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When I
reached
a break,
I took
another
look out
into the
front.

**"Can
I take
your
order?"**



LIGHT LITERATURE CLUB PRESIDENT

MIDORI TOKIWA

"Who
were you
talking
to a
moment
ago?"

She
wrapped
her
hand-
kerchief
around
the
gauze.





"Wh-
What is
this?!"

EYEPATCH-WEARING
STUDENT COUNCIL PRESIDENT

MOMONE KIBI

"Too
slow,
fool!"

She
began to
draw a
strange
figure in
the air.



*"Are you
two
dating?"*

*Both
Hibiki
and I
were
caught
off guard
by her
sudden
question.*

A high school freshman. She is the girl-next-door childhood friend, and heir to the Omniscient Magic.



SATSUKI OTOMO

A high school freshman. Thanks to the Namidare bloodline, he keeps getting involved with girls that are in trouble.



REKKA NAMIDARE

A sorcerer from another world. She can't go back home anymore, so she's now living at Rekkia's house.



HARISSA HOPE

A high school freshman. A space princess who's presently studying to be a bride on Earth.



IRIS FINERITAS CYPHERCALL

A high school freshman. She works at her family's restaurant, Nozomiya, and practices her cooking every day.



TSUMIKI NOZOMUNO

A demi-material being sent from the future in order to get Rekkia together with a girl.



R

Leviathan, the Strongest Beast. After losing most of her power, she's now living in human society.



LEA

Daughter of the mole people. After moving her people to the artificial world, she started a part-time job at Nozomiya.



TETRA METRA RETRA

A high school freshman. Also a centuries-old vampire. She has strong opinions about maids.



**ROSALIND
C. BATHORY**

A second-year high schooler. A relative of Rekka's who carries the Banjo bloodline.



**HIBIKI
BANJO**



**SHIRLEY
MADAGASCAR WEL BLOOD**

A research scientist. Sent to Earth with Fam and Rain to keep an eye on them.

A former homunculus. Now a normal girl working as a maid for Rosalind.



SUZURAN



**RAIN
WATERCHILD**

A second-year middle schooler. Princess of the merfolk who's come to Earth to broaden her horizons.



FAM

A first-year middle schooler. Also a gremlin and a former space pirate. She's come to Earth to learn about education systems.



MOMONE KIBI

A second-year high schooler. The student council president. Her family runs a shrine, and she uses her powers to fight evil spirits.



**MIDORI
TOKIWA**

A second-year high schooler. President of the light literature club and an aspiring author.

Chapter 1: Lea's Part-Time Job Life

Tsumiki Nozomuno was, quite literally, fatally bad at cooking.

After a complicated series of events about two months ago, I'd agreed to become her taste tester. And once again, today I was at her family's cafeteria, Nozomiya, to sample her food. But this time, the fish (?) dish that she offered me exploded. It was quite possibly the most confused I'd ever been in my life.

An indescribable silence descended on the cafeteria.

I wasn't the only one who was shocked. Tsumiki, the chef; Tetra, the waitress; and Lea, a Nozomiya regular, were all standing there aghast, covered in pieces of fish. Since when did fish... explode?

"Tsumiki."

"...What?"

"Over the past two months, your food's about killed me several dozen times, but... I never thought..."

"What? Out with it."

"Fine, I'll just come right out and say it."

I slammed my hands against the table and stood up.

"I never thought I'd see the food I was just about to eat blow up on me! Have you finally decided to just kill me?!"

“Of course not! Sometimes food just explodes!”

“What kind of food explodes?!”

“Surströmming.”

“That’s just a can filling up with gas and bursting!”

Sometimes cans of surströmming, the smelliest food in the world, would explode because the herring inside would ferment, releasing gas and building pressure inside the can. But even so, the food itself never blew up.

“Oh, jeez! Just shut up and eat it!”

“Eat what—Mwgrah!”

Tsumiki forced some of the leftover pieces of fish into my mouth.

“How is it?”

“Mm... Mmgh...”

She looked so serious that I felt like I had no choice but to at least chew it. But when I bit down...

Boom!



“Bwhragh?!”

I-It exploded in my mouth! The blast, which was literally inside my head, made me black out for a second. I fell backwards to the ground, but Tetra helped me up again.

“Rekka, are you all right?”

“Y-Yeah. It was a small one, so it’s not going to kill me.”

“I’m glad... I guess I shouldn’t have let Tsumiki do any cooking with strange space food.”

“I really wish you’d realized that earlier!”

“I mean, I tried to stop her, but she wouldn’t listen.”

