothered by what was happening between Mishima and I?

Well, she explained that it was because it irritated her that a man who had just confessed to her would immediately turn to a younger woman, but the sense of desperation I felt from her today seemed to be suggesting otherwise.

What Hashimoto had said the other day came to mind.

'As surprising as this may seem, I feel like you still have a chance.'

'Getting rejected is the true beginning.'

Could it be? Could it really be as he said?

Based on Gotou-san's behavior during the dinner, I could tell that she had an interest in my affairs.

However, in the end, this was about Gotou-san. I couldn't imagine her being simple enough of a person to suddenly be fancying me at the drop of a hat.

My elated heart quickly fell into low spirits.

The turbulent pondering I did on the train was now also taking its toll on my tired mind.

As I was walking home, my thoughts were revolving endlessly around deciphering what Gotou-san's intentions were, but on the other hand I also didn't want to think about it.

"I'm back."

"Oh!"

Unlocking the door and entering my home, I was met with Sayu, who bounced off her seat and jumped up to greet me.

"Welcome back... Why the long face?"

"Eh?"

"Was it not fun?" Sayu asked while gazing at my face.

"No, it was a lot of fun, really"

"Eh, doesn't seem that way to me. Did she say something mean to you or something like that?"

“Not really.”

I took off my jacket and quickly paced past Sayu towards the living room.

Why was she so sensitive to other people’s expressions?

“Hey, Yoshida-san.”

“What’s up?”

As I turned around to face her, I found her raising both her arms towards me.

“Want a hug?”

“Wha?”

As I scowled, Sayu approached me without any hesitation, her arms still extended forward.

“I don’t really know what’s going on here, but won’t you feel better if you got a hug from a JK?”

“Eh?”

Ignoring my protests, Sayu gave me a firm hug.

She vigorously pressed her head against me.

What’s she up to now, geez. I thought to myself with a forced smile.

One way or another, it was clear that she was trying to encourage me.

“That’s enough already.” I said whilst patting her shoulders.



Sayu raised her head to face me.

“Feeling better?”

“Yeah yeah.”

“Really!? You’re so simple, Yoshida-san.”

“Shush.”

I peeled the gleefully laughing Sayu off of me and grabbed my sleepwear.

“Hey wait!”

Sayu called out to me as I was unbuttoning my shirt.

“You don’t want your clothes to stink of cigarettes too! Just get in the bath first!”

“Huh, did you fill the bath already?”

“I had a feeling that you’d be home around now, so I filled it up!”

“The heck, that’s amazing.”

Sayu showed a proud expression with a peace sign, then she pointed towards the bathroom.

“Wash yourself off before getting in the bath, okay? I know you’re tired and all but don’t forget that.”

I felt a little warm in my chest hearing that.

It was an understanding and unassertive kindness.

“Yeah, sure thing.” I nodded.

Sayu returned to the living room with a satisfied expression and plopped herself down on the floor.

Then, she jerked her chin towards the living room exit as if to signal me to hurry up and go.

“I got it already.”

I brought a change of underwear and my sleep-wear and headed towards the changing room<sup>[1]</sup>.

I let out a small sigh as I took off my clothes.

At this moment, I felt really grateful that Sayu was here. If I was all alone, I would’ve probably tormented myself to sleep thinking about today’s events with Gotou-san. It would’ve been a tough night.

“Hah... I’m pathetic.” I murmured to myself with a strained smile.

I was once again made to realize that Sayu was supporting me mentally.

“One heck of a grown-up I am...”

I washed the sweat off from my body with the shower before entering the bath.

Now that I think about it, did she enter the bath before me?

I gazed down at the hot water as such a question crossed my mind.

“Well, it doesn’t really matter I guess.” I grumbled as I submerged myself up to my shoulders.

Having regained some presence of mind, I noticed that the thoughts regarding Gotou-san, that had seized my mind until a moment ago, had stopped.

Also, a somewhat uncertain feeling seemed to have started to well up in my chest.

Although there were a lot of things that I didn't understand, It remains true that I was able to eat with Gotou-san, whom I greatly yearned for. It had definitely been a joyous meal.

However, Sayu had probably been worried about me all along. She prepared the bath and consoled me through her words and gestures. It's possible that she had readied all of it before-the-fact.

I'm supposed to be her guardian, yet today, she seems to be the one taking care of me instead.

It's as if...

"...No, what am I thinking."

As if—

This must be how it felt like to be a man who went out to play with other girls despite having a wife, I thought like that for a moment. I quickly shook my head to dismiss the thought.

The alcohol must be taking its toll on my mind. Regardless of the situation, she's still a high-schooler, not my wife or anything like that. I don't need to feel guilty about it.

However, I had to admit that I need to get a grip of myself.

"If I make a high-schooler like her worry for me... then how am I supposed to play the role of her guardian?"

I scooped some bathwater and splashed my face.

# VOLUME 1 – CHAPTER 11

“A case with a cute design would be better after all, right?”

“There’s no point asking me.”

Today was a rest day.

I had dragged Hashimoto along to go shopping for a mobile phone.

Using my ID, I bought a smartphone and signed up for a plan with a high data cap.

Now, I was racking my brains, trying to decide on what phone case to get for her.

“Maybe she would like a sparkly one?”

“Well, that’s sort of hard to imagine... I mean, she doesn’t have any outdoor clothing other than her uniform. I also don’t really have any idea about her interests either.”

To my answer, Hashimoto let out a wry smile.

“Despite being her housemate, you don’t seem to know much about her.”

“I mean, it’s not like it would be normal for me to go out of my way to ask her about her fashion choices.”

“Really?”

She typically wore the same set of gray sweats at home.

The phone that she had used before was buried somewhere in the seas of Chiba, so I couldn't use that as a reference either.

"Seriously, if it bothers you that much then why didn't you just ask her directly?"

"Because if I ask her that, she'd just plead me to not buy her a phone at all."

I figured that it'd be best to just buy her the phone without her knowledge and give it to her after the fact. It was meaningless to show constraint towards something that had already been bought, after all. Since it had been paid for already, using it was objectively the better choice.

Taking a sidelong glance at me, Hashimoto let out a scornful laugh.

"What is it now?"

"Nothing much. I was just thinking that you seem to have taken quite a liking to Sayu-chan, Yoshida."

"Hah...?"

As I scowled, Hashimoto continued to examine the countless phone cases that hung from the display rack plastered along the wall.

"I mean, if our purpose here was to just buy a phone, then the design of the case shouldn't really matter at all, should it?"

"But we're talking about a high school girl. Of course she'd care about the design of the case."

"That's exactly what I am talking about. Basically--"

Hashimoto released a huff as he chuckled, then continuing in a slow, composed manner.

“You want to make her happy, right?”

I was left at a loss for words.

No, that wasn’t what I was trying to do in the slightest. That wasn’t it, but for some reason I couldn’t find the right words to retort against what Hashimoto said.

Perhaps there was a part of me deep inside that really meant to do that.

“Well, if you want to play it safe, then just choose white or black.”

“That seems a little too foolproof, doesn’t it?”

“I think it’s important that it’s foolproof.”

As he said that, I took a good look at the white case.

I didn’t feel any dissonance imagining Sayu carrying a phone with a white case.

“Let’s go with white then.”

I grabbed a white case from the display and brought it to the cashier.

After checking out the case and walking a few steps away from the cashier desk, my gaze met with Hashimoto’s.

“Hey Yoshida.”

As I stared at him, Hashimoto continued.

“I think you should really give some consideration as to how you’ll be associating with Sayu from here on out.” [1]

The tone of his voice contained both the warmth of sincere concern, as well as the coldness of a stern warning.

“It’ll be problematic if she became emotionally attached to you, or, to take it a step further, fell in love with you.”

“...Well, you do have a point.”

As I nodded in agreement, we walked out of the store side-by-side.

“Not to mention, there’s also the possibility of you falling for her, isn’t there?”

“Hell no. Anyone other than a big-chested older sister-type is a hard pass from me.”

“But that’s just your sexual preference, isn’t it?”

Hashimoto asked with a chuckle.

“I love my wife dearly, but I don’t think I can effectively get off to her.”

“The heck are you on about?”

I said with a forced smile. Hashimoto continued indifferently.

“What I’m saying is that love and sexual preferences are two different things. You best be careful.”

“No, but seriously, I don’t have any interest in anyone other than older sister-types.”



“If that’s how it really is, then I guess you’ll be fine.”

Hashimoto chuckled and raised his walking pace.

I raised my pace to match.

“Sorry for dragging you out for this. Let’s get something to eat, my treat.”

“Alright, then I’d like to go for some ramen. There’s nothing but balanced, wholesome meals at home after all.”

“What a casual humble brag. Alright, let’s go for ramen then.”

As I nodded with an awkward smile, Hashimoto commented that ‘It’s more of a complaint though,’ with a smile on his face.

\*

“Here, take it.”

I threw the paper bag without warning, which Sayu caught in a panic.

“Woah... W-, What’s this.”

“Open it.”

Sayu nervously rummaged through the contents of the paper bag. Her eyes widened as she found a small box inside.

“Eh, this is-”

“A phone.”

“Where did you get this from!?”

“I bought it.”

Sayu looked back and forth between the phone and me, before tilting her head in puzzlement.

“Are you going to use it?”

“You don’t need to play dumb. It’s obviously for you.”

“Why!?”

“It’d be troublesome if I couldn’t contact you!”

Sayu looked at the paper bag with an indescribable emotion.

“...Wasn’t it expensive?”

“Don’t sweat it. I earn quite a lot.”

“...Is it really okay for me to have it?”

“That’s why I bought it.”

Hearing me say that, Sayu nodded her head firmly and let out a slight smile.

“Honestly, I was kind of shocked earlier. It’s rare for you to go shopping on a rest day, so I thought something weird was up.”

Sayu scratched her head awkwardly and let her gaze drift around the room.

“But I see now. It was for me...”

Saying that, she showed her usual ‘gleeful’ smile.

“Yoshida-san, could it be that you actually like me quite a lot?”

“Don’t get ahead of yourself. It’s just for communication, got it?”

“Well, I guess so.”

Sayu nodded as she noisily tore off the seal of the box.

“Wow, it’s the newest model too.”

“Really? I only bought this model ‘cause it sounded kind of impressive.”

“The heck, that’s hilarious.” Sayu giggled.

She then stared me in the eye.

“Thanks a lot, Yoshida-san.”

“Yeah yeah.”

Feeling a little embarrassed, I averted my gaze from her. To be frank, it made me happy that she was pleased with what I bought.

“Oh, there’s a phone case as well.”

Noticing a second box in the bag, Sayu quickly took it out.

“It’s white!”

“Do you like it?”

Sayu vigorously nodded her head in response.

“I love white.”

“I see, that’s good to hear.”

“Your sense isn’t half bad, Yoshida-san.”

As she said that with slightly mysterious condescending undertones, Sayu took out the case and quickly snapped it on the new smartphone.

“Ta da!”

“Good for you.”

“Thanks again.”

Sayu smiled innocently as she pressed the power button on the phone.

This is how it should be. Children shouldn’t have to hold back for the sake of adults. She shouldn’t have to show restraint towards what she’s been given. Just a simple ‘thank you’ is enough to satisfy me.

It’s like I’m her guardian, really. No, actually, what I’m doing right now is no different from being her guardian. To be honest though, I’m not sure how to feel about having parent-like feelings for a high school girl whose background I know nothing about.

However-

What Hashimoto said this afternoon came to mind.

‘Not to mention, there’s also a possibility of you falling for her, isn’t there?’

The more I thought about it, the more stupid it sounded.

It was absolutely inconceivable for such feelings to sprout. To me, before she was a 'woman', she was a 'child'.

"Ah, Yoshida-san."

"What's up?"

"Let's exchange contact info."

She came next to me and showed me the screen of her phone.

I was met with the main menu of a trendy and familiar messaging app. It seems that she had downloaded this immediately after booting it up.

"It's impressive that you figured out how to download it so quickly."

"Hehe, I'm a JK after all."

The adaptability of younger people is really a sight to behold. Every time I switched phones, I went through all kinds of suffering since I wasn't able to figure out how to access its functions when I needed to.

I launched the same messaging app and showed Sayu my ID.

I've recently been using messaging apps like these to contact my superiors at work. However, I would occasionally get an important message through a messaging app, to which I would frankly like to advise them to use the company mail instead for such important messages.

"Alright, I've added you!"

Sayu announced with a gleeful smile.

Looking at my screen, I saw the account name 'its\_sayu' show up in the 'friends' column.

"Hey, shouldn't you give your account name a little more thought?"

"Says the guy who made his account name 'yoshida-man'. What the heck does the 'man' mean anyway?"

"Shush, I just decided on my account name on a whim."

Hashimoto had declared that 'it's a pain to contact you through mail so just download this' and forced me to make an account, after which I decided on a suitable name without giving it much thought.

Sayu giggled and laughed in response. Then she pressed the phone against her chest and gave it a tight hug.

"Hehe."

Sayu looked at me as she slovenly giggled.

"What's so funny? It's kinda creepy."

"Look, look."

Sayu lunged the screen towards my face.

'yoshida-man' was the only account listed in the 'friends' column.

"It's 'cause you're my only friend, Yoshida-san."

"You're talking about the app, right?"

As she continued to giggle, she squinted her eyes and said.

"For your use exclusively."

Her voice tickled the surface of my eardrums.

There was something strangely bewitching about her smile. Feeling a shiver run down my back accompanied by goosebumps, I flusteredly averted my gaze from her.

“W-, When you start your part-time job you’ll have to add a few more won’t you...”

“Oh yeah, that’s right.”

Sayu returned to her usual indifferent look, which was soon followed with a full smile.

“Well, I guess we’ll be able to freely contact one another from now on.”

“Guess so.”

“Be sure to tell me if you’re coming back late, okay?”

“I got it.”

Sayu happily hummed as she paced back to the living room. Plopping herself down on the bedding, she began tapping away at her new smartphone.

With a short sigh, I headed towards the bathroom sink. After rinsing my hands with soap, I splashed water onto my face.

What the heck was that?

That strangely erotic smile. That tone of voice that made my mind skip a beat.

She's just a child, yet she bore an odd intensity that made me want to clench my heart and it caused cold sweat to rise from my skin.

I was used to seeing Sayu's loose and relaxed smiles. Rather, I thought, just a little, that such a smile was adorable.

However, the smile that she showed today was different from any that she had showed until now – I could feel some 'motive' behind it.

I splashed my face with water again and released a long breath of air.

