



2

しめさば
イラスト/ぶーた

ひげを剃る。 そして女子高生を 拾う。



"Want
to stay
together for a
little longer?"

吉田
YOSHIDA
26-year-old
salaryman.

沙優

SAYU

A runaway high
school girl. She
lives with Yoshida,
who has picked
her up.



"I'm saying I
want to swing
by your place,
Yoshida-kun."

後藤愛依梨
GOTO AIRI

Yoshida's boss
and the subject of
his unrequited love
for five years.



"Yoshida-
cchi, you
really suck
at lying."

結城あさみ

YUKI ASAMI

Sayu's senior at
her part-time
job. A gal.

contents



三島柚葉

MISHIMA YUZUHA

A new recruit
Yoshida is in
charge of.

Chapter 1
Rain

Chapter 2
Senior

Chapter 3
Gal

Chapter 4
Dinner

Chapter 5
Confession

Chapter 6
Solitude

Chapter 7
Confrontation

Chapter 8
Reality

Chapter 9
Coincidence

Chapter 10
Punishment

Chapter 11
Warning

Chapter 12
Collapse

Chapter 13
Loathing

Chapter 14
Solace

Chapter 15
Starry Sky

Chapter 16
Future

Epilogue

Afterword

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.

AUTHOR:

Shimesaba

ILLUSTRATORS:

Boota, Imaru Adachi

TRANSLATED BY:

Fully Booked TLS

<https://fullybookedtls.wordpress.com>

COMPILED BY:

[shiina#9999 | https://discord.gg/y9xBh2rggu](https://discord.gg/y9xBh2rggu)

VOLUME 2 – CHAPTER 1

Translator: chelly (Fully Booked TLS)

A loud thud was heard as a smartphone fell next to my feet.

The lady in the suit who was seated beside me suddenly flinched in surprise.

I quickly picked up the phone and handed it back to her.

“Oh, I’m so sorry about that.”

“Don’t worry about it... If you’re planning on taking a nap, I think it would be safer to keep your phone inside your bag instead.”

At my suggestion, the lady gave an embarrassed smile and nodded in acknowledgment. After placing the phone inside her bag, she slouched her shoulders tightly and closed her eyes.

Once the sudden exchange had come to an end, the clattering of the train tracks and the noise from the air conditioning could be heard once more.

Dozens of people were cramped up within this small enclosure, sitting or standing next to one another, yet completely indifferent about their peers. The person who was sitting next to me was no exception to this either.

Strangers would gather together within this space. They would come from somewhere, perhaps glance at one another, and then in time, they would depart to somewhere else.

This interaction was nothing out of the ordinary, yet when I became conscious of it, I couldn't help but feel a certain sensation that I couldn't quite put into words.

If the people in this compartment were acquaintances instead, then would I have been interested in where they got off the train and where they were headed to?

As I was absentmindedly following this train of thought, I heard the casually-dressed man in front of me murmuring.

"Oh... It's raining."

"Huh?"

I couldn't help but yelp in surprise. Clearing my throat quietly with a light cough, I turned around and looked outside the window.

The glass was gradually becoming covered by the droplets of water.

I had to resist the urge to click my tongue aloud. Sure, the sky was covered with thick clouds in the late afternoon and it wasn't strange for it to be raining, but I had believed that I would have at least arrived home before it would have started.

Usually, I would read the weather forecast on my phone when I woke up every morning and put a retractable umbrella in my bag if it was predicted to rain on that day, but I had overslept today and had forgone that routine.

I couldn't let my suit get soaked, so if the drizzle doesn't weaken then I'll have to compromise with buying a plastic umbrella.

Having recollected my thoughts, I turned my gaze towards the casually-dressed man, who was looking out the window with a frown.

Had he also forgotten to bring his umbrella? Would he also be purchasing an umbrella at the station or would he rather brave through the rain? Would anyone be there to greet him when he returned home? I hope he has someone like that waiting for him; they could hand him a towel as he returned home so that he could avoid catching a cold.

Catching myself stuck in these thoughts, I couldn't help but chuckle to myself internally.

This was just a daydream of sorts in the end. I hadn't the slightest clue of who he was.

I let out a nasal sigh. Getting completely absorbed in these strange mental simulations was a really bad habit of mine.

Though...

Looking out the window again, I confirmed that the drizzle had turned into full-fledged rain.

I hope that no one here catches a cold, or so I idly thought.

*

"Damn... It's seriously pouring out here."

Arriving at the station that was the nearest to my home, the sound of the downpour made me question myself for a moment on whether I was standing inside a waterfall. It was as though a bucket full of water was turned over.

“Ugh.”

I dropped by the convenience store that was attached to the station to buy an umbrella for myself, but it was already completely sold out by the time I arrived.

“Well, no one would really want to walk through this rain...”

I approached the edge of the area under the ceiling to confirm the amount of rain; it was truly tremendous. It was as though the droplets were bashing directly against the ground – it could be seen visibly splattering off of the pavement.

“Need some help?”

“Whoa.”

Startled by the sudden call, I turned my gaze away from the skies and found a high school girl standing in her uniform with the shaft of her open umbrella resting lightly on her shoulder.

“It’s pouring hard, isn’t it?”

“Y-yeah...”

“You left your umbrella at home, so I came here figuring that something like this might happen.”

“I see.”

Now that I had the chance to collect myself properly, I noticed that aside from the umbrella that she was balancing with her right hand, she also held my usual black umbrella in her left hand.

“Now, what are you supposed to say?”

She asked with a smug smile as she offered me the umbrella that was in her left hand.

She's... gotten a little cheeky now.

Mentally clicking my tongue, I received the umbrella from her and replied.

"Thanks, Sayu."

"Mm, that's right."

Sayu nodded to herself with a triumphant look. She bore her usual lax smile.

"Let's go home, dinner's ready."

"...Yeah, let's."

Opening my umbrella and exiting the station, I could feel the roaring sensation of rain crashing directly into my umbrella.

To think that I would've had to go through this rain if Sayu hadn't come to my rescue. I couldn't help but shudder a little.

Then glancing at Sayu who was walking beside me, I had a sincere thought.

My housemate was astonishingly thoughtful of others.

That day, my unrequited love of several years had just been shattered. I had been drunk and was slouching my way home when I met Sayu.

What I know, is that she ran away from home for reasons yet unknown to me, coming to Tokyo from Hokkaido, and had gone from one man's house to another man's during her time here.

To elaborate on that, she had allowed those men to use her body to secure her stay; a measure I thought was distasteful, to say the least even if it was out of necessity.

She approached me in the same manner, but I didn't really have an interest in high school girls. Though it may not have been the best idea, I couldn't just leave her alone there, so I ended up letting her stay at my place on the condition that she would do all the housework, although...

"I tried going for a stronger flavor this time around since it's the weekend and I'm sure that you're also probably worn out."

"Uh-huh, I see..."

I couldn't quite put what I felt into words, but the way she was looking right now, adjusting the temperature of the pot of miso soup with a ladle in hand, was strangely becoming of her.

Under normal circumstances, she would have still been a student in Hokkaido; a pretty and thoughtful girl who would have been living out the springtime of her youth.

From time to time, I would find myself wondering how she came to be. Though I had felt the urge to ask her just why she would be willing to stay in the house of an unrelated man, as someone who had allowed it to become the way it was, it was hard for me to do so.

And so, another day, all whilst we maintained our interdependent relationship, had passed.

The situation was a bit intricate, but it was still comforting nonetheless.

I was solemnly sipping on my bowl of miso soup when my eyes were met with a strong gaze. Our gazes meeting was nothing out of the ordinary, but the intensity of her gaze right now was. Her gaze was usually rather timid,

“...What’s on your mind?”

I called out to her. Her gaze darted around in a bout of indecision, though it was clear that she had been waiting for this moment. So, she quickly adjusted her sitting posture.

“Yoshida-san.”

“Huh, why are you being so formal?”

Sayu, who was carrying a relaxed smile just a moment ago, was now suddenly showing a stern and serious expression. I mentally braced myself for the impact.

Would she try to pressure me in her underwear or something like that?

When something gets to her head there’s no telling what she might do.

As I restlessly awaited her answer, Sayu suddenly dropped her head to the floor and brought her hands together, and bowed.

“Please let me take a part-time job.”

My mouth reflexively gaped open in surprise.

Then immediately after, I let out an audible sigh.

“So that’s what it was.”

“That’s everything!”

“Alright, fine.”

“But— Wait, it’s fine?”

“That’s what I said.”

“I thought you’d be more, you know...”

Seeing Sayu raising her upper body with her mouth still wide open, I couldn’t help but chuckle.

“Anyway, isn’t asking me like that a little overkill?”

“I mean, you told me before that I should just focus on the housework first.”

Hearing that, I naturally turned my gaze towards our surroundings.

There wasn’t a smidgen of dust anywhere to be seen. The bed that I had left as it was when I woke up in the morning had been folded and the clothes that I would just leave in a pile when I used to live alone were now folded and perfectly organized within the closet.

To be honest, I think that she went overboard with the housework.

Her incredible thoroughness not only made me feel moved by her efforts but also made me come to a sudden realization – that this place was too small.

The story would have been different if I were living in a luxurious mansion, but for a home of this size, doing the housework every day would eventually lead to a situation where there was nothing left to

do in the end. Given that it was just the two of us living here, the laundry that needed to be done daily was essentially limited to underwear and the like. Doing the laundry regularly with so few things to wash would just be adding pointlessly to the water bill. As for the cleaning – while I was grateful that the house was being vacuumed every day, with the increase in the frequency of the vacuuming, the amount of dust would accumulate, and there would come a point where doing so would make a reasonable difference. As this routine continued, the tasks that needed to be done would gradually decrease over time.

“I did say that, but it’s not like there’s a lot of housework to do these days. At least, you seem to be bothered by the lack of things you have to do these days”

“Hmph... so you noticed.”

“It’s obvious.”

When she wasn’t doing the housework, she didn’t have much else to do other than reading the books and the manga that we bought a while ago or just simply surfing the internet on her smartphone to kill time.

I had also thought that if I were to let her start working on a part-time job, then it would have been around now. The person in question herself bringing it up was quite a convenient coincidence.

“U-um, but I might fall behind a little on the housework.”

“Either way, it’s still a hundred times better than when I was doing it for me.”

After she heard that, Sayu awkwardly scratched her head, and with a clumsy smile, murmured “Um, thanks.”

As of recent, I feel like Sayu has gradually shied away from holding back needlessly and has been actively replacing that with ‘thanks’ and the like here and there. That said, I think that it’s something to be happy about.

“So, do you have any place in mind?”

“Mm, I was thinking of applying at the convenience store nearby.”

“Hmm... You mean FamilyMarket^[1]?”

“That’s right.”

It was a convenience store that was just a short 5 minutes walk by foot from here. Being so close to home, it would also be easy to respond to unexpected trouble if it were ever to arise.

That said, since I hadn’t had any experience of working a part-time job during my high school days, there was a question that I needed to clear up.

“Say, don’t high schoolers need their parents’ approval to take a job?”

“Huh, I don’t think so. It might be a different story if there was some life-threatening risk involved though.”

“I see, so you don’t need their signature or anything like that.”

“Probably.”

I let out a sigh of relief. There was nothing to worry about in that case. If she had required the approval of a guardian, then I would probably have had to act as her guardian. That being said, there was no way to go about that legally, so we would probably have to call it off in that case.

“So, are you going to go for an interview soon?”

“Yeah, that’s the plan.”

“Then we’d have to buy you some new clothes.”

“Huh, can’t I just go in with my uniform?”

She rebutted as though it were a matter of course.

I grimaced.

“Of course not. Isn’t your uniform from Asahikawa-something High School?”

“I mean, it’s not like they can tell where it’s from.”

“It’d only take a bit of digging to figure it out. Plus, they’d probably notice immediately that your uniform isn’t from around these parts; going in and hoping that they won’t do a background check on you is just asking for more trouble.”

“Oh, alright.”

With a groan of acknowledgment, Sayu showed a bitter smile on her face.

“This uniform’s really inconvenient at times like these.”

I shrugged my shoulders in affirmation.

I think that for high schoolers, the uniform is like an ‘identification’ of sorts. It’s like the ‘beginner’s mark’ that’s stuck on cars – an identifier that allows various types of ‘allowances’ and ‘protections’ to be put on them. From a somewhat farfetched perspective, it’s a way of saying that they’re unable to take responsibility for themselves.

When I was a high-schooler, I'd honestly thought of it as an annoyance more than anything. Nowadays though, I've come to think of it as a way of legally protecting minors from various dangers, while also stripping them of their freedom in the process.

"Do you dislike uniforms?"

I couldn't exactly pinpoint why I would ask that, but it just followed naturally.

Maybe it's because I had hated my uniform when I was a high schooler.

Hearing me ask such a question, Sayu blinked her eyes in surprise for a brief moment, before shaking her head.

"Nope, I actually kind of like it. Not to mention that it's something that I can only wear right now."

Honestly, I thought that the answer was a bit out of the left field.

To this day, I still don't know how it had come to pass, but she was a young girl who had abandoned her high school life and had purposely come all this way to a city far away from her home on her lonesome. Given the circumstances, I had believed without a doubt that she would see her uniform as something to loathe. Perhaps I should've given it more thought.

"You know, don't these uniforms make it kind of easy to tell if someone is a middle schooler or high schooler?"

"Yeah, I guess."

With a chuckle, Sayu pinched the hem of her skirt with her fingers.

“The teachers were quite strict in middle school, so everyone wore their skirts beneath the knee. Even the rebellious girls would make sure that it was only slightly above the knee.”

Narrowing her eyes, she continued profoundly.

“In high school though, the first years would wear their skirts a little bit high, the second years would wear their skirts ridiculously high, and then the third years would calm down, since they have exams and all, and wear their skirts normally.”

I merely gazed at Sayu, who appeared to be having fun talking about this.

What could have driven this girl who spoke so fondly about her high school life to give it all up of her own accord and go this far?

As I was pondering on this thought, Sayu raised her gaze to look up towards me.

“You know, the uniforms of high school girls all look the same, but they’re actually all different.”

“The heck do you mean by that? Are you talking about the design?”

“That’s not what I mean. Um, how do I put this...”

Sayu propped up her chin on her hand and audibly went “Hmm...”



“Take for example how everyone at work wears suits. In this situation, everyone is wearing the same thing, aren’t they?”

“Well, yeah. It’s just the standard workplace etiquette.”

“That’s right. In the case of uniforms, it can differ from school to school, but it can also differ from the way each person wears it; I meant that sort of thing.”

Sayu paused for a brief moment, before continuing with a smile.

“With just a look at their uniform, you can sort of get a feel for that person, like ‘Oh this person is like that!’ if you know what I mean.”

Sayu seemed to be enjoying herself.

To be honest, I couldn’t really wrap my head around what she meant, nor could I understand what was so interesting about it.

That said, I thought that the animated way in which she was trying to explain things was sweet in its way.

“It’s just like some random person who looks at me wearing my suit and suddenly declares ‘Oh, this guy’s Yoshida from some IT company!’ right?”

“That, that! That’s what I meant!”

Hearing what I said, Sayu happily nodded with a smile.

Then, as if a lightbulb was lit in her head, she suddenly went “Ah!”

“That’s right! Facial hair!”

I scrunched my forehead and tilted my head.

“What about it?”

“I was thinking that the hairs that are leftover after you shave are sort of like a uniform in their own way.”

“Huh...?”

I scowled, unable to decipher what she meant at all. Sayu’s shoulders rocked as she giggled.

“Well, when you’re wearing just your suit, people probably see you as just another old fart.”

“Was that last part necessary?”

“But, when you forget to shave cleanly, people instead get the impression that ‘Ah, it’s the type of old fart that doesn’t shave cleanly!’ You get what I mean?”

“What?”

I responded with a strained smile.

Sayu murmured “was that not good enough?”, whilst scratching the back of her head in confusion.

“So basically, your facial hair gives people an idea of what kind of person you might be. In the same vein, by looking at a girl’s uniform, you can also get an idea of what kind of person she might be.”

“...Hmm, I don’t really get it.”

I said, shaking my head.

Sayu raised and then dropped her shoulders in disappointment. Perhaps having resigned herself to the idea that further effort was pointless, Sayu let out a long sigh before lowering her gaze.

“Well, anyway... so since I can’t go in my uniform...”

“Yeah... so—”

“Alright then.”

Interrupting me, Sayu looked directly into my eyes.

“I’ll pay you back when I get paid, so may I buy some casual clothes?”

I tried responding, but I could feel that the words that I had previously planned on saying were caught in my throat. The mood in the room seemed to have visibly lightened as I swallowed down my words.

I was simply flabbergasted.

“I can’t?”

As she watched my mouth wordlessly open and then close like a nutcracker, Sayu tilted her head as if to remind me of the question. I quickly shook my head.

“Oh... Of course, you can.... You can, alright.”

“What’s wrong, you’re not speaking very clearly.”

When she had first arrived here she was the very picture of extreme reservation, having not once asked for anything. Recently though, she’s been more willing to rely on others, which I saw as a positive development.

Though, I hadn't thought that her recognizing that she needed something and her asking for it on her own accord would be such a gratifying moment.

I covered my mouth which was about to break into a grin and steadily nodded my head.

"I just thought that it's unusual of you to ask for something."

Hearing me say that, she quickly avoided my gaze and blushed a little.

"I mean..."

After a brief moment of hesitation, Sayu continued.

"Won't you be happier that way?"

I was again at a loss for words. Then, I let out a long throaty sigh.

"Phew—"

I had been trying my best to hold my smile back, but I could not hold it any longer.

"So you knew huh."

Hearing that, Sayu showed a flippant smile and simply replied "Guess so."

As I gradually came to know Sayu, she too gradually came to know me. Knowing that oddly made my chest jump a little.

"Alright then, let's go shopping."

"Huh, now?! Aren't you rushing a little?"

“Well if you need it then you should start as soon as possible. Let’s continue eating.”

“Oh, okay...!”

Glancing at Sayu who hurriedly picked up her chopsticks, I could feel the tension leaving my lips.

Though it was changing little by little, this bizarre life of cohabitation with the high school girl named Sayu continued onward.

VOLUME 2 – CHAPTER 2

Translator: chelly (Fully Booked TLS)

“You quit right after middle school?! Seriously?”

My *senior*, who was stocking the sandwiches on the shelves, stopped her hands and looked at me with wide-eyes in shock.

“Yeah.”

“Really?! Damn! That’s nuts, Sayu-chaso^[1], seriously.”

“Is it?”

“I thought that you were the sweet and docile type. I could just feel it in your bones, y’know what I mean? Oh yeah, make sure the old stock stays in the front and you put the new stock in through the back, alrighty.”

“Okay.”

Asami Yuuki – She’s my senior at the convenience store where I had started working recently.

She had blonde hair and golden-brown skin. From the looks of it, I would guess that her appearance was put together at a salon. Contrary to the intensity of her hair and skin, her light makeup and

her slightly narrow eyes gave her a rather neat and crisp appearance. I thought that she looked really cool like that.

I had been completely overwhelmed by the vibe that she exuded at first, but she had been teaching me everything thoroughly and, most importantly, she was also a very easy person to converse with.

“Say, why’d you speak to me in such a formal way? It sounds a li’l weird, doesn’t it? We’re the same age and all.”

“Well, you’re my senior at work, after all, Yuuki-san.”

“Don’t worry about somethin’ like that. Just call me Asami.”

“Oh, okay... Ah, mm...”

I nodded my head affirmatively. Asami showed me a quick grin and hurriedly returned to stocking the sandwiches on the shelves.

“So, why didn’t cha go to high school anyway? Did you have somethin’ else that you wanna do?”

“Well, not really, um... I guess I sort of just felt like it?”

“You just felt like it? Well, I guess that’s a legit reason too in the end.”

While she was smoothly running me through the basics, she would occasionally ask about myself. The intent behind these questions was a little odd though. It’s not like she held any great interest in me or anything, but it also wasn’t as though she wasn’t curious about me at all. It didn’t seem like she was asking those questions just for the sake of it either. It felt more like she was simply asking about whatever caught her interest but not so much as to overstep my bounds.

As for me having quit studying after middle school – that was a lie.

It would be too troublesome to explain that I'm currently enrolled in a high school, but wasn't actually attending it; far from it, explaining what I was doing this far away from the school itself would put me in a real bind. Not to mention, I was really worried that coming forward with something like that would probably lead to quite a series of problematic questions. That being said, given her reaction when I said that I was a 'middle school,' a choice that was unreasonably high-risk in this current day and age, it seemed like she won't really make a fuss about it even if I told her the truth of the matter.

"It's basically the same with everything else. Move the ol' ones to the front and put the new ones in through the back. Simple, isn't it? Well, before you refresh the stock, you're supposed to properly take note of the inventory first, but until you've picked up some of the other basics you're still in the *okay-field*."

"Alright."

It's the first time that I've seen a high school girl actually use the term "okay-field." I couldn't help but smirk a little as I replied to her, but luckily she hadn't noticed it.

Asami was also 17 years old just like me. Based on her appearance and her manner-of-speaking though, I could more or less guess that she was clearly an orthodox "gal" type of girl.

"By the way Sayu-chaso, where do you live?"

Um, 'chaso' was slowly edging me towards breaking into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, so I really wish she'd stop that.

"It's about a 5-minute walk from here."

“Oh, my house’s about the same distance away too. Maybe we live really close to each other?”

“My house is in the direction of the station.”

“Ah... so you go towards the station then. I’m in the opposite direction.”

Asami scratched her head and let out a nasal sigh as she replied.

“My house is just a few minutes of walkin’ away from the station. Well, 5 minutes plus 5 minutes is still only a 10-minute walk to your house I guess, Sayu-chaso. That’s pretty lit.”

“Is it?”

The conversation had been fairly casual thus far, but I felt like it was gradually going in a particularly undesirable direction.

With the way it was going, Asami’s next words would definitely be—

“Well, I’ll come to visit your place sometime, Sayu-chaso.”

This, of course.

It wasn’t “May I come?” but rather “I’ll come”, which I thought to myself was rather like her.

I quickly showed an unperturbed smile on my face and waved my hand at her.

“Oh, I’m not too sure about that. I’m actually living with someone else at the moment and I’m not too sure if they’d be okay with it.”



“Hmm? You’re livin’ with *someone*?”

Asami’s eyebrows seemed to jump at that.

“From the way you just said it, I’m guessin’ that this ‘someone’ isn’t really your family? So is it someone along the lines of a boyfriend?”

“No no, he’s not my boyfriend, but...”

“Not your boyfriend but also not family?”

She asked with an odd vigor in her tone.

I hesitated on how to answer her probing when suddenly the words of a man whom I had lived with long ago came to mind.

When you really need to hide something badly, discreetly hide what you need to hide the most and leave the rest out in the open. You can’t look at both sides at the same time, so you’ve got to narrow the landmines that you’ve got to just one and then watch it carefully.

That man was a rather peculiar person who had managed to maintain a relationship with seven women at the same time. His phone would keep ringing endlessly throughout the day and the caller would be a different woman each time. He would always say things like “Love you dear” and the sort while on the phone, but when he did it with me, he would only say ‘you’re cute’ and nothing more than that. Thinking back, he had really never lied needlessly.

“We’re not really blood-related. He’s just an older guy that I’ve known since I was a kid.”

“An older guy that you’re not related with? That sounds a li’l dicey to me.”

“It isn’t dicey at all, he’s a really nice person.”

“I mean, for all y’know, he could just be pretending to be nice and all.”

Of course, the fact about knowing him since I was a kid was also a lie.

But I had a feeling that if I were to introduce him as family, then the lie would end up falling apart eventually.

“He hasn’t assaulted ya or anythin’ like that right? You okay?”

“I’m okay, really! He hasn’t done anything like that at all!”

Nothing like that has happened at all, to the point where I honestly feel a little annoyed that it didn’t.

The surprising part about this conversation though, was that I had never expected Asami to have such a strong sense of virtue. I kind of had the impression that she might have been of the ‘gaudy and rebellious’ type, so the disparity between her appearance and the actual person came as a rather big surprise. On the contrary, I couldn’t help but actually consider in the back of my mind that I might be the one with a screw loose for not really feeling any particular aversion to living alone with a guy.

“Frankly speaking, Sayu-chaso, you’re a really cute girl. Normal guys would probably be turned on when they see you, not to mention that he’s not even your family.”

I thought so as well.

“Hmm, I don’t quite understand why either, but nothing like that has really happened.”

“No really, I’m sure that he’s just holdin’ himself back for now. He’s probably the type that shows his fangs later.”

I couldn't understand just why she was so insistent on it, but it was clear that she held not even a bit of trust in Yoshida-san, all this despite not having ever met him. I fully understood Asami's sentiment too though; my relationship with him was anything but ordinary after all.

"Well anyway, due to some circumstances, I've ended up staying at his house."

"Huh... Do your parents not have anythin' to say in regards to that?"

She asked.

As though remembering that she still had a task to do, she continued talking while she stocked the rice balls on the shelves.

The term "parents" had startled me for a brief moment, but I quickly showed a smile on my face and nodded along.

"Well, my parents are the sort to live and let live, if you know what I mean."

I turned to look at her as I spoke that, meeting Asami's sidelong gaze head-on.

Her eyes no longer showed the indifference that it carried a while ago. It was now slightly sharp and focused and I could feel that some form of sentiment was behind her gaze.

It made me jump a little internally.

"Hmm, well I guess those sorts of parents do exist after all, and I guess that it isn't too uncommon to live with someone whom you don't really know."

After she said that, she quickly turned away from me and went back to stocking the shelves. The mood seemed rather cutthroat just a moment ago, but now it was back to its usual calm.

Just what was that gaze earlier about?

I could clearly feel my heartbeat getting faster.

“Well, I’ll come over, either way, Sayu-chaso.”

Asami muttered, then turned to face me again.

“I’d like to see for myself just what kind of person this older guy you speak of is.”

“Ah, okay...”

I hadn’t asked her to though.

Since it seemed like she had already made up her mind about coming to the house, I could only show a strained smile and helplessly agree. The odd pressure that was behind her words had made it hard for me to refuse her or get out of this situation.

“How ‘bout today then?”

“...Hmm?”

“Our shifts end at the same time today right? I can just tag along after that then.”

“Huh, today?”

I broke out into a cold sweat. Wasn’t this going a bit too fast?

“Is that guy a salaryman? Or maybe he’s a NEET?”

Worker or NEET? I felt that the two options that were presented were rather on the extreme ends relative to one another.

“He’s a salaryman, and a serious one at that.”

“So he’s the kind to still be out when ya get home.”

“Yeah.”

“Then I’ll just wait ‘til he comes back.”

Again, why was she the one calling all the shots here again? Why didn’t she ask ‘Can I come?’ or ‘Can I wait?.’ I retorted to her internally, but I was feeling increasingly frustrated as this went on.

I wondered how I should go about explaining this to Yoshida-san.

Of course, I wanted to refuse her outright right now, but I felt like that would only make things go from bad to worse. It would be just like admitting that my relationship with Yoshida-san was to be guilty or shameful. I mean, if that were really the case then I would be fine with it; I would just ask her to not get involved any further in that case. However, our relationship really didn’t carry such undertones in it, so even though I was just dealing with a senior at work right now, it would feel wrong to trample over Yoshida-san’s dignity.

After a moment of indecision—

“Well, that’s fine I guess.”

I came up with a half-baked response.

Asami then nodded and gave me a thumbs up in reply.

“Leave the rest to me.”

Leave the what?

I could only nod helplessly with a strained smile.

My part-time job would end at around 6 pm and he usually comes back at around 8 pm.

Once I'm done with the shift I should message him about this.

For once, I'm glad that Yoshida-san had bought me a smartphone.

VOLUME 2 – CHAPTER 3

Translator: chelly (Fully Booked TLS)

“Ugh!”

It was unusual to receive a message from Sayu while I was at work, so I thought I would check it out and when I saw the contents I frowned.

『 The thing is, a senior from my part-time job will be coming over. I couldn't refuse, I'm sorry. We'll probably be at the house already when you get home. Ah, it's a girl. 』

I sighed. No, having her was a good thing. I think being able to have close friends is a good thing. However, will it be okay if I explain my relationship with Sayu? And she sent an additional message that made me feel uneasy.