The space food she was talking about was a fish from Berano, the planet we’d just visited. Rain, the planet’s princess, had moved into town, so Tsumiki had asked her for some. Nozomiya’s menu was already different from your regular cafeteria, but this was getting even weirder. Intergalactically weird.

“So, you’re not going to eat any more, Rekka?” Lea asked as she pointed to what was left of the fish.

“Yeah, you can take care of it.”

“Thanks,” Lea said happily as she eagerly picked up a pair of chopsticks and chowed down on Tsumiki’s failure of a dish.

“No matter how many times I see you do that, I just can’t believe it... Is that good?”

“Yes. It’s good.”

Bang! Hers exploded, too.

“Mmm!”

But she didn't mind. She kept picking up the little pieces with her chopsticks and popping them into her mouth one after another. I knew she liked unusual foods, but this took adventurous eating to a whole new level. A dangerous one, even. And if she enjoyed this stuff, what in the world was her day-to-day diet like?

Huh... Well, she was probably capable of eating normal food. I'd just never seen her do it.

“Hey, Lea.”

“Hm?” Lea swallowed before she turned towards me. “What is it, Rekka?”

“What do you usually eat?”

“Huh? What do you mean by usually?”

“Like, on days you don't come to Nozomiya? You never really struck me as the home chef type.”

“Same. But I can't see you buying lunch at a convenience store, either,” Tsumiki joined in.

“You don't cook, Lea?” Tetra asked as she brought us all cups of water. She seemed interested, too.

“Nah. I used to only eat food raw or roasted over an open fire, so I'm honestly amazed at this thing that you humans call 'cooking.' Eventually, I want to try it for myself.”

“...When you do, just don't learn it from Tsumiki.”

“Shut up!”

“Gyah!”

Oww... I took a karate chop with a plate. Right on the nose, too.

“But if you’re not cooking for yourself, then what do you eat when you don’t come here?” Tsumiki repeated my question from a moment ago.

“I don’t really eat when I’m alone.”

“You don’t get hungry?” Tetra asked.

“Well, I spent millions of years without any food. I can go a few days without eating.”

“Then... Don’t tell me the only thing you’ve really eaten since coming to the surface has been Tsumiki’s cooking?!”

I was terrified at the thought. Tears were forming in the corners of my eyes... And then I got hit with the plate again!

“Oww! Come on, not the eyes!”

“Shut up! I don’t usually get mad, but that was certainly enough to do it!”

“You’re always getting mad!”

“That’s because you’re always making me mad!”

Tsumiki and I glared at each other. For some reason, Lea laughed.

“You two really do get along, huh?”

“No way!” we both shouted in unison.

But Lea just laughed more and finished her meal.

“Thanks for the food.”

“Glad you liked it.”

Tsumiki took the empty dish behind the counter. The conversation came to a temporary halt, but by the time Tsumiki came back, we were all talking about Lea’s eating habits again.

“Well, it doesn’t bother me if I don’t eat, but I do sometimes eat at places other than Nozomiya.”

“Oh, I see.” Tsumiki looked half surprised and a little disappointed.

“Of course, your cooking is the best. But you guys know how I lived underground for so long, right?”

“Yeah.” I nodded.

“And so now that I’m back, everything seems so new. Sometimes I go flying around on trips just to see it all.”

Now that she mentioned it, I remembered Tsumiki saying something about that before.

“So far I haven’t left Japan, but every part of this country has its own special dishes, right? Whenever I see those, I always want to try them.”

“Huh... Even if it’s just normal food?”

“I’m not picky.”

“I see.”

I knew what it was like to want to eat something tasty on a trip.

“The last thing I had that was really good was takoyaki.”

Takoyaki, huh? Had she been to Osaka? Lea closed her eyes and looked like she was remembering the day she tried some.

“They were so soft and gooey. I couldn’t believe how good octopus is. There were so many different kinds of them, and they were all good.”

“Mmm... You talking about it like that makes me want to try some for myself.”

Did they sell those at the convenience store? If I wanted them fresh, I’d probably have to take the train to someplace with a department store.

“If you really want some takoyaki, should I ask Rain to get me some space octopus?” Tsumiki asked as she raised her hand.

Oooh, that actually sounded really good.

“But have Tetra make it,” I said.

“Tsumiki can be in charge of putting the sauce on them,” Tetra said.

“What’s with you two?!” Tsumiki started to flail her limbs in a tantrum even as she sat in her chair.

It really was kind of amazing how Tsumiki never got better at cooking. She’d gotten to the point where she was capable of putting seaweed around a rice ball or putting store-bought sauce on top of takoyaki, but that was it. I was starting to think it might actually be some kind of curse.

“Are these space octopuses any good?” Lea asked. I noticed she was leaning forward a little without realizing it.