"I just don't understand high school girls..."

Despite my murmur, the recollection of the girl's bewitching smile continued to cycle endlessly through my mind.



# VOLUME 1 – CHAPTER 12

“Well, I’ll be heading out now.”

“Alright, have a safe trip.”

I lightly waved my hand as I saw Yoshida-san off at the front door.

The moment he closed the door, the house seemed to turn silent.

“...Okay then.”

With a murmur, I returned to the living room. I first cleared up the tableware from today’s breakfast and then moved it to the sink.

After breakfast came washing.

That was always the task that followed after Yoshida-san left for work.

I could feel my mind clearing up whenever my hands touched the flowing water. As a plus, the squeaking and scrubbing noises distracted me from the looming feeling of loneliness that tended to take over my mind whenever I was all alone.

I quickly finished washing the dishes. Since there was nowhere to let it dry off, I simply wiped off the remaining droplets of water with a cloth.

Around 10 minutes passed while I was occupied with that.

The distance from here to the nearest station was also around a 10 minute walk. I wonder if Yoshida-san was on the train already?

The more I thought about it, the more it seemed ridiculous.

“What difference does it make if he has already boarded the train or not?”

No matter how much I talk to myself, there was no one around to hear my words, no one around to respond to them. The frequency at which I talked to myself has risen considerably when Yoshida-san wasn't around.

My loneliness would grow with each passing occasion.

Now that I think about it, Yoshida-san would often talk to himself too. Not to mention, it was all unintentional. Every so often, he would blurt out his honest thoughts too. It was pretty funny.

“Ah.”

I let out an utter as I returned the dishes to the cupboard.

Again.

“I started thinking about Yoshida-san again.”

Murmuring that, I let out a long sigh.

Before coming here, I had wandered around from one man's house to another. It's of course a given, but each and every person had different characteristics. There wasn't one that was the same as another. Despite that, the men whose homes I stayed in all had only this one point in common.

They allowed me to stay ‘for their own sake.’ I think that such a mindset is fairly commonplace. I was sure that there was not a single person out there who would unconditionally treat someone kindly if there was no benefit for themselves in doing so.

The men until now have all *touched* me.

It was completely natural. It was the object of the negotiations that allowed me to stay at their homes.

In exchange for inviting the societal bomb that was me into their homes, they would get to have their fill of my *high-school girl* status.

Honestly, I think that such an exchange was clearly the norm.

Rather, the miraculous one here is Yoshida-san.

I really believe that he’s a miraculous person.

To be completely honest, when Yoshida-san had said that he had no interest in brats, I was convinced that that would all change in the course of a few days.

Yet, that never came to pass.

Instead, not only did he wholeheartedly scold me, but he also allowed me to stay at his home for the incredibly low price of simply doing the chores.

I couldn’t comprehend his actions.

Maybe there was some sort of benefit for him in letting me stay here?

I don't think he particularly needed me to do his housework. Rather, it would be more accurate to say that 'it's not like he couldn't do it himself even if I wasn't here'.

In reality, he had been living on his own until now. Although it was plain to see that he didn't cook for himself at all, he could probably get by just fine on his own.

I couldn't understand why all he wanted from a 'High School Girl' that had suddenly started staying at his home was to 'just do the housework'.

From an age perspective, I was a high school girl bursting with youth and energy; and although it would be improper to declare this outright about myself, I think that I'm rather good-looking too. This isn't boasting, but rather an objective assessment.

Even if he had no interest in people younger than himself, he should at least...

"He should at least... feel it sometimes, wouldn't he...?"

Voicing this thought out loud, oddly, made me feel a little murky inside.

Yoshida-san is kind.

Although I was doubtful at first, I had to admit that I was extremely fortunate to be here after spending a few days here. That was the undeniable truth.

Yet, that was the only thing that I couldn't comprehend.

What the others had 'desired of me', Yoshida-san hadn't requested any of in the slightest.

That made me feel strangely uneasy.

“Why is it?”

I just don’t understand.

It’s a sense of unease that I’ve never felt up until now.

The loneliness I felt in the afternoon when Yoshida-san wasn’t here was also a really strange feeling.

In the places where I’ve been to until now, times when the homeowner wasn’t home were times where I could instead have a peace of mind. It was a time where I didn’t have to reciprocate anyone’s expectations, a time where I could do whatever I pleased.

But here, it was different.

I had taken my time reading through the books and manga that Yoshida-san had bought, but even so, I had already finished reading through them in a matter of days. I was always in a good mood when I was reading, but rather than it being because of the contents of the book, it was moreso because of the fact that Yoshida-san had bought these books for me. Until now, countless others had given me gifts – necklaces, underwear, other things that were far more expensive than mere books and manga. Yet, none of those gifts made me happier than what he had given me.

Even I couldn’t understand what was happening.

The time that I spent with him was time that I could spend relieved.

And, because I was too relieved, I became afraid.

Why did he place me such a wonderful environment? Just what merits was I providing Yoshida-san? I couldn't understand any of it.

This incomprehensible anxiety possessed me and continued to grow with each passing day.

At this point, I think I would be better off if he just made a move on me.

Someone needing me in a simple way was just plain better for me. Plus, in truth, there was a part of me that wouldn't really mind if Yoshida-san laid his hands on me. Why? I don't know.

Yet, that was impossible.

Yoshida-san doesn't look at me in such a light. It wasn't just that he was holding back, he truly had not the least bit of interest in doing those things to me.

"Hah..."

All of this was a first for me. I've felt nothing but bewilderment ever since I came here.

I was relieved, yet I became uneasy. I'm uneasy, yet I feel warm inside.

Somehow, it feels as though my own feelings are none of my business anymore. I feel like I haven't been honest with my feelings for the longest time now.

As I wiped the table with the kitchen cloth, I let out a long sigh.

"I wonder for how much longer I can stay here?"

Murmuring to myself, I flopped down onto the living room floor.

I wonder if Yoshida-san will chase me out once it becomes inconvenient to have me around, like all the other men I've been with until now?

For example...

What if he got a lover?

As I thought that, I was suddenly overcome with an intense, suffocating feeling.

"He's so kind, after all".

Rather, why hasn't he had a significant other until now? Even from a female's perspective, it was rather odd.

He seems to still be recovering from being rejected by Gotou-san, but he was also invited to go drinking by another female coworker pretty recently, so it's not like he doesn't know any other girls.

With that in mind, it wouldn't be strange for other girls to try and take advantage of his sorrow to try and win him over.

With all that said and done, when Yoshida-san gets into a relationship with someone else, I will no longer have a place here.

I've personally witnessed high-schoolers invite their significant other to their house to play, so it would be no surprise if adult couples did the same; that goes doubly so for a man who's living alone.

And when that time comes to pass, how could there possibly be any space for me? He may live apart from his lover, but how could it be possible to maintain a relationship if his lover were to know that he was living together with an unknown high-schooler?

“Hehe, if he gets a girlfriend, he’d definitely have no choice but to drive me out.”

I let out a dry smile.

As this negative stream of thought continued stirring in my mind, a thought surfaced in my mind.

“What if...”

What if he got a girlfriend?

Would Yoshida-san... make love to her?

My body was filled with goosebumps at that thought.

“...I have to finish the laundry.”

I stood up and headed towards the washing machine, but the delusions from earlier continue to flicker in my mind, my stomach seemed to shrink.

Yoshida-san making love to an unknown woman.

The image of that in my mind made me feel extremely unpleasant for some reason.

I mean, it’s not like it’s something that I should be concerned with.

It should be normal for someone as kind as Yoshida-san – moreover someone as reliable as him – to have a lover, and such activities between lovers was normal as well.

In spite of that, the more I thought about it, the more uncomfortable I felt.



“Haaah...”

I plopped myself down on the floor before reaching the washing machine.

“What the heck is this...”

The time I spent alone in Yoshida-san’s home were honestly painful.

I felt like I would drown in this sea of loneliness and the whirlpool of negative thoughts.

“Yoshida-san... come home.”

Though he had only just left, I uttered his name as if holding on for dear life.

# VOLUME 1 – CHAPTER 13

“Are you doing this on purpose again? Cut it out before I kick you out.”

“Well... It was actually an honest mistake this time...”

“Like that makes it any better.”

“No... You have it all wrong. I rented way too many DVDs the day before and ended up watching movies all the way till this morning, so I didn’t get any sleep before I came to work...”

I slammed my desk, causing Mishima’s shoulders to shake in bewilderment. At this sight, Hashimoto, who sat at the neighboring desk, mischievously commented “oh my”.

“I don’t want to hear your excuses, just get it fixed by today, got it?”

“Okay, okay. I’ll fix it.”

“Then get to work already...”

As I raised my head to glare at Mishima, I noticed my superior approaching from behind her.

It was section chief Odagiri.

I immediately had a bad premonition.

Section chief Odagiri’s presence at our particular workstation was often a harbinger of particularly troublesome things to come. Not to mention, his gaze was glued onto me.

“Do you have a moment?”

It seems that my premonition struck bullseye. He called out to me the moment he arrived at my desk.

“Sure, may I ask what this is about.”

I straightened my posture and oriented myself to face section chief Odagiri.

“I’m sorry to tell you on such short notice.”

Section chief paused for a moment whilst stroking his beard, before continuing.

“I want you to come with me on a 2-week long business trip.”

“Huh? A business trip? To where are we headed?”

“We’re going to visit a branch in Gifu Prefecture.”

“G-, Gifu is it...”

To be frank, I didn’t want to leave home for this trip, because Sayu is there.

Not to mention, it would be bad for a guardian to be missing for two whole weeks.

I mustered my best ‘apologetic expression’ before replying.

“I think... it would be a little hard for me to go on this trip...”

At my reply, section chief Odagiri’s eyes grew wide open in surprise.

“I would’ve never thought that you would refuse to go on a business trip. You usually accept them without a second thought.”

“I mean, well... haha...”

I couldn’t tell him that I couldn’t go because I had a high-school girl staying at my place, so I could only laugh awkwardly.

Oh right, if I can get Hashimoto to sub in for me... With that thought, I looked towards my neighboring desk, but my neighbor who was here just a moment ago was suddenly nowhere to be seen.

He... went to the toilet didn’t he...

He’s probably the number one at the company in terms of ability to escape these situations.

Well, Hashimoto has his wife to think about, so I guess he wouldn’t want to leave for a few weeks either.

“Oh, what about Mishima? How about having her go instead?”

“Weh?”

I suddenly pointed towards Mishima, to which she responded with a surprised whelp. She was someone who was capable if she puts her mind to it, and it’s not like she had a boyfriend to worry about either. So it would be convenient to have her go.

I turned my gaze back towards the section chief, but he shook his head.

“The branch we’re going to doesn’t have company lodgings, so we have to sort out our own accommodations. That wouldn’t be a problem, but I doubt we’ll be about to get two rooms for a company

trip like this, and it would be inappropriate for me to share a room with a woman.”

“What’s wrong with staying in the same room? You have a wife, so I’m sure that nothing strange would happen between the two of you.”

Section chief Odagiri seemed somewhat troubled by my reply, but he mumbled “Well, I wouldn’t deny it.” before falling silent.

“Hey, you’re okay with this right?”

I said as I turned to look at her. Mishima’s expression didn’t hide how startled she was in the slightest.

“Eh, I’d rather not...”

She said as she showed an incredibly grave expression.

I mean, it’s not like I don’t understand how you feel, but you don’t... have to, well, be like that. The weight behind her expression was really something else, honestly.

Section chief Odagiri took one look at Mishima and feverishly waved his head.

“Mishima-kun simply won’t do. It has to be another man. Look Yoshida, think of this as doing me a favor. I simply can’t rely on anyone else for this. Plus, you’re single aren’t you?”

That unnecessary comment struck a thorn in my chest. Well, it’s not like I didn’t understand why it was frowned upon to send married people on such business trips.

“Do you perhaps have a reason why you cannot go? If your reason is well-founded, I wouldn’t force you to go.”

So the toughest question for me to answer has finally come.

I desperately searched for a reasonable answer. This was the only time where I couldn't explain the matter in honest terms.

As I was carefully scrutinizing my every choice of word, a savior extended a helping hand.

"Odagiri-saan... Just give it up already m~an, he just doesn't want to go..."

A male coworker trotted over to section chief Odagiri's side with an astoundingly inappropriate language. That man was Endou, whose desk was a short distance from mine.

"So how about I go in his place? I'm single and hella free. That'll work, right?"

"Don't use such a casual tone with your superiors."

"You don't want to go with me? I never thought that the boss of all people would be one to mix personal feelings with business matters..."

Endou continued to rattle on in an obstinate manner, to which section chief Odagiri showed no attempt to hide his distaste.

"Can I trust you to do your job for the coming two weeks?"

"Yeah of course, though I'll be doing whatever I want outside of work hours." [1]

Endou skeptically raised his eyebrows and replied. Section chief Odagiri let out a long sigh and nodded.

"Fine. Then I'll pass the job over to Endou."

“Cool, let’s leave it at that.”

Endou saw section chief Odagiri off with a frivolous smile, before turning to me with a sneer.

“Hey man, weren’t you part of the Gotou-only club?”

“What are you talking about?”

Endou forcefully put his arm around my neck and whispered into my ear.

“You got yourself a girl?”

“Huh?”

“Like, you don’t want to go since you got yourself a girl, am I wrong?”

I was baffled by Endou’s statement. Is that how he interpreted the situation?

That being said, he wasn’t ‘wrong’ per-se. This wasn’t about a girlfriend though, but rather about the girl, my ‘dependant’, who was staying at my place, so the reason I refused to go was unmistakably because of a ‘girl’..

“Yoshida-senpai...”

Mishima, who had witnessed the questioning from beginning to end, look at me with a curious gaze.

“You have a girlfriend...?”

“No, that’s not it.”

“Oh come on dude, you don’t need to hide it. What other reason would there be for a guy who would go on business trips like a walk in the park to suddenly refuse them?”

“As if. It’s not like there aren’t other reasons for me to refuse...”

Having said that, I fell silent.

Personally, I couldn’t see any other reason for me to refuse.

Seeing my expression, Endou showed a complacent smile and put his hand on my shoulder.

“Well, let’s not dawdle here too long, let’s go to the cafeteria.”

Saying that, he pointed towards the clock on the wall, which showed that it was 1 past noon, a good time to take an afternoon break.

“...I’m heading out for lunch.”

I declared with a slightly louder voice to my coworkers after a brief sigh. The nearby coworkers replied with an unenthusiastic ‘have a good one’.