『 I explained that you were an older brother who has no blood relationship with me but had always taken care of me since I was a little girl. 』

“An older brother who's helping her, huh.”

How it was a little strange, I laughed ironically. She was always harsh, repeatedly calling me “an old guy” so at that moment I don't know how she was able to tell a lie like that.

Certainly from this day on she decided to say that I was her older brother, it will be difficult to fake the name and some other things that made me not want to go through with it. Though I appreciate the fact that she described the neighborhood I “used to live in” as a good one by telling that lie. Anyway, she told me that she couldn’t refuse so I thought I had no reason to stop it. Besides, our house isn’t a problematic one.

『 Understood. 』

I answered briefly and put my phone on the desk. And then, as I raised my head to look at the monitor screen, I realized that my subordinate Yuzuha Mishima was standing to the side. When she suddenly entered my field of vision, my shoulders shook reflexively.

“Ahh, you scared me! If you’re close, warn me.”

“Your field of vision is narrow, isn’t it senpai?”

Mishima said that and then laughed sarcastically. Hashimoto, who was in the seat next to me, snorted through his nose.

“Is that a message? From whom?”

“I think that’s none of your business. Well, are you working on something?”

Along with my answer, I showed an expression of discontent on my face for a moment, then immediately sighed a little and pointed at my work computer.

“Please verify that the data has been uploaded to the server.

“Oh, it’s still early today. Okay, I’ll confirm.”

“Please.”

I nodded and looked at Mishima. I continued and bowed my head as if something had caught my attention and she also bowed her head a little with a puzzled expression on her face.

“What’s the matter?”

“Uh, just that?”

“Well, I think that’s all, although...”

No, I let those words slip away like a murmur from my throat.

“Send me that information through email. If you hand me one by one physically, it would be a waste.”

“Huh? Really? But if I’m ten seconds away, wouldn’t it be absurd to e-mail it?”

“No, because the emails will remain, so there won’t be any problem at any time.”

Mishima frowned at my words.

“What’s wrong? Why do you say that as if there’s going to be a problem?”

“Because there have been a few times when you haven’t caused one.”

And then I added:

“Problems occur just when you think they can’t happen. That’s why if you ‘upload them to the server’ it will remain in an email. In fact, it will immediately tell you that it’s ‘uploaded it to the server’ and recorded in the email. So, if the information is deleted from the server, it won’t be your fault.”

When I explained those things to her, Mishima had her eyes and mouth wide open saying “Ah...” in a dull voice.

“You said that for my sake, didn’t you?”

“Not at all, I didn’t say it for you in particular. I said it so that you’re able to defend yourself from problems that aren’t your fault.”

“I like you Yoshida-senpai. I like the fact that you’re teaching me properly.”

When he heard what Mishima had said, Hashimoto who was working in silence said:

“You like Yoshida.”

“Silence. I want to impose a job on this girl.”

“Huh? How unfair! I can’t work as a subordinate of anyone except Yoshida-senpai!”

“Although whose subordinate could you be?”

I said that and Mishima laughed to dodge the question, then Hashimoto said in a whisper:

“Well, it’s working better than before lately.”

Yeah, I thought so too. Lately, she seemed to be more precise than before in doing her job. However, also up until now, dealing with Mishima’s slow pace when working made me uneasy. Having no idea of my thoughts, Mishima suddenly puffed up her chest and smiled.

“I can do anything if I concentrate.”

“Ah, um... well, go back to your seat right away. First of all, from now on it’s okay to send the email.”

“All right!”

After a simple and unnatural military greeting, Mishima returned to her seat. I took hold of the seat in front of my desk, sighed, and then turned it to face the computer.



“Yoshida, aren’t you being too nosy?”

Hashimoto suddenly opened his mouth just to give his point of view. Without looking away from his screen, he continued:

“That way, I think you’ll only reduce one of many bad experiences.”

“Yeah, I’m aware of that.”

“Don’t you think it would be better if you left her alone?”

Hashimoto stopped typing and looked at me sideways.

“It’s as if you’re somehow giving her the privilege of escaping bad experiences.”

“It’s not like that.”

“I don’t know what’s on your head, but your conversation with her tells the story.”

Hashimoto finished saying what he wanted to say, looked at his screen again, and also made some noise with the keyboard.

“I’ll show her what I can teach her, including how to avoid unpleasant things.”

I said that quietly and also begun typing. Although he may have heard what I said, Hashimoto remained quiet.

*

“Oh, it’s an old guy!”

A girl with blond hair said that while pointing at me. A super rude girl. I was speechless for a moment and while shrugging my

shoulders I looked at Sayu, while the “gal” who was out of my field of vision bowed her head a few times.

“Ah, but lookin’ at him, he’s probably a good looking man... his aura... his aura is that of an old guy. I think his face is handsome, I also have the feelin’ that he’s too nice. Ah, I’m Asami. Feel free to call me just like that, okay? YOLO.”

“Ah, thank you.”

Suddenly she reached out to greet me, I bowed slightly and shook her hand. Just when I took the hand of the *gal*, um... I mean Asami, she looked at my hand with her eyes wide open.

“Whoa, amazing! Your hand’s extremely big, isn’t it?”

“Huh? Really?”

“It’s quite interesting. Look Sayu-chaso, they’re quite big, that’s so interesting.”

As I was holding my hand firmly with hers, Asami seemed to be glad. She turned in the direction of Sayu while saying “Too big!” repeatedly. Sayu somehow implied with a smile that she couldn’t say anything.

“Yeah, super interesting.”

Ah, so that was her “I give up” face. She didn’t show the slightest sign of wanting to intervene. Asami didn’t mind Sayu’s reaction, and after a while of making a fuss over my hand, she looked at my face attentively as if she remembered something.

“Wha... What is it?”

“Yup! You seem like a good guy! Okay!”

Although I didn't know what for or why she said that, I received her approval. Asami nodded and then returned briskly to the room.

"Just want to say that when Sayu-chaso said that she's living with a guy with whom she had no blood relationship, it caught my attention. Besides, you say he's not your boyfriend, right? Huh, so what's this setup? A man who's neither your family nor your boyfriend, so what does that mean?"

"Huh?"

This "old guy" had only a slight idea of what this girl's talking about. Her words didn't seem to match in context, form, or meaning. Sayu only listened to Asami's talk with a subtle smile on her face so she didn't know if she was enjoying it or suffering from it.

"But it's a good thing that when ya see him in person he seems a completely harmless old guy. Oh, I mean 'big bro,' so sorry."

After Asami talked to herself like a machine-gun, she seemed to remember something and with her hand, she tapped my bed and said:

"Well, Yoshida-san, how about sittin' down?"

This is my house, you idiot.

Sayu's part-time job senior looked like a cartoon character with a lot of punch.

"Oh! What's this? It's extremely delicious, Yoshida-cchi. Are you eatin' this every day? You're an incredibly happy person, ain't ya? Surprising."

Her words flew like machine-gun bullets. Asami, who was sitting in the living room very naturally, while Sayu was preparing the meal,

persistently asked me and Sayu questions. Honestly, I wasn't good at lying.

"Yoshida-cchi's room is so cramped."

"Well, if you went home it would get wider."

"I'll eat first."

"After you eat, go home."

Asami laughed foolishly, as she took away the strange vegetables prepared by Sayu which, when chewed seemed to have tasted delicious to her.

"But I like this splendid cramped feeling."

"Stop calling it cramped."

"No, it's just that my house is super big! It's so big that it scares me."

"Are you showing off?"

I laughed sarcastically as I put the white rice in my mouth, Asami's expression seemed to shadow and glow at the same time.

"Not at all, I'm not."

Her mouth was smiling, but her eyes seemed to show melancholy. I think she did it unintentionally. It seems that landmines were buried in unexpected places. I shouldn't probably have said that especially that it's my first meeting with her.

"Is your house close by?"

I competently changed the subject. The expression on Asami's face changed completely and she nodded several times.

"That's right! I live 10 minutes away from here on foot. So cool!"

"There's nothing cool about it."

Sayu, who was listening to our conversation in silence, began to laugh. When I turned over her to see what was happening, she was shaking her shoulders with laughter and looking at Asami and me alternately.

"I just met you, but we're already too close."

"Ah. Really?"

"Well Yoshida-cchi, I think you and I are already soulmates for eternity."

Do you even know the meaning of "soulmate" to use it like that? No, you definitely don't. I laughed ironically at Asami's comments, and from my accurate observations, Sayu laughed out loud. When I first arrived from work Sayu seemed to be quite tense about Asami as well, but now she seemed to be relaxing little by little.

"So here's today's miso soup."

The moment Sayu began to speak, her smartphone on the table vibrated at full volume. Because of the loud noise it made, all of us in the room shook our shoulders in surprise.

"Damn, that scared me!"

Asami was pretty scared. Apparently, she got a phone call, and when she checked who it was, Sayu showed some tension.

“It’s the store manager, what could it be?”

“Ah, the manager? Maybe it’s about shift change.”

“Excuse me, I’ll go out for a moment.”

Sayu took her smartphone and ran to the door, put on her shoes, and left the house. Since it didn’t seem like a private call and she could make it inside the house, it generated unnecessary suspicion. Asami and I were left alone. Before, when Sayu was preparing the meal, one could say that we were talking alone, so it wasn’t an exaggeration. For that reason, one could think that there wasn’t much difference between being alone “really” and being alone “virtually.”

If I were asked, I would say that Asami is the same age as Sayu, which is 17. When Sayu first arrived I thought about it, being alone with a high school girl I had just met was a pretty risky situation and I unconsciously sweat ran down my back.

“When the manager starts, his calls are damn long so it may take a while.”

Asami, after saying this, took a mouthful of white rice.

“Isn’t this just about work?”

“Hmm...”

When I asked, Asami was chewing and as she did so she waved the palm of her hand in my direction. I think that was the signal for me to wait a little while until she finished chewing. Mishima’s face came to mind. Hey, even high school girls know not to talk while eating. After she finished chewing what she was eating, Asami said:

“The manager’s the kind of guy who’s longin’ for company. First of all, he talks to you about work, but in the process, he also talks about other things. That’s why his calls are so long. Even though I’ve told him ’bout it many times, he still does it and I’m really fed up.”

I had a strangely uncomfortable feeling when I heard the phrase “Fed up.” It wasn’t because she used it incorrectly. However, it seemed to strangely deviate from the way this girl was talking, and the word echoed back to me.

“Even though you say that you go along with it every time. Isn’t that being nice?”

“Because I felt bad? No, I just thought that I don’t wanna become a lonely adult like him.”

I thought that was a rather bitter description. A lonely adult. I think I fit that classification appropriately.

“Puttin’ that aside.”

Asami squinted mischievously after saying this.

“What kind of relationship do you have with Sayu-chaso?”

To that question, I bowed my head. I wondered if Sayu had been disconnected from the situation while preparing the food.

“I think I told you about that already. A long time ago, I lived in the same neighborhood...”

“Ah, enough of that.”

Asami waved her hands, interrupting me.

“Yoshida-cchi, you really suck at lying. It’s so obvious that all of it isn’t true.”

“Really?”

I honestly thought that even though I had time pulling that off, I would hear expressions like “Hey!” or “Unbelievable!” and other reactions like that which she had done before.

“Remember when you were talking about you and Sayu-chaso’s past? Your eyes were looking all over the place as if they were swimming. It’s almost like a swimmer competing internationally.”

After saying all this without pausing, Asami laughed.

Like a swimmer competing internationally.

I also laughed reluctantly at that metaphor. This girl had a peculiar way of choosing her words but I think it’s interesting. As I thought about it casually, my feelings for it was almost as impatient.

The lie had been discovered. Yet how should I explain it? At this point, I couldn’t find a way to deceive her. And honestly, I couldn’t speak without Sayu’s consent, nor could I speak here selfishly.

“Hey, look, even now they’re still movin’ around!”

Asami said with a grin on her face.

“You can be honest with me.”

The cold sweat didn’t stop. But I also couldn’t remain silent forever.

“Sayu and I are...”

I swallowed my saliva because of the stress of having to lie. Sayu's smile passed through my mind. I couldn't put any strength into my facial muscles, so I could only put on a weak smile. If I were to confess everything to Asami at this moment, what face would Sayu make? Suddenly my impatience subsided and I became calm.

"What Sayu told you was the 'truth.'"

Asami's shoulders shrugged when I said that.

"What do you mean by the word 'truth?'"

Asami was investigating the meaning of the word "truth." Although that didn't mean she was looking up the meaning of the word itself. I knew what she meant and why she was asking. I scratched my head, even though it didn't itch, and said:

"I think it's like what a politician would say sometimes."

"How?"

"I don't remember."

When I said those words, Asami let out a little laugh.

"That was sudden. But what's your relationship with her now?"

"No, you should ask a question about the last thing I said."

At my request for a question, Asami, during the time she was thinking, seemed not to refuse it, and then shook her head.

"There's no reason to do that, is there? A politician who doesn't remember what he said is too dangerous."

“Isn’t it? But, as politicians would say, I think I have no choice but to apply it in this situation.”

Until that moment Asami seemed to understand and nodded a bit several times.

“It will be like that then. In other words, that’s how you’re going to solve this situation, right?”

I didn’t answer. I was silent for a moment and then nodded. It was Sayu and not me who lied to Asami. It was a mistake to expose a lie for my convenience, no, I thought it was deceitful.

“But isn’t that the same as acknowledging a lie?”

Asami narrowed her eyes and looked straight at me as if she were shooting with her eyes. I felt that she was testing me, but either way what she had said wouldn’t change.

“I admit I want to hide the truth. Also, it’s isn’t like I’m good at lying anyway.”

I finished saying this and I sighed deeply. As I sighed I felt all the words I had to say coming together in my chest. Suddenly I thought I wanted to smoke a cigarette.

“I don’t think it’s right for me to expose what she’s trying to hide.”

When I finished saying this, I put the last of the white rice in the bowl into my mouth. Although Asami didn’t say anything, she had an empty look at her face.

“What’s wrong?”

Asami opened her mouth as if she had remembered something and while she was sighing she tapped her mouth with her hand, and then a wide smile was drawn on her face.

“Hahaha, you really are a nice guy. It’s surprising.”

“Huh? A nice guy?”

As I answered with this question, Asami nodded a little and looked at the surface of the table.

“I think it’s usually not a question of whether it’s ‘right or wrong’ but rather whether they ‘want or don’t want to.’ It’s a human thing.”

“Well, I guess I was thinking about whether I want to or not.”

At my words, Asami looked up and stared into my eyes. I thought that was the meaning of what she had asked me. Asami’s eyes expressed a strange sensation at what I expressed strongly. I sighed a little and continued with my words. It was simple.

“I just didn’t want to do something deceitful, that’s all there is to it.”

Asami opened her eyes wide. Suddenly her resolution came.

“Hey, what’s wrong? Did I say something strange?”

“Ah, no, it’s different...”

Asami laughed with all her strength, so much so that her shoulders shook because of it, she raised her face and while covering her mouth with her hand she said:

“When you said that, your eyes didn’t seem to move around at all, it was damn hilarious.”

“Huh?”

“Many people out there are pretending to be cool and say things like that. Though most of the time you can tell they’re just faking it because their eyes are constantly moving around. I think it’s because they’re only saying what they think the people want to hear from them. Got me, Yoshida-cchi?”

After saying this, Asami stopped laughing.

“I could tell that you were speaking directly from the heart. It astonished me.”

I was surprised that I didn’t say anything. I laughed forcibly and said:

“Really?”

“Oh yes, of course.”

Asami’s shoulders shook as if she were surprised and she spoke rather quickly. And after that, she continued talking as if she wanted to trick me.

“I’m really amazed that you’re such a good person Yoshida-cchi.”

“That’s not true.”

“Yes, it is. Sayu-chaso’s really lucky.”

After saying that, Asami again looked at the table surface. I could see a faint glow in her eyes, so I impulsively looked away.

“Although you can choose the people you relate to, you can’t choose where you meet them.”

Asami said so in a low voice. Until a moment ago I wanted to ask her why she used the gal language and since I didn't want to make fun of it, I stopped thinking about it.

"That's why I think it's incredibly lucky to be able to deepen a relationship with a good person you've met."

At first, when Sayu said she would bring Asami, I didn't wonder why she brought this senpai into the house. However, sometimes when I saw Asami's look, it seemed a little similar to Sayu's distant gaze. I scratched the back of my neck and said

"I think we all have such encounters. If it hasn't happened now, it will happen later."

"What does that mean? I'm not wishing for somethin' like that to happen. LOL."

Again, Asami used the gal expressions she was using before.

"Hey, isn't it tiring for you to keep talking like that?"

"Huh? Is somethin' wrong with it? This is how I've always spoken."

"So when you switch to a normal way of speaking, it's unintentional? Just a while back, you forgot to correct yourself to say 'it surprised me' and instead said 'it astonished me.'"

When I said that, Asami was flustered and seemed pissed off.

"What are ya grinning for? Ah! You're so annoying."

"No, no, I was thinking back what you said back then."

"What are you on about?"

“A swimmer competing internationally.”

Asami’s face turned red and then started to assault me.

“Ouch!”

“Dummy! You’re such a big dummy!

While I was fending off a violent Asami, the front door opened.

“Sorry, sorry, the call with the manager went long... What’s wrong?”

When Sayu returned to the room, she looked at Asami and me and then squinted with perplexity. Asami completely changed the expression on her face, stood up, and stood in front of Sayu.

“Listen to me Sayu-chaso, Yoshida-cchi’s abusing me. This damn old fart, he’s the worst I tell you!”

“Hey.”

While looking at us, Sayu smiled sarcastically.

“You two seemed to be really getting along, huh?”

“Does this look like we’re getting along to you?”

Asami was quick to say “No way!”

Sayu said “Fine, fine” as she approached Asami and sat in the place where she was originally seated and then looked in my direction.

“You’re no longer tense, are you?”

I was silent and shrugged my shoulders. I’ve had an impression that Sayu had an antenna sensitive enough to detect the atmosphere of

the situation and the expressions on the faces of others. For some reason, I thought she couldn't be fooled. Although from the beginning I didn't intend to lie. I took a look at the clock and it was already around 10 pm. It would be problematic not to get the high school student back to the house.

"Go on, eat what's left of your food quickly. After you finish, go home. I'll go with you."

"It's fine, you don't have to come with me, it's only a 10-minute walk."

"Idiot, a high school girl shouldn't walk alone at this hour and if a policeman sees you, you'd be taken into custody."

I said that to Asami, who just laughed and waved her hand.

"The *popo* in this area doesn't do patrols."

The "popo." I was almost speechless at that old expression.

"I just thought that if I'm walking with a high school girl alone at night I'd also be detained and questioned by the police. Oh boy."

For a moment, I was horrified by the idea of being questioned by the police. However, I felt uneasy about having a high school girl return home alone despite the risk of being considered a suspect.

"Either way, I'll be anxious about you walking home alone at this hour. I'll go with you."

When I said that again, Asami sniffed hard through her nose.

"You already said that. LOL."

Why is this girl full of herself?

“Let him go with you. It would be troubling if you were involved in an accident or incident while on your way home.”

Sayu said this and Asami muttered an “hmm” as she nodded several times.

“If Sayu-chaso says so, then I guess there’s nothin’ I can do. Fine, I’ll go with you.”

“Where do you even get those things you say...”

Although I said it with a wry smile, up to that point I didn’t dislike the way Asami spoke. Talking to her was like having a casual conversation between men.

“But, I won’t be responsible if they question you Yoshida-cchi, that’ll be a YOLO situation.”

“Okay, just finish your dinner already.”

It seemed funny to Asami who, with a wide smile, took the dishes from the remaining garnishes. After observing Asami, I looked at Sayu and our glances were in sync. Sayu looked into my eyes.

“What’s going on?”

“Yoshida-san, are you smiling?”

“I’m smiling.”

At my answer, Sayu giggled and grabbed the chopsticks to start eating what was left. Although at first, I thought it was rude to bring a gal into the house, surprisingly, they really seemed to get along well.

I thought it seemed like a pretty good thing that Sayu, who was always locked up in the house, would go out and make new friends. That way, she will accumulate new experiences, not worry about painful past, and be with someone who's just the opposite of her.

"Thank you for the food."

I went ahead and finished my meal and went out to the balcony in high spirits. Strangely, I couldn't do anything else but smoke. It wasn't because of stress. I wanted to have a cigarette to feel calm. I thought I only felt like smoking when I was angry, when I was happy, or when I was having some difficulty.

*

"This is far enough, I'll take it from here."

Asami said as she stopped on her tracks. We've been walking for 8 minutes while making small talks.

"I can take you in front of your house."

"Hmm, it's fine. Besides, I don't want you to see my house."

Asami's words made me clearly understand her "rejection." Since I knew she's being serious about it, I didn't pry any further.

"I see. Well, even though there's still 2 minutes left, be careful on your way back home."

"You worry too much, LOL."

Asami smiled a little and I waved my hand.

"Um... I know it's kind of late to say this, but sorry for going uninvited."

“It’s fine, except for the fact that you kept on saying ‘Your house is cramped,’ I didn’t mind at all.

That it didn’t bother me was a lie. I was honestly uneasy since I returned home from the work.

“But, I really think that the house is good enough. Including the fact that it’s cramped.”

Asami said that and shrugged her shoulders. Although she had a joking attitude, Asami’s eyes showed a little hint of sadness. Although I didn’t know why I had an affinity with “cramped” houses, thanks to that very eyes of Asami, I’m now thinking otherwise.

“If you like it that much, you’re free to visit anytime you want.”

At my words, Asami opened her eyes wide.

“Huh? Is that okay?”

“Of course. You’re Sayu’s friend after all.”

Asami smiled widely and pointed at me.

“You’re like her dad. How funny.”

“I’m her guardian.”

Asami nodded when I answered and then sighed.

“I think it’s good that you’re her guardian. Well, if Yoshida-cchi says it’s fine, I’ll come again. See ya.”

Asami smiled and turned her back. I also raised my hand and nodded, and then I saw Asami walking away.

“I actually have some advice for you, Guardian-san.”

Asami said as she suddenly grabbed my arm.

“Sayu-chaso’s really good at takin’ advantage of her *smile*, I’d be more careful if I were you.”

Without waiting for my answer, Asami turned around and continued walking right after she finished saying what she had to say. I looked at her back in silence. After a few intersections, she turned left and after that, she was no longer on my sight.

“Her smile...”

I thought of Sayu’s smiling face. Her face when she was laughing. When she would make an ironic smile. And then I felt that there was a hidden meaning in her smiles. It was as if she had designed everything herself to manipulate me.

I’d be more careful if I were you.

What Asami had just said crossed my mind again.

“She asked me to be more careful.”

What are she even telling me to be more careful about? I sighed and started walking back home.

VOLUME 2 – CHAPTER 4

Translator: chelly (Fully Booked TLS)

“Okay... Well, I’m not saying it’s crazy, but to think that you’d decline again...”

Chief Odagiri said without hiding his disappointment. At those words, I felt it deeply too, but all I could do was nod. It was a request for another business trip. Some time ago, I voluntarily accepted business trips, but now that Sayu was in the house I could not be absent for long without feeling uneasy.

Some time ago when I refused to take a trip it was a surprise, but as expected a second time would really make the chief unhappy about it.

“What’s going on lately? It seems like you’re on some sort of mid-life crisis.”

“No, that’s not it!”

“Yeah, I think it’s not. Looking at the way you work, it seems that it’s not like that. I understand. If that’s the case, there’s a reason, right? Don’t hesitate to tell me, you don’t need to hold back.”

Although questioning was natural, it was extremely agonizing for me. Although back then I vaguely thought of preparing an excuse for a situation like that, I never thought that talk about a business trip would come up again so quickly. It was total neglect.

“Can it be a problem with your partner? Still, it would be nice if you told me. Well... it’s not like you’re getting married, so I don’t think that’s the reason you’re refusing.”

“It’s not... it’s not like that.”

“So what’s the reason?”

Although Chief Odagiri’s tone wasn’t strong, this time he gave me the impression that he was not going to let me go without hearing a reason. I really messed up. There’s no way I could tell him that a high school girl was staying at my house. Moreover, I couldn’t tell a lie in a whim. Silent, nervous, and asking myself what to do, suddenly a familiar face appeared behind Chief Odagiri.

“Huh? Chief Odagiri, how are you doing today?”

“Ah, Mishima-kun...”

The one who suddenly came out from behind Chief Odagiri was Mishima.

“I came because I have some matters to discuss with Yoshida-senpai but, are you busy?”

“More or less. It’s about an upcoming business trip.”

As soon as she heard the chief’s words, Mishima opened her mouth wide and said, “Huh?”

“A business trip? Yoshida-senpai’s attending one?”

“Well, yeah but it seems he’s going to decline it.”

“Oh, it’s just that Yoshida-senpai can’t go on a business trip!”

Mishima said it in an extremely loud voice. She said it so suddenly that I was surprised.

“Yoshida-senpai told me that he had to go to his parents’ house regularly this month. Her mother’s ill...”

After saying this, Mishima put her hand to her startled mouth.

“...Ah, was I supposed to keep it undisclosed?”

Then she looked in my direction nervously and bowed her head. Although the expression on her face was really tense, it was clear when she looked at me that the ulterior motive was to do me a favor. It was as if she were saying, “Okay, nod.”

“Ah... Well... I guess the beans have already been spilled.”

I nodded and then Mishima said “I’m s-sorry” in a low voice and bowed her head. Seeing the situation between Mishima and me, a confused Chief Odagiri shook his hand.

“Is that what happened? If it was something like that, it would’ve been nice if you had told me from the start.”

“No...”

“Since Yoshida-senpai’s a person who’s very attached to his family, he didn’t want to use this kind of family situation as an excuse, right?”

“Well... sort of...”

I didn’t have the opportunity to properly respond as Mishima interrupted me and spoke non-stop.

“If that’s the case, I will ask another one. Yoshida-kun if you find it unbearable to say something like that... it would be fine if you said something like ‘it’s a family matter’ or even something ambiguous.”

Chief Odagiri stared at me, but differently than he had done before, and it was a warm look, as if he were doing me a favor.

“Since you work seriously every day, if you refuse for a reason like that I wouldn’t question it. Next time tell me properly.”

“Yes... I’m sorry.”

Even without completely believing until that moment that Mishima had invented that pretext, and with feelings of guilt inside me, I nodded my head.

“However, there’s still a problem. So who else would be good to send on the trip?”

After saying this, Chief Odagiri looked extensively at the next desk. Endou, who belonged to the same team, was the colleague who replaced me the previous time I was asked to go on a business trip. But the place where he always sits now was empty. It must surely be because he went on a week-long business trip to Tohoku. And Koike, a close colleague of his, accompanied him this time.

“Hashimoto-kun’s married, and I can’t ask the newbies to fill in...”

After saying this the boss looked at the seat next to me. Hashimoto, a colleague who until just now was working quietly, upon realizing the presence of Chief Odagiri, carefully left his seat.

Although for me, Hashimoto was a colleague who could be counted on, but at a time like this, he definitely wasn’t. For better or worse, he was a person who managed to survive by picking his battles. The unexpected silence that formed with Chief Odagiri, who I know was

silent about the problem of having no one to ask for the trip and I who had refused a few moments earlier and didn't know the right thing to say had ended.

"Odagiri-san. A moment please."

A cold voice came from a distant desk. When I looked in the direction the voice was coming from, Gotou-san was smiling and raising her hand. The chief and I found it unusual for Gotou-san to say anything at that moment, so we were completely immobilized by the surprise.

However, the chief immediately seemed to remember to move his body and shook his head back and forth, quietly said "I'll be back in a moment" and left me there while he headed to Gotou-san's desk.

Gotou-san is my boss. She was the one who had brought me to this company, my unrequited love, and also the woman who had already rejected me once. I was on a project with Gotou-san who was part of Human Resources and focused on labor issues at the time. Although we never had long conversations, we continued to work in the same office, and every day, I saw her nice figure.

Chief Odagiri waved his hand and said something to Gotou-san. As I watched the scene get absorbed, someone next to me gave me a slight push. It was Mishima, who stood beside me without my noticing. Mishima said in a low voice without looking at me:

"Yoshida-senpai, I think that it'll be good if came up with an excuse."

She must have been talking about the business trip. Although it was too sudden and left me in awe, Mishima's act helped me quite a bit.

"Thanks for earlier."