“They’re very big. And they’ve got something like 50 arms.”

Tetra spread out her own arms to show how big they were. Lea’s eyes started to sparkle.

“Oh, I bet we could make lots of takoyaki with that. I was a little sad when the last place ran out of octopus.”

“...Huh?” We all turned and looked at Lea.

Did... Did she really just say that?

“Lea, you mean to say the restaurant ran out of octopus?”

“Yes. Why?” Lea seemed confused.

“Does that mean you ate all the octopus they had?”

“Yes.”

“Didn’t you just say you didn’t really need to eat?”

“I just meant that I can store a lot of energy, not that I don’t enjoy eating. When I want to eat, I can eat as much as I like.”

“Huh...”

Come to think of it, in her Leviathan form, Lea was huge. And while she was tall, her core—in other words, Lea in her human form as she stood before us now—was still just a normal-looking girl. If that meant all the energy needed to transform into her Leviathan form was contained inside her human body, that would explain things. But there was something else I didn’t quite understand.

“How’d you get the money to pay for all that takoyaki, anyway?”

“Money? Oh, you mean those hard, round, flat things and the scraps of paper that humans use?”

“Hang on...”

Did that mean...

“Tsumiki, Tetra.” I beckoned to both of them, and they moved closer. “Hey, do you think there’s any chance Lea doesn’t know about money?”

“She knows it exists, right? I mean, based on what she just said...”

“Yeah, but she doesn’t seem to really understand it.”

I looked up.

“So, Lea, where did you get the money for it?”

“Hm? Oh, somebody would always give it to the owner.”

“Somebody?”

“It was someone different each time. Whenever I would stare at a shop or restaurant, somebody would always come talk to me... Actually, it was always a man, come to think of it. When I said I wanted to eat something, a man would always buy it for me.”

“...”

We put our heads together again.

“...They were trying to pick her up, weren’t they?”

“Lea’s really pretty, after all.”

“But she probably didn’t even realize what was going on.”

Tetra was right. She probably had no idea.

“Knowing you, Lea, there’s no way... but did any of those men do anything to you?”

“Do anything...? Hmm, when I started eating, they were all really happy, but they gradually started to act strangely as the meal went on.”

“Strangely?”

“Their eyes would start to dart between me and the food, but when I asked if they wanted some, they’d shake their heads. I’d keep eating, but they’d suddenly start shouting, ‘Please stop!’ and ‘No more, please!’ When that happened, it meant I was supposed to stop eating, I guess, so I would thank them and leave.”

My head started to ache a little.

“...She probably drained every last yen out of their wallets, huh?”

“If she was eating enough to close down the store, then yeah...”

“I don’t know who those guys were, but I feel sorry for them...”

Well, I knew exactly what those men were after, but I still couldn’t help taking a little pity on them.

“Rekka? What are you guys talking about?” Lea was staring at us, clearly confused.

“Man, I don’t even know where to start... Actually, let me ask you something first.”

“What?”

“Lea, do you have any of those hard, round things or paper things?”

“Nope.”

“I knew it...”

After I’d saved Lea’s story, I’d gotten so wrapped up in getting ready for Tsumiki’s Food Champion cooking competition that I’d completely forgotten to explain to her how money worked. There was no way she’d be able to survive in modern society without it... Right?

“Lea, have you ever run into problems because you didn’t have any money?”

“No, not really.”

“But normally you’d need food and a place to stay... Where’d you get those clothes you’re wearing?”

“These? Tsumiki gave them to me when I came to the surface.”

“I just thought that you’d stand out too much if you wore what you did when you first got here,” Tsumiki responded. “Since my skirts didn’t fit and neither did my mom’s, we ended up having to give her a pair of Dad’s pants.”

That was nice of them, but...

“Did you never notice she was in the same outfit all the time?”

“I gave her several outfits... and she’s been washing them, too.”

“Huh?”

How was she washing them if she didn’t have a washing ma-

chine?

“I washed them in the river.”

She did what?

“Rivers these days aren’t that clean...”

“That’s true, they aren’t. But, fortunately, I can control water.”

Water magic sure is convenient, huh?

“So, um... you have clothes and food, I guess, but where are you living?”

“Where do I live?”

“I mean your home.”

“My home?”

“...Where do you sleep?”

“The sea. I just float on the surface and sleep.”

Wow, yet another answer I hadn’t expected.

“It feels good to sleep on top of the waves, but once in a while, I get hit by human boats. That does hurt a little.”

For most people, that would do a lot more than “hurt a little,” but that wasn’t even what I was concerned about right now.

“So you’re sleeping outdoors. In the sea.”