I glanced towards Hashimoto’s desk, but he hasn’t returned yet.

As punishment for running away from the section chief, he can have lunch by himself today.

\*



“Shouldn’t these noodles like, you know, have a little more texture or something? Konjac noodles would at least have some chewiness.”

Endou slurped on his Chinese noodles with a disparaged expression.

“You know, the more I eat this, the more I feel like this is what it feels like to eat animal food, y’know? It’s to the point where I wish that they’d just change the name on the menu already. You know, something like ‘animal food set,’ or something along those lines. They’d probably actually sell more if they changed the name just cause people would be curious about it.”

“Despite saying that, isn’t that all you ever eat?”

Our coworker Koike, who Endou had dragged along for the ride, was eating a bowl of fried rice beside Endou. The two of them got along pretty well. From an outsider’s point of view, it would appear that they would clash due to their polar opposite personalities, but on the contrary, it seems to have helped the two to achieve a fine balance of sorts.

“Soooo-”

Endou, who had been complaining to Koike, suddenly turned to face me.

“Who’s this girlfriend of yours? Don’t tell me that you finally managed to snag Gotou, did ya?”

“Like I said, you’re misunderstanding.”

I waved my hands in denial, but Endou continued to gaze at me with suspicion.

Feeling a gaze, I took a glance at Mishima who was eating next to me. She seemed to be glaring at me.

“Your noodles are going to thicken if you let it sit like that.”

“Yoshida-senpai’s case is more important than my noodles.”

Despite having barely touched her noodles, Mishima continued to focus her attention on me.

Letting out a short sigh, I finally voiced the conversational tangent that I had desperately prepared whilst ordering food.

“By the way, the package will arrive during the two weeks you’re gone.”

“Package?”

Endou crunched his eyebrows.

“What about this package? Couldn’t I always go grab it later?”

“No, this package is something you want to grab as soon as it comes.”

“Okay man, what is this package you’re talking about?”

After waiting for a brief moment, I made an obvious expression of ‘It’s better I don’t say’, to which Endou smiled and nodded.

“I see I see. So that’s what it was. Now that I think about it you have quite a bunch yourself don’t you, Yoshida.”

Endou let out a broad grin that seemed to show that he understood what I meant, but for some reason Koike lightly elbowed him.

“What’s wrong?”

“Hey, you bought some DVDs last year, didn’t you?”

Koike's eyebrows raised up for a brief moment, but he quickly nodded his head.

"Now that I think about it, you were totally into Naruse Kokoa, weren't you?"

"Gack--"

I immediately choked and spit out the kudzu-powdered yakisoba I was eating.

Mishima cast a suspicious glance towards me.

"What does this Naruse mean...? What is it about?"

"Right, what was it again, I think it was an anime character or something."

In truth, she was an adult-video actress. [2]

Listening to my attempt to hide the truth, Endou broke out into wild laughter, while Koike bemusedly sighed before taking another mouthful of fried rice. On the other hand, Mishima looked as though a question mark was literally floating above her head.

"Well, if he'd go so far to hide it, I'd say that its better you don't ask."

Finally easing his laughter, Endou returned to slurping his noodles. Looking at him, I couldn't help but feel somewhat apologetic.

"Hey, um, sorry about what happened. You ended up going in my place."

"Don't worry about it man. Being single and all, I have all the time in the world. Not to mention, I might get to eat some tasty good while I'm in Gifu."

“Besides that though, section chief Odagiri doesn’t really like you.”

“Yeah, I’d say he hates me.”

Endou jokingly trembled with a broad grin.

“He hates me so much that I’m actually kinda looking forward to it. So seriously, don’t worry about it.”

“...Sorry, thanks for the help.”

“Man, it seems like you make a big deal out of everything. This must be why you’re not popular with girls.”

“Hey, that has nothing to do with this.”

Endou’s comment was meant as a bit of a low blow, but unexpectedly, I couldn’t help but think that he might not be wrong about that.

“Well, I don’t care what your reason is, but since I’ve already taken your place for this business trip-”

After taking a loud slurp of his Chinese noodles, he looked me straight in the eye and continued.

“Make sure you get your fill of whatever it is you’re skipping out for, be it DVDs or girls.”

Having said that, Endou engrossed himself in his bowl of noodles again. Listening to the sound of him slurping his noodles, I let out a light sigh.

His words clearly contained the meaning of ‘Your answer doesn’t convince me, but I’ll let you off the hook this time’. Despite being a fundamentally rough person with a carefree personality, he was a

surprisingly open-minded person when dealing with other people's problems. He's helped me numerous times during work.

I probably won't be able to keep it a secret forever. By the next time I'm forced to go on a business trip, would Sayu have already returned to Hokkaido...? Hm...

"Yo-shi-da-senpai."

"Phhack"

Just as I was chewing on the kudzu-powdered yakisoba, Mishima suddenly elbowed me hard on the side, causing me to nearly spit out the food in response. After forcefully gulping down the food, I hit Mishima's shoulder with the palm of my hand.

"Hey, what's your deal? Don't do that when other people are eating."

"Erm...

Mishima looked at me, then abruptly looked away. After repeating this cycle a few times, she finally spoke up.

"Is it true that you don't have a girlfriend?"

"Oh come on, didn't I already say that I didn't? How many times do I have to say it?"

The wound only gets bigger with each mention, so I wish they'd stop.

Mishima seemed eager to press on for a moment, but then shut her mouth and nodded.

"If that's true, then it's okay I guess..."

“What is that supposed to mean? It’s not like I need your permission to date or any-ow!! Hey, cut it out already! Why do you keep elbowing me!? And right in the ribs every time too!”

With a sulky look, Mishima finally settled down and started eating her now-cold bowl of Chinese noodles. As I looked on in puzzlement, Endou, who had witnessed the whole scene unfold, burst out in laughter.

“What?”

I glared at Endou continuously slapping the table in a fit of laughter. Taking ahold of himself for a brief moment, Endou shook his head with trembling shoulders.

“It’s nothing man, just keep it up!”

Tears began forming in the corners of his eyes as he continued.

“I really ought to believe you now when you say you don’t have a girlfriend!”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means what it means man. Ain’t that right, Mishima?”

Endou turned the spotlight over to Mishima, who gave him a stern glare as she stuffed her cheeks with cold Chinese noodles.

What the heck are they talking about now? I looked at Koike for a bit of guidance, but he just showed me a strained smile and shrugged.

\*

After lunch, Mishima had quickly wrapped up her code correction. Having not much work myself, I started packing up to head home on time.

I put my belongings into my business bag and was about to leave when Mishima called out to me.

“Yoshida-senpai?”

“What?”

I made no attempt to hide my displeasure of being called out to just as I was about to leave, though it didn’t seem like she came with trouble. She walked up to me carrying all her belongings.

“Do you have some time after work?”

“Uh... If it’s possible I’d like to go home for today though.”

“So, do you have any plans?”

“Um... Not really.”

“Okay, then come with me for a little bit.”

The demanding way in which she spoke ticked me off a little, but given the incident at noon, if I try to force my way home, it would probably lead to more misunderstandings instead.

“Alright, I’ll bite. What are we going to do?”

“Let’s go watch a movie together.”

“Huh? A movie?”

“There’s a theater at the train station closest to your home, isn’t there?”

“Uhuh.”

“Then let’s go. The movie starts in an hour.”

“H-, Hey.”

Without waiting for my reply, Mishima started walking away at a brisk pace. As I hurriedly chased after her, I felt a gaze on me, to which I turned my head, only to have my gaze meet that of Gotou-san, who was at her work desk. It made my heart skip a beat, but I couldn’t really say anything in this situation. After a slight bow, I hastily left the office.



# VOLUME 1 – CHAPTER 14

“The realization of a fated encounter comes after the fact.”

So says the professor as he hands a handkerchief to the crying heroine.

“A meeting that changed the course of a life cannot be known until all has come to pass. Only when everything has changed, only when everything has ended, can one begin to notice.”

“Then... What do I do about these feelings?”

The young girl had made every effort to make the most out of her feelings for a young man who belonged to the same year at the same university, which she herself described as a ‘fated love’. Having learned that the young man would be going overseas, she had broken out into tears, proclaiming that ‘the love she was fated to, had ended this day’. Now, in this scene, she was conversing with her professor.

“Does it truly matter whether your love is fated or not?”

“Eh?”

The professor took a hearty gulp from his coffee mug, and waited briefly before continuing.

“Fated or not, your love is genuine. Is that not good enough as is?”

Hearing the professor's profound words, the main character opened her teary eyes.

"Go and tell him what you must. That is all you can do at the very moment, is it not?"

The professor said with a cheery smile.

Though her eyes still flowed with tears, the heroine nodded resolutely and stood up from her seat.

"I'll be going."

The heroine declared as she ran out of the room. The professor's gaze followed the heroine as if looking at a blinding light.

I took a fleeting glance at Mishima, who was seated beside me, and found her bearing an expression unlike any I've seen from her thus far.

Her profile displayed more than just sadness and anger, but more importantly, it bore a degree of 'seriousness' surpassing any of the expressions I've seen from her at work.

'Why don't you ever make such a face at work?', so I thought, but to be honest, I was impressed by how seriously she was taking this movie.

Personally, I was uninvested in this movie at best. Taking a look at the person on the other side of me, they too had their eyes glued to the screen.

It was probably just not in my nature to be able to enjoy a movie to the fullest. Although the screen depicted the events of a fellow person's life, I just couldn't accept it as something that could happen in reality. Thus, I was unable to comprehend it at an emotional level.

Yet, the words of the professor reverberated in my mind.

“The realization of a fated encounter comes after the fact.”

It was a rather fitting way to put it. In truth, meetings that change the course of life happen regardless of intention, and in the moment, these encounters seem insignificant if not mundane. Yet, when looking back, such moments often seem to be of the contrary.

One such example was my meeting with Gotou-san.

I had met her at an industry panel targeting job-seeking fresh graduates.

I had just finished listening to the panel hosted by the company I had my eyes on, and I figured that since I was here, I might as well take a look at the other companies. That was when Gotou-san called out to me.

“You have a rather earnest expression” She said with a smile.

I still remember that moment even to this day.

If I hadn’t met her that day, I probably wouldn’t be working for this company; nor would I have been blessed with such a suitable job, and perhaps I wouldn’t have built up such a career either.

Though, if I had to ask myself what fated encounters I have had since then...

One face in particular comes to mind.

That slack and relaxed smile.

Now that I think about it, my life really has taken a turn since her arrival.

That being said, I can't really call it an encounter that has changed the course of my life. In truth, Sayu had coincidentally appeared before me, desiring a place to stay. I provided her a place to stay in return for doing household chores and whatnot, making my life easier. That's all there is to it.

"You might not realize it-"

Startled by the shout of the heroine on-screen, I pulled my attention away from my thoughts and back on the screen.

During the time that I had been lost in thought, the scene had shifted. The heroine was trying to express her feelings to the young man from a distance away.

"When we first met, you helped me so, so much that it's hard to put into words!"

Though her voice was shaky and her eyes were teary, the heroine tried her utmost to express her mind.

The young man continued to listen with a somewhat uneasy expression.

"Back then, when you reached your hand out to me... You might not have thought much of it, and I know this might sound ridiculous, but in that moment, you really saved me!"

Flashbacks were mixed in with the heroine's monologue, showing how the story had begun. It was a scene where the heroine had just graduated from high school and entered a university in the big city. In the crowd of the bustling campus, she quickly found herself isolated from the people she knew, and, feeling the relative insignificance of her existence, came to an abrupt halt. That was when the young man, who had been looking around whilst walking, crashed into her, causing her to fall on her behind. The young man

flusteredly apologized, and extended a hand whilst asking 'Are you okay?'. That was when the heroine had fallen in love.

"The thought that even someone like myself could be noticed... gave me peace of mind!"

The heroine confessed as tears flowed from her eyes.

"You've been on my mind ever since then!!"

'To be noticed by someone'. This line seemed to strangely echo in my mind.

My mind rewinded to a certain scene.

It was when I drunkenly stumbled my way home, having just been rejected by Gotou-san. Sayu sat beneath the lamppost, her arms around her knees. She had seemed as though she was clad in an air devoid of anything.

What had she been thinking about in that moment?

Had she hoped that someone... anyone would notice her?

As for me-

"I know that it was just a coincidence when you bumped into me, but even so-"

Had I been the one to notice her?

"It... made me happy."

As I gazed at the crying figure of the heroine reflected on the screen, the image of Sayu's relaxed smile surfaced in my mind.

\*

“Mmmph-!”

Mishima stretched in a flamboyant manner outside the cinema.

Her shirt was pressed out of the opening of her jacket, and from it, I could roughly see her body lines.

How... wholesome. That's not to say that it was small.

It's just that, with the knowledge of a greater force like Gotou-san's weighing on my mind, those of most other women became a source of calm and relief instead. That's really all there is to it.

“Somehow”

Mishima murmured after she finished stretching.

“I feel like I've gained a lot.”

“Gained a lot of?”

“On a whim, I thought: ‘why not go watch a love story with Yoshida senpai or something~’”

“The heck?”

“But it was a way better experience than I thought it would be...”

Mishima hummed with a grin.

“So how was it, Yoshida-senpai?”

“How was what?”

“The movie. What did you think of it?”

“Hmmm, what did I think of it? Even if you ask me that...”

It would be incredibly awkward to admit that I had something else on my mind the entire time.

Plus, since Mishima seemed to have enjoyed the movie quite a lot, it wouldn't be right to avoid the question. If I had to voice my thoughts on the movie, which part should I talk about?

The professor's words immediately came to mind.

“Oh right, do you remember when the professor said ‘The realization of a fated encounter comes after the fact’? That really... resonated with me in a way.

As I said that, Mishima's eyes seemed to light up in excitement.

“Right!? Right!? I also really felt the impact of those words... I see, so Yoshida-senpai also felt that way.”

After nodding in a satisfied manner, Mishima suddenly grimaced.

“What's wrong?”

“That's not right.”

Mishima put a hand on her chin and muttered.

“I was wondering if it's really okay to understand that.”

“Huh, but I thought you understood it?”

“Uhuh, I do, but is that really a good thing?”

As I tilted my head in bemusement, Mishima seemed to hesitate while elaborating.

“It’s sort of, like... Umm... kind of boring in a way isn’t it?”

“Boring?”

“That’s right. I mean, in the future, I’ll be having all sorts of incredible meetings that will have a great impact on my life won’t I? All these meetings will happen in the present. It’s not what comes after or before, but what’s in the moment.”