I responded in a low voice. Mishima was a little embarrassed as if she were a spoiled child and then shook her head.

“I’m sorry I said at that time that someone in your family was ill. It was impolite of me.”

“No, it’s okay... I probably wouldn’t have a credible reason.”

“Also, it wasn’t a lie someone else would tell for their convenience.”

I looked sideways at Mishima. She was usually a kouhai who doesn’t care much for work, but at that moment, she felt that she had a strong sense of duty and gallantry.

“It’s because of Sayu-chan, isn’t it?”

“Yeah.”

It may seem that sometimes she forgets, but she knows Sayu. In the company, there are only two people who knew of Sayu’s existence: Mishima and Hashimoto. For this reason, I believe that Mishima, seeing that I was in a predicament came to help me.

“Either way, you really helped me back there.”

I told Mishima who looked me straight in the eye and said:

“So, will I get a reward from you?.”

“That’s bold.”

“It was thanks to me that you were saved Yoshida-senpai, so if there’s anything you could do for me, even if it’s small, it would be nice.”

“I’ll treat you to a meal.”

“It’s a promise, okay? Just the two of us!”

“It’s hard for me to invite more people if I’m the one who’ll be paying.”

At my words, Mishima clenched her fist and nodded vigorously.

“Yes! I can earn some Yoshida-senpai points that way.”

“What’s with those ‘points’? Sounds suspicious.”

I said that with a little smile, then I was startled because at that moment Chief Odagiri and Gotou-san faced in our direction.

Gotou-san laughed sweetly and tilted her head while Chief Odagiri denied several times with his and went to where we were. Apparently, their conversation was over.

“It seems Gotou-san will make the arrangements to send one from another branch. What a lifesaver.”

“Oh? That’s good to hear...”

I was deeply relieved. Although I shouldn’t make Sayu a top priority, my real intention is to take care of her and not get into trouble with my boss. If I couldn’t refuse, and if someone else couldn’t replace me, I would honestly have been quite distressed about having to go.

Since Gotou-san intervened in that difficult situation, I had to go later to thank her privately and tell her how I felt. As I thought about this, I casually looked in the direction of Gotou-san and our glances met.

Immediately, it became a match where *whoever looks away loses*. I was held captive in this mysterious confrontation, and without looking away from me, Gotou-san smiled forcibly and made a small signal with her hand, asking me to come to her. That movement was so sudden and natural that it took me a while to realize that what she did was directed towards me.

Still distracted, I saw Gotou-san, who scowled at me in bewilderment, signaled me with her hand again. Until that moment, I finally realized that she was indeed calling for me.

“Senpai.”

“What?”

Mishima hit me on the side with her elbow, and when I turned in her direction, she pointed with her chin to Gotou-san’s direction.

“She’s calling you.”

“Ah, she’s calling me?”

“Really? Who else would she be calling? Shouldn’t you be going right now?”

“Oh... oh...”

Why are you in a bad mood? I thought. When Mishima was speaking, she was frowning, with sharp eyes directed at me, and shaking her head several times. I went to Gotou-san’s desk.

“Why didn’t you come immediately?”

“Uhm... sorry, for a moment I didn’t know it was me you were calling.”

While smiling mischievously, she asked me in a joking tone and I responded while blushing. As she sat at her chair, she tilted her body a little, bent her knees, and pressed her back into the chair. I unconsciously watched that whole series of movements. With the rainy season fast approaching and because of the air conditioning, the humidity level was high which made things inside the office, *embarrassing*.

From an early stage of the Cool Biz^[1] that the company adopted, many employees worked with only a shirt or blouse. Gotou-san and I were among those employees. The moment Gotou-san sat down in the chair, thanks to an unbuttoned button, I could see her collarbone, and nervously, I looked away.

“S-so, why did you call me?”

I asked her. Gotou san looked back from where I was and then pointed to her monitor screen. That behavior gave me an uncomfortable feeling and I remembered looking back at myself. As I did so, I was met with the look of Mishima who was looking at our direction. It was no accident that our glances met. She was certainly taking a peek and disregarding her job.

『 Get back to work! 』

I scowled and motioned for her to use her keyboard, but she also scowled decisively and then forcibly stuck out her tongue before she directed her gaze at the monitor screen.

“Hehehe. You two are really close, aren’t you?”

“No, not at all.”

After a short exchange of glances, Gotou-san laughed, and I felt a bit embarrassed. When I looked at Gotou-san again, she was pointing at her monitor screen. I moved a little bit closer to Gotou-san and looked at the screen. It was written in a Word^[2] document.

『 Do you have any plans for today after work? 』

After confirming that I had read it, Gotou-san used her keyboard and typed:

『 How about going out for dinner? 』

Recently, eating out alone with Gotou-san has increased compared to before. Although that was something to be happy about, this way of inviting me was just as sudden as the time I went out with her to eat grilled meat. I remember that time she asked me the somewhat arbitrary question of whether I had a girlfriend or not which I struggled with quite a bit when explaining.

Spending time alone with Gotou-san made me very happy, but, that memory worried me as if it will torment. However, there was no way I would reject such a lucky invitation from Gotou-san. Besides, I originally had no reason not to accept an invitation from my boss nor the character to decline such a thing.

“Sure, I’m free.”

As those bitter memories came back to my mind, I shook my head.

“You can? Great. I’ll send you an email with the details over lunch.”

After saying this briefly, Gotou-san showed a wide smile.

“I understand.”

I also responded with something simple to make it look like “a business conversation.” I said “Excuse me,” bowed slightly, and walked away from Gotou-san’s desk. As I returned to my place, I could clearly see that Mishima was moving her head unnaturally, but I ignored her. When I reached my desk, Hashimoto was already in the seat next to me with an indifferent look on his face.

“It was a rather long trip to the bathroom.”

“Can’t help it. I suddenly got a stomachache.”

“Yeah... yeah...”

I frowned at Hashimoto's shameless response, and he smiled as if I were hiding something.

"So you managed to arrange a date with Gotou-san during working hours, huh?"

"Really, it's not a date..."

"You're not going to deny that it wasn't a business conversation?"

"Shut up."

Mainly considering the circumstances, it was really annoying when he made fun of me. He skillfully avoided meeting Chief Odagiri by emptying his seat and was now there working. I can't go out to dinner without first communicating with Sayu, I thought. I took out my phone and wrote her a short message.

『 Sorry. Gotou-san invited me to dinner so I'll be eating out today and then I'll go home. 』

I really wanted to send her something a little more sensitive, but I didn't have anything prepared, and I was on the clock so the content had to be brief and I sent it to her immediately. Looking at me sideways, Hashimoto said with a clear tone of mockery:

"Oh, you're telling your wife?"

"Hey, that's enough."

*

When the meat was on the grill, a "shh" sound was immediately heard. Bubbles appeared on the surface of the meat as it gradually shrank, and as I watched it, I turned each of the pieces of meat with the pincers.

“Mmm, looks delicious.”

Said Gotou-san who was sitting in front of me while her eyes looked brighter than usual. Gotou-san and I went back to the same restaurant we had gone to the previous time. I saw the color change on both sides of the meat from pink to orange and I pressed it a little with my tongs. Through them, I felt the strong flexibility of the meat in my hand. Apparently, they were getting a good amount of heat inside.

“Now we can eat it.”

I said this and took a piece of meat and Gotou-san lifted her plate slightly with both hands. When I placed the meat on her plate, she laughed a little childishly.

“Hehe, thank you. As you’d expect from the person in charge of grilling.”

“Oh, please.”

Gotou-san and I had already had many drinks from the beer glasses in front of us. We had already finished toasting. While we were talking about harmless things, I was roasting the meat. Slowly, my stomach was getting full, and also deliberately, I was getting impatient.

“So what have we here?”

Even though it isn’t my cup of tea, I initiated the conversation with Gotou-san as it seemed she wouldn’t do it first. I was wondering when we would start talking about the real issue, so I got a little impatient. Gotou-san turned her head to the side.

“What do you mean by that?”

“I mean, is there anything I can help you with? You suddenly invited me to dinner in the middle of work.”

When I said that, Gotou-san made a worried face and then a grimace.

“What’s wrong? Did I catch you?”

I said bitterly as if I knew the truth. I was a little upset, so she made a charming expression she knew I’m weak at.

“I’m not hiding anything... maybe.”

Gotou-san ate a piece of meat that she took from her small plate and chewed slowly. Then, after swallowing it completely, she suddenly tilted her head and looked me in the eye.

“Why did you refuse to go on a business trip?”

As expected she would ask me that, I thought. I felt tension on my face. And at the moment, I understood that I couldn’t run away without answering that question. Gotou-san was staring at me when she asked. Perhaps she didn’t notice the change in my expression either.

“I already told you about this, so I’m not chastising you at all. It’s company policy not to force anyone to take business trips, so you’re free to refuse.”

That’s how it was. The company had achieved growth in such a short term, paving the way for those kinds of policies. Young people today have a strong tendency not to accept it as they feel it’s *obsolete*.

Lunch can be taken at any time between 11 am and 3 pm, and you can also change to a flexible schedule to get in and out of work. Back

then, when Gotou-san said, "The boss can't force you to do anything he/she orders you to" this also included the trips.

I think the achievements have increased because it's a company that implemented that scheme, so every single worker for that aspect of the organization; they work stress-free.

"So, asking you that kind of question was only out of personal curiosity. Don't you think?"

At the words of Gotou-san, I answered vaguely just to show I was paying attention.

"When we went out last time... you also... asked me a similar question."

Gotou-san hesitated to say anything and looked at me again as she turned away, then nervously looked at the table surface.

"You told me you had nothing to do with Mishima-san, right?"

"Yeah. Didn't we already talk about that? I said that nothing's going on between the two of us..."

"But, aren't you two eating together more frequently?"

"We just got a little closer than before... No, it's just that she appreciates me... Well, I don't really know how to explain it, but, I think that's why we're frequently together."

"Well, I guess so... But still."

Gotou-san raised her voice. She also made some gestures, which wasn't a characteristic of hers when she speaks.

"It's clear that you're leaving the office earlier than before lately."

“Ah, that’s because I want to have more time to sleep.”

“No, that’s not it, you’re definitely lying. I can tell by the way you look away while you stutter when you talk.”

“Oh, but it’s not a lie...”

It was an outright lie. After staring at her, Gotou-san sighed a little, and said slowly:

“I think it’s because... Maybe you haven’t even noticed it yourself, but...”

It seems she was doing a preamble.

“Yoshida-kun, you’ve never even used your phone during work before.”

When I heard those words, I felt bad. I certainly hadn’t seen it that way. Perhaps she noticed the change in the expression on my face, because Gotou-san, who looked puzzled, denied with her hand.

“Ah, I’m sorry. I’m not accusing you or anything. But I want you to know that I’m not playing around either.”

“No, that’s... Well...”

As I stuttered, Gotou-san smiled bitterly and continued talking.

“The thing is, a subordinate who had never used his smartphone at work, suddenly starts doing things like that... And I don’t think you’re just contacting a colleague.”

“You... have a point.”

I honestly didn't want to make a statement, but certainly what she was saying had a fairly logical and normal development. There was no point in denying it so I meekly nodded.

"That's why I'm very worried... Ah, you want another beer?"

"Ah... Please."

I replied. Gotou-san flashed a smile and then pressed a button to call the waiter. When the waiter arrived, Gotou-san said "Two beers please." I took the empty glass that was in front of me and gave it to the waiter.

"Thank you very much. Sorry if I made you worry..."

"No, this isn't a company dinner so you have nothing worry about."

Well, that's true. I thought about continuing with the subject, but I held back. Implicitly, I realized that she now seemed to speak without taking a position.

"So..."

I muttered softly. Gotou-san was slightly confused then she looked at me.

"What is it?"

I knew specifically what she meant by that question without the need to ask again. Why I had refused to take the business trip, who I was contacting, those were the questions she wanted to ask.

"It's just that..."

As I started to say those words, I came to a sudden halt. Actually, except for Hashimoto, I had no intention of telling anyone about

Sayu. However, was it fate? Mishima had discovered that Sayu was staying at my house. It seemed that being stubborn and hiding this from Gotou-san was meaningless.

“Two beers, sorry to keep you waiting.”

“Ah, thanks...”

The waiter arrived at a quick pace and immediately put the beers on the table and said, “Please excuse me” as he hurriedly moved to another table. As Gotou-san placed one glass on my side and another on her side, I felt my senses were slowly coming together. Certainly. Regardless of whether I’ll talk about Sayu or not, it was more important to first eliminate the feeling of discomfort. Finally, I was able to put into words the feeling of uncertainty I felt a few moments ago.

“Before anything else, is it okay if I ask you something?”

When I asked that question, Gotou-san looked confused for a moment and then tilted her head to the side.

“What?”

“No, I mean...”

I understood the meaning of Gotou-san’s question. And, I also understood the doubt that led to the question. However, there was only one thing that I really didn’t understand.

“Gotou-san, why do you care so much about the reasons behind my actions?”

I looked Gotou-san in the eye when I asked the question and she seemed to be startled. Previously, Gotou-san’s remarks indicated that she seemed to be highly aware of what was going on with me

lately. Until now, I had hardly thought deeply about why she's fixated on an employee's behavior. But as I listened to her comments, I thought it was clear that it was something like "I'm just paying close attention to all employees" but she was looking at me too closely.

No, I think it's true that she really was paying attention to other employees. I think that's probably what it was. Gotou-san had been in the office watching all the employees around her, walking around, making it easy for people who had work to do to talk quietly. I was aware of it.

However, today Gotou-san had known the situation remarkably in detail. If she really had the same viewpoint when she saw each of the employees, there was no way she could remember those things she asked of me. If that was the case, I almost didn't want to be too self-conscious.

I continued to think of her as my romantic interest for five years, and then she crushed that affection. But despite that, I had come to the conclusion that Gotou-san was watching me closely over the other employees. There was no way I could get rid of this uncomfortable feeling. I wonder if Gotou-san only saw me as just "one employee among many others."

If I were to assume that she had a special intention, what the hell would it be? I had a feeling that it was unfair that before I was done with that doubt, I would clear up the mystery and answer her question.

"You don't have to force yourself to answer if you don't want to..."

And then what I had thought about went further, apparently for me it was something very important.

"But in that case, I won't answer any of your questions either."

I couldn't think of another way, so I made an assertive comment. At my words, Gotou-san opened her eyes a little wider and blinked more than usual. Then she raised the corners of her mouth a little and sighed.

"I was surprised..."

After saying that, Gotou-san drank a shot of beer seeming to avoid the question. Seeing that, I remembered that I hadn't even taken a single sip of my beer yet. The foam of my beer had been reduced to a single centimeter. Bewildered, I also drank a shot. A stimulating feeling that seemed like an electric shock passed through my throat. And then for some reason, the assertive comment I just made ran through my head.

"So that was something that's on your mind, huh."

After saying that, Gotou-san blushed a little. Why would she have blushed at that moment?

"Yes, I certainly pay more attention to you than others. That's a fact."

Gotou-san slowly said these words. However, that was a little strange. She wasn't looking into my eyes, her gaze was directed at the surface of the table aimlessly, and her face was red. I didn't say anything, I waited for her to continue with what she was saying.

"Okay."

Gotou-san just nodded, and after looking away from me, she finally looked at me again.

"Um, I hope you won't be surprised to hear what I'm going to say but... that's probably not possible, I guess?"

“So the reason...”

“Yes?”

“Why I care so much right?”

“Yes.”

Just by looking at her appearance I knew. Now, she was trying to answer me seriously. It was clear that her mood was different from usual now because she was always completely calm, so I didn't know what she was thinking. Gotou-san slowly inhaled and then exhaled. Seeming to have made up her mind, she stared at me and with a slightly flushed face she said:

“I like you, Yoshida-kun.”

My thoughts froze. What did she say just now? She liked me. Did she say that? When my mind came to, suddenly chaos began. No, no, no. But it was only a few months ago that she rejected me. She told me she had a boyfriend. Did she break up with him? No, no, no. Assuming that she broke up with him, what she just said would mean that I'm only a rebound. A thought came to me spinning around in my congested brain. In the end, all that came out of my mouth was:

“Huh?”

It was just that one word.

VOLUME 2 – CHAPTER 5

Translator: chelly (Fully Booked TLS)

“You’re kidding, right?”

I asked in a coarse voice. Gotou-san calmly shook her head.

“It’s true.”

“No, but...”

I said, interrupting her.

“You told me you had a boyfriend and that you’ve been dating for five years!”

Gotou-san, with a bitter smile, shook her head and said:

“That was was a lie.”

“...Huh?”

I suddenly felt weak and leaned my back on the chair.

“What the heck is this all about?”

It was a natural question. Even though she said she likes me, didn’t she reject my confession? For what reason? I don’t understand at all.

To my justified question, Gotou-san put a dramatic expression on her face and nodded several times. And then, she kept talking.

“I’m sorry. You see... I have a pretty good *intuition*.”

“Intuition?”

“Yes.”

Gotou-san nodded and at the same time, the waiter came and left the meat we ordered then went away hurriedly. Now that I think about it, when we both entered the restaurant there were already people. It’s probably full by now. Waiters and waitresses were rushing back and forth.

Once I took my mind off Gotou-san, I felt my thoughts had calmed down a bit. Gotou-san casually pushed the meat plate towards me so that I could grill them. I received the plate quietly and placed the pieces of meat one by one on the grill.

“When you invited me over to your house, I was very happy. I almost felt like jumping for joy. But...”

Gotou-san said as the noise of the meat being grilled increased.

“What I felt back then was that ‘Today’s not the day.’”

“Ah.”

“Yes. I thought that ‘if I nod my head and start going out with him now, for sure things wouldn’t work so well.’”

I looked at her and asked.

“Is that what your intuition told you, Gotou-san?”

“That’s right. So that gave me the impulse to lie. About having a boyfriend, and...”

“I see...”

I sighed and took the tongs. I was happy that Gotou-san invited me to dinner, more so when she said she likes me, but there was something I didn’t understand well. She thought “Today’s not the day” so she made up a right lie to reject me. I scratched my head. I didn’t know whether I will be relieved or not. So we like each other? Then it will be okay if we go out. Although it wasn’t a wedding, I don’t understand why she was worried about a designated day.

“Um, so in other words, since it wasn’t a ‘lucky day’ so you didn’t want to do it or something along those lines?”

I spontaneously asked Gotou-san who burst out laughing.

“Ah, hahaha, it’s isn’t like that! It’s different! We’re not talking about the lottery!”

“Well, what is it then? I feel relieved, though I don’t know why.”

I murmured and turned the meat over. Gotou-san chuckled. I thought it was not a situation to laugh at because I was serious. Although I should have been happy about the turn of events and that she had confessed to me that she likes me, at the same time that my heart rate was increasing, a strange feeling of discomfort and of feeling out of place coexisted inside me.

“I am a cautious woman.”

After saying that, Gotou-san stared at the grill.

“I like to take time to grill the meat so that it’ll taste delicious.”

“But if you overcook it, it’ll spoil the taste.”

“But if you eat it when it’s soft just because it tastes more delicious, it’ll upset your stomach.”

“After a few times, you’ll start developing an eye for when it’s cooked just right.”

At my words, Gotou-san suddenly shook her shoulders.

“Do I like the type of woman who seems to have a lot of dating experience?”

“Well, look at how much sex appeal you’re giving out right now.”

Surprised by what I said, Gotou-san put her hand to her surprised mouth.

“Is that so?”

“Yes, you heard me right.”

I answered that and Gotou-san laughed out loud.

“Now we can eat.”

“Oh? Really? Let’s dig in.”

Gotou-san happily took the chopsticks then grabbed a piece of meat. She ate it and smiled widely.

“Mm, delicious.”

“Really?”

I looked away from her and laughed ironically. See? That's the sex appeal I was talking about.

"So you don't think our relationship can last, then?"

"Mm, I wonder if that's the case."

"How long did you think it'll last?"

I asked abruptly. I knew that if I didn't speak clearly and ask her, the conversation would not progress at all. To my question, Gotou-san turned her head a little to the side.

"Hmm... I'm not sure I can answer that."

"Huh..."

I sighed. I like her. Without a doubt, I like her as a member of the opposite sex. But this conversation that's been going on for a while now is extremely uncomfortable. It's killing me, and it's not very productive. Honestly, I feel like I'm being played. If you're not interested, then just say you're not interested, that's what I thought.

"I don't believe it."

"Huh?"

When I answered, Gotou-san looked up and stared at me.

"All that talk about you liking me. I think that's too good to be true."

"No, I mean it. I've liked you for a long time."

"You're just making fun of your kouhai."

When I said that, for the first time, the expression on her face turned gloomy. Gotou-san put down her chopsticks and looked at me with a serious expression.

“Well then, how can I make you believe me?”

I was shocked by what she just said and the expression on her face. I was puzzled by the sudden shift of her behavior as she was so casual back then. However, I shouldn’t flinch here. As my heart beat faster, I remained as calm as possible. To test her, I played my best card.

“Will you... do it with me?”

I looked Gotou-san in the eyes and spoke clearly. Her shoulders contracted for a moment and then she immediately withdrew her gaze from me. I noticed that, slowly, her cheeks were becoming red. I felt that the silence was extremely long. To avoid the uncomfortable silence, I took a glass of beer and drank it.

“Well... I....”

Gotou-san opened her mouth. She was about to say something but stopped. Then she opened her mouth again, and in a low voice, she said:

“I’m a virgin... is that okay?”

“Pffft.”

I spit out the beer involuntarily. The word “virgin” echoed vividly in my mind. And at the same time, I realized that I had asked a stupid question. It was too direct and rude a question.

“Um, I take back what I said, I’m sorry.”

I told Gotou-san, who had a puzzled look.

“...So you don’t like the fact that I’m a virgin after all?

“Ah, that’s not what I meant!”

I said out loud. I was worried about the misunderstanding.

“I just thought that I had asked a really rude question, so please allow me to take back what I said!”

“Oh... but do you dislike virgins?”

This person, strangely enough, clung to that topic. Is it that big of a deal?

“No, no... In the first place, I find it hard to imagine that you’re like that.”

“What do you mean ‘like that?’”

“No, I mean... that thing you said about being a virgin.”

It was strangely embarrassing to say the word “virgin” in front of a woman. However, that’s exactly what I said. A woman as attractive as her remaining inexperienced up until the age of 28 seemed like a joke to me.

“Anyway, I think nothing’s wrong with it... I just didn’t get the chance.”

Gotou-san suddenly looked away and pouted. Seeing the situation, I thought what she was saying seemed to be true. And she seemed to be quite concerned about that.

“No, I’m really very sorry. I take back what I said earlier.”

“Once you’ve said it, there’s no taking it back.”

It was exactly as she said so I just lowered my head. Then, I lifted it slowly, looked at Gotou-san, and saw her red cheeks as she was facing the table.

“Oh, are you mad?”

“I’m not, but...”

She made a slight nervous movement and gave me a look.

“I really like you, Yoshida-san.”

“Eh... Ah... Yes...”

“So, if that’s what you want, then I...”

“Ah! No! Seriously it’s fine!”

I guessed where her words were going, so I interrupted her.



“What happened earlier was nothing!”

“But you want to, right?”

“That’s...”

I really do! Argh, idiot! I think if I pushed a little I would get it. Gotou-san’s breasts that I have always dreamed about... If only I asked for it... Idiot!

As I insulted myself in my mind, I sighed a little. That’s enough. However, I also regretted that I had troubled Gotou-san too much. I have no heart. Feeling sad, I put my feelings in order, and then, to clarify my relationship with Gotou-san, I said:

“But, from now on I definitely won’t say another word of confession to you.”

“Huh?”

At my words, Gotou-san’s eyes opened wide. Without worrying about it, I continued:

“You’re always trying to get other people to say things you want to hear. I won’t let myself be fooled again.”

Gotou-san was breathless because of what I said. My words were in a category beyond her expectations. I felt a little better. Gotou-san is the type of person who would do all sorts of things to get other people to say what she wants to hear. That trick won’t work on me anymore.

“No, that wasn’t my intention at all...”

“If that wasn’t your intention, then it’s even worse!”

Gotou-san puffed up her cheeks.

“Oh, you don’t have to get mad at me. Yoshida-kun, do you really like me?”

“Of course I like you! That’s why I got mad!”

“I’m tired of you leaving me all flustered every time we interact.”

I said it clearly.

“Gotou-san, if you really like me then it should be fair that you’d be flustered by me as well.”

Having said that, I took the glass with the beer and hastily chugged it down. I finished and left the glass in place.

“Ah...”

I let out a sigh.

“I said it...”

I said what I was thinking at the time. Finally, I said it. Everything, from the fact that I liked this person to the fact that I was under a lot of stress. I knew inside I would have a hard time dealing with it, I was attracted to her and at the same time because of some of her weaknesses, a part of me found her stressful.

Both sides of the coin were gently pressing me, and making me seriously tense. When I told her what was on mind all along, it was evident that the weight on my chest was lightened. Gotou-san, upon hearing it, seemed confused and let out a chuckle and said:

“Have you always wanted to say that?”

“Yes, very much”

“5 years ago?”

“That’s right.”

This time, when I responded, she laughed.

“Eh, you do like me.”

“I told you that before...”

Also, for five years I have been grilling the meat she eats. Except, I disliked it, though I never said anything about it.

“I see. Well, next time I’ll be the one to confess.”

“Please do so.”

“Although I don’t know when I’ll be ready... but will you wait for me?”

When she asked me that, I was immediately going to answer “yes” but I held back. I won’t adjust to someone else’s pace. Although this puts me in a bind, I knew I had to *fight* her because if I didn’t, I definitely wouldn’t win.

“Um, I don’t know. Maybe someone better will appear soon.”

When I said that, Gotou-san pouted.

“Yoshida-kun, is that the extent of your feelings for me?”

“No, not at all.”

I gave the beer a shot.

“It’s like if you cook meat for too long, then it’ll get burnt.”

After all, it would smell bad enough to eat. Gotou-san laughed as she shook her head.

“I’ll be careful not to burn it.”

After saying this, she also gave the beer a drink. For a while, we felt uncomfortable with each other, and to break the ice, we took the meat that was on our plates and ate it in silence, along with several shots of beer.

“I’ve answered your question.”

Gotou-san said slowly. Even without saying it, I knew she implied that I was the next to answer. Undoubtedly, Gotou-san had answered my question. That being the case, I thought I should also answer her question truthfully.

“Taking into consideration what we just talked about...”

First, I wanted to confirm my hypothesis.

“You wanted to know whether or not I’m dating someone, right?”

I asked Gotou-san a direct question and for a moment she seemed to hesitate. The expression on her face froze and she immediately shook her head, then putting aside the chopsticks from her hand.

“...I couldn’t think of any other explanation for it.”

I was confident that I could answer the question of whether or not I had a woman. Looking at Gotou-san, I opened my mouth and said:

“No, I’m not dating someone else. Since I joined the company, I’ve fallen for none other than you.”

I said it naturally, and for a moment Gotou-san seemed to be speechless as her mouth was half-open. She then looked away from me saying:

“Is that so?”

Gotou-san’s gaze then wandered across the surface of the table as she shook her head.

“Well, I guess it’s not a lie. Because your eyes tend to swim when you lie, Yoshida-kun.”

“Like an international swimmer?”

“Huh?”

“No, it’s nothing.”

I remembered Asami saying it and said it in a low voice, but I didn’t dare to say it one more time. Anyway, I suck at lying. I didn’t know that Gotou-san knew that characteristic of mine.

“So why?”

No matter what I said to change the subject, Gotou-san would not take the bait.

“Why did you refuse?”

I gulped slowly. I decided not to lie. When it’s a situation like this, you have no choice but to choose your words wisely while conveying the truth. I gathered my courage.

“It’s not that I’m dating any women, but there’s someone who’s living with me at home right now. Someone considerably younger than me, a minor.”

When I said that, Gotou-san frowned.

“What? What do you mean?”

“It’s exactly like I said. It’s because I’m living with a minor. That’s why I don’t want to be away from home for a long time.”

“No, not that.”

Gotou-san’s gaze looked confused and then she tilted her head to the side.

“This... *minor*. What’s your relationship with this person?”

“An old acquaintance, someone from my old neighborhood.”

I looked at Gotou-san closely as I said it, taking care of every detail so she won’t suspect me. Gotou-san looked into my eyes as she listened to my words.