“It doesn’t matter. No, I guess it does matter.” Tsumiki sighed loudly. Then she grinned as if she’d gotten an idea. “I guess I need to teach you about the importance of money. And how to get

rid of sleazy pick-up artists!”

“No, it’s more important that we get her a place to live.”

“Right, right. I know that,” Tsumiki said with a nod. “My dad knows a local real estate guy. We can find her an apartment. And until she can pay rent, she can stay in my room. Tetra’s already using the guest room.”

“Oh, that’s all right! I’ll just commute from New Jizu.”

“That’s a long walk, though.”

“But...”

The two of them argued for a bit.

New Jizu was originally the artificial world where Lea had been imprisoned. But now with her gone and the seal undone, the mole people had moved in. There used to be a hole out back at Nozomiya that led straight there, but we’d sealed it up because it was dangerous. That meant if Tetra wanted to get back and forth between here and New Jizu, it would mean several hours of walking through the cave tunnels in the mountains behind the school.

“You don’t have to give me a place to stay. I’m perfectly happy at sea.”

Lea still didn’t seem to understand what the problem was.

“You can’t do that!”

“That’s not okay!”

“R-Right...”

Getting shouted at from both sides, Lea seemed to shrink a little.

“You know, my living room’s free, and I’ve got an extra futon. She can stay with me,” I offered.

“That’s even worse!”

“You definitely can’t do that!”

“R-Right...”

I got yelled at from both sides, too...

“Well, so what do we do about Lea and money for now?”

“Huh? There’s only one answer to that.”

Tsumiki looked at me in an exasperated manner and clenched her hands into fists.

“A part-time job!” she yelled.



And so, three days later, I was on my way to the supermarket on the shopping street after school. Tsumiki had gotten both me and Lea part-time jobs there.

“Hey, Lea.”

“Rekka.”

Lea was waiting for me in the parking lot. She stood up from the low wall she’d been sitting on and walked over to greet me.

“Sorry, Rekka. I didn’t mean for you to have to get caught up

in this.”

“No, it’s fine. Both Tsumiki and Tetra are busy at Nozomiya, I guess.”

Today I was here to support Lea.

We’d taught her most of what there was to know about money, but she was still just learning how to function in modern society. I was worried she’d run into other problems, so I’d ended up getting a short-term part-time job alongside her.

“Okay, before we go greet the manager, let’s go over your story.”

“My story?”

“First, you’re from overseas, and you’re here on a homestay program. Second, you’re 24 years old. Third, you arrived in Japan two months ago, and now that you’ve settled in, you’ve decided to get a part-time job.”

Tsumiki and I had come up with this story to explain how Lea looked.

“Where is ‘overseas,’ exactly?”

“Just say ‘the American countryside,’ and you’ll probably be fine.”

Nobody was going to ask her what state she was from, probably. Really, the hardest part was deciding on her age. She was so pretty that she could’ve passed for either a youthful woman in her thirties or a mature girl in her late teens. And the fact that her real age was at least seven figures only made things harder. In the end, we’d just decided to split the difference and say she was in her mid-twenties.

“Also, if anybody asks why you came to Japan, just say you’re into Japanese culture.”

“Got it. But is that something they’re certain to ask?”

“It’s just kind of a thing you always ask foreigners.”

I knew I probably would.

“Hmm, I see.” Lea seemed satisfied.

It wasn’t a perfect back story, but that’s why I was there to support her. Tsumiki had explained to the manager that I’d be helping out Lea, too. If I could stay with her while we were on the clock, I could help resolve any issues that came up.

“All right, it’s almost time for our shift to start. Let’s go in.”

“Yeah.”

If I remembered right, the manager wouldn’t be in his office right now, so we’d have to search the store to find him. We went through the sliding doors into the supermarket. The air conditioner made it nice and cold inside. I could feel the sweat on my skin starting to cool as I asked one of the employees where I could find the manager. I was directed to the produce aisle.

“How about a hot dog?” One of the employees, an older woman, offered us a sample.

Since I was on a mission, I just smiled and waved. I then walked over to a man in a store uniform who was working the produce aisle.

“Um, excuse me. Are you the manager?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

The man looked to be in his fifties and was wearing glasses. He turned to us with a pack of vegetables in his hand.

“Hello, I’m Rekka Namidare. I believe Tsumiki Nozomuno might have told you about me.”

“Oh, yes. You’re the boy Tsumiki was talking about?”

“That’s right. Thanks for letting me work here.”

“Yeah, nice to meet you. Good to see you’ve got so much energy.” His gaze drifted behind me. “So... that’s the foreign girl I’ve been hearing about?”

“Yes, that’s... What?!”

“Hm?”

I turned around and saw that Lea was happily gobbling up the hot dog samples.