“I see what you mean.”

As I nodded, Mishima allowed her gaze to wander across the floor and let out a light sigh.

“Won’t you notice such important things in the moment? That this is a fated encounter?”

Although her eyes grew moist, I could still see a stubborn light within.

The playful mood that she always carried about was replaced with something else entirely. Surely, this was how she truly felt.

“By the time you notice a fated encounter, anything and everything is already over and in a place far beyond your reach... It’s moving to see it played out in a story, but I would rather not be a part of it.”

She added and then smiled.



“I’m fine with just the present. Who cares about yesterday or tomorrow? It’s not like I can live in any time but now.”

The smile Mishima bore now was levels more mature than the one she usually bore. I never thought that she was one to carry such an expression.

“Mishima-”

I asked before I had any time to give it any thought.

“Have you perhaps... had a fated encounter?”

As I asked that, Mishima’s expression grew blank in surprise, and then-

“Pfft-”

She lost it.

“AHAHAHA! That’s right, that’s so like you, Yoshida-san! Well, that was refreshing~”

“Huh? What are you on about?”

“Mmpf-ack-hmm.. Okay that’s enough, that’s enough already.”

Mishima had laughed so hard that tears had formed in her eyes. She nodded a few times as she wiped the tears from her eyes.

“Yup, I’m having one. A fated encounter that is.”

Saying that, she looked me straight in the eye and continued.

“That’s why, I don’t want to let that meeting get away.”

I could feel a burning determination coming from beyond her gaze.

Feeling a strange sense of pressure, I turned my gaze away from her and nodded.

“I see. Well, do your best.”

“Yes, I will!”

Mishima gave an unnatural bow and cheerfully smiled. Seeing that expression, I felt overcome by a sense of relief.

Now that’s the usual Mishima.

I’ve only noticed this recently, but seeing a ‘unknown expression’ from someone I knew made me feel rather uncomfortable.

The same applied be it Sayu or Gotou-san.

Seeing these unknown expressions, I would feel a sense of helplessness, not knowing what to do.

As for Mishima in particular, I honestly think that the playful way in which she usually smiled suited her really well.

At that thought though, I couldn’t help but feel a little uneasy.

Back when she had first become my subordinate, that ‘playful smile’ of hers had been a source of further frustration. Despite that, how was it now? I now felt that that aspect of hers was considerably charming instead.

Taken aback by the change in my thoughts, I let out a bitter smile.

“Well, I’m sure you’ll be fine, Mishima.”

Hearing me say that, Mishima tilted her head in puzzlement and looked at me wide-eyed.

“What?”

“I’m talking about your fated encounter. If it’s you, I’m sure that you’ll be able to make something out of it.”

Mishima head tilted further as she looked at me with a complicated expression.

“What do you mean by that?”

The straightforward manner in which she pressed for answers made me feel a little embarrassed.

“I mean... Mishima, you’re a pretty quick-witted person and you’ve got a great smile. I’m sure that fated person of yours will fall for you eventually, at least, that’s what I think.”

In the silence that followed, I could feel the embarrassment slowly getting to my head as I awkwardly scratched the back of my head. I’m really just not used to praising someone. It’s honestly nothing to write home about, but it made me feel oddly embarrassed.

Noticing that Mishima seemed unresponsive, I turned my eyes towards her and found her gaze drifting restlessly about.

For someone who I would expect to take this all in with a frivolous smile, she seemed strangely uncomposed.

“W-, Well... That would be-”

Mishima mumbled with a mixed expression.

Then, she showed a pained smile.

“A little hard.”

I had never seen such a smile from her before.

It was different from the ‘deceitful smile’ that she would show at work; it was as if she was hiding away something important behind that smile.

I had blanked out for a moment think that I had stepped on some sort of emotional landmine, but by the time I came to my senses, Mishima’s expression looked as though nothing had happened.

“Well, that being said, I’m really happy to be praised! I mean, it’s not everyday that Yoshida-senpai of all people praises me!”

“I wish you’d give me something to praise you about at work though...”

“Ahaha, I’ll try my best in moderation~”

Mishima giggled and showed her usual mischievous smile.

“That aside, Yoshida-senpai.”

I recognize that expression of hers.

It’s the expression she carries when teasing me.

Feeling a sense of impending danger, I instinctively shifted backwards, but before I could complete my retreat, Mishima rushed up to me.

“Wh...”

In the next moment, she pulled me in with a tight embrace. Since I was about a head taller than Mishima, it was as though she was burying her face in my chest.

“Hey, what are you...”

As the sudden sweet scent of shampoo lightly slipped into my nostrils, I could feel a tingling sensation running across my body.

“Oi, let go already...”

Mustering my wits, I grabbed Mishima’s shoulders, readying myself to peel her off of me. It was then that Mishima suddenly raised her head, gazing directly at me with upturned eyes and a teasing smile.

“...Did I make your heart skip a beat?”

“...-! Like hell you did, just let go already!”

Finally wrenching Mishima off of me, she broke out into a fit of shrill comical giggling as looked me straight in the eye and said.

“So you can make that kind of face as well, Yoshida-senpai.”

“That kind of face...? What do you mean by that?”

Hearing me ask that, Mishima showed a toothy grin, as if she were celebrating a great victory.

“The face of someone whose heart skipped a beat, of course.”

“Tch...”

Having been unable to hide my unrest, I was now being subjected to the relentless teasing from behind a triumphant smirk.

Without voicing my irritation, I turned my gaze away from Mishima.

“It’s not nice to tease a guy like this.”

“I wasn’t teasing you though.”

Mishima plainly declared.

“I wasn’t wondering if even I could make your heart skip a beat.”

“...As if I won’t if a woman decided to embrace me so closely.”

“Oh, so that means you think of me as a woman! Ahaha~”

She giggled, though I’m not sure what she found so funny. Then, she exhaled loudly as if trying to empty all the air from her stomach.

Just what was she scheming now? I thought to myself with an exasperated sigh.

Curious as to what time it was, I took a look at my wristwatch, which showed that it was nearly 10pm. I’m a little worried about Sayu, so I should probably head home soon.

Raising my head, my gaze locked in with Mishima’s, who had started staring me right in the eye as I was lost in my thoughts.

“You look like you want to go home.”

“Well... it’s about time I guess.”

“Alright, then let’s call it a day.”

Mishima said briskly then quickly bowed her head.

“Well then, thanks for everything today.”

“It was my pleasure...?”

I don't think that I've done anything worth thanking me for. She's conscientious in the strangest ways.

With a gleeful smile and the turn of the heel, Mishima paced towards the station.

As I saw her off, she suddenly turned around.

“What would you if my fated person-”

Shouted Mishima.

“Was you! Yoshida-senpai-!”

“Hey cut it out already! Just go home!”

At my reply, Mishima let out another amused laugh and waved her arms high in the air towards me. Finally, without turn around this time, she headed into the station.

“...Time to head back.”

I murmured to myself as I walked away from the station.

A fated person.

As that saying traversed across my mind, the image that flickered within was that of Sayu's face.

I looked at my wristwatch again. It was now 10pm.

Would Sayu still be awaiting my return? Or would she have gotten tired of waiting and gone to sleep?

Regardless of which, I can't help but feel a little guilty.

I did contact her before going to the movies, but by that time she had surely started making dinner already.

I'll make sure to eat today's leftovers for tomorrow's breakfast.

With that in mind, I hastened my pace and arrived home before long. It definitely feels faster to walk home with something in mind rather than absentmindedly trotting home.

As I turned my key in the lock, I didn't hear the usual clack

"Huh... I guess she forgot to lock it."

Tilting my head a little, I opened the door.

"Sorry I'm late. Sayu, you forgot to lock the door."

As I walked in, I could immediately tell that something was off. Though, I couldn't tell what that something was.

Usually, she'd pop her head out and greet me, but today there was no reply.

"Is she sleeping...?"

I took my shoes off and walked into the living room, but she wasn't there."

"Hey, Sayu?"

I knocked on the door of the wash and changing room and opened the door, but the bathroom heater wasn't on. I could feel the cold sweat forming on the surface of my skin.



I opened the bathroom door just to make sure, but Sayu wasn't inside either.

"...Maybe she went to the convenience store?"

It would be good if that was the case, but she never goes out to buy anything beyond basic necessities, so it's hard to believe.

I took out my smartphone and opened the messaging apps

'Hey, where are you right now?'

After sending that messaging, I heard a light electronic beep from the direction of the living room.

"...My god."

Rushing to the living room, I found the phone that I had left Sayu on the table.

Cold sweat began to trickle.

She left the house on her own but left her phone behind?

Well, maybe she's the type to not always have her phone on her, maybe I was just overthinking it...

But I couldn't shake off this uneasy feeling.

What if someone had entered this place and dragged Sayu away by force?

When that thought surfaced in my mind, my body bounced like a spring.

I hurriedly slipped on my shoes and ran out the door.

The dull and ordinary streets of the residential district seemed darker than ever.

# VOLUME 1 – CHAPTER 15

“Is it really okay?”

He said with his arms clutched on my shoulders.

He exuded a kind atmosphere. He had a handsome face, objectively speaking, but it wasn't my type.

I've already forgotten his name.

“It's fine.”

I tried my best to show him a relaxed smile.

He nodded at my response, touched my body, and then connected us.

“Does it feel good?”

He asked.

“Mhm.”

I nodded.

To be honest, it was painful.

But pain was good.

“Misaki...-”

He called my name.

That wasn't my actual name, but my current name.

"It feels good."

I said with a cutesy voice as if that were true.

I know that that's all it would take to satisfy him.

Does it feel good? Does it feel bad? I can't tell.

All I could feel was a slight throbbing in my stomach and a numbness around the entrance.

Those two sensations gave me a sense of relief.

At least I have a body.

I thought.

When I woke up, the room was already dark.

"Huh..."

I hurriedly got up and looked at the clock. It was already 9pm.

My mind went blank seeing that. At this time, unless I prepared everything beforehand, I wouldn't finish making dinner before Yoshida-san got back.

Ever since Yoshida-san assigned me to do the 'household chores', I've always prepared the food and bath before he returned from work. I've always thought of it as my duty.

I was about to send a message to Yoshida-san to tell him that dinner would be late when I noticed a notification on the smartphone that he had bought me.

It was from him.

‘I’ll be watching a movie with a colleague at the cinema of the nearest station, so I’ll be late. Have dinner without me.’

I was overcome with relief upon seeing that message.

“...Thank god.”

That didn’t mean it was acceptable for me to sleep at such a weird time, but at least I didn’t bother Yoshida-san in the process.

Calming my nerves, I noticed that my skin was moist from cold sweat.

As the chilling sensation traversed through my body, I remembered the contents of the dream I awoke from a moment ago. Goosebumps immediately leaped from the surface of my skin.

I hadn’t had such a vivid recollection of those times since I’ve come to this home; I immediately understood why that was the case.

Yoshida-san’s mysterious kindness had given my heart a moment of reprieve. I was deeply aware of this.

Despite that, that the path to which I arrived here won’t disappear. That was reality.

“Yoshida-san.”

My thoughts spilled from my mind.

That was when I came to the realisation that I was an incredibly foolish human being.

I should have resolved myself for this from the moment I stayed at the first stranger's house. In exchange for running away from home, I would live out my life like this.

To escape from what was true hardship, I had to be prepared for another kind of hardship.

Immediately, I had become numb – as intended.

Though, to be honest, I think I really did feel it. Even if I felt uneasy about what I was doing, even if I felt repulsed about what I was doing, I just let it be and continued on my way.

And then, I met Yoshida-san.

He denied everything that I had become, yet accepted me as I was. He had made me feel troubled, confused, moved, and this time, he made me feel uneasy.

He thought that I was selfish, weak, foolish.

Yoshida-san was truly kind; moreso than any of the people I'd met thus far.

Although he was one to assess others strictly, it was only out of worry. As much as he acted as though he prioritised himself, he would always keep an eye out for others.

For someone like him to show me kindness, it must be out of pity.

It was strange.

Ever since I ran away... Ever since I ran away from the fate that I had been bound to, I had only ever concerned myself with 'how much time I had left until I was going to be thrown away'.

How many more months, weeks, or – more often – days would it be? This question was always on my mind.

But it was different now.

I think that some part of me doesn't want to be thrown away by him.

Rather, maybe that same part of wants him to like me.

It's not that I want him to love me. I want to support his romantic pursuits, and I want him to be happy.

Even so, I want to have a place as 'somebody' he likes. That would be my wish.

That was why... his kindness had become my greatest fear.

If even he would throw me away, then how am I supposed to find any value in myself?

I still haven't figured out what his requirement for not hating me is.

What does he want from me? Have I fulfilled what he requires from me?

The more I think about it, the more uneasy I get.

'I'll be watching a movie with a colleague at the cinema of the nearest station'.

Looking down from the phone, I deeply pondered the meaning behind this message that Yoshida-san had sent me.

By colleague, did he mean girl? Since Yoshida didn't say superior instead, it probably wasn't the Gotou-san who he was in love with.

However, Yoshida-san definitely wasn't the type to take the initiative to play after work. Not to mention, he had gone to the movies.

As for who invited him, I had a gut feeling that it was probably a girl.

Was it the girl who invited him to go drinking the other day?

Yoshida-san liked Gotou-san, but what about that girl? Did he perhaps like her too? If so, what were they planning on doing after the movie?

These thoughts seemed to go on forever. Even though it should have nothing to do with me, I couldn't help but get more and more anxious and time went on.

I peeked at the clock again. It was already past 9:30pm.

The message from Yoshida-san was received at around 7pm.

"The movie... should be ending soon."

Usually, I don't think I would've even considered doing such a thing.

Yet, knowing full well how stupid this was, I couldn't contain myself.

Still wearing my indoor clothes, I put on socks, slipped on my loafers, and ran out the door of Yoshida-san's home.

I'll wait outside the cinema, take a look at Yoshida-san and the person who's with him, and then go home. That's all I plan on doing.



It would only be logical for me to be unable to find him. Since I don't know what movie he was watching, I'd have to run into him by coincidence when he was leaving the cinema. Moreover, there would be a mass of people in the area in front of the station.

Finding him from such a crowd didn't feel realistic at all.

Or at least it should've been.

Should I consider myself lucky or unlucky? The moment I arrived in front of the cinema, I spotted Yoshida-san.

Him, and the lovely suit-wearing girl who held him in a tight hug.

As if my body had turned into stone, I couldn't move a muscle.

Yoshida-san showed an expression I haven't seen before. He looked flustered, troubled, embarrassed.