“Ah. If so, then why is this person living with you now?”

“Ran away from home and couldn’t find anyone else to rely on...”

That was not a lie.

“Since when?”

“A few months ago.”

At my response, Gotou-san seemed strangely convinced and nodded several times.

“I see. That’s why you always have to hurry back home. Just to confirm...”

My ears were on alert listening to what she was saying.

“Is this person a boy? Or is it a girl?”

I saw this one coming. Depending on the answer to this question, the phrase “Living with me” will change greatly. However, by the time Gotou-san asked this question, she had already realized many things, and so did I.

“Must I say it out loud?”

At my words, Gotou-san looked away and seemed to be worried.

“Yoshida-kun... I think you already understand, but... you’re walking on a tightrope you know? Letting a runaway girl stay at your place...”

“I know.”

“It’s a bold question to ask, but, you’re not doing anything inappropriate with her, are you?”

The tone that Gotou-san used was sharp. Her usual friendly, smiling demeanor disappeared and she was now looking directly at me with a serious face.

“Of course not. I’m not so stupid as to lay a hand on a girl.”

I answered clearly and Gotou-san looked into my eyes for a few seconds and then closed it before sighing deeply.

“Well that’s fine, I guess, but...”

After taking a sip of the beer, Gotou-san stared at the glass, seeming to reflect on something. Then she blinked once, took a deep breath, and then spoke again.

“Yoshida-kun.”

“What is it?”

Gotou-san looked at me again.

“I can’t comprehend it.”

“Huh?”

“You said you liked me, didn’t you?”

“I said it and it’s the truth.”

“I see, but...”

Gotou-san frowned, looked at me once, and then withdrew her gaze. After a brief pause, she looked at me again. I could see the displeasure on her face.

“But while you say that, you also said that you’re living with a woman I know nothing of, and that sickens me.”

“No, she’s not a woman, she’s a brat. Besides, nothing has happened.”

“It’s not about that, Yoshida-kun.”

My words seemed to just pass through Gotou-san’s ears as she continued talking.

“I know that you’re always a gentleman towards women and the fact that the girl hasn’t become your romantic interest is proof of your stance.”

“Well, what about it?”

“People’s values change from time to time.”

“You may feel this way now, but what about tomorrow? Or the day after? While I’m alone at home, you’ll be together with that girl. You won’t even know when your feelings have changed for her.”

“Come on, she’s a high school student, there’s no way I’m having a relationship with her.”

“You can’t say that. There are adults out there who come and go as high school girls. You don’t know when you might suddenly realize the charms of that girl.”

“Gotou-san.”

“And even if you’re not interested in the girl, what if she falls in love with you? What if that girl brings her body closer to yours? Would you seriously reject her? Perhaps you might just go with the flow and something might...”

“Gotou-san!”

As I raised my voice, Gotou-san shook her shoulders in shock and stopped talking. As if I were scolding her, I slowly said:

“No, I mean it, that won’t happen.”

“Really? Do you promise?”

“I promise. Do you want to do a pinky swear?”

I said this by showing the pinky of my right hand. I stood up and Gotou-san stared at my finger like a little girl, then suddenly laughed.

“I don’t like it. You’re suddenly treating me like a child.”

“I’m not, believe me...”

“Um... I got too emotional just now. I’m sorry.”

Gotou-san bowed her head a little and put a piece of meat that was still on the plate into her mouth. She chewed several times and then breathed heavily through her nose.

“Delicious.”

“Glad you liked it.”

Gotou-san looked down like a worried child, remained silent for several minutes, and continued to put meat in her mouth. During that time I was also quietly gulping the beer. I took a fleeting glance at my wristwatch and it was already eight in the evening. Has Sayu had her dinner yet? I thought.

“Yoshida-kun.”

Hearing her voice, I looked at Gotou-san again, and at that moment no one would think she was a girl who seemed to have self-confidence.

“You won’t be robbed of me by a young girl, will you?”

I looked up when I heard Gotou-san’s question. I felt chills all over my body.

“Gotou-san...”

I have never seen that expression on her face until now. Just thinking that I was the one who brought it out of her, I felt my body tremble with an emotion that I couldn’t understand as either pure joy or a sense of superiority.

Honestly, I was excited. I looked away from Gotou-san and continued:

“Five years. A woman I’ve like for five years just told me she likes me. Under these circumstances, did you really think I’d be tempted by anyone else?”

When I said that, Gotou-san’s cheeks turned a little red, and then she looked away from me. A subtle silence came between the two so Gotou-san unnaturally cleared her throat. When I looked at her again, I saw the usual Gotou-san with her gentle smile and self full of confidence.

“Well, if you’re saying that much...”

Gotou-san bowed lightly and her mouth made a smile.

“I’ll meet this *girl*.”

When I heard those words, my thoughts froze. Meet a girl? Who? Sayu? Gotou-san meeting Sayu? Where?

“Um... you mean...”

I started to sweat cold and said that as if to make sure I heard what Gotou-san said.

“I’m saying I want to swing by your place, Yoshida-kun.”

“Wait, wait, wait.”

“You have nothing to hide, right?”

“I don’t, but even so...”

“Then why?”

I was speechless at that simple question from Gotou-san.

“You’re asking me why...”

“Do you find it more difficult to invite me over than allowing a high school girl to stay with you?”

“...”

I couldn’t find the right words to answer. When she saw the expression on my face, she nodded with satisfaction.

“Well, it’s decided.”

I didn’t answer anything. Which essentially meant the same thing as giving my approval.

VOLUME 2 – CHAPTER 6

Translator: chelly (Fully Booked TLS)

『 Sorry. Gotou-san invited me to dinner so I'll be eating out today and then I'll go home. 』

I had just finished making a potful of meat and potatoes when I noticed the message from Yoshida-san. Although I had mixed feelings, I was grateful that he had contacted me, and of course, I had no right to limit his actions.

『 Got it! Have fun~ 』

Having said that, he's probably very concerned, so I sent him a message that gave him the idea that "I don't mind at all!" I tucked my phone in my pocket and removed the lid from the pot. The hot, white steam came out along with a mild, salty smell that covered the entire room, which occupied my stomach through the nose.

"Smells good."

I murmured to myself and took a piece of potato with the chopsticks. As I took it to my mouth and chewed it, I felt the taste of soy sauce and a little bit of the aroma of Katsuo dashi^[1] came through my nose.

"It's so delicious..."

I nodded, put out the fire on the stove, and then sat down in the hallway. My stomach churned at the smell of meat and potatoes filling the hallway, but I didn't feel like eating right away.

"Missing out on the opportunity to eat this delicious, freshly cooked meat and potatoes. Poor Yoshida-san."

I muttered and laughed at myself. And then suddenly, as if it were natural, I sighed. Yoshida-san must be having dinner with his dearest Gotou-san right now. They are probably at a fancy restaurant or the same yakiniku place last time.

Come to think of it, I didn't know the *Yoshida-san* who spent time away from home. What does he look like at work? What kind of people did he relate to? What does he do for fun? I didn't know much about the expressions on his face except for the ones he used when he was with me. The way Yoshida-san looks at me is completely that of a child. And the frustrating thing is, he doesn't see me as a "woman" at all.

I'm not saying that's a bad thing. That's one of the best things about living with him, and I think it's also one of the things that show his personality the most. But as an adolescent girl, the fact that he was not interested in me as a woman gave me an uneasy feeling.

If I were Gotou-san.

Somehow, I've had that thought. If my body was the same as Gotou-san, would Yoshida-san lay a hand on me?

Yoshida-san told me that Gotou-san's chest was bigger than mine. I'm relatively big for my age, too. But if this size hardly stimulates his sexual desire, I can't help but wonder how monstrously large her chest is.

I wondered what kind of expression Yoshida-san was giving to Gotou-san. I tried to imagine it, but I couldn't do it very well. Yet, when I tried to imagine the look and expression on Yoshida-san's face as he stared at Gotou-san, I felt a little lump on my chest. I thought that this was definitely not love or affection. But, it was displeasing to think that Yoshida-san may be giving someone else an expression that he doesn't want me to see.

"I'm not quite sure..."

Mumbling, I brushed the back of my head against the hallway wall. I've changed a lot since I got here. Even I couldn't decide if that was a good thing or not. Nonetheless, I think my heart is safe, by far, more so now than before. Of that, there was no doubt.

I have Yoshida-san to thank for that. He provided for me as much as he could and then told me to do with my time as I pleased. That's why I believed he should be free to live his life and that I shouldn't interfere. I didn't want to be a burden to him as much as possible. I also wanted to help him as much as possible. I thought about living this way for a while.

I opened the rice cooker and the smell of freshly cooked rice rose along with the steam. I put the rice in a bowl that had been used for guests before I moved here and put the meat and potatoes in a slightly hollowed out plate for side dishes.

Although I thought about adding another vegetable dish to the menu, when I realized that Yoshida-san would not be coming home for dinner, I suddenly became reluctant to do so. If it's just me, I don't mind having just one side dish.

"Thanks for the food."

I clasped my hands together, then took my chopsticks and gobbled up the meat and potatoes. I'm the one who prepared it, so surely it

would be delicious. The corners of my mouth went up naturally, but soon it went down.

It's delicious.

Yoshida-san would always praise me like this whenever he found the food delicious. He doesn't hold back from sharing his thoughts on the food I prepare. It's not like one of those in-depth reviews found on food mangas, but I was more than happy with those few simple words.

I took a bite of meat and potatoes in my mouth and chewed them a little. Then a mouthful of white rice. As I did this in silence, I could feel the meat and potatoes gradually fading in flavor.

"Something's..."

I mumbled to myself.

"Off..."

I remembered this empty feeling. It was from when I was still in Hokkaido...

"Your tamagoyaki^[2] is delicious as always, Sayu-chan!"

A friend's voice echoed in my mind again. The moment I remembered it, a shiver ran down my spine, and I broke out in a cold sweat. Before I thought of anything, I rushed to the bathroom.

"...Blech!"

And then, I threw up in the toilet the meat, potatoes, and white rice I had just eaten. My throat was burning and my stomach felt like it was freezing cold. I couldn't stop shivering.

Eventually, my breathing slowly calmed down and nausea receded, so I twisted the lever and flushed the contents of the toilet bowl. When I stood up slowly, my feet felt a little numb and I wasn't sure if they were touching the floor or not.

In the end, even after coming to this point, I still can't escape my past. For some reason, I always feel like throwing up when I remember that *girl* I used to get along so well with. Why did I suddenly remember her? Not once since I had come to this place that I have been reminded of her.

Ah, right... it's because Yoshida-san's not here right now. I've gotten used to this lifestyle, and there isn't much to keep myself occupied right now. If only Yoshida-san had come back as he usually does, this wouldn't have happened. I sighed as I thought about it.

"Really, nothing has changed..."

I always say that things are my fault, but deep in my heart, I blame others. I had completely lost my appetite and was sipping from a refrigerated bottle of barley tea when my phone, which I had left on the desk in my room, vibrated.

The only contact listed in my messaging app was Yoshida-san. In other words, the fact that the phone was vibrating meant that Yoshida-san just contacted me. When I glanced at the clock on the wall, I felt that it was still too early for Yoshida-san to come home, as it was only a little over an hour when he had told me that he would be eating out for dinner.

It was a bit early for him to be back. After all, he's with the woman of his dreams. I thought that eating as slowly as possible would be the normal thing to do. When I looked at the screen, I saw a message from Yoshida-san.

『 Sorry, this is extremely sudden... 』

I couldn't read the full message on notifications alone, so I swiped my finger on the screen and moved to the messaging app. As soon as I opened Yoshida-san's thread, my eyes widened.

『 Sorry, this is extremely sudden, but I'm bringing Gotou-san home with me today. 』

Bringing *her* home? To this house? I felt a pang in my chest. A grown man bringing home the woman of his dreams. It was easy to imagine that it wasn't just about him bringing home the girl of his dreams. Though my feelings were in haze, I'm not going to go against what Yoshida-san has decided.

『 I see! Should I stay somewhere else for the night? 』

I quickly typed and sent the message, put my phone down, then plopped down on the desk. Yoshida-san will be home in a while, with Gotou-san. I imagined the situation a bit, and immediately afterward I hit my forehead on the desk.

"Idiot. It's none of your business what he does, right?"

Why is it so confusing for me? Yoshida-san's long time love might be coming true. Shouldn't I be celebrating? Shortly thereafter, my brain was filled with *anxiety*.

Supposing the romance between Yoshida-san and Gotou-san bears fruit, I think somehow my presence would be a nuisance if I continued to stay here. It would be practically impossible for me to hide my presence from a lover, and I couldn't casually call this home. If it comes to that, I...

"I'd be thrown out again..."

When I said that, my chest felt tight. But at the same time, the smiling face that Yoshida-san sometimes showed appeared in my

mind. If I'm not there and Yoshida-san can keep smiling, then it's probably a good thing.

That's what I thought. The phone on the desk shook again, and I lifted my head from the desk and looked at the screen.

『 No. That's not it... 』

And then when I saw the content of the message, my thoughts stopped.

『 Gotou-san said she wanted to meet you. 』

"Huh?"

I blurted out in surprise. I wondered how Gotou-san knew about my existence. I can only conclude that it was Yoshida-san who told her. If so, then how did he explain my existence to her? And why did she say she wanted to meet me? My mind was filled with nothing but question marks.

The questions swirled around in my brain, I leaned my elbows several times on the desk, tapped my feet lightly on the floor, and moved restlessly. Finally.

『 If you think it's okay Yoshida-san, then it's fine by me... 』

It felt like it took me more than ten minutes to reply.

VOLUME 2 – CHAPTER 7

Translator: chelly (Fully Booked TLS)

Editor / Proofreader : OD Dragon (Fully Booked TLS)

“It’s a really small space.”

“I said I don’t mind.”

“No, really, it’s much smaller than you might think, Gotou-san.”

“It’s fine, don’t worry.”

We finished our meal and took a train to the station nearest to home. As we exited the gate, I felt a sudden surge of nervousness. I felt a slight chill in my stomach. I could feel my stomach churning and my heartbeat quickening.

“Oh, wow, there’s a movie theater!”

“Ah... it’s been there for a long time.”

“Do you go there often?”

“No, not much.”

“Hmm... not much, huh? Even though it’s nearby.”

“Do you like movies, Gotou-san?”

“No, not really.”

“Oh, I see.”

So what was the sequence of events that led up to this? Because of her excitement about the movie theater, I thought she was a movie buff like Mishima.

Gotou-san was looking all over the place, watching everything around the train station as she followed me. And then, she immediately noticed a convenience store a short distance away.

“Oh, speaking of which, that little girl staying at your house, how is she doing tonight? Isn’t she hungry?”

“Ah, no...”

I shook my head, moved my left hand as if it were a cat’s paw, and then my right hand as if holding something from the kitchen.

“She can cook. I think she probably prepared something convenient today as well.”

When I said that, Gotou-san nodded her head with an expression on her face that seemed to have a hidden meaning.

“Proud of your wife?”

“N-no, you’re wrong!”

“Haha, I’m kidding.”

Gotou-san smiled amusedly and headed towards the convenience store.

“You’re buying something?”

“I have to buy a present.”

“No, you don’t have to.”

“That’s not for you to decide, is it?”

With her shoulders shrugging as she laughed, Gotou-san entered the convenience store. I can’t imagine Sayu being happy to receive a souvenir from Gotou-san at all. On the contrary, it was easier to imagine her looking at me with a troubled smile.

As I walked into the convenience store, I saw Gotou-san standing in front of the sweets department, looking at the shelves. Without looking at me, she asked:

“Does that girl like sweets?”

“...I’m not sure, but I don’t think she dislikes them.”

I remember the time Sayu and I went to a family restaurant and ate parfait. From the way she reacted at the time, I don’t know if she loved it or not, but she probably didn’t hate it.

“Then, I wonder if she would be happy if I bought something sweet and creamy...”

“I don’t know...”

“Maybe ice cream?”

“I’m not sure...”

Gotou-san suddenly glanced at me. When our eyes met, I felt a little stunned.

“You don’t know much about her, do you?”

Gotou-san smiled and said that as if it was nothing.

“Well, there are eclairs, ice cream, snacks, and a bunch of stuff! There’s so much to buy. I wonder which one will give me the win.”

“You don’t have to buy all that stuff...”

“No, no, it’s fine. Besides, it doesn’t make sense if I don’t bring her a present that will make her happy.”

Gotou-san said this happily and put the sweets and other snacks in the basket in her hand one after another. I guess she didn’t listen to my comments at all. No, perhaps...

What Gotou-san said a while ago came to mind.

You don’t know much about her, do you?

Those comments I made may have been deemed unhelpful. Now that I have thought about it, I’m not sure what kind of things Sayu likes or dislikes. I feel that I don’t know much about such trivial things.

“Aren’t you buying anything, Yoshida-kun?”

I was surprised when Gotou-san suddenly spoke to me. She was standing right next to me and she had a lot of stuff in her basket.

“A-ah... I think I’ll get a coffee.”

Pretending to be thinking about something, I nodded and headed to the beverages section. I picked up a coffee drink with milk and sugar, and Gotou-san grabbed me from the side.

“Oh, what is it?”

“I’ll buy it for you.”

“No, no, it’s okay...”

Gotou-san moved her face closer to mine, interrupting my words. The rapid change in the physical distance between us made it impossible for me to complete the second sentence.

“You’re doing me a favor, and I want to thank you for that. Got it?”

“O-okay...”

Gotou-san slowly shook her head, smiled, and walked to the cash register. Looking at her figure from behind, I sighed. She sure was taking her time.

We finished shopping and slowly made our way home. If I was alone, I would walk quickly, but Gotou-san wears heels. If I don’t match her stride, she’ll be left behind.

It was strangely refreshing to be walking alone with Gotou-san and to hear the loud, clicking sound of her heels on the street at night. While making small talk along the way, Gotou-san asked something which caught me by surprise.

“Hey, what’s her name?”

“Huh?”

“The girl’s name. What is it?”

“Ah...”

She was probably referring to Sayu. I wondered if it was all right to say her name, but she would probably ask me later anyway even if I didn’t say it here.

“Her name’s Sayu.”

“Sayu-chan. Sounds nice.”

Gotou-san nodded, her mouth seemed to be about to smile. And then she continued to ask me.

“And her last name?”

“As for her last name, I think I caught a glimpse of it on her student ID card, but I wasn’t paying much attention.”

As I replied, Gotou-san suddenly burst into laughter. I looked at her to see what was going on, but she was looking at me with a teasing look on her face.

“Although that girl has been an acquaintance of yours for a long time, you don’t know her last name. I find that quite strange.”

I couldn’t respond to Gotou-san’s words with my mouth open in shock. I was totally screwed over. Back then at the yakiniku place, I lied to Gotou-san about my relationship with Sayu.

However, I was very careful not to let my eyes *swim*^[1] around, and since she hadn’t followed up on it, I assumed that it was deceptive. But, the fact that I was accused of this kind of trickery suggests that I was firmly under suspicion.

I looked at Gotou-san with a sideways glance, but she was still in a bit of a good mood and clicked her heels. She did not continue to ask questions, so it seemed that she had no intention of pursuing the fact that I’m not sure what Sayu’s last name is. She was quiet and smiling as always so I didn’t know what she was thinking.

Her mysteriousness had been her charm, but now she looked at me in a very eerie way. After that, Gotou-san hardly touched on the subject of Sayu, and as we walked around making bland conversation, we arrived home in no time at all.

“Can I ask you to wait for a moment, please?”

“Hmm? Why?”

I got to the door and as I turned the key in the lock, there was a sudden breeze of cowardice.

“Ah, I don’t think I cleaned up.”

“Huh? Wasn’t Sayu-chan doing the housework?”

“Well, yeah, but it might still be a bit messy.”

“Stop trying to delay the inevitable, Yoshida-kun.”

Smiling, Gotou-san put her hand on the doorknob. As I held the door, Gotou-san plastered an even more forced smile on my face. It was a smirk. Then she grabbed the doorknob with both hands and pried it open.

I didn’t expect her to go that far. As I was holding the door with only one hand, I gave up and pulled my hand away from the door. When I looked inside, I saw Sayu standing in the hallway with her mouth hanging open. Sayu looked at me and Gotou-san in turn, then tilted her head in confused silence.

“Uh, I’m home...”

When I said that, Sayu finally smiled bitterly and let out a breath.

“Welcome home...”

When I looked to the side, I saw Gotou-san had a seemingly happy smile on her face.

“Good evening, Sayu-chan. I’m Gotou.”

Gotou-san said as she stared at Sayu and lifted the plastic bag in her hand.

“First of all, want some snacks?”

Sayu smiled vaguely and then looked at me. See, that’s why I knew this was going to happen. The expression on Sayu’s face was hardly different from the one I had imagined.



Gotou-san looked sideways at me as if following Sayu's gaze and then smiled at me.

"I'm not sure how long I'm supposed to be standing here."

"Oh, I'm sorry! Please come in..."

I let her through the front door with the same vague expression as Sayu and closed the door. I felt the cold sweat running down my back. I tried desperately to imagine what Gotou-san would say to Sayu after this, but I couldn't get my head around it at all.

"Do you like sweets?"

"Ah, yes, I like them..."

Compared to Gotou-san who, as always, was smiling at her own pace, Sayu was hesitantly talking and floundering. Then naturally, she let out a sigh.

*

"Hahaha! Basically you saw a girl on the street so you picked her up and decided to let her stay with you. You did something amazing without knowing it, Yoshida-kun."

It was my first time meeting Gotou-san, and she was just what I had imagined from the things I have heard from Yoshida-san, except that she was even more difficult to read than I had imagined. It'll be difficult to hide anything from her.

Gotou-san asked Yoshida-san and me some questions while helping herself to the snacks she brought, but whenever we would try to cover something up, she would politely point it out. After a while, both Yoshida-san and I had given up and started to answer her questions honestly.

“Sayu-chan, did Yoshida-kun do anything strange to you?”

“Wha— Gotou-san!”

Gotou-san looked at me with a mischievous smile and compared Yoshida-san’s reactions to mine. I looked across at Yoshida-san, who was obviously anxious and chuckled at him. Why is he anxious? He didn’t do anything.

“He hasn’t done anything to me. I was really surprised.”

When I answered, Gotou-san squinted a little and nodded.

“Surprised, huh?”

Gotou-san stared at me so closely that I looked away in a hurry. I had trouble with the way she was looking at me. I felt as if she was looking into my heart.

“Well, Yoshida-kun doesn’t seem to be interested in younger people. You’re quite lucky, Sayu-chan.”

“Even if I were interested, I wouldn’t lay a hand on her.”

“Eh~ I’m not so sure about that.”

“Hey! I’m not such an easy man!”

“Haha, it’s a joke.”

Gotou-san was teasing Yoshida-san. On the other hand, Yoshida-san reacted by looking a little embarrassed. The exchange was hilarious, and it was easy to see that these two had developed a friendship over the course of their time at work. It became clear to me that their relationship had gone beyond that.

It was supposed to be nice, but oddly enough, it bothered me. Did I show it in any way? As I looked away, repressing a hazy feeling, I had the feeling that Gotou-san was staring at me. When I turned my gaze in her direction, our eyes met as she looked into my face.

“What’s wrong?”

“Ah, no... it’s nothing.”

“Your face says otherwise, though.”

Gotou-san smiled persistently while staring at me. Ah, that smile, I really wish you would stop it. It was as if her smile completely hid her true nature. The eeriness of not knowing what was hidden in her smile was robbing me of words to say.

“Really, it’s nothing. Maybe I had too much dinner.”

I said to keep up appearances. Gotou-san responded with an “I see” and a nod, not probing further. She probably knew my answer was improvised yet she didn’t insist. I was relieved, but at the same time, I thought it was a bit creepy.

“Speaking of which, what did you have for dinner?”

Yoshida-san was silent for a moment then asked this as if trying to change the subject, and to help him I looked up and answered.

“Meat and potatoes. It was pretty good.”

“Oh, is that so? Such a shame that I couldn’t have it freshly made.”

“That’s right. Be sure to eat some tomorrow morning.”

“Got it.”

When Yoshida-san and I were talking casually like we usually do, Gotou-san burst out laughing. She funnily shook her shoulders and then gave us a sly look.

“You’re like newlyweds.”

“No, seriously, stop it.”

Yoshida-san’s reaction seemed to be amusing for Gotou-san as she laughed even more. I found the way she laughed funny as it was similar to a child’s.

“I’m going to the bathroom.”

“Okay, see you later!”

Yoshida-san stood up and walked down the hallway to the door of the toilet. Only Gotou-san and I were left in the room. As I was breaking out in a cold sweat by myself, trying to figure out what to say, or even if I needed to say anything at all, Gotou-san let out a sigh and then said in a low voice:

“Hey, Sayu-chan.”

“...Yes?”

Gotou-san and I looked into each other’s eyes. A smile appeared on her face that seemed to be hiding something until now. However, it was a gentle smile and she had a straight look that seemed to pierce my eyes, and it stung.

“I’d like to have a word with you in private.”

“Alone?”

“That’s right.”

Gotou-san nodded, then raised her index finger suggestively.

“Maybe there’s *something* you want to ask me, just as there’s something I want to ask you too? I wonder.”

I was irritated by her expression, which seemed to indicate that she was seeing right through me. But she was right, there was only one *thing* I had to ask her.

I think Gotou-san implicitly presented me with the “terms of exchange.” She was implying that now that we had the opportunity to be alone together, we could answer each other’s questions. I think she really is a sly person. That being said, I don’t really have a choice.

“I’ll make time.”

When I answered, Gotou-san smiled and bowed her head slightly.

“Thanks.”

“No, it’s...”

Turning away from Gotou-san, I waited for Yoshida-san to come out of the bathroom. It should have been only a few minutes, but it felt like a long time. I heard the sound of the toilet flushing and then Yoshida-san came out of the bathroom. I turned around and gave an excuse I had just thought up.

“Yoshida-san, sorry, I forgot to buy the ingredients for breakfast tomorrow.”

When I said that, Yoshida-san stood still for a moment, but quickly tilted his head and responded.

“I don’t mind. I can just go grab something tomorrow.”

“No way, you have to eat properly in the morning.”

“There’s nothing we can do about it if you haven’t bought ingredients.”

“No, I mean, that’s why...”

While feeling guilty for deceiving Yoshida-san, I put a fake smile on my face.

“Would it be possible for you to go buy them now? It’s almost 10 p.m. and I might get called out for being outdoors at this time...”

As I said this, Yoshida-san raised his eyebrows and looked at me, then Gotou-san in turn.

“Well, I don’t mind making a trip out but... are you two going to be okay?”

“It’s fine. We’ll have a fun chat with each other. Right, Sayu-chan?”

“Ah, yes... we’ll be fine. So could I count on you?”

Gotou-san intentionally laughed at Yoshida-san. When I nodded, Yoshida-san sighed a little and nodded his head.

“What do I need to buy?”

“I need some eggs, nira^[2], and also miso.”

“Got it.”

Yoshida-san glanced at Gotou-san once more, then took his wallet and cigarettes out of his business bag, which he kept at the side of the corridor, and headed for the door.

“I’ll be back after I’ve had a smoke, so it might take me a little while.”

“Okay. Have a good one.”

Yoshida-san walked out of the door and closed it. There was silence for a short while.

“Now then.”

Gotou-san spoke suddenly. When I lifted my gaze, I was met with eyes staring straight at me.

“So, can I ask you first?”

“...Yes.”

When I nodded, Gotou-san put on a different, slightly darker smile than before and asked me.

“Is it true that you’re a high school student?”

“It’s true.”

“Where are you from?”

The question left me speechless for a moment. I was thinking if I should tell her the truth or not. But I thought that if I were to lie, she would definitely catch me.

It’s not a question of whether I should tell the truth or not anymore. It’s a situation where I just have to tell her. I gulped and answered.

“From... Hokkaido.”

“Since when did you run away from home?”

“More than half a year ago.”

Gotou-san didn't change her expression at all when she heard my answer. Nonchalantly, she continued asking me serious questions.

“Why did you do it?”

The question reminded me of numerous events that took place in Asahikawa, and I shook my head.

“I don't want to answer that.”

“...Okay, I understand.”

Gotou-san nodded quietly at my response.