“Lea! What are you doing?!”

“She said I could eat them,” Lea said as she swallowed down another one.

The hot plate where the hot dogs had been roasting was now empty, and the lady who was handing out samples had a smile frozen on her face. I wasn’t even sure she was blinking.

“I-I’m sorry! Lea, you apologize, too!”

“H-Huh?”

I grabbed Lea by the head and forced her to bow.

“...Are these two going to be okay?” I heard the manager whisper behind us.



We began our shifts by working the cash register.

“So, when you press this button on the screen, the cash drawer opens. Make sure you count the change twice before you hand it to the customer.”

“Okay, I understand.”

“...Okay.”

Lea and I both nodded at the manager’s instructions.

“All right, let’s get you some practice. You can each take turns. Switch off every few customers. It’s not busy today, so you don’t need to be in a rush.”

The manager smiled, then ran off to do some other work. We were lucky to have such a nice manager.

“Okay, let’s do this. Do you want to go first?”

“...Can you go first? I’d like to watch you before I try it.”

“Sure, I guess I can do that.”

I was still a little nervous myself, though. It was my first part-time job, too. But just like the manager said, it wasn’t busy, so it was a while yet before anybody came to my register.

Ka-clunk.

“Oh...”

The old lady at the next register over walked off. Well, there weren't any customers, so it was probably normal to take care of other work when it was slow. But that meant that out of all five registers, ours was the only one that was manned. That made me more uneasy, but I took a few deep breaths to calm myself down.

It was fine. They told me that if there were suddenly too many customers to handle, I could hit the button near the register to ring a bell and someone would come to help. If things got bad, I could just do that.

Finally the first customer came to my register.

“Oh, a student? You're new, aren't you?”

“Yes. This is just a temporary job, though.”

“Oh, how lovely.”

The woman that walked up looked like a cheery housewife, and her basket wasn't that full, either. She seemed like the perfect first customer.

Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep.

“That will be 1,860 yen.”

“Here you are.”

She handed me 2,000 yen.

“Thank you.”

Crap... My mind went blank for a second.

“Y-Your... Your change is 140 yen. Oh, and here's your receipt.”

“Thank you. May I have a bag, as well?”

“Oh! S-Sorry.”

“Thank you.” Instead of getting angry at how slow I was being, she just smiled.

Man, I really messed that up. I almost forgot her receipt, and I totally forgot about bagging her stuff. I also forgot to count the change, too. I don't think I screwed it up, but the manager had just told me to check it twice.

“Ugh...”

No point in getting upset about it. I just needed more practice. As long as I didn't forget the order, I probably wasn't going to fail but so badly. I decided to just focus on the next customer, and by the time I'd checked out five or six people, I'd actually gotten the hang of it.

“Your change will be 500 yen. Thank you very much!”

Whew... I finally got through a checkout without making a single mistake.

“...Oops.”

I'd forgotten about Lea. I quickly turned around and saw that she was standing in the exact same place as before. Had she been staring at my hands the whole time? That explained why some of the customers had been looking behind me.

“Lea, do you want to try?”

“...Okay.”

She was a little hesitant as we switched places at the register. I

was a bit worried, but if things got bad, I could lend her a hand. That was the whole reason I was there, after all.

“Excuse me.”

“I’m sorry?”

I turned around to see an elderly woman with a cane.

“I’m sorry, but can you tell me where the seaweed is?”

“The seaweed...?”

Uh-oh. I still didn’t know where anything was in the store. There were no other employees around, and the old woman had come to me for help. I couldn’t ignore her. I didn’t like the idea of leaving Lea by herself, but...

“Do you know where the seaweed is?” she asked me again.

I had to do something.

“Lea, I’m going to have to go for a minute. If something happens, ring the bell.”

“B-Bell? The bell?”

“That’s right. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

I took the old lady with me and began to check the shelves, but I couldn’t find the seaweed. I’d never bought any on my own, and after my mom and dad moved out, Harissa had done all the shopping.

The canned goods aisle maybe? Nope, no luck there, either.

“Do you not have any seaweed?”

“No, I’m sure we have it...”

“I don’t know what I should make my husband for breakfast then...” she said quietly.

She sounded a little unnerved, but I was feeling it, too.

“Sir Namidare, is something wrong?”

“You’re looking awfully lost, human.”

Suddenly I heard voices I recognized. I turned around and saw Suzuran holding a shopping basket. With her was Ulaula, who was trying and failing to get Suzuran to let her fill the basket with candy and snacks. Both of them were wearing their maid outfits. They were probably here shopping, as well.

“Suzuran, do you know where the seaweed is?”

“The seaweed? Answer: It’s next to the spices.”