The scene reminded me of the day that Yoshida-san had gone to the drinking get-together with Gotou-san. Back then, when I gave him a hug on hopes of encouraging him, he had showed a slightly troubled smile and patting my shoulder, saying 'that's enough'.

I was forced to realize it.

Yoshida-san really didn't think of me as a woman in the slightest.

That, and that the same could not be said for the girl who currently held Yoshida-san tightly in her arms.

I could tell from his expression alone.

"That's alright, I guess."

I murmured in a voice unheard to anyone but myself.

“This isn’t something that I should be worried about.”

Finally, my body began to move again. I turned away from the station and began walking away.

Go back. Go back, don’t show anything, and greet him as though nothing had happened.

Apologize for not having prepared dinner and ask him to take a bath first.

One step, two steps. Then, I came to a halt.

Everything in my vision had become faded and blurry.

“Huh.....?”

The trickling sensation rolling down my face told me everything. I was crying.

“Why?”

Noticing that the passersbys began casting their puzzled gazes towards me, I flusteredly fled the scene.

I wiped my eyes with the sleeves of my sweater, but tears kept gushing forth uncontrollably.

My mind flashed back to image of Yoshida-san being hugged by the unknown girl.

“Why... Why...?”

Why do I hate it so so much?

When that question surfaced from my heart, I finally noticed the feelings that had sprouted inside me.

“...Haha, it can’t be.”

Even though my eyes continued to flood with tears, a dry smile leaked onto my lips.

I’m... jealous.

Towards a girl I knew nothing of.

Towards the girl who drew forth expressions from Yoshida-san that I hadn’t seen before.

Shameless as it may be, I had to admit it – I wanted to monopolize Yoshida-san.

“... I’m just so, so-”

The pain seemed to rend my chest apart.

It was a boundless, incorrigible pain.

“Foolish... aren’t I?”

Before I knew it, the thudding of my feet against the pavement had been woven between the cries of my sobbing.

If I continued to stay there, I would only be a burden to his happiness.

I can’t go back, I can’t go back.

It’s just that... I have nowhere else to go.

So I aimlessly ran off into the night, gushing and huffing, like the fool that I was.

\*

After separating from Yoshida-senpai and passing through the toll gates, I came to a halt on the stairs heading towards platform.

“Going home like this... makes me feel a little peeved.”

The very thought of the expression that he bore when he saw me off made me feel a little annoyed. He had looked as though he were a parent sending his child off to kindergarten.

As exhilarating as it was to have made his heart jump before leaving, it was apparent from his attitude today that – despite him viewing me as a woman – he didn’t think of me as a potential romance at all.

I understood that, but I still couldn’t help but feel a little disheartened.

And that was probably why I felt a strong urge to stick around. ‘As if I would go home having done so little!?’ the thought refused to subside.

That being said though, it’s not like I felt an urge to chase after Yoshida-senpai. To start with, given the way he looked when he sent me off, he probably headed straight home without loitering around. Even if I were to go after him now, I hadn’t the slightest clue which direction he headed off to.

With that, I figured that I may as well take a stroll in the area around the station closest to Yoshida-senpai's home.

To quickly turn my thoughts into action was one of my few strengths.

I exited the paid area and looked around the plaza in front of the station.

The station was bigger than I had expected. It had its own cinema, restaurants, and a department store to boot. Though, amusingly, I couldn't imagine him frequenting any of these facilities.

My memory's a little fuzzy, but I think I remember hearing that he lived over 10 minutes away from the station.

"Alright, let's go this way then."

Spotting a less busy and somewhat dimly lit avenue, so I figured that I may as well go that way.

It's not that I hated the crowdedness of the station, but I liked the peculiar atmosphere that was found only in these open, quiet places.

He may have walked down this road before, or he may have not. Regardless, there was a mysterious vibe to walking through this place.

"Well, despite that..."

I mumbled to myself in a particularly deserted part of the road.

Despite that-

I never imagined that I would be so gripped by romance.

I always loved movies, love stories even more so, but as I viewer, I couldn't help but think that such plots and settings were far departed from my life. I enjoyed such stories as an onlooker and nothing more.

Men in reality always seemed disheartening by comparison, either lackluster or self-centered. Perhaps it was because I thought I would never meet a wonderful man like those that always appeared in such stories.

To be completely honest, the reason I had my current job was almost certainly because I had an appearance that was 'popular with older men'.

During the interview, the only person that attempted to pry out my true nature was Gotou-san. Had she had a larger role in my employment, I wouldn't have been hired in the first place.

So, I joined the company due to the acceptance of older men, and soon became a subject of their fawning.

Immediately after that, I noticed that in such a workplace, it would be easier to get by slacking off when I could rather than working my butt off. I just had to pretend I didn't know what to do, then after getting an incomprehensible explanation from one of the older men, I would show a bit off progress and say 'it was all thanks to you senpai!' with a smile on top. I would receive the least amount of stress while outputting the least amount of work. And so, I planned to keep this half-heartedness up until I had enough money saved up.

It was then that I was assigned to Yoshida-senpai's project.

He really had a way of actually taking care of someone, as in, he wouldn't accept 'being unable' as the way I was, nor would he feel a sense of superiority over a junior that could do her job. Rather, he would assess me strictly and unsparingly.

For the first time since entering this company, someone seemed to have seen me for what I was actually capable of. Although it was a blunder on my part, I couldn't help but feel a little joyful.

Despite that, I further polished my act and continued playing to role of the 'incapable'. Just how far would I press for him to crack? And so, with a mix of anticipation and uneasiness, I continued to poke at his shell like a child. Even so, he didn't crack at all.

By the time I realized it, I had begun following him with my eyes during work. From there, it wasn't hard to figure out that he had a crush on Gotou-san.

'I see I see, he's working hard to impress this girl', so I had thought, but after a while, it didn't seem to be the case. Even when she was out on assignments to affiliate companies, he was working the same as ever, if not even harder than when she was present. Though his neighbor Hashimoto-senpai would complain and grumble about it, he would continue to distribute workload to his project members. It seemed that he had always held a serious demeanor and a strong sense of responsibility.

I soon came to understand that I wasn't the only one he was kind to either.

I felt that, carrying that sentiment, my feelings for him had at some time twisted into love.

"Oh?"

The path branched from here. Downhill led to an even darker area, while going up the stairs felt as though it would lead to a somewhat spacious area.

Feeling as though the path was dark enough as it is, I decided to head up the stairs. I preferred the sensation of going upstairs to the

downhill slope anyway. The conscious sense of going one stair at a time was somewhat enjoyable.

The street lights became more frequent as I went, making it a much brighter area than the last. Reaching the end of the staircase, I encountered a neat little park.

“Oooh, there’s a nice feeling to this place.”

Looking around, there was an area lined with several benches.

“It seems like the sort of place where kids can play on the lawn while the parents chat around.”

It was located directly next to an apartment building, so it must’ve been the residential district’s park.

That being said, a park with a lawn was quite to my taste. The place around where I lived was a little garish by comparison, so it wasn’t the sort of place where there would be such a park.

Taking in my surroundings, I walked towards the bench and took a seat.

On the concrete area a short distance away, it looked like a young boy was practicing on his skateboard. There didn’t seem to be anyone other than him around.

Having few people around was calming; it seemed like the perfect time to absentmindedly think about something.

As long as I made it back to the station before the last train, it felt as though I could stay here as long as I wanted. The lingering thoughts of my mini-date with senpai seemed to come flooding back.

Though, I was starting to feel a little hungry.



Now that I think about it, we came to the cinema without grabbing anything to eat first.

“I think I brought something earlier...”

I put my bag down beside me and started fishing in my bag for a few snacks I vaguely remember bringing along that might fill me up a little. While I was distracted doing that, I felt that there was something beside me that I didn’t see earlier.

“Waah”

I let out an inane shout as I stood to attention.

Behind the bench next to me was a person sitting on the floor with their arms wrapped around their knees.

“T... That scared me.”

Judging by her long hair, it seemed to be a girl. Her body was wrapped in a rough looking sweater.

At my shout, she solemnly raised her head. Too young. It was clear that she was still a minor. Turning my eyes towards her feet, she wore a pair of loafers. As I first thought, she was something akin to a high-school girl.

We looked blankly at one another for a few seconds, before she hung her mouth and uttered.

“Ah... you’re the person from”

“Hm?”

“No, it’s...”

The girl shook her head and shut her mouth.

“You’re a high schooler, aren’t you? What are you doing out so late? If you’re out after 10 o’clock you’re going to be sent to the guidance counselor later you know?”

Hearing what I said, the girl showed a grim expression and turned her gaze towards the ground.

“I just don’t know... where to go back to.”

From that alone, I gained a rough understanding of her situation..

I see, so she ran away.

It’s a different story for a university student, but it would be rough for a high-schooler to do the same. For people who looked particularly young, a bit of bad luck would soon turn to finding themselves on the receiving end of guidance if they were to use the metro and the like. For people who wanted to avoid that, they had no choice but to wander aimlessly nearby.

“...Well, that wouldn’t happen if they were with their guardian.”

I uttered before I noticed.

There were times where one wanted to run away from home and indulge in doing what they never could’ve before, I understood that feeling.

As the girl gazed blankly at me, sat down on the bench once again and told her.

“Look, I’ll be here until the last train is about to leave, so take your time and think about whatever you need to think about, okay?”

Hearing what I said, the girl's eyes seemed to grow wet, and she tightly bit her lower lip.

"...Thank you very much."

"It's nothing, really."

Kids with manners were often good kids.

With such an antiquated thought, I began fishing through my bag once again. My hunger only got worse as time passed.

After a bit of mixing around the contents of my bag, I finally found what I was looking for. It was the packs of rice bran crackers that I kept on me for times like these.

As I opened the packet of crackers-

*Grrruuuuu*

My stomach rang out.

Looking at the bench beside me, the girl's face was still buried in her knees, not moving in the slightest. Though, the little of what I could see of her ears had turned a little red.

"Heh-"

I chuckled to myself, and offered one of my two packs of crackers to the girl.

"Wanna eat?"

The girl raised her head. Though she briefly showed a worried expression as her gaze scrawled across the floor, after a long deliberation, she nodded.

“Alright then, take it. What’s your name?”

“Thank you very much... My name is... Aka-...”

The girl stopped. Only after a long breath did her expression slacken a little.

“My name is Sayu.”

“Sayu-chan. I see~, that’s a nice name, call me Yuzuha.”

It was probably a fake name. She had probably intended to give her actual name, but stopped in the middle.

She was cleverer than I expected, though, I like talking to clever kids.

I had meant to enjoy this time alone, but it was nice to enjoy these unexpected meetings too.

Taking a bite from a cracker, I thought of a topic to chat about.

# VOLUME 1 – CHAPTER 16

“You’re a runaway?”

Asked Yuzuha-san after a brief moment of silence. There was an odd tone to her voice.

She wasn’t really prying or questioning me or anything like that. ‘I’m sort of curious, but you don’t really need to answer’, her voice seemed to imply.

“Well... something like that.”

Though, that was something that happened over half a year ago. This time, I had just run away from Yoshida-san’s home.

I had originally intended to turn back, but the carefree cracker munching lady next to me gave me a reason not to for the time being.

Why was this person loitering around in a place like this at this time? The question piqued my curiosity, but I think that it would be pointless to ponder about it.

“Running away, hrrrmc... mhgmhgmhg”

Yuzuha said with her mouth full of crackers. Swallowing with a big gulp, she continued.

“I guess there are times where you would want to run away... Back when I was still a high schooler I ran away a bunch of times.”

“Mhm, I see.”

“My mom and I never got along you see, so I ended up running away a lot after we fights.”

Yuzuha said with a nostalgic smiled. Then, she turned her gaze sideways towards me.”

“So why did you run away, Sayu-chan?”

The question left me at a loss for words. Why did I decide to not go back to Yoshida-san’s home? I wasn’t able to put my answer into clear words.

Seeing that I couldn’t find it in myself to speak, Yuzuha turned her gaze away from me and opened and took a breath like a pitcher readying to throw.

“You know, fighting with family... getting tired of going through the motions in a happy household... there’s a lot of reasons.”

My reason was definitely neither of those.

That said, the words ‘happy household’ seemed to speak to me.

“Did you get along with your family? Were they good to you?”  
Yuzuha-san asked.

He wasn’t my parent, but I should answer with him in mind. After all, she was asking for the reason why I was here.

“We get along great... at least I think we do. They’re unbelievably kind too.”

Yuzuha took a glance at me and muttered ‘I see’, as if to show that she was paying attention.

“You ran away despite that?”

Her voice suggest that she meant to confirm my decision, rather than question it.

It’s strange. I had been so wary of her until a few moments ago. To be honest, the scene of her holding Yoshida-san in her arms still made me feel queasy.

Despite that, during the course of this conversation, I got the feeling that I could pour my heart out to her.

“I don’t believe... that there could be unconditional kindness.”

Yuzuha-san’s shoulders jumped hearing what I said. She turned to gaze directly at me, tilted her head slightly, and waited for me to continue.

“There is always a reason, no matter how insignificant... for anyone to show kindness to another.”

“I think so as well.” Yuzuha-san agreed with a slight nod.

“At home... there is someone who’s been incredibly kind to me, but no matter how much I think about it just can’t figure out why. Why are they treating me like this?”

The words seemed to fly out of my chest. My thoughts were being translated to words so smoothly that even I was surprised. Why was I saying all this to someone I had just met? Not to mention, this girl should’ve been a nuisance to me, so why was I telling her all this? The thought whirled through my mind, but I didn’t stop.

“Just the thought that there’ll be one day where I would become unnecessary burden... that I would be thrown to the wayside makes me restless.”

“So you ran away?”

Seeing me nod in response, Yuzuha-san sighed.

“...Well, it’s not like I don’t understand how you feel.”

She swung her legs back and forth as she continued.

“I also think that there’s no such thing as unconditional kindness... but sometimes, I can’t help but think that there are people out there that might convince me otherwise.”

She had seemed uninvested at first, but now I could feel some passion behind her words.

“It didn’t matter how much I thought about why they were being so kind, in the end, I couldn’t figure it out. Yet, despite knowing that, I couldn’t stop thinking about it.”

Saying that, the girl let out a wry chuckle.

“And by the time I realized it, I was entranced.”

Ah, so that’s who she was talking about. Looking at her profile, there was no way I wouldn’t understand.

That she was talking about Yoshida-san, and that she had surely fallen for him.