“I'm not going to ask you what circumstances led you to run away from home and end up all the way out here.”

Gotou-san's voice was gentle. I could tell she was taking into consideration my mental state. I was glad that I didn't have to lie to her. It was frightening that this person could read my mind, but it was very clear she speaks to me with the utmost respect. I can't do a disservice to someone who respects me so much.

“However.”

I felt that the tone of Gotou-san's voice had diminished a little.

“There's one thing I need to clarify.”

Gotou-san looked me in the eyes when she said this. I also looked her in the eyes. Her eyes look like they're going to suck me in. I felt my heart racing.

“I’m asking this as Yoshida-kun’s ‘friend’ and as someone who’s a ‘stranger’ to you.”

After saying that, Gotou-san smiled. And then, in an instant, the smile disappeared from her face. She gave me a cold look which seemed to pierce my eyes.

“How long do you intend to stay here?”

After Gotou-san said that, I bowed my head a little. It felt like my heart was about to burst.

I too have thought about it many times since coming here. And now, she is making me face that inescapable question head-on, which I have been trying to avoid answering over and over.

VOLUME 2 – CHAPTER 8

Translator: chelly (Fully Booked TLS)

Editor / Proofreader : OD Dragon (Fully Booked TLS)

I wanted to say something, but I knew I didn't have the answer.

"I..."

I only managed to say that and then I was silent. For a minute, no, more like five minutes, Gotou-san and I were both still.

"You don't have an answer, do you?"

Gotou-san broke the silence, smiling gently at me. Her tone was not accusatory, but rather confirming. She looked down, her eyes wandering over the desk as if choosing the right words to say.

"There's something distinctive about middle school and high school students you know?"

I saw a hint of melancholy in Gotou-san's eyes as she said this.

"No matter how hard you try or push yourself to the limit, it won't change the fact that you're a high school student. It's frustrating, but there's simply no way of saying that you're anything else."

Gotou-san, still looking down, continued to speak in hushed tones.

"It's a *powerful* identity. Being a high school student that is."

Then Gotou-san raised her head and looked at me.

“Even if you go to other places, even if you stop wearing your school uniform, you still won’t be anything other than a high school student.”

Those words were so sharp and accurate that they pierced my naive heart. It was something I have been thinking about for a while now. Even after leaving my old self behind and running out so far, I was still treated as a “high school girl” wherever I went. Every guy I have met so far took me in just because I was a “high school girl” who looked pretty.

However, it was inconvenient for them to have a “runaway high school girl” stay for long periods. That is why I had to frequently move from one place to another. On the contrary, it’s exactly because I am a “high school girl” that Yoshida-san sees me as a child.

“Even if Yoshida-kun condones it, society won’t.”

When I heard Gotou-san’s words, my heart ached for a moment. But at the same time, I felt as if the feeling of uncertainty within me vanished. Yoshida-san didn’t request anything of me as those other guys did, he simply helped me settle down here. As long as I did the bare minimum of housework, he never said anything to me about what I was doing at other times.

I was extremely relieved to have such a lifestyle but at the same time, it made me skeptical. Is it okay for me, who left everything behind and ran away, to be able to enjoy such a peaceful living environment? Am I allowed to do so? Gotou-san just gave me the answer to that. Of course, it’s not allowed.

“...Thank you very much.”

I found myself saying that. Gotou-san simply stared at me.

“I think... I’ve always wanted someone to tell me that.”

The words poured out of my chest.

“Even though all I want to do is run away from everything to live an easier life... I’ve also wanted someone to tell me “*don’t run!*”

Gotou-san listened to me without saying anything.

“I wanted someone to point out how “weird” it is for Yoshida-san to spoil me like this. Ever since I ran away from home, I’ve sought shelter in the homes of many men... using my *body*.”

As I said that, Gotou-san’s eyes widened for a moment then she bit her lower lip tightly.

“That sort of thing...”

“Seriously, there’s something wrong with me. I easily let them use my body in exchange for a mere few days of shelter. What’s more, I’ve started to feel a little bit of pleasure in being wanted by those men. But...”

I stopped talking for a moment, then Yoshida-san’s face came to mind. He was the only person who wouldn’t allow me to make an easy choice.

“Yoshida-san never once laid a hand on me. Instead, he told me, ‘I’ll knock some sense into your head.’”

“Pfft.”

Gotou-san, who had been listening intently up to that point, suddenly laughed.

“I’m sorry. I know it’s a serious conversation, but... Haha~”

Gotou-san nodded several times and funnily shook her shoulders.

“I could imagine Yoshida-kun saying those lines very clearly. It’s really— it’s so like him.”

Gotou-san then looked at me with a soft expression on her face.

“Good for you. You’ve finally found a place to settle down comfortably.”

“...Yeah.”

My eyes welled up and I was about to shed tears.

“I believe that Yoshida-kun has accepted you. And that you trust him, too. I can tell that immediately from the way you talk to each other.”

Gotou-san continued to speak, tapping the desk with her index finger.

“That’s why it’s fine to let him spoil you. There’s nothing wrong if you let yourself be spoiled by someone who wants to spoil you.”

Gotou-san walked over to me and sat down next to me. Then she grasped my hand and gently squeezed it. Her hands were cold.

“But you see, no matter how much Yoshida-kun is willing to accept you, it can only last for as long as society is willing to turn a blind eye to your existence. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

“I do.”

“That’s why you should start thinking about it, even if it’s little by little. So, what are you going to do from now on?”

Gotou-san looked me straight in the eye. I can tell it was a very important question for her as her eyes looked dead serious. Somehow, I wondered if this was her true nature.

“...I have a past that I’m trying to escape from no matter what. And that hasn’t changed at all.”

“Hmm.”

“It makes me want to throw up just thinking about it, and I don’t feel like going back.”

“I see.”

“But... I know I can’t go on like this. I can’t ask Yoshida-san to provide for me for the rest of my life. That’s why...”

I sighed slowly and said the following words one by one to make sure I didn’t make a mistake.

“To face my past head-on...”

The past that I really don’t want to remember. The smile on my best friend’s face came to mind and then disappeared. I want to forget, but I know I must not.

“I’ll have to... ready myself.”

I thought of my mother, who probably wasn’t waiting for me to return. And my brother, who I’m sure was terribly worried about me.

“I need to get out of here and go back to where I came from. For my own sake... and Yoshida-san’s sake as well.”

After I said that, I looked Gotou-san in the eye. She slowly put on a smile, then placed her hand firmly on my shoulder.

“...Well said.”

Gotou-san said in a low voice and then hugged me.

“As long as you have that thought, it’ll be fine.”

Gotou-san whispered those words in my ear.

“You know, high school is a special time. Though you might feel like you’re forced to stay as a high school student for a really long time, the truth is...”

I felt her tone of voice change to something nostalgic like she was talking to someone from her past.

“It’s just a very short chapter of your entire life.”

After saying that, Gotou-san moved her hand onto my head then gently stroked it.

“That’s why you must face the challenges you have in life and enjoy the times when you get to be spoiled... Make sure you live your high school life to the fullest. Because you’re still a high school student even if you’re not in school right now.”

Gotou-san’s words slowly seeped into my heart, and I found myself welling up again. This time I couldn’t hold it in. Tears were spilling out of the corners of my eyes.

My heart is so conflicted. I wanted to run away from everything, but I knew I shouldn’t. I didn’t want anyone to care, but I knew I wanted them to. While I felt that being a high school girl was an inconvenience, I was also hung up on the thought of not being one. My emotions are all over the place, but I know they are sincere.

Holding me to her chest as I cried, Gotou-san continued to stroke my head.

“Everything you’re feeling right now, it’s all yours. It’s nobody’s business but yours and people have no right to interfere. All the pain and suffering you feel, all the happiness and joy, it’s all yours and yours alone.”

Gotou-san’s soft-toned words seemed to resonate directly into my head. It’s probably because our bodies were so close, and I’m sure she knew what I wanted to hear. Everything she just said pierced me without any resistance.

“That’s why... once you’ve had enough of running away... turn back, face everything, and accept it all. Because that’s the right and responsibility you hold towards your own life.”

“Ugh... yes...”

I let out a sob and nodded my head, then Gotou-san hugged me again. The next thing I knew, I was crying out loud. Her chest was so warm.

*

“Well, didn’t you have a question to ask me?”

When I finally calmed down and stopped crying, Gotou-san put her smiling face back as if she were someone else and asked me that question. That’s right, there was something I wanted to ask her no matter what.

“Gotou-san...”

After I cleaned myself up, I stared deeply into her eyes. It was meant to say “Don’t try to run away.”

“Do you like Yoshida-san?”

Gotou-san’s eyes opened wide and then she laughed.

“What? You’re asking me that?”

“It’s important!”

“For whom?”

Gotou-san is the type of person who responds to a question with a question. And she kept on throwing questions that stuck in my mind. But I definitely wasn’t going to back down.

“For me and Yoshida-san...”

I answered honestly. I looked Gotou-san in the eye and she laughed as if she had seen something amusing. But she didn’t speak at all.

“S-so, what’s your answer?”

I got impatient so I asked Gotou-san again, but she just smiled broadly and tilted her head. I was frustrated so I spoke again.

“Since Yoshida-san... seems to like you a lot...”

“You’re still incomprehensible to me,” that’s what I meant to say. Gotou-san sighed and then asked me back.

“Is it frustrating?”

“That’s not what I’m talking about!”

“Haha, don’t be mad. It’s just that you’re so cute.”

Gotou-san laughed strangely and then shook her head as if she had resigned herself to something.

“I like him. I don’t care about anyone but him.”

“...Really?”

“Why would I lie about it?”

“Because it’s hard to figure out what you’re really thinking, Gotou-san.”

I muttered and Gotou-san smiled politely then nodded.

“A mysterious woman, huh?”

“I really hate that kind of thing.”

“Haha, I got told off.”

Gotou-san laughed like a child and let out a sigh.

“I really like him. I’ve been watching him since he joined the company. He’s extremely upright and stubborn yet he’s flexible enough to adapt to the ways of others. It’s not often you meet someone who’s “*kind*” in every sense of the word.”

Gotou-san said with an expression of someone who’s truly in love. I’m not capable of making a face like that, I thought.

“What a relief...”

I found myself muttering that. Gotou-san looked at me sideways and tilted her head.

“What was that?”

I answered Gotou-san's question without hesitation.

"I thought it would make me very happy if Yoshida-san's love came true."

When I said that, Gotou-san had an expression on her face that I have never seen before. Then she laughed at me for a second, trying to cover it up.

I wondered why she made that expression. It was kind of complicated and I can't tell whether she was sad, nervous, or annoyed.

"Yeah. It would be nice if we could get together without any problems."

"That would be really nice."

When I nodded, Gotou-san showed her fake smile again and then tilted her head to look into my eyes.

"Sayu-chan... will you cheer us on?"

As I was about to answer, a scene appeared in my head. Yoshida-san and Gotou-san were kissing each other. And then Yoshida-san, blushing as if embarrassed, embraced Gotou-san again.

"...O-of course. I will!"

When I answered, Gotou-san smiled and said "Thank you." For some reason, my chest felt tight. But I acted as if everything was fine and words came out of my mouth one after the other.

"Please let me know if there's anything I can do to help! I don't know what I can do... but I'll help in any way I can! So..."

As I said those words in quick succession, Gotou-san looked at me with such an expression that had me confused whether she was laughing or not.

Suddenly, my phone rang, interrupting what I was saying. When I looked at the bright screen, I realized it was a call from the store manager.

“Oh, I’m sorry. It’s a call from the store manager of my part-time job... What could he possibly want at this time?”

“It’s fine, go ahead and pick it up.”

I bowed to Gotou-san and rushed out of the door with my phone in hand. There was no way I would have taken the store manager’s call in front of Gotou-san. I felt like complaining to the manager just for today.

*

When Sayu-chan walked out of the door, I felt my shoulders loosen up.

“Phew...”

I sighed. Maybe I was nervous. Having an honest talk with someone really makes me very nervous.

When Yoshida-kun told me that a high school girl was staying at his home, I thought that she might be a shameless girl, but unexpectedly, she turned out to be a humble and polite girl.

That expression on her face, those gloomy eyes, I remember seeing it in the mirror many times when I was in high school.

“I’m getting old...”

Obviously, what I did was a lecture. How would it have felt to have an unknown woman come in and suddenly be lectured to? Although in the end, I felt like she was listening to me, she was clearly wary at first, and I'm sure she was uncomfortable.

Unlike Yoshida-kun, I can't guide someone with straightforward methods since my personality is a bit twisted. Everything I had said was shallow. I had been objectifying myself the whole time while talking to Sayu-chan.

I've never known how difficult it is to convey something. And I realized that I'm old enough to have known that already. In a company, no one needs to tell someone how they really feel. I felt like I was having an open conversation for the first time in a long time.

Face the challenges you have in life and enjoy the times when you get to be spoiled.

"What was that?"

I remembered what I had said to Sayu-chan and let out a scornful smile. I think I have a really wicked personality. I used to tell that to other people when I was still a high school student, but it was something I could not do at all.

She is so pure, so I'm sure she sees me as "a really kind person." But that is not the case at all. I just saw myself in the past through her. No more than that. I felt like my past could be cleared up a bit by having Sayu-chan put her life in order.

I'm sure Yoshida-kun is the same. Although Sayu-chan speaks of Yoshida-kun's kindness as unconditional, I'm sure that somewhere in the back of his mind, Yoshida-kun is asking for something from Sayu-chan.

“Adults are really selfish...”

I muttered to myself and let out a sigh again.

You're free to live your life as you wish and you should learn to clear yourself from what bothers you.

I'm sure that's what I really wanted to say to her. I don't know why I can't put into words what I really want to say.

But if it's Yoshida-kun, I'm almost convinced that he can lead her in a good direction. And I wonder how the feelings for Yoshida-kun that have grown in Sayu-chan's heart will manifest themselves. Until I see it happen, I will have to refrain from wanting Yoshida-kun.

At that time, my intuition which told me “Not now” was right. I don't want to experience not being able to get what I really want ever again.

“You're taking too long, Yoshida-kun.”

Absorbed in my thoughts, I wanted to see his face.

VOLUME 2 – CHAPTER 9

Translator: chelly (Fully Booked TLS)

Editor / Proofreader : OD Dragon (Fully Booked TLS)

“Ah.”

“Huh...?”

I was on my way to the 24-hour supermarket in front of the train station when I unexpectedly ran into someone I knew. We stood in front of each other with our mouths open like idiots and then pointed at each other at the same time.

“Yoshida-senpai.”

“What are you doing here?”

Mishima was standing in the street at night, dressed in a tailor’s suit.

“Ah... I went to see a movie.”

“You just got off work and went straight to see a movie. You sure have a lot of energy left in you.”

The fact that she was still in her suit meant that she hadn’t gone home yet. To my surprise, Mishima nodded while showing an ambiguous smile on her face.

“There’s something I really wanted to see.”

“What’s it called?”

“Ah... hmm... the movie’s called *Song of Hydrangea*^[1].”

“Oh, you mean the one with the huge poster in front of the station?”

Every morning, I see a huge poster on my way to the train station. If I remember correctly, the leading lady was one of Hashimoto’s favorite actresses. When that guy talked to me about that movie, he told me over and over again “You should definitely go see it” but I couldn’t remember the details because every time he told me about it, I didn’t really pay him any attention.

“Was it good?”

“Well, yeah... it made me cry.”

As I received such a vague response from Mishima, I noticed that her eyes were a little red. It really was a movie that made her cry.

“So it seems.”

My attention reverted from the movie to the fact that she was here.

“Why are you here? You’re in the opposite direction from the train station.”

I could tell that Mishima had come to the station to watch a movie, but it felt strange to see her on this road leading away from the station. Even though she was walking in this direction, there wasn’t any particular store that she could stop by. It was just a residential area. Mishima responded to my question by scratching her cheek with her index finger.

“I was in the mood for a little walk. Come to think of it, this is the neighborhood where you live, Yoshida-senpai.”

“What kind of explanation is that?”

“Anyway, what are you doing out here Yoshida-senpai?”

“Oh? Yeah...”

I couldn't tell her that Gotou-san was at my house.

I came to buy some ingredients for breakfast, but I couldn't help but notice the way Sayu was acting when she asked me. I got the feeling that she was trying to get rid of me or something. However, it was hard to imagine that Sayu would actively want to be alone with Gotou-san, and also there is a possibility that I'm reading too much into it.

“I'm going to buy some ingredients for breakfast.”

“Yoshida-senpai makes his own breakfast huh? That's a little unexpected.”

“I don't make it, Sayu does.”

When I answered, Mishima's body shook. She then looked at me with a slightly puzzled expression.

“Huh? Sayu-chan's at your home right now?”

“What? Of course, she is. She has no other place to stay, so...”

“...Oh, right.”

Mishima answered me briefly, with an ambiguous implication.

“Can I go with you?”

“I don't mind, but do you even like going shopping?”

“I’m curious to know what Yoshida-senpai eats.”

“For real?”

Showing a firm smile, Mishima followed me as if it were expected. Mishima, with a tight smile on her face, nodded at me as she should have. Even when I was buying *nira*, eggs, and miso at the grocery store, Mishima would ask me questions about this and that.

“It’s for *niratama*^[2] right?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“Do you often prepare *niratama*?”

“No, I don’t think it was that often.”

“If you’re eating *nira* in the morning, your mouth’s going to smell a little bad.”

“That’s to be expected, so I’ll brush my teeth before I leave.”

When I said that, Mishima laughed. Then she pointed to the basket that I’m holding.

“Actually, would that be enough?”

“For what?”

“There are only four eggs in there.”

“That’s right... they have a discount and since it’s only for two people, I don’t have to buy many.”

With that said, I remembered that I seemed to have run out of beer. I took some beer cans that were piled up from the liquor section, and they were suddenly seized by Mishima.

“Hey, what’s going on?!”

“Let me ask you something.”

“Huh?”

I glared at Mishima as disapproval for confiscating my beer, but I was so surprised by the seriousness of her face that it made me lose my annoyance. Mishima looked me in the eye and spoke.

“If I ask you to let me stay at your place tonight, would you let me?”

For a moment my mouth was open, but what she said was so out of the blue that it made me sigh deeply.

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Exactly what I mean.”

“Why should I let a woman who’s not my lover stay over for the night?”

“But Sayu-chan isn’t your lover.”

“I told you, I’m just trying to protect her.”

“Then, what about Gotou-san?”

I was speechless. Mishima frowned a little and spoke again.

“How’s Gotou-san?”

“What does Gotou-san have to do with this?”

Mishima frowned in a way that was neither angry nor sad and then lashed out at me.

“Why would you deceive me like that?!”

“What are you talking about?”

“You are! Gotou-san’s at your place right now!”

I blinked my eyes when Mishima said that with a strong tone.

“Hey, how do you know that...”

Mishima choked on my words, then dropped her gaze to the floor.

“I voluntarily worked overtime today, which is rare for me. I was hoping that you might praise me for that tomorrow, Yoshida-senpai.”

Mishima made no eye contact with me but continued to speak slowly.

“When I left the office after working on one program, I saw you and Gotou-san coming out of a *yakiniku* place in front of the station. It made me curious. I was wondering which station you were getting off at and it’s actually the station closest to your home.”

Mishima said that and then glanced at me.

“Um... sorry for following you. I deeply apologize.”

“Ah, it doesn’t matter, well...”

Only vague words came out. Instead of anger, what I felt was more like an annoyance.

“Then, on impulse, I got off at the station too. When I followed you and saw you walking towards your residential area, that’s when I realized, ‘Oh, they’re going home...’ Somehow... I felt so helpless... So I went to the movie theater and watched the movie I wanted to see, but I just couldn’t wrap my mind around what had happened.”

“H-hey...”

Mishima began to tear up more and more as she continued to speak, and I was just confused. Mishima didn’t seem to want to cry at all, so she put some effort into her eyebrows and made a show of trying to hold back her tears. After a short pause, she continued.

“I couldn’t just go home that’s why I was wandering around aimlessly when suddenly, I bumped into you... So I thought of asking you about your relationship with Gotou-san.”

“Hey, you...”

“But you’re so bent on trying to hide the fact that it made me furious...”

Mishima stopped talking, and with the nasal drip running from her nose, she put the beers she had seized back into the basket.

“Let’s finish shopping and then leave.”

“Oh, yeah... That’s what I’ve been thinking all along.”

“Don’t sweat the details.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Mishima as she walked hurriedly towards the cash register. I added a few more cans of beer and then went after her.

*

I was standing in a small space in front of the supermarket with a plastic bag, which was heavier than I expected, and Mishima, who was slightly unhappy and sucking on a pack of soy milk. A few moments had passed since we had finished shopping and walked out, but Mishima remained silent.

I had no idea why this was happening, but it's not a situation where I can just say "well, I'm going home," and I was just standing there without a place to go.

"So that's how it is."

Mishima spoke suddenly.

"I was so sure that Sayu-chan wasn't home, that's why I thought you'd taken the opportunity to bring Gotou-san home."

"That's impossible since there isn't a moment when Sayu isn't home."

"Though I don't really know why, in any case, that's what occurred to me."

Mishima said and once again sipped her pack of soy milk. After gulping it down, she looked at me sideways.

"You know, did you really think I would invite the woman I like over when there's a high school girl home?"

"Well, that's..."

"So, that means Sayu-chan and Gotou-san are keeping each other company right now?"

"Yeah, that's right."

“I don’t really get it...”

Mishima muttered, then shook the pack of soy milk she had in her hand. Apparently, she had already drunk it all.

“Just to confirm, you still like Gotou-san, right?”

“Huh? Oh, that’s...”

Mishima suddenly asked me that question, and I was confused and stammered. There was no point in trying to hint at what she already knew.

“Well, I mean... I can’t just give up that easily.”

I refrained from saying anything to Mishima because I didn’t think it was necessary at this point to tell her that our feelings were mutual.

“If that’s the case, what you’re doing isn’t right, Yoshida-senpai.”

“Why’s that?”

I bowed my head to Mishima’s words. When she saw me, Mishima frowned and shrugged her shoulders.

“I don’t know the exact details, but usually, when you bring the woman you like home, you wouldn’t just leave a high school girl that’s been staying with you alone with her.”

“No, that’s...”

Before I could explain that it was Gotou-san who wanted to meet with her, Mishima continued talking.

“If you’ve really fallen in love with the woman you’ve always liked, then isn’t love powerful enough to make you ignore everything else?”

The woman you've been in love with for a long time is at *your* home. The presence of a high school girl will hinder your chance to advance the relationship in many ways."

"That's probably true, but that doesn't mean I'm going to kick her out."

When I said that, Mishima shook her head.

"Normally... you'd kick her out."

The words were uttered in a chilling tone that I had never heard from her before.

"A high school girl with unknown origins or the woman you've fallen for? You don't even have to think about who's more important."

"Hold on..."

I said that, trying to cut off Mishima. She glared at me with frustration evident on her face.

"What exactly are you trying to say? Why are you bad-mouthing Sayu all of a sudden?"

"It's not like I'm trying to speak badly of Sayu-chan. She's a good girl."

"But you said something about how it would be better to get rid of her!"

"I didn't say you should get rid of her!"

Mishima shook her head and looked me in the eye.

"In the end, what are your priorities, Yoshida-senpai?"

“Priorities?”

When I tilted my head, Mishima sighed and nodded.

“That’s right. There’s Gotou-san, who you’ve always thought of, then there’s Sayu-chan, who you brought home a while back. And as the situation stands, Gotou-san’s coming over to your home.”

“Right, and?”

“If I really wanted to develop a romantic relationship with Gotou-san, I’d do my absolute best to keep Sayu-chan’s existence a secret from her. ‘I want to go out with you, but I’m staying together with a high school girl who isn’t family.’ That just sounds completely ridiculous, don’t you think?”

“Look, as I was saying...”

As expected, I couldn’t keep quiet and interrupted her.

“That doesn’t mean I can simply get rid of Sayu. If I did, it would mean that I have kicked her out if I started dating Gotou-san, wouldn’t it?”

“Exactly!!!”

Mishima suddenly screamed and stomped the ground with her shoes. It was the first time I had ever heard her raise her voice like that, so I was a little taken aback. Mishima quickly opened her mouth and bowed her head, as if she had just realized something.

“I’m sorry...”

“It’s fine...”

Mishima lowered her gaze to the ground, then continued speaking.

“I’m just... I’m saying that would be the normal thing to do.”

“So that’s what you’re saying.”

“It’s about deciding whether to throw Sayu-chan out or not. If you really like Gotou-san, then you should make it your priority to date her.”

“...But.”

“No, I understand. I really do.”

Mishima looked back at me and then smiled. It was obviously a forced smile and I could feel the pain behind it.

“Yoshida-senpai, I know that you’re not the type of person capable of doing that. But... at the same time, I can’t help thinking...”

Mishima paused for a moment, sighed deeply, and then continued.

“That’s no longer something you can call ‘love,’ right?”

“Huh?”

“It’s about your feelings for Gotou-san. I think you might be confusing pure admiration with feelings of love.”

“No, that’s not—”

“And that perhaps...”

Mishima interrupted me and then looked at me sideways.

“Your feelings for Sayu-chan are turning into love.”

“Absolutely not.”

Our glances met. Mishima's eyes seemed to be filled with some kind of unstable emotional turmoil.

"Is that so?"

We remained still for a few seconds, then Mishima looked away.

"If that's the case, you're too nice of a person, Yoshida-senpai."

Mishima scratched her head.

"If you're too nice, you won't be able to get what you really want."

Mishima continued to throw out her opinions.

"...Sayu-chan won't be staying at your place forever, you know?"

I wanted to say something back, but I couldn't think of anything at all. As I was speechless, Mishima looked up and clumsily put on a smiling face.

"I've been such a bad girl today!"

"No, not really."

"I'm sorry! If I stay with you any longer, I'm afraid I'll say something unnecessary, so I'm going to leave now."

"O-oh... I see. I'll walk you to the station."

"No, thanks! Go home as quickly as possible, Yoshida-senpai. I'm sure they're both waiting for you."

"You're the one who held me back."

"Hehe."

Being quick to make light of these things, somehow it made me feel like I was a little child.

“Well then, thank you for your time!”

“Oh... yeah.”

Mishima turned on her heels and walked quickly to the station. As I watched her walk away, I thought of Mishima’s smile from a few minutes ago. It was an awkward, fake smile that seemed to be masking her true feelings. Compared to that, the smile that Sayu had put on when she first came to my place was better.

Mishima had a tremendous amount of enthusiasm and was probably trying to tell me something that I don’t yet understand. Though, I think I still have not accurately grasped whatever that was. I sighed and started to walk back home.

It’s about your feelings for Gotou-san. I think you might be confusing pure admiration with feelings of love.

Mishima’s words resonated in my head. That can’t be true. I think it’s safe to say that I’m still in love with Gotou-san. There was no one else who could make my heart beat so fast, and no one else who had any great meaning to me.

And then.

Your feelings for Sayu-chan are turning into love.

That’s the one thing that’s never going to happen. I just want to protect her from the unreasonable conditions she has been subjected to. I wanted to help her get back on the right track. I don’t have the slightest desire to do anything with Sayu as a woman. However, Mishima’s words made me realize something.

I simply wanted to offer Sayu a refuge until she comes to terms with her past and her feelings about it. However, exactly how long would that take? A month? Maybe half a year? It could be a year from now or several years for that matter. Or, maybe it'll be tomorrow. When I thought about it, I was stunned. I couldn't imagine my life without Sayu anymore.

"That's strange..."

I placed my hand over my mouth. Mishima was right. Perhaps it would be difficult to have a relationship with Gotou-san while Sayu is at home.

When I told Gotou-san about Sayu, she told me, "I can't comprehend it. You said you liked me, didn't you? But while you say that, you also said that you're living with a girl I know nothing of, and that sickens me." Even if she could come to terms with that, as long as Sayu is around, I would never be able to invite Gotou-san home and do things that lovers typically do.

If that's the case, when is the time that I will be able to be with Gotou-san? And where would Sayu be? What would she be doing by then? When I thought about those two things, my mind went blank. Nothing comes to mind.

"...This is troubling."

I found myself overwhelmed by it. And without any progress in my thoughts, I arrived at home.

I stood in front of the door and took a deep breath. On the other side of this door are Sayu and Gotou-san. I knew I couldn't just walk in with a somewhat hazy expression on my face.