“Thanks!” I waved at her and took the old lady in the direction she pointed. “Here we go! Sorry, this is it.”

“Thank you, sonny.”

Whew. I guess that worked out. What a relief.

“Um, is everything okay, Sir Namidare?”

“Suzuran? Yeah, you really helped me out there.”

I was really starting to panic. I don’t know what I would’ve done if Suzuran hadn’t come by.

“Question: What are you doing here, Sir Namidare? That apron seems to belong to the store. This is puzzling.”

“I’m working here.”

“Oh, I see.”

“That’s right. I’m helping out Lea... Lea!”

I’d forgotten something really important!

“Sorry! I’ve gotta go! I’ll thank you properly for this later!”

“Wait! Sir Namidare!”



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“That human’s sure in a hurry, huh?”

I left Suzuran and Ulaula behind as I raced back to the cash register.

“What the heck happened?!”

By the time I got back, there was a long line at the register.

“Lea!”

“R-Rekka...” Lea turned towards me with tears in her eyes.

“What are you doing? I told you to ring the bell if something happened!”

“I didn’t know which button it was...”

I almost fell over right then and there. She didn’t know which button the bell was?! I hit it for her to call in emergency reinforcements.

“I’m sorry for the wait! Let me take those for you!”

I then switched places with Lea at the register, bowing and apologizing to the customers as I rung them up.



“If you don’t know how to use things, you need to say so up front.”

“I’m sorry...”

“I’m so sorry...”

Both Lea and I apologized to the manager.

“I need someone who can use a cash register, you know.”

Ugh... This wasn’t good. The manager was starting to have second thoughts about hiring Lea.

“No, um... I wasn’t there when it happened, and I think Lea just panicked! I’ll teach her how to do it as fast as I can, so please...!” I was begging him to let Lea keep her job.

“Hmm, well, I suppose that’s true. So, Lea, what can you do?” The manager turned from me to Lea.

“Hmm... I can lift heavy things, I guess.”

“You’re a girl, but you can lift heavy things, huh? There are some people in the back unloading things. Can you go help them?”

Did he mean cardboard boxes filled with merchandise? To find out, we walked down the corridor in the back of the store that went outside, then headed for the loading dock. From a distance, we could see the shutters were open.

“Hey, what are you doing here?” an older man asked us as we approached. He was in the middle of moving cases filled with boxes and bottles.

“The manager told us to come help out!”

“I see. These are pretty heavy, though!”

“We’ll still do our best!”

“I like your spirit! All right, start by taking all the boxes off

that shelf. Load them onto the cart there and move them to the rear entrance of the store.”

“Got it!”

We started hauling the boxes just like he’d told us, and he wasn’t kidding. They were pretty heavy. From the sounds they were making, they were probably filled with canned goods. I carried them to the rickety cart, panting heavily, and then pushed the cart over to the rear entrance to the store.

“Hey, are you okay, missy?!”

Once I was done, I heard the old man yell out in surprise. I hurried back to see Lea standing there, holding a stack of ten of the heavy boxes.

“You don’t need to be in such a hurry. Actually, how can you even lift all that?!”

The man didn’t know who Lea was, so of course he couldn’t believe his eyes.

“This is nothing,” Lea said casually, then proceeded to carry the boxes over to the rear entrance without using the cart.

“Lea, next time carry less at once,” I whispered to her as she walked along, being careful not to get in her way.

“Why?” she asked.

“Normal girls can’t carry that much. It’s not a good idea to stand out like that, you know?”

“All right, I understand.” Lea nodded and set down the boxes she was carrying.

As I watched her walk back for more, I couldn't help thinking that this whole thing might be harder than I'd thought it was going to be.

“Ngwaah!”

Suddenly, I heard the old man shouting. It looked like he was trying to carry a huge load of boxes now, too.

“What are you doing?!”

“Hrrrgh! I'm a man! I won't let a kid and a girl beat me!”

No, listen, Lea's special! Also, I certainly didn't carry that much!

As I tried to figure out a way to explain things to him without revealing Lea's identity, he suddenly lost his balance.

“Uwaaah!”

“Gyaaah!”

We both screamed.

“Hmm?”

Lea came back from carrying another load of boxes, confused at the scene she walked up on.



“I know this isn't really your fault, but...”

“I really don’t know what to say. I’m sorry.”

“I’m sorry, too.”

We both bowed to the manager again.

It wasn’t directly our fault, but even so, quite a lot of merchandise had been ruined because of us. If he wanted to fire us now, I couldn’t blame him.

“...All right, you can stop bowing. Nobody was hurt, and you didn’t mean any harm, so I’m willing to give you another chance.”

“Th-Thank you...!”