Although we both spoke in vague terms, we were talking about the same person. Though, I was the only one who realized that.

“Fear is quite a troublesome thing to deal with isn’t it? It can make people do what they otherwise wouldn’t, but also stop them right in their tracks.”



Yuzuha-san suddenly stated. In one smooth motion, she raised her gaze from the ground and turned her head to peer directly into my eyes.

“I heard this quote from a movie sometime ago, and when I did, I remember going ‘I see’.”

Still locking her gaze to mine, she continued.

“Sayu-chan, I think that you’ve been possessed by your fears and become unable to take action.”

Hearing her put it into words, I couldn’t help but agree. I was afraid; afraid of being a bother to him, afraid of being one day be rejected by him, afraid that when that time comes, I would lose my place to belong.

“But if you let your fear stop you from doing what you need to do, nothing will ever change. You’ll wallow in fear forever and ever.”

She suddenly propped herself upright from the bench and stretched.

“If that’s the case, wouldn’t it be better to do something?”

Being the twisted and broken person that I was, I found it difficult to meet her honest and unwavering gaze. There was more to her than meets the eye, but she was a straightforward person nonetheless.

She had managed to put her thoughts into actions; the result was probably that hug.

“Well, there are some things that won’t change just because you act...”

Yuzuha-san showed a somewhat self-loathing smile and reseated herself on the bench.

“By that do you mean the person you were talking about just now?” I asked despite knowing full well.

She nodded in reply as her gaze dropped to the floor.

“Mhm. I tried my best to appeal to him, but it didn’t seem like he noticed at all. Maybe my ways just aren’t applicable to him.”

Though, I was sure that that wasn’t the case. She had managed to draw an expression out of him that even I hadn’t yet seen before. That was an expression that I’m sure he only showed to ‘women’.

However, I didn’t voice this knowledge. I couldn’t just say that I had been peeping all along.

“That said though, it’s better than doing nothing at all. At the very least, it’s better than lounging around waiting for the future to come, then coming to regret having not done anything after the fact...”

The tone of her voice was a bit heavier than before, as if she were flinging her words to the floor.

“There’s something to be gained from trying everything and learning that it was all for naught.”

Her words didn’t seem to be directed at me anymore. She was saying all this to sort through her feelings.

Even so, what she said strangely resonated with me. My heartbeat got louder.

Since half a year ago... No, since long before that, all I’ve been doing is running away. I ran and ran and ran, away from my fears, not knowing how far it would take me. I schemed and tricked to continue this life of doing ‘nothing in particular’. Although it worked out, I was unable to find any answers.

Compared to someone like me, the girl before me was forthcoming, tenacious and beautiful.

“I don’t think it was pointless.”

The words naturally flowed from my mouth. Yuzuha looked at me with surprise.

“It would be irresponsible for me to say that everything will go well... but even so... I’m sure that your honest feelings... will cause that person to change.” I said, picking my words carefully.

Yuzuha’s gaze seemed to waver.

Then, she avoided my gaze altogether and scratched the tip of her nose embarrassedly.

“That’s encouraging...”

She said as her lips tightened. After a brief pause—

“Thanks a lot.” She said in a soft, humming tone.”

“It’s nothing...”

Silence flowed between us. Though, it was not a off-putting silence, but rather a strangely calming one.

Moments earlier, I felt the crushing weight of sadness in my chest, but that was now replaced by a warm calm sensation. I really was a helpless naïve child, wasn’t I?

“Sayu-chan, I don’t know who it is that you don’t want to dislike you; your family, your lover, or perhaps someone else entirely...”

Yuzuha said as she stood up from the bench and leisurely walked towards the bench I was sitting at. Then, she took a seat right beside me.

“But if you want to be involved with them from here on out, if you want yourself to feel needed by them, then there’s something you have to do first.”

Saying that, Yuzuha-san brought my hands between hers. My hands had gotten cold after being exposed to the chilly nighttime winds, but her hands were rather warm. Feeling a little embarrassed, I asked back.

“Something I have to do...”

“You need to lay your true nature bare.”

“My true nature...?”

“That’s right. ‘This is who I am. This is a part of me. Knowing that would you still be with me?’ That sort of thing.”

Saying that, she suddenly let go of my hands, causing the chilly sensation to return.

“I don’t believe that there’s anyone out there that hides nothing, but it would be hard to tell someone to accept you as you are while hiding everything there is to hide.”

“...You have a point.” I replied whilst thinking about Yoshida-san.

I could feel that he purposely avoided asking about my background; and that I had let it be for my own benefit.

But the present situation was as Yuzuha-san had stated. It was honestly naïve and self-serving for me to think that he would accept me as I was while I hid everything from him.

“Not to mention... The really kind person you were talking about has been unconditionally kind to you since you’ve known them, right?”

“...Mhm, to be point that it scares me.”

“Then won’t it be right to assume that they’ll continue to stay that way regardless?”

Upon hearing what she said, I came to a sudden realization.

“If they’ve been unconditionally kind to you, Sayu-chan, then I think that means that they really have faith in you. So, won’t you try to have faith in them... if only just a little bit more?”

What she said was right.

Has he betrayed even once? Though we haven’t been living together for all that long, I don’t think that he’s ever disregarded me.

“I think... you’re right.”

I let myself get trapped in my thoughts, creating the very fears that I ran away from.

I’m really foolish, aren’t I?

“...Ready to go back?”

Yuzuha-san said with a gentle smile as she looked me straight in the eye.

She didn't force the matter. It was merely a well-intentioned question.

Well, there wasn't really meaning in sitting around any longer. Plus, Yoshida-san might be getting worried around now.

"Mhm... I'll-" Translated by yuNS

-head back. [www. crimsonmagic .me](http://www.crimsonmagic.me)

So I meant to say, but the rapid clattering of feet against the nearby pavement drew our attention away.

The noise was accompanied by the person that had appeared in my mind moments earlier.

"SAYU!!"

Hearing the cry, my shoulders reflexively jumped.

Yoshida-san, still wearing his work suit, jogged towards us upon spotting me. He was dripping with sweat all around.

"...The heck are you doing here?"

"Uhm, I..."

"You left your phone behind as well, so I got worried..."

Out of breath, Yoshida-san turned to look at the person beside me and suddenly froze.

"...Didn't you go back already, Mishima?"

"I could say the same for you, senpai..."

Yuzuha-san, her expression not hiding her bewilderment in the slightest, turned her gaze back and forth between Yoshida-san and I.

“Uhm... about this...”

Yuzuha-san rigidly smiled and proceeded to ask.

“Is she your daughter?”

“Like hell she is!”

“Oh of course,ahaha.”

Yoshida-san too, bewilderedly turned his gaze back and forth between Yuzuha-san and I, but his eyes soon shot a glare towards me.

“I sure hope you have an acceptable explanation for this.”

An acceptable explanation.

Hearing him say that made me feel a little strange. Was it because he had noticed that I was gone and had been flustered about it?

Wouldn't someone normally be more at ease instead when I was gone?

Following that train of thought, what Yuzuha-san had said to earlier came to mind.

‘So, won't you try to have faith in them... if only just a little bit more?’

Despite how he's treated me thus far, I'm still unable to put my trust in him due to the fear that's nested inside me.

I think it's about time to face it once and for all.

"I'm not sure if you'll be able to accept it... but I promise to explain everything."

Hearing my response, Yoshida-san finally loosened his scrunched eyebrows and let out a sigh. Seeing the sweat trickle from his cheek to his chin made me feel a little happy, but also rather apologetic.

"Uhm, senpai, hello."

Yuzuha-san stood up and wave her hand in front of his face.

"What do you want."

"What do you mean by 'what do you want'? Isn't she a high-school girl?"

"What about it?"

"What do you mean by 'what about it'? Aren't you two living together?"

"Yeah, so?"

"Yeah, so'...?"

She grew increasingly restless with each passing moment, scratching her hair noisily.

"So the reason you've been going home early is..."

She murmured. After a brief moment, she loudly clicked her tongue.

"AHHH, I don't get it!!"



She plopped herself on the bench and raised her legs off the floor.

“So we were talking about the same person... Haha, that’s sort of interesting I guess.” She uttered with a slackened smile.

She turned to look at me.

“By the way, that’s a secret, okay?”

“Ah... Yes, of course.”

Seeing me nod in reply, Yoshida-san looked at us with suspicion.

“By that you mean...?”

“...Didn’t you hear that it’s a secret?” I declared.

Yoshida-san hurriedly glanced at both Yuzuha-san and I, before dropping his shoulders in resignation.

“Senpai!”

We jumped in surprise at Yuzuha’s sudden shout.”

“What is it?”

“...I sure hope you have an acceptable explanation for this.”

Yuzuha-san mimicked Yoshida-san’s earlier statement word for word, but with a far more menacing tone.

Yoshida-san smiled awkwardly and lightly nodded.

“Alright, I’ll explain everything to you sometime.”

Yuzuha-san stared at him for a brief moment, before letting out a sigh. Then, she stood up from the bench with a cheerful smile.

“Well, you know what they say about ‘poking your head into other family’s business’, so I’ll get going.”

“Why were you even here in the first place, anyway?”

“And that is none of your business now is it senpai?”

Yuzuha-san mischievously stuck her tongue out and picked up her bag.

“Or maybe your heart skipped a beat meeting me at a place like this?”

“Not rea-... Hey ow!”

After hitting Yoshida-san with her bag, she began to giggle.

“Well, catch you later, Sayu-chan.”

“Ah... see you.”

As I returned her wave with a light bow, Yuzuha-san turned her eyes towards Yoshida-san.

“Also, I’ll be looking forward to that ‘acceptable explanation’ of yours, Yoshida-senpai.”

“I got it.” He said as he averted his gaze embarrassedly.

With all that done, Yuzuha-san returned down the steps from which she came.

I’m not sure how to put it, but she’s a cool person.

I'm sure that she understands what within herself is truly important.

"Hey, Mishima!"

Yoshida-san's sudden shout snapped me out of my thoughts and caused Yuzuha-san to turn back in surprise.

"Be safe on your way home!"

In response, Yuzuha-san broke into a fit of giggling, before shouting in return.

"Alright, Dad!"

Hearing that, even I couldn't help but chuckle.

Yoshida-san awkwardly scratched the back of his head and waved his finger towards Yuzuha-san with a 'shh' gesture.

Finally seeing her off, Yoshida-san glanced sideways towards me.

"Let's go back."

Thought it had been a nonchalant statement, my chest felt like it was going to burst for some reason.

Holding back the tears that seemed like it would burst out any moment, I nodded in response.

"...Mm, alright."

He let out a brief sigh. Then, giving me a light pat on the back, he walked ahead.

Yoshida-san's back seemed so big in that moment.

# VOLUME 1 – CHAPTER 17

I went to take a shower first after arriving at home.

The sensation of sweat running down my skin felt nasty, plus, I was in the mood for a hot bath.

Not to mention, I need some time to find the words to deal with Sayu. If I sort through my feelings in the shower beforehand, I would hopefully be able to face her with a calm mindset.

The hot water helped relaxed my tense mind and allow the questions I carried to surface.

First, thank god I was able to find her; all the more so without incident. After all, I had ran out to find her with the mindset that she had maybe been kidnapped by some hoodlums or the like.

However, with her safety came another question.

Why had she run away? She hadn't contacted me at all either.

If she had merely meant to go out for business, knowing her, she would've certainly contacted me beforehand.

However, she hadn't done that. Rather, she left her smartphone at home.

Rationally, it meant that she simply disliked this place and meant to leave here for good. However, she had left all her belongings here as well.

I don't know why she was with Mishima either. Had they planned to meet up in front of the station? But they shouldn't have known one another to begin with.

However, the alternative – meeting at the park – seemed rather strange as well...

No matter how much I thought about it, I wasn't able to figure it out.

“...It'd be faster to ask her directly.”

I knew that, but I couldn't bring myself to follow through with it.

I shut off the faucet and got up from the bath.

With the whirlpool of thoughts still weighing on my mind, I exited the washroom.

I roughly dried my hair and body with my bath towel, put on my underwear, dressed in my pajamas, and exited the dressing room.

“It's your turn, Sa-“

Exiting the dressing room, I looked in the direction of the living room, where Sayu was. My mouth remained open as I stopped for a few seconds to process what was happening.

“Hey...”

My mind was turning, but I had nothing to show for it. Finally, I mustered up something to say.

“Put on your clothes.”

That was all I could say.

For some reason, Sayu stood still in the living room in nothing but her underwear.

It was a black, simple set of cutesy lingerie, adorned with a ribbon in the middle

Well, that aside, what was she doing in her underwear. It didn't seem like she was changing, nor did she make an effort to hide herself despite my presence.

"Hey, Yoshida-san."

"I'll listen to what you say, just put on some clothes first."

"Hey."

"Let's talk after that, okay?"

"Listen."

Sayu's tone was serious. I couldn't find the words to continue and closed my mouth shut.

I wasn't sure what was happening, but perhaps her being in her underwear had something to do with what she wanted to say.

"...Uhm, Yoshida-san, you probably don't see me as such, but..."

Sayu continued with much difficulty. I didn't know how to properly respond, so I looked away from her and awaited her next words.

Looking straight at a high school girl in her underwear would be a little off-putting.

"You know, despite how I am... I'm still a woman... well, a girl, actually."

“Uhuh, I get that.”

There was a lot of weight behind that statement, but I readily parried it.

Still, Sayu shook her head at my reply.

“You’re wrong Yoshida-san, you don’t understand that at all.”

“And why do you think that?”

Hearing my rebuttal, Sayu wordlessly approached me step by step. Faced with the eerie pressure exuded by the high school girl closing in in nothing but her underwear, I reflexively took a step back.

Finally, Sayu arrived in front of me, looking me right in the eye with unturned eyes.

“...W-, What?”

Mildly NSFW Image LINK

Translated by yuNS @ crimsonmagic . me

“You know, for a high school girl, I think my breasts are on the larger side.”

“Uhuh.”

“And know a high school girl like that is in front of you in nothing but her underwear.”

“Just put on your clothes already.”

“How do you like it?”

My eyes which had avoided looking at Sayu until now, now turned to looked directly at her.

“Don’t give me that, to start with, a high school girl shouldn’t be showing her skin to-...”

“Wanna have sex?”

My thoughts came to a halt.

In then it rapidly accelerated, accompanied with fury.

“I told you that I was going to kick you out if you pull this shit again...!”

“The people I met before-!!”

I had meant to pacify her with those words, but Sayu responded with a volume close to a shriek. The intense pressure behind her words felt as though it was binding me.