With one hand, I gave myself a slight slap on the cheek and said “Alright!” to motivate myself. I inserted the key and turned it. I felt strangely nervous, even though I was only going home.

Chapter 10: Punishment



VOLUME 2 – CHAPTER 10

Translator: chelly (Fully Booked TLS)

Editor / Proofreader : OD Dragon (Fully Booked TLS)

“This is... a punishment for toying with me.”

I listened to my then-girlfriend, who had tears in the corners of her eyes as she clutched a pancake knife in one hand as if she were speaking to someone else.

I’ve never toyed with her. I loved her with all my heart. What shocked me the most was that such a statement came out of her mouth, she who was the smartest and most understanding of the seven lovers I had at the time. I loved all seven of them equally, and I thought that would make them happy.

And everything went well.

The expression on her face when I told her that I had six other lovers was so strange that I don’t know how to describe it. Her face went from confusion to frustration, then from sadness to anger. Various emotions began to bubble up onto the surface of her face, becoming visible.

“So... what do you plan to do after this?”

I didn’t understand the intent of the question.

“Plan to do...? I plan to continue loving all of you after this...”

“What are you talking about? Are you stupid?!”

When her anger was clearly exposed, I realized that I had made a mistake. I told her that since I had faith in her, but for her, that was an absolutely unforgivable line I had crossed.

“It’s insane to be in love with seven people at once! Don’t you plan to get married?!”

“I don’t have to get married. As long we love each other, there won’t be any problem.”

“Even though I thought about marrying you!”

She stared at me, tears streaming down her face, and picked up the pancake knife on the table. That was also a mistake. You shouldn’t eat pancakes while discussing important matters. I have learned my lesson.

I was so shocked when she swung the knife at me afterward. If I hadn’t avoided being stabbed, I would have charged her with assault and that would have been a disaster. I didn’t want to do that, and I didn’t want to get hurt in the first place, so I ended up running away from the scene.

I spent a few nights in an Internet café and when I went back home, she was no longer there. Over the next few days, I contacted my other lovers, but none of them were responding either. For some reason, I couldn’t bring myself to go see them. If one failed, the others would too. It was a relationship built on such a balance. I thought about starting over, so I moved places.

I moved to a new home in Tokyo, thinking that if I wanted to hide from someone, it would be in a crowded place. I had a lover at my

old part-time job who knew everything about me, so I had no choice but to give an excuse to my boss and decisively handed in my resignation. But now, I have a new part-time job in Tokyo.

I still have a lot of money saved up from my previous part-time job, so I should be able to make it for a few more years on a reduced income. So it is better to go slowly in terms of job search. But the most pressing problem is this loneliness.

Before I moved, I could meet a woman almost every day. There was a sense of fulfillment in that life, like watching a lovely flower bloom. But what about now? After working part-time, I would go home alone, turn on the TV to hear someone's voice, even though there was no particular program I wanted to watch, and go to bed alone when I got bored.

There is no appeal in this way of life. Nor do I have any confidence in myself. As I was watching TV and eating a strong-flavored side dish from the supermarket, I suddenly thought of something. It would be nice to be able to pick up a runaway girl at a time like this.

I remember the time when I still had my seven lovers, I happened to pick up a runaway high school girl who was sitting in front of a convenience store in my neighborhood. She had good looks and a large chest. When I brought her home, she immediately surrendered her body to me. Her body was soft, and her insides were tight.

However, unlike my other lovers, that girl did not want me at all. I was a little upset with the way she pretended to feel good, and the way she stared into my eyes but seemed to be thinking about something else entirely. I let her stay at my place for a few days, but when a girlfriend of mine insisted on coming over, I threw her out.

I was certainly living the life back then. Not having a woman by my side anymore is lonely and boring, but it can't be helped. I guess it doesn't matter if I don't want myself right now at all. If I carefully let

time pass, it'll become a good thing. All of that aside, I just want to hold a woman who is soft and smells good. I thought about wanting to be free from the pain of not having any object of my affection nearby.

"Alright."

I made up my mind and put down my chopsticks.

"I'll find myself a runaway girl."

*

"Huh? A runaway girl?"

Asami-chan said with a blatantly furrowed brow.

"Yeah, a runaway girl. Have you seen one around here?"

"Nope, besides what are you gonna do if you find one?"

"Well, I want to take her home with me."

"Y'know, that's a crime... You creep me out."

Asami-chan shook her head with a look of disgust on her face. She is a high school girl who works part-time at the same convenience store. Her tanned skin and blond hair gave her the appearance of a gal, but contrary to that impression, she is morally upright. I've tried to ask her out for dinner several times, but she has always turned me down.

"Don't you think I'm doing her a favor by offering her a place to stay?"

"I know what you're thinkin'."

“That can happen with men and women who live under the same roof, even if they don’t plan to.”

“That’s seriously creepy.”

Asami-chan seemed to think I was joking, and completely dismissed my words, but from the way she reacted, it seemed she really had no idea. I can easily see her thoughts through her eyes. It’s convenient because if you just ask her a question, you can find out most of what she knows.

“I see... there are no runaway girls here, huh?”

When I showed my disappointment, Asami-chan snorted.

“Why’re you so thirsty for girls?”

“I’ve had seven lovers, you know. And I lost them all at once. I can’t help but miss them.”

“Seven?! So like, one for each day? That’s freakin’ hilarious.”

It’s the truth, though.

Asami-chan, who didn’t seem to believe me at all, took the fried chicken out of the fryer with a laugh.

“The new girl’s the same age as me, but if you try to pick her up, I’ll kick your ass.”

When I heard Asami-chan say that, I tilted my head.

“New girl?”

“Huh, you haven’t heard?”

As she put the fried chicken on the hot food display, Asami gave me a look.

“Y’know, there’s a girl who signed up recently. Sayu-chaso... her name’s Sayu-chaso.”

“Oh, yeah... There are more names on the list now. So she’s the same age as you?”

“Yep, and just so you know, she’s super cute.”

“Is that right? Sounds like fun.”

When I said that, Asami-chan furrowed her brow, even though she had said it herself.

“If you ever lay your hands on her, I’ll tear you apart.”

“Are you two close?”

“Quite close. We’re soulmates.”

Asami-chan easily becomes friends with anyone. I remembered that she immediately got along with the lady who worked part-time here before, something that I’m not capable of.

“Hmm...”

As I gave that vague response, I thought of this girl named “Sayu” who I had never met before. She’s close to Asami-chan, so she must be a gal as well. Or she could be a weak-minded type of girl. I thought that would be better. If I push her enough, I might have her eating out of my hand.

After hearing the story from Asami-chan, while I had some delusions, I continued to work. As I changed out of my convenience store

uniform at the end of my shift, I looked at the shift chart on the wall and saw that I was scheduled to work with a girl named “Sayu Ogiwara” the next day.

I couldn’t help but look forward to seeing her face now.

VOLUME 2 – CHAPTER 11

Translator : **FireHawk** ([Fully Booked TLS](#))

Editor : **chelly** ([Fully Booked TLS](#))

Proofreader : **OD Dragon** ([Fully Booked TLS](#))

“Sayu-chaso, your phone.”

“Hmm?”

Asami put her textbooks on the table in the living room and pointed at Sayu’s phone next to her. Sayu checked the phone and then her expression softened.

“Oh, it’s Gotou-san.”

“Gotou... who’s that?”

“Um... She’s... a friend.”

Sayu replied hesitantly. Asami froze for a moment and then gave a sudden “Wow!”

“You’ve got buddies other than me?!”

“Well... we just became friends recently.”

“It doesn’t matter. Isn’t it good when you have a lot of buddies, right?”

Asami asked and without waiting for a reply, answered, "It sure is!"

Today, their shifts ended at the same time, so they came here to study in the living room.

Looking through her assignments, Asami talked to Sayu. It looked like she really enjoyed this conversation so I tried not to disrupt it. Yet, when the conversation got interrupted by the message, her expression didn't change much, since they really were just high school students enjoying their free time.

Apparently, Gotou-san exchanged contacts with Sayu that day. The day I met Mishima at the station: after parting with her, I hurried home, but when I returned, I couldn't believe my eyes.

"Oh, you sure took your time."

"Hey, welcome back, Yoshida-san."

Gotou-san and Sayu were waiting for me at home.

"Wait, don't move. We're not finished yet."

"B-But Yoshida-san's back..."

"Hey, I'm *much* more important than some Yoshida-kun."

"Some Yoshida-kun?!"

I was a bit annoyed by that. They chatted joyfully in the living room. Also, Gotou-san took out her cosmetics and tried applying some on Sayu.

"What are you doing?"

"Can't you see? We're doing makeup."

“What for?”

“What for?!”

Gotou-san looked at me with disdain, while gently dabbing Sayu’s cheek with a sponge.

“She’s such a wonderful girl. And if you teach this girl how to do makeup, she’ll become even more wonderful.”

“Oh, I see...”

Before this, I thought that since Sayu by herself is really beautiful, she didn’t need makeup and cosmetics, but it looks like I was wrong.

This whole situation really surprised me, but even more unexpected was that they were talking peacefully. Just a couple of hours ago, Sayu was nervous and wary of Gotou-san, but now there is nothing like that as if they have been friends for a long time.

“I’ll put everything in the refrigerator.”

“Oh, yes... thank you,” said Sayu with a glance.

I put the eggs, onions, miso, and beer in the refrigerator and sighed.

If you think about it, a lot has happened today. I was already worn out by the fact that Gotou-san came to my house. Then I also bumped into Mishima, who asked a lot of questions that I couldn’t answer. Of course, everything ended well, but when I returned, the fatigue took its toll.

“Yoshida-kun.”

“What?”

I looked at Gotou-san, who stopped applying makeup and chuckled.

“You had a pretty long smoking session out there, didn’t you?”

Her words confused me for a second and I didn’t know what to say, but luckily Gotou-san didn’t look at me.

“I’m sorry that it took quite a while... I-I just met a friend.”

“Oh, that’s how.”

I said that the friend was Yuzuha, but the makeup-focused woman didn’t go into the subject.

“Okay, I guess now it’s done.”

Gotou-san nodded in satisfaction, placed the cosmetics on the table, and reached into her bag.

“Here, see for yourself.”

She pulled out a small mirror and handed it to Sayu. Sayu hesitantly looked into it and squealed.

“Wow!!!”

“Looks different, right?”

“Uh-huh, a completely different person!”

“Haha, you’re so impressed, looks like my efforts paid off.”

Sayu looked in the mirror, and then suddenly raised her head and looked at me.

“Yoshida-san, what do you think?”

“Huh?”

Before that, I could only see her profile, but when I saw her face, I understood what “different person” they were talking about.

The usually slightly gloomy girl now looked bright and radiant. Although the expression did not change much, for some reason she seemed a lot happier. The skin looked thinner and more attractive.

To be honest, I was really embarrassed by this transformation, so I blushingly looked away.

“Well... Not bad... P-Probably...”

I couldn’t answer properly, and Gotou-san laughed.

“You’re so bad at praising people, Yoshida-kun.”

“I-I’m just not used to that sort of thing...”

And again this woman giggled in response. Sayu also shook with laughter.

“You know, I heard that a man who’s not capable of complimenting a girl’s makeup will never become popular.”

“I’m not trying to become popular.”

I replied, slightly annoyed, while Sayu and Gotou-san quickly exchanged glances and then started laughing again. It looked like they really got along.

“Well. It was really fun, but it’s time for me to go home.”

Gotou-san said while looking at her watch. I put my keys and wallet back into my pocket and stood up.

“I’ll walk you to the station.”

“Oh, really? Thank you.”

“Ah, then I’ll go too!” Sayu got up, but I shook my head, stopping her.

“It’s already too late. I’ll do it myself.”

“B-But...”

“Sayu-chan.”

The girl was about to insist, but Gotou-san smiled softly at her.

“If you feel like talking, just send me a message. But for today, let’s part here.”

“Okay”

After the woman’s gentle request, Sayu nodded reluctantly.

So they exchanged contacts just after they met. And I only found out Gotou-san’s phone number six months ago. Have to admit, it really hurt my feelings. Trying to overcome it, I went out into the corridor.

Putting on my sandals, I opened the door and waited. I watched Gotou-san slowly put on her high heels and then shook my head when the thought came to my mind, “If we were married, I would see this every day.” I forced myself to look away from her and quickly raised my head, suddenly meeting Sayu’s gaze.

She looked in my direction, and when our eyes met, she just shrugged her shoulders. She showed an already prepared smile and waved to us. Not knowing how to answer that, I simply bowed my head in confusion.

“Sorry for the intrusion.”

After putting on her shoes, Gotou-san stood up and turned towards the living room.

“Okay, Sayu-chan. See you!”

“Uh-huh! See you!”

“After saying that, Gotou-san went out into the corridor.”

See you!

Well, I had a bad feeling about this, since these words basically meant that she would like to talk to Sayu more. As dark thoughts crept into my head, I closed the door and turned the key.

*

“Good girl...”

“...What?”

On the way to the station, Gotou-san suddenly spoke up.

“About Sayu-chan. She’s a very good girl.”

“Yeah... that’s true.”

“Is that why you couldn’t leave her alone?”

“No... Well... I don’t know.”

I answered vaguely. If she’s asking if I couldn’t leave Sayu alone because she’s a ‘good girl,’ then I don’t think that that’s the reason. Although, I do not really know why I took her.

“Haha, that’s great.”

Gotou-san laughed.

“What is?”

“No, nothing. Just thinking out loud.”

Gotou-san simply grinned as usual and lightly poked my shoulder.

“Don’t you dare do something with her! Now she has my phone number, you know?”

“I won’t!”

I frowned and Gotou-san again chuckled.

“One more thing...”

She started to speak again, but her voice was completely different this time.

“Take care of her.”

I realized that she was serious. She looked at me out of the corner of her eye, and it was clear that she was not joking: there was a smile on her lips, but a dead serious look.

“Of course... That’s what I’m doing.”

I said, lowering my eyes.

“If I weren’t capable of doing it, I wouldn’t have brought her home in the first place.”

“Yeah, it’s you we’re talking about, right, Yoshida-kun? That’s why I said it.”

I looked at Gotou-san speaking, with a faint twinkle in the eyes. Her gaze was fixed somewhere in the distance, somewhere far ahead.

“She’s a weak kid. A girl who doesn’t understand herself.”

She muttered and looked at me again.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if emotions suddenly burst out of her.”

I couldn’t take my gaze off Gotou-san. I don’t know why, but there was so much strength in these eyes.

Without saying anything, I continued to look in her eyes, and when she noticed, she just smiled and looked in front of her again.

“Well, no matter what, I know that you will be able to handle it, Yoshida-kun.”

“Why is that?”

“Don’t you know? At work, even higher-ups call you a ‘problem solver.’”

“Huh?!”

“If one relies on you, there will definitely be no problems, and everyone knows this.”

“And what does this even mean? Is that the reason behind all these hard projects they’re giving me?”

Gotou-san smiled and patted me on the shoulder.

“I’ll support you. Both at work and with Sayu-chan.”

“Well... I guess I’ll gladly accept it then.”

The woman said that as if it’s some sort of an apology for all the future ‘difficult’ projects and smiled at me again.

*

So basically, I introduced Sayu to Gotou-san and they became friends.

But the thing is that they never told me what they were talking about that day nor what happened and why they became friends.

Well, if this is a secret from everyone, then I guess I shouldn’t stick my nose into it either. Besides, Sayu smiled as she typed a message, so I think that everything is fine.

Asami was right. I won’t say that having many friends is good, but I won’t say that it is bad either. And after all, Sayu, before getting a job, only communicated with me. Whereas now, she could talk to Asami and Gotou-san.

Thinking about that, I looked up and met Asami’s eyes. I was slightly surprised. It looked like she was angry about something. She stared at me and obviously didn’t intend to look away. I thought I should do the same thing, so I also gazed at her.

“What...?!”

“Nothing. Just looking.”

“Okay then.”

This staring contest was a little awkward, so I stopped. I took my cigarettes and lighter and headed to the balcony when suddenly Sayu's phone started to ring.

"Whoa! That sure scared me!"

"Someone's calling?"

"Yeah, looks like the manager..."

"He calls a bit too often in the evenings."

Asami chuckled and shrugged her shoulders.

"Sorry, I'll go out."

"Okie-dokie."

Sayu trudged into the corridor. Of course, she could've accepted the call inside, but Sayu was too well-mannered.

Seeing how she closed the door, I went to the balcony to smoke, when Asami suddenly called out to me.

"Yoshida-cchi..."

"What?"

"Yoshida-cchi... You sure you don't think about doing anythin' weird with Sayu-chaso?"

I frowned and asked with confusion.

"What do you mean by 'Anything weird?'"

"Well... Um..."

Asami started lowering her voice.

“I mean, she’s got a real set of badonkers^[1]!”

“Where did you learn that word?”

Realizing that the conversation was not over, I sat down on the bed.

“And why do you ask?”

“Um...”

Asami looked away at the table. It was not often that she chose words.

“What I’m saying is... That no matter how good of a person you are... She’s sweet and beautiful, and you live under the same roof. Can’t believe that you don’t have any lewd thoughts at all.

“Well...”

“Uh... Or perhaps you’re impotent?”

“Don’t make me angry.”

I sighed and scratched my head.

“Well, yeah... Sayu’s certainly sweet, but it doesn’t turn me on. She’s still a *JK*.”

Saying this, I remembered her soft smile.

“I-I just want... for her to smile naturally.”

As I said this, Asami opened her mouth and then started laughing.

“Hey! Why are you laughin’?!”

“Oh, sorry! You’re just stupidly kind.”

Asami’s shoulders trembled and the corners of her lips were lifted as she spoke.

“That’s not true.”

“It is.”

Asami said while smiling, but then she suddenly became serious. She looked like a grown adult now. This sudden change surprised me a little.

“I know that you’re really kind, Yoshida-cchi. So, could I ask you about somethin’?”

“Ask about what?”

Asami wasn’t one of those who with a serious look ask for something, but I didn’t say it out loud. I’m not that rude.

“I just think... She shouldn’t work right now... How, um...”

“What was that ‘um?’”

Asami frowned and began to mumble.

“There’s this one *nasty* senpai.”

“Nasty?”

“Yeah, he’s somewhat... Something’s wrong with him.”

Asami couldn’t explain and was constantly shaking her head.

“It feels like if you relax, he’ll eat you.”

“What are you talking about?”

“How can I say this... In general, he’s a manwhore.”

“Manwh— Choose your words!”

“But he’s different from a lotta people, he’s a lot calmer.”

“...I don’t really understand, but you’re telling me that this kind of person works with Sayu?”

I said and Asami silently nodded.

“Generally speaking, previously, their shifts didn’t intersect, but starting from the next week, he’ll have a new schedule... and apparently will work with Sayu-chaso.”

“I see...”

I didn’t know him at all, so I couldn’t judge him only by what Asami was saying, but she seemed really worried about this.

“So, Yoshida-cchi...

Asami said, looking straight at me.

“I want you to protect Sayu-chaso.”

Her eyes were directed at me.

“Listen, if something happens and if Sayu-chaso gets into trouble... Before that happens, protect her and make sure it never gets to that... Ah, and of course I’ll also protect her at work.”

“Pfft... Haha.”

“Huh?!”

Asami frowned at me.

“What?”

“No, I just thought that you too.”

While I was laughing, Asami looked confused and waited for the continuation.

“You’re really kind.”

I said it and she blushingly looked away.

“It’s nothin’ like that!”

“Aren’t you just looking out for your junior at work?”

“Not just a junior, but...”

Her eyes flickered and then she spoke quietly.

“My dear friend.”

Trying not to smile, I nodded.

“I see. Well, if you say so, I’ll be more attentive.”

“...Thanks.”

“And yeah, tell me right away if something happens.”

“Gotcha!”

Looking into each other's eyes, we nodded, and then the door opened.

"Sorry, the manager really likes talking... Did something happen?"

Sayu came from the hallway and stared at us. We both smiled and shook our heads.

"Nothing."

"Nothin'!"

Having said the same thing at the same time, we started to laugh.

"What's happening?"

Only Sayu didn't laugh and walked into the living room slightly annoyed.

How peaceful. At that moment, I thought Sayu and Asami were kind and serious kids. And I began to think that I wanted to protect their smiles as long as possible.

VOLUME 2 – CHAPTER 12

Translator : FireHawk (Fully Booked TLS)

Editor : chelly (Fully Booked TLS)

Proofreader : OD Dragon (Fully Booked TLS)

“Morning... Oh...”

When I entered the store from the back door, there was pure darkness. The manager and Asami usually don’t turn the lights off, so it’s rarely that dark here.

I took my uniform out of my bag and began to change quickly.

It was clear from the schedule that the manager was working at night and that Asami should already be at the store.

I don’t think that three people is enough for a busy shop near the station, but for our little store, it was the right amount. The manager even said that four people would be too much. That being said, today I’ll work with someone I’ve never met before.

The light probably wasn’t on because this someone turned it off. Frankly, I’m a bit nervous. Looking at the schedule again, I searched for the name of this person, and then I found it.

“Kyouya Yaguchi”

“Um...”

A strange feeling... I'd rather say familiar... I felt like I've seen or heard this name before.

"Maybe it sounds like the name of some celebrity?"

Nothing came to mind, but somehow the feeling that I knew him didn't disappear.

I stared anxiously at the board when suddenly the door opened and a guy's face appeared.

"Whoa! You scared me... So you've already come."

"Ah, yeah... Nice to meet you, I'll be wor—"

I began to bow, introducing myself, looked into the eyes of a guy in a working uniform, and then... I was speechless... Yes. I remembered. Remembered this familiar feeling.

The guy in front of me also blinked his eyes several times and screamed.

"Wow!"

"*Miyuki-chan?* It's you, Miyuki-chan!!!"

"No, you must be—"

"Why are you here?! Long time no see. I remember you!"

"You're wrong... You mistook me for someone."

However, he wasn't wrong. Because of that, my voice trembled.

"Wrong?! I will never forget the woman I've been with."

I was covered in goosebumps.

Right. Kyouya Yaguchi. A person who I stayed with for a few days when I was in Ibaraki. He looked at me with a soft expression as if he was trying to appear kind.

But that was just an illusion. The guy in front of me was an unpleasant person who could nimbly date several women, and who I wanted to forget. I remembered how disgusted I was when I found out that he was simultaneously dating seven women.

“Wait, Miyuki-chan... I haven’t seen your name on the schedule.”

“Yes, I’m saying that I’m not...”

Miyuki is not a real name. That’s how I was introducing myself to *them* and he remembered.

However, since I introduced myself as Miyuki, I couldn’t use my real name. Finding myself in a difficult situation, I was just staring at the floor, and then Asami appeared behind Yaguchi-san.

“How long are ya planning to stand here, Yaguchi?! And you, Sayu-chaso, if you don’t check-in, the manager will think you’re late... What are you two even doin’?”

With beaming eyes, Yaguchi-san turned to Asami.

“Asami-chan! I know — I know her!”

“Eh? Where from?”

“This is Miyuki-chan! She was staying at my place sometime before...”

“Hey!”

I almost yelled for Yaguchi-san to shut up. He and Asami were startled.

My body was shaking. My heart was beating wildly. My breathing quickened.

“He... he mistook me... I’m Sayu Ogiwara.”

I said in a trembling voice. But Yaguchi-san tilted his head suspiciously.

“Nah... When I last saw you, you were definitely Miyuki-chan... You know, it hurts to hear that I mistook you for someone...”

Yaguchi-san didn’t finish speaking when Asami, who was standing next to him, kicked him mercilessly in the shin.

“Why so violent all of a sudden?!”

“Sayu-chaso told ya already. Or are you deaf?”

Asami said in a cold tone and grabbed Yaguchi-san by the shoulder.

“Also, you’re slackin’ off for too long. A li’l more and the manager will fire you.”

“Hey, hey! I just wanted to talk to the new girl. We’re not busy right now anyway.”

“Shut up and go already!”

Asami, holding Yaguchi-san’s shoulder, forcibly pushed him out of the office and into the store. Then she closed the door.

Sighing, she looked at me. She shot me a puzzled look that was literally screaming, “What was that?” and I shuddered in response.

“Um... Well... Asami, I...”

I don't know if I wanted to make an excuse or just tell the truth. I simply tried to break the silence. My heart was beating wildly. I was out of breath.

“That's...”

“It's okay.”

“...Huh?!”

I raised my head and looked at Asami. She shook her head.

“It's okay, you don't have to say anythin'.”

“...”

I was speechless, I was just staring at Asami, while she continued with seriousness.

“If you wanna explain everything, I'll listen. But it doesn't look like you're ready for it yet. And yeah, you're all pale right now.”

She patted me on the shoulder and pointed to a folding chair. I sat down. Asami bent down and took my hand.

“If you don't wanna tell anything, then you don't have to. And if you do wanna tell me something, Sayu-chaso, then I'll listen to ya... Okay?”

“...Okay!”

My face was burning and tears gathered in my eyes. Since moving to Tokyo, I sure have cried a lot.

Seeing me like this, Asami smiled in amazement and slapped me on the shoulder again.

“Calm down a little. I’ll check-in for ya. But only for today!”

“Yeah, thanks.”

“I’ll go and punch Yaguchi one more time, so don’t worry about it.”

She smiled, flashing her teeth, and left the room. When she left, the tears, which I somehow held back, flooded my eyes.

Why is Yaguchi-san here? The probability of him moving somewhere nearby and working at the same job is extremely low. Such a terrible reunion, like he was stalking me.

Moreover, Asami overheard our conversation. She is a kind and good girl, so she’s probably worried about me, but perhaps she understood more from the conversation than I thought. Her kindness always helped me out, but at the same time laid down a heavy burden.

After running away from home, I thought for the first time that I had found a friend with whom I could talk to on an equal footing, carefree, getting away from my problems. But now, Asami is worrying...

And even though after some time, the tears stopped, the pain didn’t go away.

I looked at the clock on the wall: ten minutes had passed since the start of my shift. Asami checked-in for me, but I felt guilty for slacking off.

What to do with Yaguchi-san? And what to do with Asami? But most importantly...

Yoshida-san's face suddenly came to mind.

Should I tell him?

There were a lot of thoughts in my head, but now I have to work. I took a deep breath and slapped my cheeks.

"Alright."

Slightly calmed down, I opened the door and went into the store.

*

"Thank you for your hard work! Be careful on the way back."

"Yes, you too. Good luck with another two hours, Asami!"

"Thank you. Bye!"

My shift ended, Asami smiled and waved at me. I waved back, and she headed back to the shelves. I walked into the office and sighed.

I don't know what Asami did, but Yaguchi-san didn't talk about my past anymore. And when I had difficulties, he would explain everything to me. Asami also worked and chatted as always, as if she had forgotten what happened. She didn't even try to bring it up.

Although seeing how upset I was, it was simply impossible to remain indifferent, so sometimes the atmosphere was a little awkward. Asami behaved too naturally, which even seemed abnormal.

Despite how the day began, the shift ended without any problems.

Yaguchi-san behaved well when he helped me with my work, so I thought he wouldn't talk about my past anymore. Also, it was

somehow strange seeing him working, since I only saw him at home before.

Perhaps, there was no reason to worry. At least that's what I thought.

After I changed, I went out through the back door of the store. And the moment I opened the door, I saw a man standing at the telephone pole.

"Good work today!"

"You too... Good work."

Yaguchi-san was doing something on his smartphone.

"You know, I was waiting for you."

"What do you want?"

Just a few moments ago, I was positive, but now everything changed.

Yaguchi-san's shift ended three hours ago and yet, he was standing here. I don't know whether he was waiting for me here all this time, or he just came back at the end of my shift. Either way, the situation was terrible.

Seeing my wariness, he smiled.

"Hey, don't be so scared. Weren't we close... physically close."

"Don't put it like that."

"...It's weird, Miyuki-chan. I don't recall you being defiant at all."

"..."

Hearing this, my chest started to hurt.

Yes. When I was at his house, I was already used to “that kind of thing,” so I didn’t resist. I even practiced showing my satisfaction.

Yaguchi-san didn’t look bad. Rather, I’d say he looked handsome and he had an excellent figure. So at that time, I remember thinking, “I’m glad that he isn’t one of those with who I feel completely uncomfortable.”

“I was surprised to meet you here.”