Our next job was to take inventory. We went from shelf to shelf, aisle to aisle, recording how much of each product was currently in stock.

“Hmm... These snacks aren’t selling, huh?”

The label read “dried herb snacks.” They sounded healthy, but it was hard to imagine what they might taste like.

“Lea, how are things looking for you?”

“Huh? Oh, f-fine.”

“What’s wrong?” I turned towards her.

“Nothing... I was just thinking that making money is a lot harder than I thought.”

“Yeah, I can see that.”

“If all the men who paid for my meals worked this hard for that money, I should’ve thanked them more politely.”

“...”

She still didn't quite get it, but I decided not to say anything.

“I've been causing a lot of problems for you, too...”

“Aww, don't worry about it.”

“But...”

“It's fine. Really, don't worry. Our relationship might be a little different than most, but you and I have been through a lot together. I'll stay with you until you're happy.”

“Rekka...”

For a few seconds, Lea pensively closed her mouth as if considering what I'd said, but then she gave me a dazzlingly bright smile.

“I'm counting on you to make me happy then.”

“Yeah, leave it to me.”

When I smiled back, Lea's eyes narrowed happily as she smiled even brighter.

“...Oh?”

It was a pleasant moment, but Lea suddenly piped up like she'd just realized something.

“Rekka, I have a question.”

“What's that?”

“Are you allowed to put things in your pocket before you pay for them?”

“Of course not. That’s shoplifting.”

“That man over there just did it.”

“...What?!”

Lea pointed towards the alcohol section of the store. I could see a man standing there swiveling his head left and right to look around him. Both of his hands were in his pockets.

“Lea, did you see what he put in his pockets?”

“A little bottle and a little bag.”

A bottle of sake and some snacks? That fit the bill considering the aisle he was on. It wasn’t that I doubted Lea, but yelling at him didn’t seem like the right thing to do. I hadn’t seen him do it myself, and it was possible that Lea was just mistaken somehow.

I decided it was probably a better idea to talk to him first. I headed towards the shelves of beer and sake... and my eyes met his. He then turned and ran.

“Whoa!”

Crap! I’d stared at him too long.

“Damn it!” I chased after him.

“Rekka, is shoplifting bad?” Lea asked as she ran up beside me. She still didn’t seem to understand what was going on.

“Yeah, it’s bad!”

“Then is it good if we catch him?”

“That’s right!”

“Got it,” she said with a nod.

She then started to run faster. She jumped over the people and carts in front of her, and she seemed to move even faster still when she hit the ground again. She was now running quicker than any human possibly could, and she caught up to the man with no trouble.

“Taah!”

She jump-kicked him. She’d probably held back, but that only meant but so much with someone as insanely strong as she was. The man went flying through the air, smashed through the automatic doors, and rolled out into the street.

“Oh my God...”

I put my hand on my forehead and looked up at the ceiling.



“Sure, the man was a thief, and I’m glad you caught him, but... You know, we’re a customer service business at the end of the day. It’s not good to go too far...”

The manager then sighed, scratched his head, and told us we were fired.

“I’m sorry, Rekka...”

“No, don’t let it bother you.”

Feeling down, we headed back to Nozomiya to tell Tsumiki what had happened.

“Huh? What’s wrong, you guys? You look a little down in the dumps.” Tsumiki was working, but she frowned when she saw how bummed we looked. “Tetra, go get the table ready.”

“All right.”

Tsumiki then led us to the living room on the second floor, and I told her what had happened.

“I didn’t think you’d get fired on your first day.” Tsumiki pressed her palm to the bridge of her nose and sighed softly. “Weren’t you supposed to be looking out for her? How did this happen?”

“I’m really sorry.” There wasn’t anything else I could say to that, so I just shrank back into my chair.

“...Well, you can’t change what’s happened, can you? We need to think about what to do next. Come on, Lea, don’t just pout in the corner.”

Tsumiki looked up and smiled at Lea, who was awkwardly sitting on the floor in the corner. She slowly staggered to her feet and walked over to us, but she still looked really down.

“...I’m sorry I’m such a failure...”

“Now now, you’re just not used to working yet.”

Despite how mean she normally was to me, Tsumiki was being really sweet to Lea.

Well, I guess that made sense. Nozomiya was doing really well right now, but it had been on the verge of bankruptcy until recently. It was only thanks to Lea that it had survived, so I could understand why Tsumiki would want to go out of her way to help Lea.

“So, anyway, about the next job I have lined up... There’s kind of a problem.” Tsumiki crossed her arms and sighed.

“A problem? Are there any weird jobs like that on this shopping street?”

“Our shopping street is quite normal, I’ll have you know. But the next job I have lined up for you isn’t here.”