Sayu put a hand on my pajama shirt, then grabbed in tightly in her palm. Her hands were shaking.

“The people I met before... all wanted to do it.”

The people she met before... that she wasn’t referring to a lover went without saying.

She was talking about the people whose homes she surfed around.

I could feel a swelling sensation in my chest.

When I listened to what she had to say when she first arrived here, I got the feeling that might’ve been the case. She purposely spoke about it in vague terms, so I never asked about it in detail.



However, I had nothing more to say. Yet, seeing her wordlessly shake in front of me, I felt a sudden realization – I had to ask.

“...Did you do it?”

I placed my hand on the hand that she grabbed me with. After a brief intermission, she lightly nodded.

I couldn't help but sigh.

“...I see.”

“Disillusioned...?”

“Mm... I don't know. Sorry.”

I felt a bit ashamed that I couldn't firmly deny it.

In this moment, I felt something akin to disappointment intermixed with anger towards some men in this world. In between these feelings was a sense of despair; a desire to ask Sayu, who had allowed these men to do such things to her, 'Why?'.

“Yoshida-san, don't you want to do it with me...? If even just a eensy weensy bit?”

Hearing her say that, she pulled me into a hug. I could feel her chest pushing against me.

I wanted to tell her to stop playing around, to push her away, but her expression was serious, sincere, yet somewhat sorrowful. Strength seemed to leave my body.

“Hey.”

She said with deep breaths as she touched me through my trousers.

“Hey, cut it out.”

“Not until you answer me.”

Sayu looked me directly in the eye as she ran a finger across my trousers.

“Do I excite you?” She said as she slowly placed a finger on the band of my trousers.

She would only need to touch that and she would know the answer to that. I wasn't thick-skinned enough that I wouldn't react to the slightest when pressed by a pair of ample breasts and appealed to in such a way by a woman.

In order words, my lower half was in 'that state'.

With a heavy sigh, I grabbed Sayu's hand that was on my trousers.

“Of course. I don't think that there's a man out there that wouldn't be.”

Hearing me answer, Sayu's face suddenly flushed red. She quickly turned away from me.

“What's the point of getting embarrassed now? Quit screwing around already.”

“S-, Sorry...”

“And get away from me already, before I make you.”

“O-, Okay...”

Sayu stepped back away from me. Then, after a moment hesitation during which she cast her eyes restlessly about, she crossed her arms to hide her breasts, her face flushed.

“Come on already. You wouldn’t need to hide it like that if you just put on your clothes.”

“I-, I can’t... I want to keep talking like this.”

Why was she so fixated on that?

I still don’t get was it that she wanted to talk about that she *had* to be dressed like this.

“Uhm... so you see.”

Her eyes drifted along the floor as she desperately searched for the words to say.

It seemed as though she had something she needed to get across to me, so I decided to keep tight.

“I-, I was desperate. And... you see, I needed a way to somehow live without going home.”

Sayu continued, bit by bit.

“Of course, taking in a high school girl comes with more demerits than it’s worth. If the police find out, you’d most likely go to jail. That why... I figured that there had to be some merit in taking me in, you see?”

Her words came to a halt as she hung her head defeatedly.

She didn’t want to talk about the cornerstone of her situation.

“...And that merit ended up being your body, huh.”

Sayu’s back curled as she lightly nodded.

“...Mhm. I really hated it at first... but somehow... I got used to it. It just became *normal*.”

“...I see.”

“Rather, it was only in those moments that I truly felt that I existed; that I was needed. There were times where I even felt happy... if not satisfied... you see...”

“...Mm.”

I didn’t know whether I should be angry or sad.

All I knew was that I didn’t want to listen to this any longer.

However, Sayu wanted me to hear it, so I did everything I could to hold it together.

Even then, I couldn’t just plug my ears and give default responses.

I desperately held down the feelings that were endlessly festering within me and did what I could to earnestly engage in the conversation.

“Everyone would use me, saying things like ‘You’re so cute’ or ‘That feels good’; I had taken their offer for a place to stay after all. That was fine, it was easy to understand. When the demerits for that person outweighs the merits, I would be chased away. I would repeat that, again and again.”

Contrary to what she said, her expression was completely indifferent, as though it were a matter-of-fact. Her voice was complete devoid of emotion, as though she were reading someone else's biography.

"That's why I don't understand you."

She raised her head and looked me in the eye.

"Why are you letting me stay here, Yoshida-san?"

She spoke softly, but I could feel an intense amount of passion within what she said.

"I don't have anything to offer you. Anyone can do simple household chores. As it stands, I'm nothing but a minor convenience to you. It doesn't have to be me either. Despite how much trouble I've caused you, you always respond with kindness. Knowing that kindness... I began to wonder how to be make it so that I won't be cast aside again... and I couldn't figure it out."

"...You"

I couldn't find the words to rebut.

What she said was certainly correct.

There weren't many people out there would accept demerits without merit. However, such intricacies were things that minors should turn a blind eye to until they grow to become adults. The thought a high school girl had considered all this and offered her body as a result was regretful to say the least.

"I'm such an idiot aren't I? I'm really just a helpless kid that doesn't even know the first thing about herself... I don't know what I should do when I'm not expected to do anything by anyone."

Saying that, she approached me once again.

Again, she moved up to me, and again, she hugged me.

“Yoshida-san, if you really don’t mind-” Sayu said with a trembling voice, her head against my chest.

“Then do it with me. I’m fine with it if it’s you. If you would do it, then I would feel li- ugh! Mmpf! W-, What, I can’t breathe...”

Without hearing what she had left to say, I pulled her into a hug with all my might.

“Yoshida-san... I can’t...”

“Shut up.”

“What’s wrong... Wha-“

I dragged Sayu by her shoulders and pushed her against the wall of the hallway.

“Yoshida-san... uhm...”

“No.”

“Eh?”

“No means no.” I continued, staring at her straight in the eye.

I’m sure my forehead was completely crumpled up, but in this moment, I couldn’t figure out how to loosen it.

“Alright, listen up.”

Sayu blinked a few times with a mix of hesitation and surprise, before nodding a few times.

“Honestly, I think that you’re really cute.”

“Eh?”

“Despite being a high school girl, you have the right curves and the right bodylines. You’re good-looking, you can do the housework, there’s nothing more I could ask for.”

“W-, What’s this all of a sudden-”

“But you aren’t my type.”

Her face went blank at my declaration.”

“...Huh?”

“I can’t love you.”

Her lips parted in surprise. I continued to stare at her eyes, which absentmindedly blinked a few times.

“I won’t do it with a woman I don’t love. Well... I’d of course react to your body, but I don’t want to see you naked, nor do I want to have sex with you in the slightest. You asked me just now remember, that ‘if I don’t mind’? Then I’ll answer you. I do mind. I refuse. Got it?”

Sayu loudly gulped as if overwhelmed. Having said all that I had to say, I left her alone for a few seconds.

“...hick”

She nodded.

“Okay then... now put on your clothes already.”

“O-, Okay...”

I pointed to the sweats that had been cast aside in the living room. Sayu bounced on her feet to retrieve it and – finally – vigorously pulled it over her head.

With the skin reflected in my eyes decreasing, I could feel the tension slipping away. I sat down in the hallway where I was.

I had moved my body and mouth with the sole purpose of getting her to cut it out. With that objective completed, I could finally gather my bearings.

It felt as though I could now begin to gradually put what I wanted to say into words.

“...You said that you could do nothing for me, but it really isn’t it case.”

Hearing my murmurs, Sayu, who had now dressed herself, slowly crawled towards me and sat down next to me.

“To me, a home has always been just a place to eat, take a bath, and sleep.” I continued.

Though I wasn’t looking at her, I could tell that she was looking at me.

“Work was enjoyable. Plus, the more I worked, the more I earned. Knowing that I would be able to save up, I really had no qualms about my life being round trips from home to work.”

Thinking back, my life had been as I said.



In the five years since I've started working, I couldn't remember anything but work. Of course, I have memories of going drinking with my coworkers and going bowling with them.

However, I never once had a lover, nor had I ever taken any long breaks to do travelling and the like. Either way, I found some way to involve myself with work each and every day.

"That's fine, I thought. Plus, I often fantasized about dating Gotou-san and how bright such a future could be." I said in a somewhat deprecating tone as I turned to glance at Sayu.

Unable to find the words to respond, she showed an awkward smile and let out a long nasal breath.

"But when you arrived... all that changed."

Since she arrived.

Even without going into specifics, there was more than enough to talk about.

"I would have a delicious dinner and a prepared bath waiting for me when I got home. Plus... you're here, Sayu."

My thoughts smoothly transitioned into words. I could hear Sayu breathing deeply beside me.

"How should I put this... You're concerned about what 'added value' you bring, aren't you?"

'How am I seen by others?'. 'What do they want from me?'. She had come all the way here fearing the standards set by others, hasn't she?

This was my final answer to her fears.

“My life has a lot more enjoyable just by you being here, Sayu.”

Sayu’s gaze seemed to waver.

“I just got rejected by Gotou-san back then, so I may have been feeling a little lonely too... Knowing that you’ll be here, that I would have someone to chat about pointless topics over dinner, that I wouldn’t be sleeping all alone in this cubicle, has made this place a lot more comfortable. I’ve begun to think that ‘I have to get home sooner’ too.”

During the time that I was talking, Sayu eyes had grown ragged and she had broken into tears. I couldn’t pinpoint why she cried, but even I could tell that those were not tears of sorrow.

“That’s why I want you to stay with me, or so I should say.” I said as I scratched my chin.

The hairs which I’m sure I had shaved this morning had already started to regrow.

“I’m nothing but an unseemly old man, so...”

I really should have said this sooner.

Ever since bringing this girl home, I’ve felt nothing but the desire to help her without taking back.

She had run away for some reason. On top of that, she had been jump from one man’s home to another. I had hoped to become the white knight that would protect and guide this girl back on track.

Those were my honestly feelings, but that wasn’t everything.

I had mistakenly believed that it was everything, when in truth, it lacked fairness.

“So, until you feel ready to go back-”

I would take this girl in – that very idea had been a mistake.  
Cohabitation without equal standing was wrong.

“Won’t you stay here?” I finally said.

Sayu let out a sob and hung her head downwards.

She rubbed her eyes with the sleeves of her sweaters and sniffed her snot countless times.

Then, she raised her head with a crumpling expression and asked in a trembling voice.

“Is that okay?”

“Mhm, if all you’re doing is staying of course.”

“...You’re really a desireless, pitiful old man.”

“Now ain’t that right.”

Sayu let out a chuckle even as she wiped her tears. Even I couldn’t help but laugh.

As she giggled, she crawled up until she was right beside me, and then rested her head against my shoulder.

“...nks.”

“What?”

“We’re both such miserable people.”

Saying something that was clearly different from what she had said earlier, she raised her head.

“Since you’re so pitiful, I’ll be with you.”

With that, she finally seemed to loosen up, showing her trademark slackened smile.

“Yeah, let’s do that.”

A high school girl was hard for an old man like me to deal with.

But I’m sure the same applied to her; an old man was hard for a high school girl like her to deal with.

Perhaps only now, having laid bare each of our weaknesses, did our ‘cohabitation’ truly begin in earnest.

# VOLUME 1 – CHAPTER 18

“Yoshida-san, you’ve got some hairs growing out.”

“Huh? I shaved already.”

“You must’ve missed the spot then.”

“Really?”

Hearing Sayu, who was in the midst of making omelets in the apartment’s simple kitchen, mention it, I returned to the washroom to take another look. It was just as she had said, there were a few hairs remaining. Clicking my tongue, I turned on the electric shaver and went about the daily routine once again.

“Well, actually-” Sayu said without looking away from the frying pan as I left the washroom.

“Leaving a few hairs is fine isn’t it? It’s sort of fitting, in a way.”

“The heck do you mean by that?”

“Exactly what it means.” She said as she turned off the stove and moved the fluffy looking omelets onto a plate.

“Here you go.”

“Oh, looking good.”

“Take as much rice as you’d like to go with it. Ah, right, have some of this too.”

After handing me a bowl of rice and a plate of omelet, she starting filled a soup bowl with miso soup from the pot. From the deftness of her movements, one might think that she was a professional housewife.

It's been a few weeks since the night when Sayu had approached me in her underwear and I've since gotten used to the sight of her doing the housework.

I broke a leg trying to explain what happened to Mishima... but looking at the results, everything had settled down peacefully.

"Well, knowing you senpai, you won't have the guts to lay your hands on a high school girl anyway."

Though she had been as rude as ever, she had managed to accept the situation for what it was.

As for events that have been bothering me, Gotou-san has been approaching me quite frequently as of late. Strangely enough, she would often invite me to have lunch together. Not to mention, when she ate alone, she would have nothing but salad, but when she ate with me, she would order a plentiful meal.

I can't complain of course, but the sudden closing of the distance between us for no particular reason at all has left me needlessly anxious – and well, it's bad for my heart.

"I figured I would come see you as you are, you see."

She would often tease me with a bewitching smile on her face.

Though the working environment has changed to somewhat, my life with Sayu has continued without any notable problems.

Putting the omelet aside for the moment, I opened the rice cooker. As I filled my bowl with rice, I couldn't help but notice how Sayu was dressed today.

"Huh, why are you dressed in your uniform today?"

Hearing me ask, Sayu smiled and turned only her gaze towards me.

"Suit me?"

"Well, it'd be strange if a uniform didn't suit a high school girl, actually."

"Geez, that's not what I'm talking about..." Sayu said with a displeased look as she continued.

"There are times where I'd like to become a high school girl is all."

"There are times...? Even without your uniform you're still a high school girl aren't you?"

"That's right, but you know."

With two bowls in hand, Sayu walked towards the living room area. Rice, omelets, and wieners – though it was as ordinary a breakfast as it gets, it was still very appetizing nonetheless.

"Thanks for the meal."

"You're welcome."

Seeing me dig in, Sayu continued where she left off.

"If I wear my uniform, you'd have to recognize me as one even if you didn't know right?"

“Well, you have a point.”

The saltiness of the miso soup was just as I liked it. Taking a few sips from the soup, I could feel my body warming up – a sensation which I quite liked.

“So even if you see me making breakfast in the kitchen, you’d still recognize me as a high school girl.”

“Guess so.”

“It’s convenient isn’t it?” Sayu murmured as she fed a piece of the omelet that she made into her mouth.

She nodded in satisfaction at her own handiwork.

Though I had no idea where she was going with this, I made sure to show some vague signs every so often that I was still paying attention.