Yaguchi-san said, smiling.

“Are you staying with someone again?”

“...”

I remained silent. He smiled and nodded.

“I see. Still on the run. Pretty bold.”

“Yes... May I go now?”

“That was rude. We haven’t finished yet.”

“I have nothing to say to you.”

I replied and walked past Yaguchi-san. I wanted to run away from here... No, from him.

“W-Wait!”

Yaguchi-san grabbed my hand. Surprisingly, he was quite strong.

“W-what?”

“I wonder where you live.”

“What?!”

I repeated with irritation. Smiling softly, he continued.

“I just want to go to this place... The place where Miyuki-chan lives. Anyway, you live with a guy, so there’s probably no one in there right now.”

“What’s the point of going to my place?”

“I’ll just come in! Then we’ll talk. We haven’t seen each other for a long time.”

While saying this, Yaguchi-san smiled like a child and it was creepy. Bringing him home wasn’t a good idea.

“No! I won’t bring anyone over without permission from the owner.”

“Well, why don’t you get it then? I won’t do anything bad.”

Yaguchi-san’s answer startled me.

Is he really not going to do anything, simply a visit? If so, I didn’t understand his intentions. There was nothing between us which we could talk about.

I shook my head and spoke confidently.

“Still no. I’m going home... Sorry.”

I snatched my hand away and quickly started walking. Yaguchi-san with a smile on his face said something.

“If you allow me to go with you, I won’t tell anything about your past to Asami-chan and the manager, Miyuki-chan.”

My heart skipped a beat.

He threatened me. Classic... I understood that I shouldn’t be led by it, but his words were enough to make me feel pain in my heart.

“And what will you do, if I don’t agree?”

I asked. Yaguchi-san grinned at me.

“You probably already know that by yourself.”

I was speechless.

He’ll tell the manager about us. And ruin the peaceful life that I finally got. Perhaps Asami will begin to despise me if she finds out that I was giving my body to unknown men. And the manager, if he finds out who I am, can simply hand me over to the police. Then the police will be bothering Yoshida-san. I don’t want that. I don’t want to cause him even more trouble. He already did a lot... So much that I don’t think I would ever be able to repay him.

I clenched my fist and took a deep breath.

“...Are you really just going to visit?”

Yaguchi-san’s face lit up with joy and he nodded.

“Yes, that’s right! We’ll just chat!”

“Then, I’ll ask the owner.”

“Ok. By the way, I don’t want to bother him, so I’ll leave before he comes back.”

While saying this, Yaguchi-san looked at his phone screen., It looked like he was checking the time.

“Then not for long...”

“Really?! Hurrah!”

“But be sure to keep your promise.”

“Of course I will.”

Yaguchi-san smiled happily. Such an innocent smile might’ve seemed cute, but to me, this smile looked insane and not good at all.

I took out my phone, opened the messaging app. I started typing to Yoshida-san and then I was unsure.

What should I write to him so that he doesn’t worry?

The first thing that came to my mind was to tell him that I’ll bring Asami home, but it would be a lie. If I was going to lie, then why bother writing him anything at all.

Then it would be more correct to write “senior from work.”

Racking my brain, I typed the text and sent it:

『 I invited home a senior from work. But he’ll leave before your return. So don’t worry. 』

Yoshida-san might get worried about what I wrote to him, that’s why I added the last sentence.

Sighing, I put my phone back in my bag and turned to Yaguchi-san.

“I told him. Let’s go.”

“That was fast. By the way, I’m looking forward to it.”

He came up to me and asked.

“Shall we hold hands?”

“No.”

As we walked home, he was in high spirits, but I was full of unpleasant feelings.

VOLUME 2 – CHAPTER 13

Translator : chelly (Fully Booked TLS)

Editor / Proofreader : OD Dragon (Fully Booked TLS)

“Wow! Isn’t it nice here? It’s much more organized than my place.”

Yaguchi-san said in excitement as he entered.

“He must be a very diligent man.”

When Yaguchi-san said that, I replied indifferently.

“I do all the housework.”

“Housework? You’re the one doing it all, Miyuki-chan?”

“That’s right.”

Yaguchi-san looked puzzled. He blinked a few times and then suddenly shouted.

“He’s making a high school girl do all the housework! What a weird person!”

Yaguchi-san was giggling as he said that.

“...He’s not really weird.”

“No, he’s definitely weird. Why won’t he just do all the housework himself?”

Yaguchi-san then sat down on Yoshida-san’s bed without asking for permission.

Although he said those things, Yaguchi-san barely cares about his housework. While it seemed feasible to be able to do the housework even if you had to work, for some reason I felt annoyed.

“You do everything? Cooking, laundry, cleaning, all of that?”

“That’s right.”

“Haha, how interesting!”

Yaguchi-san shook his shoulders and laughed briefly, then patted the space beside him with his hand.

“Don’t just stand there, Miyuki-chan. Why don’t you sit down?”

I nodded and sat down on the floor in front of him, knowing that he wanted me to sit beside him. Yaguchi-san’s lips twitched in frustration, but he didn’t insist that she sat next to him.

“...So this is where Miyuki-chan lives now, huh?”

“ ... ”

Yaguchi-san looked around the room.

“Kind of cramped.”

“...That’s because it’s not meant for two people.”

“You knew that already, yet you’re still staying here. You have a lot of guts, Miyuki-chan.”

Yaguchi-san said that and then chuckled. I know he was being sarcastic.

“How long have you been here?”

“Roughly two months.”

“Two months?!”

Yaguchi-san shouted out. For the first time since I met him, I saw something other than a smile on his face.

“Huh? He’s been letting you stay here for two months?”

“That’s right...”

“So you’ve been doing the housework?”

“Yes, I do.”

“What else?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?!”

Yaguchi-san shouted out again.

He paused for a few seconds with his mouth open and then sighed. After scratching his head, he spoke as if he were talking to himself.

“That’s some kind of perversion...”

“Huh?”

“Ah, it’s nothing.”

Yaguchi-san smiled and bowed his head.

“I’m going to ask you straight out, have you ever had sex with this person?”

“...Ugh!”

The topic was so sudden that my breath was mixed with saliva. The saliva got into my trachea and I choked for a while.

“A-are you okay? Was it such a surprise?”

“That’s...”

I cleared my throat and raised my head. My eyes met Yaguchi-san’s, who had a really strange look on his face.

“He picked up a high school girl and has been living with her for two months now, right?”

“...Well.”

“Wouldn’t it be weird if you went that far and never had sex? After all, he’s a man. I’d understand if you were ugly as hell, but even without me saying as much, you’re a really pretty girl.”

I was dumbfounded by Yaguchi-san’s ability to talk about outrageous things without hesitation. However, I could not help but understand what he was saying. I had thought so at first, too.

“...Oh, I see.”

Yaguchi-san scratched his head again and then sighed. He looked into my eyes and then spoke clearly.

“So it’s been a while since we’ve seen each other.”

“Huh?”

“You haven’t been having any sex, right?”

“Huh? Um...”

“It’s the same for me. I broke up with all my girlfriends and came here.”

Yaguchi-san got up from the bed and sat down beside me as if it was something natural. I tried to move away from him as quickly as I could, but he immediately grabbed my shoulder.

“U-um... I thought we’re just going to talk.”

“Well, that was the plan, but being under the same roof with a pretty girl is hard to resist in many ways.”

“That’s... ugh.”

No matter how much strength I used to reject him, the force of Yaguchi-san’s grip on my shoulder was much stronger. I couldn’t move. I stared at Yaguchi-san in disgust, but his face was closer to mine than I expected, and I flinched. Yaguchi-san continued to speak with a gentle smile on his face.

“You don’t have to look so scared of me. We did it every day when you were at my place. Don’t you like it? Sex?”

“That’s the problem...”

Without listening to what I was saying, Yaguchi-san's face approached mine. As soon as I knew that he was going to try to kiss me, I got goosebumps all over my body.

"...Eek!"

Just before Yaguchi-san's lips were about to touch mine, I shook my head as hard as I could. With a loud thud, our foreheads hit each other.

"Ouch!"

Yaguchi-san's right hand weakened and I escaped from his restraints, backing away to the wall. He rubbed his head and looked at me with a surprised look on his face.

"How awful... So that's how much you don't want to do it with me?"

"Haa, haa..."

I tried to say something back, but my shoulders just went up and down with my uncontrolled breathing. I couldn't tell if it was anger or fear, but my lips were trembling and my chest boiling.

"I can understand if you viscerally hate it, but at least don't look at me like that. You did it with me before and it went without a hitch. But now, you hate it this much."

As he said that, I instinctively pushed my back against the wall and kicked the floor with my foot, even though I couldn't move back any further.

"That's fine. It's not like it's a big deal."

"No..."

“It won’t hurt at all. You’ll be fine.”

“...Get away from me!”

Without thinking, I shouted. My throat hurt and my body was hot. My skin felt strange. Even though I have slept with him before. My whole body was rejecting him.

Ah... why did I let this man into the house? Was it so I wouldn’t lose my relationship with Asami? Or was it to prevent the manager from finding out the truth?

As I thought about it, Yoshida-san’s face popped into my mind. That’s right. Yoshida-san. I didn’t want to cause any trouble for him, that’s why I brought Yaguchi-san here. The goosebumps I felt all over my body intensified.

If I accept this person now and get it over without making any fuss, things would work out without causing any trouble for Yoshida-san. If I reject him, he’ll get angry and I don’t know how things will turn out.

I pressed my body against the wall and curled up. As I slowly let my guard down, I looked at Yaguchi -san. My mouth was dry.

“...Okay.”

“Huh?”

There was no way that Yaguchi-san could hear my voice as I squeezed it out of my throat, so he tilted his head. Ignoring the pain in my stomach, I took a deep breath and spoke again.

“So... I’m saying it’s okay—“

A clattering sound from the front door interrupted what I was saying. Both Yaguchi-san and I naturally turned our gazes in the direction of the sound. The door opened violently, and *he* entered...

“Oh...”

A muffled breath, like a sob, escaped from the back of my throat.

“Sayu!”

Yoshida-san was standing in the doorway, breathing hard.

Chapter 14: Solace



VOLUME 2 – CHAPTER 14

Translator : **FireHawk** ([Fully Booked TLS](#))

Editor : **chelly** ([Fully Booked TLS](#))

Proofreader : **OD Dragon** ([Fully Booked TLS](#))

“Ah, finally done.”

“Yeah... Was really hard this time.”

When the sun started to set, I had already finished my work and now Hashimoto and I were just sitting, completely exhausted.

“Every meeting they tell us to do something that wasn’t in the initial contract.”

“They should increase our salary then... If they don’t do that, they certainly don’t value us at all.”

Usually, Hashimoto didn’t complain about his job, but this time he muttered with irritation.

“Well, at least we managed to complete it. Good work!”

“You too.”

We picked up the canned coffee I brought and opened them at the same time.

Today was the deadline. We were tense from the early morning, but now we were finally able to relax.

The phone in my pocket vibrated.

“Huh?”

Who could be messaging me at this hour? I took it out of my pocket and looked at the screen. It was a message from Sayu.

『 I invited home a senpai from work. But he'll leave before you return. So don't worry. 』

“A senpai from work...”

The message felt strange.

Is it Asami? I don't think so or else she would have just written “Asami.” If it isn't Asami, then her last sentence would definitely *worry* me.

I don't mind if she invites her friends home. Asami comes when she wants to, and in that case, Sayu usually doesn't message about it.

Thinking about it, I remembered a conversation with Asami that we had a couple of days ago.

There's this one nasty senpai.

How can I say this... In general, he's a manwhore.

I immediately got up from the table.

Hashimoto looked at me in surprise. Gotou-san, sitting in the distance, also shuddered and looked in my direction.

I sat down again immediately, but the unpleasant feelings continued to sting my chest.

“Yoshida, did something happen?”

Hashimoto asked worriedly. Thoughts were spinning in my head.

The order is completed. Testing and writing a report were the only things left. There was nothing they needed me for.

Thinking quickly, I put on the jacket hanging from the chair and spoke to Hashimoto.

“Sorry, I need to go. Can you handle the rest?”

“Why so suddenly?”

“I’ll explain everything later.”

“...Okay, got it. I can handle it.”

Hashimoto grinned and waved it off.

“I don’t know what happened, but it looks like you should hurry.”

“Sorry again and thanks!”

I put my laptop in the bag, checked my phone, took the wallet, and immediately ran out of the office.

Behind me, I heard Gotou-san say, “What happened with Yoshida-kun?!” and Hashimoto replied, “He said his stomach hurts like he’s giving birth!”

*

No matter how much I am in a hurry, the train didn't get faster. It quietly swayed, but I was really worried, so I sent Sayu a message.

『 Are you okay? 』

But there was no answer.

Anxiety intensified, I got off at my station and ran. But even though I ran as fast as I could, it seemed like I didn't get any closer.

When I got home, I turned the key and opened the door.

First of all, an unknown guy caught my eye. I looked at Sayu, who was pushed up against the wall.

"Sayu!"

I shouted breathing heavily, she opened her eyes wide in surprise and then sighed powerlessly.

Her hair was tousled, the clothes were also disheveled. And in front of her was this unknown guy. I felt my body temperature rise. It was anger.

However, there was a reason why I didn't immediately jump on him.

"Sayu..."

I looked into her scared eyes.

"Is he your boyfriend?"

The answer was obvious, but I had to ask anyway. Because it was my and Sayu's house, it'd be wrong to kick out the person she invited.

Even from a distance, I could tell that Sayu's eyes were wet. She didn't say it out loud, she just shook her head.

I nodded and asked something else.

"So, is it fine if I throw him out?"

The tears ran down the girl's face as she nodded.

"Alright then."

The moment she gave me an answer, my body moved like a spring.

"Hey, w-wait!"

"Move, asshole!"

"Hey, don't be so violent!"

"I said get out!"

I grabbed him by the collar and pushed him out. Fortunately, he was frail, so I could easily do this, even though I haven't trained for a while.

I closed the door, locked it, and stared at the guy.

"Who are you?"

I asked and released him. He smiled and told me his name.

"Yaguchi. Kyouya Yaguchi."

"You're Sayu's senpai from work?"

“Haha, so that’s how she introduced herself to you. But you know, when we first met, she told me her name was Miyuki.”

“Miyuki?”

“She stayed with me a few months ago. Unfortunately, only for a couple of days.”

After hearing those words, everything made sense to me.

He allowed Sayu to stay at his place... and used her body as payment. Now they met again. That’s why her message said, “Don’t worry.”

“So yeah, I’m that *senior* she mentioned. I asked to come over and she agreed.”

“I already knew that. She sent me a message.”

“Oh, that’s why you rushed back here. So you’re a worry-wart, huh?”

Yaguchi was clearly showing his hostility towards me. But that was to be expected since I also wasn’t really friendly.

“What were you doing?”

I asked directly. At first, he was surprised but then grinned and answered my question.

“Wasn’t that obvious? We were about to have sex.”

It was as if something exploded inside me, but I still tried to control myself.

“Quit joking around!”

“I’m not joking. I’m pretty serious right now. And what about you, you really haven’t laid a finger on her?”

“Of course I haven’t. She’s a high schooler!”

“Well, yeah, I know that...”

Yaguchi smiled and pointed his finger at me.

“You lived with a JK for two months and didn’t do anything to her, so of the two of us, you are the weird one. You risked bringing her home. And what did you get from it?”

“It’s not about what I got—”

“No, no, no!”

Yaguchi interrupted me.

“People always do something to get something in return. You may make beautiful speeches, hiding behind this facade, but don’t you dare blame me.”

“You better shut up! You’re an *adult*... And adults have no right to do this to a child!”

I was furious, but Yaguchi just looked at me and sighed.

“Well, it looks like it’s useless to talk with you.”

“What do you mean?”

“You know, you’re exactly the same.”

“Huh?! Same as who?”

“Same as me.”

After that, I just couldn't follow his words anymore. How am I the same as this guy? What is he talking about?

“When the high school girl asked for help, I helped her by taking her in, just like you. And although she didn't mind living with me, bringing her home without parental consent is a crime.”

“So what? Since you've already committed a crime, you can do whatever you want with her?”

“Hey, that's not the same as rape. Since the girl herself offered her body as payment, why not enjoy it?”

“You're crazy...”

“The crazy one's you.”

Yaguchi muttered.

“So you allowed her to live with you, at your place, in exchange for doing the housework. Decided to play as newlyweds, huh? I don't know why you decided to help, but it's not normal to let her in for free for two months, and even allowing her to earn extra money.”

“She didn't want to go back home, so I didn't force her.”

“Ahaha, you really don't get what I'm saying, do you?”

Yaguchi laughed again and stared at me coldly. The deceptive smile suddenly disappeared and it felt like he grabbed my heart with his bare hands.

“So are you going to take care of that girl for her *entire* life?”

The question made me choke.

“What about university? And what about work?”

I wanted to answer, but couldn’t find words.

“See? How irresponsible...”

Yaguchi said and chuckled.

“As I said, you’re the same. You’re not having sex with her, but you’re using her. It looks like you enjoy saving that girl, but as soon as she becomes inconvenient for you, you’ll just get rid of her. It doesn’t matter what you think now. After all...”

He suddenly slowed down.

“You’re *not* her parent.”

Yaguchi’s words caused my stomach to tighten.

I knew it all along. But even so... I just wanted to help her. Was there anything wrong with that desire?

“Even so...”

I clenched my fist.

“Even so!”

I looked at Yaguchi.

“I don’t ever want to become someone like you, an adult, who distorts and hammers messed up values into the head of a little girl.”

What Yaguchi said was right. I can't object. But I don't think that it justifies his actions.

These words came straight from the heart, and these were my real feelings.

Yaguchi stared at me, as if I were an alien, then looked away and scratched his head.

"...What a sad human being. I've had enough of you."

Looking annoyed, he turned around and walked down the corridor.

"Hey!"

I stopped him, and he reluctantly turned around.

"What?"

"Don't you dare mess with Sayu again."

I said, and he sighed with irritation.

"Just thinking about having to deal with you, an *idiot*, who has such an annoying sense of justice... It makes me want to throw up. I won't bother her anymore. I promise,"

He started walking again, but then he suddenly stopped and turned around,

"You know that it would really suck if you throw her out right away after these bold claims. Just so you know."

Yaguchi spoke with mockery.

"I didn't even think about throwing her out."

“That’s easy enough to say... But if Miyuki-chan quits her job, I’ll count it as your loss. Good luck!”

He walked down the corridor. I watched until he disappeared and then leaned against the wall. Yaguchi’s words were spinning in my head

It looks like you enjoy saving that girl.

What’s wrong with helping someone?

I don’t know whether I was angry or sad. The emotions were swirling inside.

What’s wrong with helping a helpless child?

“Fuck...”

All of you are only talking about benefits and problems.

Adults must protect children.

Nobody.

“Fuck!”

Nobody helped her. Why did nobody lend her a hand? And why can’t I do this?

“Not a single one of you helped her...”

You all just inflicted more irreparable wounds on an already hurt child. And after that, without taking any responsibility, simply threw her away.

“Even if you tell me not to help her, it would have been better if any of you did!”

Feelings inside me that were about to explode, burst out from my mouth.

I was breathing hard. Everything started to distort before my eyes. It took me a few seconds to realize that I was crying. I was sitting in the corridor, trying to catch my breath when suddenly the next door opened.

There lived a seemingly kind woman.

“Did... Did you scream just now? Are you alright?”

I haven’t spoken to her before. She looked at me with a confused expression and I was embarrassed.

“Sorry... for the noise. I’ll go home now.”

“No... There’s no need for an apology... Rather I’m glad that everything is alright.”

“Yeah...”

After this strange conversation, she closed the door.

I sighed trying to calm down a little. When I came to my senses, I remembered that Sayu was at home. Indeed, currently, she is much more important than my anger.

I pulled the handle, there was a click, but the door didn’t open. I forgot that I locked it with a key. Putting it in and turning it, I opened the door.

“Sayu...”

I entered the living room and she was still sitting on the floor. Her shoulders were still quivering.

She was crying.

“Sayu, I drove him off.”

“...Yoshida-san.”

Sayu raised her head and looked at me. The tears were flowing from her eyes.

“What... What have I done...”

I came closer and sat down. Then I took her fragile hand.

“I used to... Used to do *it* with him.”

My chest hurt. I imagined it for a moment before the image disappeared.

“There was nothing wrong with that. It felt normal.”

“Sayu.”

“We’ve done *it* so many times.”

“Sayu, enough.”

“Done *it*...”

Sayu’s voice trembled. She squeezed my hand.

“I thought about doing *it* again... But I suddenly got scared.”

She hung her head.

“Yoshida-san... What’s wrong with me?”

These words caught my breath.

“I can’t do the things I could do before. I don’t understand what’s going on with me...”

“Sayu...”

When I noticed, I was hugging Sayu.

“It’s okay! That’s completely normal!”

“But before getting here, I always did *it*, so why did I suddenly...”

“It’s okay. If it’s scary, be scared. It’s alright.”

“Uuu...”

I held Sayu tightly and heard her voice, she was crying on my chest.

Why? Why did things turn out like this?

Holding Sayu, I felt helpless.

This happened at the time when I thought that Sayu stopped with her self-sacrificing behavior.

Looks like I was wrong.

Not entirely wrong. Nevertheless, she has changed a little.

She was able to refuse a man she wasn’t attracted to. And she didn’t think that it was a wrong choice.

Although I can’t confirm it.

Everything wasn't that bad after all.

I bit my lip and felt a faint taste of iron.

"Everything's alright now, Sayu. You rejected him. Well done."

I said and stroked her back. Trembling, she spoke to me.

"But because I refused... He can tell everyone about my past... And if the manager finds out, he'll call the police, and it'll cause problems for you, Yoshida-san."

"Don't worry, it's me who allowed you to stay here, so that's my responsibility."

"But that's—!"

She raised her head and looked at me. I don't know what she wanted to say, I really wanted to hear it, and yet...

"Please!"

I interrupted her and almost screamed.

"You should think more about yourself!"

Sniffling, Sayu looked at me with confusion.

"Why... Why are you neglecting yourself... Why do you constantly sacrifice yourself? If you don't value yourself... No one will be able to protect you!"

I tried not to cry.

I felt the room vibrate with my voice. It seemed that the silence that followed felt strangely prolonged. The only sounds were the sound of Sayu sniffing and the noise of a fan.

The girl looked at me, tears flowed down her face when she said.

“Why, Yoshida-san... Why would you go so far to protect me?”

The question startled me.

If you're too nice, you won't be able to get what you really want.

Mishima's words.

But as soon as she becomes inconvenient for you, you'll just get rid of her.

Yaguchi's words.

They were spinning in my head.

“I don't know...”

I didn't notice that I said it out loud.

“I don't know it myself...”

I let Sayu live here. I compromised our cohabitation by filling in my loneliness and giving her an escape route.

But I hated seeing Sayu suffer.

I don't know the reason. I don't know who benefits from this cohabitation the most: me or Sayu.

The confusing “reality” squeezed my neck.

Hanging my head, I suddenly felt warmth enveloping me. It was Sayu. She hugged me.

“Yoshida-san...”

She said with a stuffy nose.

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologize.”

“...Thank you.”

“You sure have changed after all.”

Not wanting her to see how I was holding back tears, I lowered my head even more. Sayu’s chest was pressed against my face. I immediately thought how *soft* she was.

“Yoshida-san... It was you who changed me.”

Without choosing too many words, I simply replied.

“I want you to become a normal high school girl.”

“Mm.”

“I want you to be able to go to school, make friends, study, and grow up.”

“...Mm.”

“Seeing that you are unable to do that... This painful feeling... I know it’s selfish.”

“...Mm.”

I squeezed Sayu's shoulders, her arms weakened and she let go of me.

"I don't even know if it's for your sake or mine..."

I then looked into her eyes.

"But I want you to value yourself more... That's what I know for sure."

She listened to me, and her eyes became wet. She nodded endlessly.

"Sure, got it!"

An unexpected soft smile appeared on her tear-stained face.

"I'll do my best."

I thought I knew which path she chose, but it appears that I didn't even have the slightest clue.

Still...

Her gentle smile... It was beautiful.

Sayu sniffed loudly, wiped her tears with her sleeve, and took a deep breath.

"I'll go make miso soup!"

"Huh?"

"I cried a lot, so I need something salty!"

"O-Okay..."

Saying this, Sayu stood up and headed to the kitchen.

Looks like her nose was still stuffed up, so she was sniffing while pouring water into the pan. Seeing her like that, I was relieved.

If I were a little late, she might already be on the verge of despair. And I would have nothing to help her. At least, I managed to save her this time.

However.

I remembered the “reality.”

I’m not Sayu’s parent. I will have to return her someday.

I already felt this vague reality creeping into the back of my mind.

Nothing has been resolved.

I should not forget that.

VOLUME 2 – CHAPTER 15

Translator : **FireHawk** ([Fully Booked TLS](#))

Editor : **chelly** ([Fully Booked TLS](#))

Proofreader : **OD Dragon** ([Fully Booked TLS](#))

“Did... *somethin'* happen yesterday?”

“Huh?”

Asami suddenly asked me. I was busy putting products on the shelves, so I answered vaguely. My vague answer sure did irritate her, so she asked again, but this time more aggressively.

“Don’t ‘Huh?’ me. Did *somethin'* happen between you and Yaguchi yesterday?”

“Yaguchi-san? Why?”

I was startled when I heard Yaguchi-san’s name but tried not to show it.

Today we worked the same shift again, but he didn’t speak to me. The awkward situation played into my hands, but it seems that Asami didn’t like it.

If I told her about yesterday, it won't do any good for me nor Yaguchi-san. Although I felt guilty towards Asami, if Yaguchi-san decided not to say anything, then I won't tell anything either.

"I hate this *side* of you, Sayu-chaso."

"Huh..."

Asami turned around and headed to the office, where Yaguchi-san was taking a break.

"W-What?"

I immediately followed her, and she, not paying attention to me, rushed inside.

"Huh? What happened?"

This was Yaguchi-san's voice.

I too hurriedly went inside. Yaguchi-san was sitting on a chair eating a bento, and Asami was standing in front of him with her hands on her hips.

"What did you do with Sayu-chaso yesterday?"

Asami asked directly.

Yaguchi-san looked at her casually, then turned his gaze to me. His look was literally saying, "Did you tell her?" so I just shook my head.

He chuckled then responded to Asami's question.

"Um... I went to her place, then asked her if she wanted to have sex."

"Huh?!"

“But... she refused.”

“Well obviously! Are you a damn idiot?!”

Asami screamed while Yaguchi-san frowned and shook his head.

“I won’t know if I didn’t ask.”

“You should’ve known that even without askin’! Oh, and I hope you didn’t assault her, did ya?!”

Yaguchi-san scratched his nose with his left hand, smiled, and said:

“W-Well... Just a bit.”

“Huh?! ”

Hearing his words, Asami aimed a blow with her right hand and slapped him. The slap echoed through the office as Yaguchi-san’s chopsticks fell on the floor.

I was surprised that he told her everything and I didn’t expect this sudden slap...

“Ugh... It hurts, I even dropped my chopsticks.”

“Yeah, but it’ll only hurt just this once.”

Asami said coldly to Yaguchi-san, who was rubbing his cheek.

Yaguchi-san looked up at Asami and suddenly changed his expression. I couldn’t see her face.

“Looks like you’re used to it, and you might treat it as a part of your daily routine.”

Asami continued with her voice trembling in anger.

“But for people who have already been hurt... whenever something bad happens, they don’t just get new wounds, but the old ones reopen too.”

Asami clenched her fist.

“And here you are, just like that, again and again, and again, and again... You’re constantly hurting them through those invisible wounds.”

There was so much anger in her voice. I’ve never seen her like that before, and I’m sure Yaguchi-san hadn’t either. We remained silent and waited for her to say something.

Her shoulders were trembling and yet, she continued quietly.

“So pathetic. Hurting someone who’s already been hurting a lot. You’re the worst!”

Her voice grew louder as she spoke and by the end, she was screaming as if emotions were bursting out of her. Motionless... Yaguchi-san was just staring at Asami in shock.

“Apologize to Sayu-chan.”

“Huh?”

“I said apologize!!”

“Okay, Okay... I got it. I will.”

Yaguchi-san nodded under the pressure of Asami.

He turned his gaze towards me and said, “I’m sorry!”

Now that all three workers were in the office, there was no one in the store.

Composing herself, Asami opened her mouth, frowned, and turned towards Yaguchi-san.

“Apologize. Be sure to apologize!”

“I know, I know.”

I don’t know if Asami heard his answer, but she just walked past me and went into the store.

“Sorry for the wait!”

I heard a louder than usual voice from the cash register.

She left and we were alone. Relieving the tension, Yaguchi-san sighed.

“Sheesh... What a bunch of do-gooders in here...”

“...”

Muttering, he looked at me. Then he guiltily bit his lower lip and slightly bowed.

“Sorry about yesterday.”

“Oh?”

“I don’t think the offer was a bad thing... But I went a little too far... Kinda lost my head.”

He said quietly while looking at the floor. He then lifted his head and looked at me again.

“I’ve only ever had sex consensually. It would be bad if I ruin my *record*...”

“What are you...?”

I didn’t expect that. I always thought that he was a terrible person.

However... looking at his current expression, it looks like he isn’t that bad. It’s just as if something has changed us, and we’ve become different.

“Um...”

“Yeah?”

I decided to ask.

“Why did you tell Asami about everything but my past? I wouldn’t have any excuse.”

What he said yesterday, “We did *it* every day when you were at my place...” Of course, there was no excuse for his actions, but I can understand his way of thinking, “If we’ve done *this* before, why can’t we do *this* now?”

However, he didn’t.

Yaguchi-san looked at me in confusion and then tilted his head in surprise.

“I promised not to talk about your past if you brought me to your place.”

That answer surprised me.

He said that he just wanted to talk, but tried to rape me. And yet, he was going to keep the promise.

His strange behavior made me laugh.

“Pfft...”

“Why are you laughing?”

“You’re really weird, you know?”

“Huh?”

As soon as he said that, he raised his eyebrows.

“I don’t think that I’ll be able to forgive you... for yesterday...”

Yaguchi-san slightly tilted his head and I continued.

“But I’m not angry anymore. It’s just that... Yesterday, I was really scared. But if you pull off something like that again, I’ll...”

My eyes were full of determination. Looking at me, he opened his mouth in surprise.

“I’ll get really angry.”

I said while he stood with his mouth open for a few seconds and then took a deep breath.

“How scary... Fine, I promise. I won’t do that anymore... I already know that you have a terrifying watchdog.”

Yaguchi-san said with irritation and picked up the chopsticks from the floor.

“Although that ‘guy’ who lives with you... he’s strange, isn’t he?”

“Huh?”

He threw the chopsticks into the trash can and shrugged.

“He has this young girl next to him who’s so attractive, but he’s not even trying to get laid with her. He’s really missing out.”

“A-attractive...?”

“Yeah. Haven’t you noticed it yourself?”

Yaguchi-san smiled like he did yesterday.

“My cheek really hurts, I need to cool it down. I’ll go buy a drink.”

He got up from his chair and headed for the door. On the way, he turned around and pointed his finger at me.

“I apologized. So make sure to tell Asami-chan.”

“Oh, yeah...”

“And also...”

He scratched his head and raised his eyebrow.

“Tell her that she’d be a lot less scary if she kept talking like a gal when she’s angry.”

“How about you tell her that yourself?”

In response, he just smiled at me and left the office.

I was there alone.

Even though I found Yaguchi-san terrifying yesterday, I'm surprised that I don't have that feeling anymore.

Although the reason was obvious...

Yesterday, I was saved by Yoshida-san.

And today, Asami helped me.

It's just that people are protecting me.

And I've never felt so encouraged to keep moving on.

*

"Huh? Yoshida-cchi won't come home today?"

"Yeah... Looks like it."

After work, Asami came over as a matter of course. I was cooking dinner in the kitchen when I got the message from Yoshida-san.

『 Sorry. There are problems at work and I have to deal with them. So I'm going to stay at the office for the night. I wish I could go home, especially after what happened yesterday... I'm really sorry. Cook only for yourself. Leave the house only if necessary. If something happens, message me right away. 』

Yoshida-san would usually send short messages. But this time, he sent a really long one.

Asami looked at the screen and we read through the text together.

"Whoa, he's too worried. Is he your daddy or what?"

"Well... It's my fault though... I gave him a reason to worry."

I said as Asami glanced at me and poked me in the side.

“It’s not your fault, Sayu-chaso.”

“...”

I didn’t know what to answer, so Asami took my phone and started typing a message.

“What?”

“Wait a bit...”

She said cheerfully while typing quickly.

『 Yo, Yoshida-cchi, Asami here! ☆ I’m at your house rn. Since you’re gone, I’ll look after Sayu-chaso tonight. Great idea, don’t ya think? Hurry up and respond! 』

The content surprised me.

“Is it really okay for you to stay the night with me?”

“It’s fine. It’s fine.”

“Won’t your parents be worried?”

I asked, and her eyes moved for a moment. I was surprised, but Asami smiled and shook her head.

“Everything’s alright, really. They won’t be home *again* tonight anyways.”

“I see...”

I regretted asking that question.

The phone vibrated and a message came from Yoshida-san.

『 Sorry. If you don't mind, please do. I'm relying on you. Thanks. 』

Seeing this, Asami smiled.

“Yay, Sayu-chaso! We'll be together all night! That's a blast!”

“Yeah... Blast!”

Asami's smile was so soft and contagious, so I smiled too.

“Then shall we have dinner? I'm hungry.”

Asami asked, but she suddenly shook her head.

“You know what? We should be fine without dinner for now.”

“Huh?”

“I want to go somewhere. Let's go together.”

She pointed out the window.

It was past 8 pm already and dark outside.

“At a time like this...?”

“Yup, exactly at this time.”

“Well, if we go together, everything will be alright. Let's go!”

“You sure understand everything, Sayu-chaso.”

Asami clapped her hands.

“Well, it's decided then. Let's go.”

“W-Wait, where to?”

“You’ll like it. Oh, but before, I need to drop by home.”

“Okay, sure.”

Asami ran to the front door, while I was turning off the stove and light. I put the phone in my pocket and we left the house.

“There are only a few street lights. It’s scary to walk alone at night.”

“Huh? Isn’t that fine?”

“There are a lot of street lights near my house and they are so bright that it’s annoying.”

“I see.”

We chatted and walked along an unknown road. It was a 10-minute walk from Yoshida-san’s house, but the buildings were completely unfamiliar to me.

As Asami said, there were many bright street lights. Houses around looked good.

“Can you wait here for a sec?”

Asami said suddenly, smiling at me.

“Y-Yeah.”

I nodded. She took out her wallet and pulled out a thin card. Then she inserted it into the device next to the large gate. Something beeped loudly and the gate started opening slowly.

“Huh?!”

I saw a huge house behind the large gate. It looked more like a “building” rather than someone’s “house.”

“I-Is this your house?”

I asked.

Asami looked at me and nodded. The smile on her face was somewhat lonely.

She quickly went inside. Something rang and Asami came out with a bike.

“I’m back!”

“A bike?”

“Yup, the place is a bit far for walkin’, so let’s ride this.”

“Um... Me too?”

“Uh-huh, you’ll sit on the back.”

“Together? Will everything be alright?”

If the police catch us, we will be interrogated.

“Then you can go on your own two feet.”

“You’re so mean!”

“Don’t worry, that place’s almost rural, so there are no popo there.”

“Popo...”

Asami closed the gate while talking, got on her bike, and patted the pillion.

“C’mon, hop on.”

“Okay...”

I sat on hesitantly. Asami waited for me then started pedaling.

The bike swayed, and I lost my balance.

“Whoa...”

“Grab onto me. Hold on tight.”

“O-Okay...”

I grabbed Asami’s waist and regained my balance.

We were riding, and the wind blew over me. My legs were cold, but the upper part was warm... It was Asami’s warmth.

We’ve only met recently, so why do I feel so calm?

I was lost in my thoughts.

“Hey, Asami.”

“Huh?”

I didn’t notice how I began to speak.

“You know...”

“What?”

“I came here from Hokkaido.”

“Whoa, that’s crazy far. What for?”

Will I be able to say the truth? Will I be able to do this now?

I didn’t think about it, and I just started telling her where I am from and who I am.

Asami continued to pedal slowly, while rhythmically nodding to me.

I felt like something big, black and heavy, something I was holding in myself, started to gradually melt and disappear in the darkness of the night.

I told her the story of how I lived before I arrived here, how I met Yoshida-san, Yuzuha-san, Asami and how I got to know Gotou-san.

When I finished, Asami had already stopped pedaling.

“Here we are.”

Asami said as she stopped the bike. I finally noticed that the scenery around me had changed.

“Whoa...”

We were atop a small hill. It was a park with a small bench and a lawn. There was so much vegetation that I was surprised that there was a place like this in the city.

And above there was a dazzling starry sky.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?”

“Yeah...”

“I like this place.”

Saying this, Asami left her bike at the edge of the park and headed to the center of the lawn.

And there she laid down, I did the same thing. My gaze was directed to the sky.

“It really is beautiful, you can see the stars even though we’re in the city.”

“When I saw it for the first time, I was amazed too.”

Asami smiled and sighed.

“Father’s a politician.”

“Huh?”

“And mother’s a lawyer. Cool, right?”

“Are you talking about yourself?”

“Yup.”

Breathing out through her nose, she continued.

“They were always busy with work since I was a little kid so I was always left to myself. It’s not that I was unhappy, but it was lonely. I started to hate that huge house.”

“I see...”

“To annoy my parents, I started this ‘gal’ thing. Mom fainted and dad was enraged. They didn’t even think why I did this.”

“That’s how...”

“My mother always warned me what would happen if I didn’t take my studies seriously. So I worked hard...”

Asami is really smart. From what I heard, she has amazing grades. I was a little jealous about it.

“Mom wanted me to become a lawyer. I already figured it out when I started high school. But I’m not interested in it.”

“Yeah, I don’t think it suits you.”

“Haha, that hurts, y’know?”

Asami fell silent. I was waiting for the continuation, but Asami remained quiet. Surprised, I looked at her. For some reason, she was blushing.

“Huh?! What happened?”

“Um... Well... Promise me you won’t laugh...”

“Huh?”

“Promise me that you won’t laugh, okay?!”

“I-I won’t!”

I was confused, but Asami was dead serious.

Hearing my answer, Asami quietly said.

“I want to become a writer.”

“Wow! You’ll definitely become one!”

“W-Well, it would be nice if I will...”

“Don’t worry, you definitely will.”

I saw Asami’s school essays, and I always admired how good they were.

“Okay, okay... Enough.”

Even in the dark, it was clear that she blushed. Asami continued to speak, just to hide it.

“That’s why I want to study literature instead of law.”

“I see...”

“My mother immediately opposed it.”

“As expected...”

Asami sighed and pointed to the stars.

“That was our first serious fight. And for some reason, dad took my side.”

Asami narrowed her eyes slightly, looking at the sky. I looked at her face, she seemed a little more mature.

“We then, as now, laid and looked at the stars. I was so stunned by this beauty, and dad said, ‘Your problems are nothing compared to the universe.’”

Asami chuckled and closed her eyes again.

“I thought to myself, ‘Suddenly start speakin’ on such a grand scale, what the hell’s this baldie talkin’ about?’”

“Savage.”

“Just how can I, an ordinary person, compete with the universe?”

Asami said. She smiled, but then became serious.

“It’s just that... I couldn’t agree with his words, but looking at the starry sky, I started to think.”

“About what?”

After a short pause, Asami quietly, but clearly said.

“What’s my life among these huge stars?”

Asami spoke, looking at the starry sky. She looked really beautiful.

“From the stars’ point of view, we sure are insignificant and small. But each of us still has our own story, own future and each of us lives in our own little world.”

“...”

I looked at the stars, and Asami’s words penetrated my soul.

“I know I’m rambling.”

Asami took my hand.

“You also have your own story, Sayu-chaso, your own future. They are only yours, no matter what... I understand, that this story isn’t the most pleasant, and yet...”

Squeezing my hand tightly, she looked at me. Our gazes met.

“Everything has a meaning and a purpose. Everything will be fine.”

“...”

My eyes started to well up.

Asami continued to speak while still looking at me.

“Your path was very painful. It’s unbelievable how hard it was. I understand how diligent you are, I know how you told yourself, ‘I must move on... I gotta keep walking...’ But you know what? Why not use a bike from time to time?”

“Yeah... Yeah...”

“You managed to walk here, so I’m sure you can make your way back.”

“Right!”

I hugged Asami.

My eyes were burning. Since I came here, I cry all the time.

“Hey, don’t cry, don’t cry... Don’t...”

I pressed my head to Asami and didn’t see where she was looking, but I heard her sniffing.

On a small hill under the stars.

Asami and I cried for a few minutes.

VOLUME 2 – CHAPTER 12

Translator : chelly (Fully Booked TLS)

Editor / Proofreader : OD Dragon (Fully Booked TLS)

“I’m really sorry about yesterday...!”

After working overtime, I went home immediately and apologized to Sayu. She confusedly waved her hand in the air.

“No, no, it’s not your fault, Yoshida-san.”

“Even so...”

“Fine, fine. Anyway, why don’t you get changed? Dinner’s ready.”

Sayu pushed me from behind and forced me into the room.

I had many more things to apologize for, but I knew that resisting now would not get me anywhere, so I obediently followed.

While I was changing out of my suit and into my sleepwear, Sayu was quickly preparing the dinner table. By the time I finished changing, all the dishes were on the table.

“Thanks.”

“It’s nothing. Let’s eat!”

“Bon appétit!”

Sayu said with her hands clasped together and picked up her chopsticks before I did. It was clear that she was looking out for me.

I also said “Bon appétit” and took a sip of the miso soup. I could feel my whole body relax. When I sipped Sayu’s miso soup, it really made me feel like I’m back home.

“Sayu.”

I was thinking about it the whole time, even while I was at work.

“Yes?”

Without waiting for Sayu to tilt her head, I bowed my head deeply.

“I’m sorry you had to go through something scary.”

“Huh? That’s not true.”

“I’m sorry I couldn’t protect you.”

“But you protected me!!”

Sayu shouted, and surprised, my body began to tremble. Then I suddenly shook my head several times.

Sayu shouted, and then her body shook as if she had been struck by her own loud voice. Then she quickly shook her head.

“You protected me...”

“But still, you must’ve felt hurt.”

“I got what I deserved. It reminded me of the path I’ve taken just to get here.”

“But...”

“Yoshida-san.”

I was interrupted by Sayu.

She put her chopsticks down on the table and stared into my eyes.

“Before I came here...”

With a serious look in her eyes, Sayu continued to speak.

“I thought that no one would ever really help me. So if I let myself be used, I could do the same to them. That’s how cynical I was.”

Be used.

It’s about allowing the other person to do what they want. And being used means, in her case, getting a safe place to stay. If that’s what she meant, then that’s certainly what she was doing.

“But...”

Sayu paused and then closed her eyes. Then she inhaled and exhaled slowly. When she opened her eyes, she had a very soft and natural smile on her face.

“Then I met you, Yoshida-san. You were the first person who protected me. I also met Asami, and she accepted me for who I was.”

Sayu’s eyes watered slightly as she said this.

I couldn’t take my eyes off the smile she had on her face. I’ve never seen her smile like that before.

“I wanted to run away from it all, but it was so hard to go anywhere. I thought that no matter where I went, it would be hopeless. But I couldn’t stop running, and so I suffered for a long, long time.”

Sayu suddenly stood up and walked over to me. She then sat down next to me and gently pinched my shirt.

“But after living with you, Yoshida-san, finally... I finally—”

Sayu looked into my eyes and then pulled my shirt tightly.

“It’s like... I’m finally able to think about the future.”

When I heard those words, I felt goosebumps all over my body.

“The future...”

The next thing I knew, I was saying those words to myself.

“Yeah, the future.”

Sayu nodded, tears welling up in her eyes. She continued to speak.

“It’s not about how far I’m going to run anymore, it’s about where I’m going to go.”

“Sayu...”

“What I should do, what I want to do... I’ll give it serious thought.”

After saying that, Sayu placed her hand that she used to pull my shirt on top of my hand.

“I’ll summon up my courage, so...”

After she said that, a single tear flowed down her cheek.

“Just a little longer...Will you stay by my side?”

Just a little longer.

I trembled at those words.

Suddenly, I was speechless. Sayu winced as she tried to hold back her tears.

“No good...?”

“No, it’s just that...”

Sayu had said, “Just a little longer.”

It was something we had both been keeping vague and just now, she put it into words herself.

“You’re really...”

Finally, she set a “deadline” for herself.

And she brought it up on her own. It was a huge milestone for our relationship.

“Really... great.”

I said with a sigh.

“Huh?”

As Sayu tilted her head in confusion, I placed my hand on her head and stroked her hair roughly, not caring that it made her hair messy.

“H-hey, Yoshida-san.”

If Sayu had made up her mind, there was no way I could not make up mine.

Deep down, I didn't think it was wrong for her to keep postponing the "deadline" and stay here forever.

Just as Yaguchi had said, I enjoyed living together with this girl. I felt like I was saving her, and yet I was also being saved.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I knew this. But I hadn't been able to articulate it clearly until now, and I was tormented by the contradiction.

As her guardian, I can't just sit around and do nothing.

"Me too."

When I said that, Sayu looked me in the eye with her messy hair.

"I'm going to help you get back on track so you can get back to living a normal life."

At my words, Sayu's eyes widened greatly.

"So..."

I decided to say something to her that I had never said before.

"Hang in there."

Sayu's eyes instantly welled up and she roughly wiped them with the sleeves of her sweater. She sniffed her stuffy nose and shook her head vigorously.

"Yeah!"

And then, with a smirk and a toothy grin, Sayu smiled.

It was a childlike smile that I had never seen before. I couldn't help but admire it for a moment.

"Oh, crap."

"Hmm?"

Hiding my embarrassment, I pointed to the miso soup.

"It's getting cold."

"Ah, that's right. Let's eat right away."

Sayu wiped her eyes once more with the sleeve of her sweaters and quickly went back to her side of the table where her dinner was placed.

This is good.

Little by little, Sayu is starting to look forward to her future. Eventually, she's going to return to a normal life.

That's what I thought, but I realized something.

I took a sip of the miso soup and let the saltiness of it sink into the back of my tongue.

What happened between me and Sayu today was a promise of goodbye.

Sayu is aware of it too.

But even so, I think we were both convinced that it was the right thing to do.

EPILOGUE

Translator : chelly (Fully Booked TLS)

Editor / Proofreader : OD Dragon (Fully Booked TLS)

Unusually, I had to work overtime.

The convenience store doesn't get very crowded, so I never had to work overtime before. But today, as I'm nearing the end of my shift, some people from a high school athletic club came into the store. Both Yaguchi-san and I had to stay at the cash register, so we were not able to make any progress in restocking the merchandise. We had to work overtime for an hour to finish it because if we didn't, the people on the next shift would be in trouble.

"Thank you for your hard work!"

When I left the store and checked on my smartphone, it was already 7:00 pm.

Today is Saturday. Yoshida-san is at home, and I'm sure he's hungry.

I had to hurry home and prepare dinner, so I ran.

It took me less than five minutes to get back home. I took the duplicate key out of my bag and opened the door.

"Sorry I'm late, Yoshida-san..."

As soon as I opened the door, I saw Yoshida-san standing in front of the kitchen, which was integrated into the hallway.

“Oh, welcome home.”

“I’m home... Huh? What are you doing?”

When I asked Yoshida-san, who was standing in front of the pot with a sullen look on his face, he answered bluntly with an even more sullen look on his face.

“I’m making miso soup. What does it look like?”

“Um, you are?”

I hurriedly took my shoes off and walked over to Yoshida-san’s side. I saw the brown soup simmering in the pot.

“Why?”

“You’re asking me why...?”

Yoshida-san paused as if he’s troubled and scratched his chin. Since his beard had grown a little longer, I could hear the sound as he did it.

“You’ve been cooking for me for a while now, so I thought I’d give you a break this time...”

When Yoshida-san said that, I felt warm inside.

How could something like this make me so happy?

Thinking about this, I found myself hugging him as if I were tackling him.

“Whoa, be careful!”

“Thanks, Yoshida-san!”

“Ah, yes... Dinner’s almost ready, so hurry up and go change. I can handle the preparation myself since I only made miso soup.”

“Okay!”

Skipping to the living room, I quickly changed out of my street clothes and into my loungewear.

After I slipped off my top and got into my underwear, I looked sideways at Yoshida-san. But he wasn’t looking at me, as he should have been. For some reason, I was a little unhappy to see him stirring the pot in a dazed state.

“Yoshida-san.”

“What is it...?”

When I called out to him, Yoshida-san naturally looked in my direction, but then quickly averted his gaze.

“Hey, idiot! Get dressed first before you call out to me!”

“Perv.”

“You’re the one who called me, you idiot!”

Yoshida-san blushed a little and looked down at the pot again.

I chuckled and slipped my loungewear back on over my head.

I felt that I had become completely at home in this house.

I no longer ask myself the question, “Is it okay for me to be here?”

I took off my jeans and put on comfortable underwear. I stole a few glances at Yoshida-san, who’s mindlessly stirring a pot of miso soup.

I no longer wonder if it's okay to be here anymore.

However.

"Yoshida-san!"

"Are you dressed?"

"I am!"

"What is it?"

When I called out to him, Yoshida-san looked at me sideways.

I smiled and said *it* again.

"I'm home!"

Yoshida-san looked confused and scratched his chin out of habit. Once again, I heard the scratching sound.

"You said that before."

"Can you say, 'Welcome home'?"

"Huh? Welcome home..."

"Haha."

When I nodded my head in satisfaction, Yoshida-san tilted his head slightly and sighed.

"I'm home" and "Welcome home."

I wondered how many more times I would be able to exchange these words with him.

When I thought about it, I felt a little pain in my heart.

But I had already made a promise to him.

As I realize that our days together are coming to an end, with him by my side, I will get through today.

The strange, communal life of a high school girl and a grown man will continue, at least for a little while longer.



SHORT STORY: LAUNDRY

Translator : chelly (Fully Booked TLS)

Editor / Proofreader : OD Dragon (Fully Booked TLS)

“Wow, you’re really handy, ain’t ya?”

Asami said, standing next to me with her textbook open while I was folding the clothes I had washed.

“Huh?”

“The way you fold clothes – it’s so quick and nimble. Don’t ya think it’s amazin’?”

“Oh, really? I think it’s normal.”

When I tilted my head, Asami tilted her head too while scratching it.

“I’ve also been watchin’ ya cook for a while now, and I noticed that the speed at which you do household chores ain’t normal for a JK.”

When Asami said that, I couldn’t help but look down at the laundry at hand.

“Well, even when I was at home, I did a lot of household chores. So I guess that’s why.”

“Wow, you’re pretty serious ’bout it, huh?”

Asami's concentration was ruined by our conversation, so she put a sticky note on the page of the textbook and closed it.

"I've never done laundry in my life."

"Huh? Never?"

"Yup, never."

Asami nodded casually and pointed to the laundry next to me, all folded and stacked.

"The housekeeper does all that for me."

"Oh... a housekeeper."

"Yeah, a housekeeper. She comes to my house every two days. She cleans the house, does the laundry, and then leaves."

"I knew there was such a job, but I never thought I'd hear about it from a friend."

When I expressed my honest opinion, Asami giggled with amusement.

"The school I go to has many rich families, but I've hardly ever heard of one hiring a housekeeper. Well, it's not a big deal."

Asami let out a bitter smile and pointed to Yoshida-san's T-shirt, which I had subconsciously pulled into my hand while listening to her story.

"Lemme try."

"Huh? What?"

When I asked, Asami frowned deliberately and pointed to Yoshida-san's T-shirt again.

"As I've said, I wanna try foldin' it."

"Oh, you want to?"

"Yup."

As she said this, Asami took Yoshida-san's T-shirt from me and placed it on her lap. Then she smiled at me.

"You said that you've never done it before, so I wonder if it's something you'd want to bother with."

"I said I wanna do it, so why don't ya let me? Here, what do ya want me to do?"

Despite my puzzled look, Asami showed great enthusiasm.

But she really didn't seem to know what to do and was looking at me while pinching the hem of her shorts. I couldn't help but feel weak and burst out laughing at the same time at the sight of her glittery eyes.

"Wait, what are ya laughin' at?"

"Nothing... Well, first of all, you're facing the wrong way. Turn the collar side towards the floor and spread it out."

"Aight."

"Then, fold both sleeves toward the body."

"What's the 'body?'"

I took my time to teach Asami, who had no skill in her hands due to lack of experience.

Every time she finished a step, Asami would ask me, “How did I do?”, with a huge smile on her face. It was refreshing to see that smile of hers. It’s so different from her noisy yet mature demeanor.

“I did it!”

“Well done.”

“Can I do the others too?”

“That would be helpful.”

I handed her a few T-shirts, and she started folding them by herself, without asking for my instructions.

Seeing that, I felt my cheeks relax again.

She was so immersed in folding the clothes that she began to drop her gal speech.

Maybe it wasn’t that ingrained in her. She’s probably unaware of it, but when she’s serious or concentrating on something, she reverts to speaking normally.

“There! It’s perfect, isn’t it?”

“Perfect, perfect.”

Asami smiled as she casually lifted the neatly folded T-shirt. As I nodded my head repeatedly at the results, Asami contentedly placed the T-shirt on the floor, picked up another one, and began to fold it.

I plugged the iron into the outlet, placed a dress shirt on the ironing board, and sprayed water upon it. Then I slowly ironed it.

Asami took care of the T-shirts and I took care of the dress shirts, and soon we were done folding the laundry.

“Thanks, you helped me a lot.”

“No, it’s my pleasure. It’s been fun.”

Asami snorted with satisfaction and smiled.

“I, Asami, have folded laundry for the first time. Sayu-sensei, how much is my score?”

“Hmm, out of a hundred points... a hundred.”

“Damn, a perfect score. I knew I had a knack for it.”

Asami nodded with such a smug expression on her face that I couldn’t help but laugh.

“Why are ya laughin’?”

“No... I mean, I’ve never seen anyone who enjoyed folding clothes as much as you.”

“It’s fun to do something you’ve never done before. You might not want to do it again after a few times, though.”

Asami said that and lied down on the floor. She then lowered her voice a little and continued to speak.

“Y’know, the part-time job, it wasn’t really necessary for me.”

“Ah... That’s right.”

Asami's family is quite well-off, to say the least. There is no reason why a rich, high school student like her has to work part-time, and I'm sure she can easily get an allowance if she asks her parents.

"I don't listen to my parents, I wear my hair like this, and I'm always tryin' to be rebellious. So, it would be pretty crazy of me to ask them to give me an allowance just like that."

Asami laughed as if she was making fun of herself.

"Well... I have my parents pay for my tuition, so I think it might be a good idea to do my best with just a small amount of money."

"That's not true."

When I spoke, Asami just looked at me while lying down. As if prompted by her gaze, I continued to speak.

"I didn't get along with my parents, but they gave me an allowance. Until now, I've only done things that I've had to do, and I've done them reluctantly. That's why it's great that you can choose to work hard at something you don't have to do."

At my words, Asami's expression darkened for a moment, but then she immediately raised an eyebrow and smiled.

"Thanks. But, my case's a li'l... different."

Asami said that and then heartily raised her upper body.

"After all, I only wanna do what I wanna do."

She said while tapping the pile of folded T-shirts.

"I just wanted to have fun with the money I earned instead of using the money my parents gave me."

She then jokingly stuck out her tongue for a few seconds.

“I see...”

I knew that this wasn’t the only reason, but it would be unwise to point it out.

Just as I thought, Asami is tough and straightforward.

“So, next time, why don’t you try the washing machine?”

“Hmm?! I’m in!”

At my suggestion, Asami jumped at me as if she was going to bite me. I burst out laughing again at the sight of her.

“Next laundry will be in two days.”

“In two days?! I’ll definitely come. If you do the laundry without me, I’ll be mad.”

“Okay, okay, I won’t.”

It wasn’t like I minded doing it.

“Well, now I’ve somethin’ to look forward to!”

“I’ll be sure to tell Yoshida-san that you folded these.”

“Tell me about Yoshida-cchi’s reaction later.”

I looked at Asami, who was smiling happily. I felt that I would like to do the laundry even more.