“You see, I ran away from it all cause I didn’t like being a high school girl.”

Her abrupt confession made me stop my chopsticks.

“But nowadays, for some reason-”

After a brief moment of hesitation where she cast her gaze on the objects on the table, she show a slackened smile and continued.

“I feel a bit glad that I’m a high school girl and all.”

“...I see.”

I nodded before taking a slurp from the soup.



There are a lot of things I still don't know about her.

I wouldn't ask her about what she wouldn't say. I didn't think that was any need to ask either.

But if there's one thing I could say, it's that I quite liked that smile of hers.

"Well, your uniform..."

Hearing me speak, Sayu focused her attention onto me as she took a gulp of rice.

"Your uniform is well... normal? I guess."

It might've been better to say that it suited her, but just the thought made me feel a little embarrassed for some reason.

"But I think that normal smile of yours... suits you." I forcefully muttered, before taking a piece of the omelet.

The mixture of sweetness and saltiness was just as I liked it. The texture was quite fluffy too.

Then, noticing that Sayu still hadn't reacted to what I said, I raised my gaze from the bowl to find her blushing.

"What's wrong"

"Eh, no... it's nothing really, heheh."

Sayu smiled as if to brush it over before munching down on a weiner.

Now able to smile in more ways that was true to herself, Sayu had become quite adorable, as should befit her age.

She may have had many rough experiences until now, but I hoped that this place would give her a place to be herself.

And with time, I hoped that she would be able to gather the strength to face what she would need to face eventually.

“Yoshida-san.”

Having suddenly been called out to, I raised my head, only to find Sayu staring straight at me.

“If I wasn’t a high school girl, would you have fallen for me?”

“Wha?”

At my inane welp, Sayu broke into a fit of giggling and shook her head.

“It’s just a joke Yoshida-san. The way you always take things so seriously is kind of funny in a way.”

“Oh geez...”

If Sayu wasn’t a high school girl.

At that thought, the scene from a few weeks ago, where Sayu had been in her underwear, flashed through my mind.

If she had been an adult, not a high schooler, but my age...

‘Then do it with me.’

The all-too vivid recollection of her voice made goosebumps rise on my skin. I shook my head furiously and pulled myself back to reality.

“What’s up?”

“Oh, nothing much.”

I shoved my mouth full of rice and started chewing to smooth it over.

Regardless, she was still a high school girl. Just a brat way younger than myself.

Affirming that with myself, I swallowed down on the rice.

As took a deep breathe in, then a deep breathe out, a notion gradually surfaced in my mind.

It may be a good thing that Sayu is a high school girl.

I felt a strong sense of dissonance towards this notion.

So what if she wasn't a high school girl? What then?

First thing in the morning wasn't a good time to think about such difficult topics. I slowly sipped on the bowl of miso soup. Whilst basking in the warm sensation spreading throughout my body, I also dissolved the pointless thoughts that were running through my mind.

“Yoshida-san, you seem to be taking your time this morning, you sure you have enough time?”

“Hm? Uh...”

Hearing Sayu mention that, I took a peek at the clock. I should've already left 5 minutes ago.

“Shoot.” I muttered as I hurriedly devoured what was left of my breakfast.

Then, I headed towards the washroom, roughly brushed my teeth, put on my jacket and picked up my bag.

“Have a safe trip.”

Sayu’s smiling figure intersected with the morning light, making me squint instinctively.

“...How dazzling.”

“Eh?”

“No, it’s nothing. I’m heading out then.”

Running out the entrance and taking a big breath of the morning air, I gave my cheek a good slap.

It’s like we’re newlyweds.

That thought had astounded me.

Who knows how long this lifestyle would continue?

Be it coincidence or fate, Sayu and I had met one another, and so began our life of cohabitation.

What would happen next? How would this all end? I couldn’t imagine it, yet, I didn’t want to abandon it.

I turned back and looked towards the entrance of my apartment.

Until recently, this had been the home that I alone left and returned to.

But it was different now.

That was my home, from which I returned to and left, as well as Sayu’s retreat. It was a place that would protect her and allow her to pass her time undisturbed.

Just the thought of working to protect this home gave me the strength to look towards the future, if only just a little bit.

“Alright, let’s get going”

I said as I took a step forward.

The peculiar cohabitation between an old man and a high school girl was only just beginning.



# AFTERWORD

Nice to meet you all, this is Shimesaba.

This written work was a product of careful efforts piled together on the web, I had been quite fearful when writing this work.

Thinking back, when I first began writing this work on 'Kakuyomu', I remember looking at the site's trends and thinking 'well this isn't going to get popular' and laughing it off in a way. At the time, I had also been enjoying writing a trendy isekai fantasy story, but suddenly (if I remember correctly, it had been when I was sitting on the toilet bowl at home) the idea for the character 'Sayu' came into mind and after that I couldn't stop myself running with it.

I believe myself to have been extremely lucky that a story that had begun with such a whimsical idea had grown to become what it was and be discovered by the managers.

I like to think that the character, the story, and how it turned out was all a product of coincidence, so I can't help but feel blessed that there are now people out there who coincidentally came to like this work.

Now then, from here on I would say my thanks.

Firstly, to those who had discovered this work on the broad world of the internet, then decided to read it, I would like to thank you from the very depths of my heart for your support.

Next, to my manager W-san, who had discovered the possibilities of this work and pushed it all the way to publication, I would like to

express my deepest gratitude. Though, perhaps I should be apologizing instead? I had cause them a lot of trouble throughout the process after all.

Finally, to the illustrator boota-san, who had given substance and breathed life to the characters, to the proofreaders, who had read the scrutinized the work more seriously than I the author did, as well as all those who were involved the process of it's publishing, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to you all.

Whilst wishing for another coincidental encounter between everyone and my story, I will end the afterword here.

Shimesaba.



# WORD FROM THE TRANSLATOR

Hello, yuNS here.

For many of you out there, just know that you weren't the only one click-baited. I remember seeing this book be number 1 on the Amazon Light Novel Rankings and thinking 'what in the world has this world come to', before being mildly surprised by a rather wholesome story with heavy themes instead.

That aside, let's talk about the cultural background behind this work, since it may not be a topic that English readers are particular with.

The book's setting is based on the frequent incidents of runaway girls, typically teenagers, waiting under a lamppost or an electronic billboard for a man to bring them to their home. For this, they have gained the alias of '神待ち少女' (Kamimachi Shoujo), literally 'Young Girls Waiting for God' – derived from the halo effect that occurs when under these sources of light late at night. From what I've read on interviews with survivors as well as news articles, the motives of these girls is in no small part due to the combined pressures of coming of age, the systematic abuse, exploitation, and perhaps fetishization of High School Girls in 'JK Culture', as well as a Japan's willingness to turn a blind eye to individual issues due Japan having a one of the most collectivist and conservative cultures on Earth.

Moving on, the act of bringing these girls home are referred to, in the case of a high schooler, ‘女子高生を拾う’ (joshikousei wo hirou), which in the most literal interpretation means ‘Adopting a Stray High School Girl’, in the same sense one would adopt a stray cat or dog. Evidently though, there are other interpretations of this term, so for part of the title of the book that used this term, ‘そして、女子高生を拾う’ (soshite, joshikousei o hirou), I rephrased it to ‘Then I Brought a High School Girl Home’, since in colloquial English, neither ‘adopting a stray’ nor ‘picking up’ would make sense.

With that explained what’s up with ‘I Shaved’ then? When translated literally, that part of the title means ‘I Shaved my Facial Hair’. Some might interpret this part of the title as figuratively meaning ‘being heartbroken’, in the same way Japanese girls cut their hair after being heartbroken, but as for whether that applies to facial hair? I’m not so sure. It may be, in the authors words, a happy ‘coincidence’ perhaps.

Anyway, although there’s still a lot more to unpack, I’ll leave it here for now. I do plan on creating a glossary of culture reference, if not a preface for this work when I have time, so stay tuned to that if you will.

Big thanks to Yuuki and xyi for sticking it out for over a year, and again, thank you all for reading this translation!

yuNS

P.S. There’s still a Side Story for Volume 1.

# VOLUME 1 – SIDE STORY

“Ah.”

With a slip of the hand, the yolk of the sunny-side up oozed onto the table.

“What a waste.” I murmured to myself whilst wiping the table with a damp kitchen cloth.

“Sorry, I spilled some.”

Feeling guilty about wasting the food that she had put effort into making, I apologized to Sayu who was eating breakfast across from me. Hearing my apology, she turned to glance at me, blinking idly for a few moments as if to process what was happened, before chuckling.

“It’s fine it’s fine, it’s not like you did it on purpose or anything. Don’t worry about it.” She murmured in response as she deftly separated the whites with her chopsticks and fed it into her mouth.

She skillfully avoided the yolk of the sunny-side up whilst gradually eating away at the whites.

Compared to me who simply broke apart the yolk and ate it together with the whites, Sayu’s method was refreshing in a way.

“About the sunny-side ups you make-”

Hearing me suddenly decide to speak out, Sayu stopped her chopsticks and tilted her head.

“Hm?”

“I was just thinking that the yolks are tender, sort of light a soft-boiled egg in a way.”

“Mhm...”

Sayu vaguely nodded, before tilting her head once again.

“Do you not like it?”

“No it’s nothing like that. I actually prefer it that way, since it meshes better when mixed with rice and the egg-whites.

“I see, glad to hear it.”

I wasn’t concerned with the tenderness of the yolk. It had merely been an idle observation turned thought.

“The sunny-side ups my mom made were always cooked till the yolk became hard, so I always found it a little dry and tasteless. Since as far back as I can remember, I never did like sunny-side ups, really.”

“Really?”

“I tried making it a few times when I first started living alone, but I could never get the hang of controlling the heat and the timing to add water, so it always ended up with a hard-yolk like the ones my mom made.” I continued the conversation whilst looking at Sayu, whose seemed more dazed than ever.

“So anyway, what I wanted to say is, you’re really good at cooking.” I said to bring an end to what I thought was a pointless discussion.

It was only then did Sayu show some signs of life. Her eyebrows twitched and her face flushed as though her consciousness had only just returned to her body.

“Oh, r-... really?”

Sayu leaned her head to one side and fidgeted with the ends of her hair in a slightly embarrassed manner.

“Did your parents teach you?”

“Huh?”

Her expressions had frozen over as soon as I asked.

I realized that I had stepped on a landmine, but I couldn’t take back what I had said.

What am I doing asking someone who ran away from home about their parents? The regret continued to run laps through my mind.

“My mom wasn’t the kind of person who cooked a lot.”

Sayu paused as she cast her gaze at the plate of sunny-side up in contemplation.

“So I mostly learned to cook on my own, looking recipes up in cookbooks and on the internet. I experimented a lot until the flavor was to my liking.”

“...I see.” Translated by yuNS

I had never asked about her household situation until now, nor was it a topic she would bring up herself. I believed that such a topic was one that the involved party should bring up of their own accord.

Yet, I had committed such a blunder in a moment of thoughtlessness. I cast my gaze downward, which Sayu had caught onto with a quick glance.

“But you know!” Sayu voiced out energetically with a loud cap.

“I really do enjoy cooking. It was something I tended to go off on my own to do. You could call it... a hobby? I guess.”

“Mhm...” @ [www.crimsonmagic.me](http://www.crimsonmagic.me)

A sigh naturally leaked out through my mouth.

She had been forced to act considerately again.

“Well, thanks to that, I get to look forwards to having delicacies every day, though.”

Sayu’s faced turned a little red as she failed to hold back a smile.

I ate another piece of the sunny-side up. The flavors of the yolk spread through my mouth whilst intermixing with the rice. It was a flavor I couldn’t get enough of.

We continued to eat our breakfast without exchanging words. After a while, Sayu’s sunny-side up was stripped bare of it whites till nothing but a neat yolk sat on the plate.

Curious as to how she would eat the yolk, I sipped on my miso soup whilst pinning my attention to the plate. Finally, she sandwiched the yolk between her chopsticks.

Resting the weight of the yolk on the chopsticks, so as to not break it, she picked up the yolk in one swoop.

Then, in a rare moment for Sayu who always ate in small and compacts bites, she opened her mouth wide and devoured it all at once. In the next moment, she shut her eyes as if basking in happiness and exhaled audibly from her nose with satisfaction.

I had intended to mind my manners, but the all too surprising action had left me staring in shock. Sayu, whose attention was no longer occupied by the golden yolk, raised her gaze, which naturally found itself on a collision course with my own.

Sayu's chewing lips came to a halt. Her cheeks swelled like a hamster as she tilted her head in puzzlement.

"Hm?"

"Uh, sorry." I replied, hurriedly breaking eye contact.

"I was just a little surprised that you ate it all in one go." I said whilst awkwardly moving my gaze from object to object on the table.

In the meantime, Sayu had started chewing again and swallowed the yolk.

"Erm, is it weird?"

"No, that's not really it, but..."

I shook my head rapidly in response. Sayu's expressions and voice had been all too uneasy.

"You know, you usually don't open your mouth wide to eat everything right? So I was just a little taken aback."

"O-, Okay...?"

Sayu fell silent, her gaze turning restlessly about.

An indescribable atmosphere permeated throughout the living room.

“Y-, Yoshida-san...” Sayu finally spoke.

Glancing at her, her face was strangely red.

“You seem to be looking at me, in a lot of ways...”

“Eh, no, you don’t have to put it like that...”

“Is it normal to look at people when they open their mouths while eating...?”

“Of course not, I just happened to look.”

“...Perv.”

“WHY!!?” I raised my voice in a hurry.

It was only then did Sayu finally crack into a fit of giggling. Along with it, the mood of the room had quickly returned to normal, which was a relief.

“It’s really delicious to eat the yolk in one go.” Sayu said before taking a gulp of miso soup.

“The yolk’s flavor, like, explodes in your mouth.”

“It explodes?”

“Yup, it does.” Sayu said with a chuckle.

“Why don’t you try it next time, Yoshida-san?”

“Well... if I feel like it I guess.”



At my vague response, Sayu showed a mischievous smile.

“And next time, I’ll be watching you open your mouth wide okay?”

“Hey, you don’t have to go that far do you?”

“Not like you’re one to talk though~”

Seeing her laugh, I could feel the corners of my lips slackening.

The conversation that had unfolded from my slip of the tongue had given me a little insight on side of Sayu that I didn’t know. It gave me a strange feeling.

And for some reason, the scene of her closing her eyes in pure happiness after devouring the eye-yolk replayed through my mind time and time again.