“Huh? Is it really that hard to find a job here?”

“Well... Remember all the mole people who moved to New Jizu with Tetra?”

“Yeah.”

“After things settled down, a lot of them have started coming up here to work. They’re doing the same thing Tetra is, trying to learn about our culture to develop their own. So right now, most of the places around here are well staffed with new employees.”

“Huh, I see.”

The mole people (or perhaps the Jizuians?) were working hard now, huh? When I’d met them, they were all so lifeless that they were practically like zombies, but maybe things were starting to change for them. Tetra’s hard work had paid off after all. Anyway, putting that aside...

“Okay, so I get that there aren’t any jobs available around here, but what’s this about a ‘problem’?”

“Um... One of my dad’s old classmates just bought an old restaurant and renovated it, and he’s going to reopen it.”

“What kind of place is it?”

“The menu and prices are the same as a typical chain restaurant.”

“Huh? So it’s just a normal restaurant then.”

“Yeah, I guess. It’s not a chain, though. It’s just him.”

“I see. But if this is a friend of your dad’s, he can’t be that bad, right?”

“Of course not... He’s a nice guy. Personality-wise.”

“...?”

Tsumiki seemed to be doing a really good job of avoiding the point. She was choosing her words a little too carefully.

“Hey.”

“What?”

“So what is this ‘problem’?”

“Um... Well, I was actually supposed to see if any of my classmates wanted the job, but I think Lea’s close enough...”

“Tsumiki...?”

“This restaurant is...”

Tsumiki finally relented and started to explain.



That Sunday was the grand opening of the new restaurant Lea would be working for, Linda Lovers.

“Okay, everybody gather around!”

Linda, the manager and owner of the restaurant, clapped his hands and assembled the employees. He was, as his name might suggest, rather feminine. Despite his personality and his tone of voice, however, he had the body of a professional wrestler.

“It’s almost time for us to open. Everybody be friendly and energetic, okay?”

“Right!” the other employees shouted in response.

“R-Right.” I wasn’t feeling so confident.

All of the employees except for me were women. Well, the manager was technically a man, but something told me he wouldn’t be happy if I singled him out for that. The awkwardness I was feeling wasn’t just because I was the only guy there, though.

“Wow, this is a really nice place, huh? I like what I see.”

R, the girl from the future who didn’t care in the least about our modern sexual harassment laws, was going around and examining each of the waitresses’ uniforms in turn.

Honestly, the uniforms here were pretty lew... Ahem. I mean to say the skirts were a little short, and the design definitely emphasized the chest. It was kind of hard to look at them directly. R might’ve been enjoying herself, but as the only guy there, what was I supposed to do? I didn’t feel like there was anywhere safe to rest my eyes.

“Hmm? You sound down, Rekka. Give me more some energy!”

“Right!”

“Non, non! You’re not just supposed to be loud. Come on, be sexy.”

“R-RIGHT!”

“Yes, that’s just fine, hun.” Linda nodded, satisfied.

I didn’t know why it was so important that I be sexy, but he was the boss, so if it was important to him, it was important to me.

The whole concept of this place, according to Linda, was “to bring out the ultimate cuteness a girl can have,” and the lew—ahem—cute uniforms were his idea. The original concept was to have an all-female staff—sort of overlooking the manager, of course—but he also wanted a male employee to have around in case something happened, so that’s how I got hired, too.

“Oh, my. Lea, your name tag’s twisted.”

“Oh... Is this right?”

“Yes, it’s just perfect, honey! Perfect! You look really cute!”

“Th-Thank you?”

At least, that’s what he said. I was pretty sure the real reason was probably just because he wanted to hire Lea. Tsumiki had introduced us both, after all.

“Listen closely, okay? This is a garden, and all of you are pretty little fairies. Your job is to heal the stomachs of modern men, who are all sick with ulcers and worry.”

“Right!”

Right... Wait, what?

“...Okay, I have to do my best...” I heard Lea say to herself.

Even if she didn’t keep this job, that didn’t mean she wouldn’t be able to find another one. Tsumiki might not have anything else lined up for us, but there were still plenty of other places we could try. Even so, Lea seemed eager to put her best foot forward here and to make up for her previous failure.

Before long, it was time for Linda Lovers to have its grand opening.



“Rekka, wash these plates for me, dear!”

“Yeah!”

“Rekka, be a dear and go get me the whipped cream.”

“Yeah!”

“Rekka!”

“Yeah?”

“I just felt like saying your name.”

“Please don’t mess with me like that!”

I was supposed to be in charge of the kitchen, but since the manager did all the cooking, I was sort of just helping out. I wasn’t even out in the dining room, but I was still being kept

pretty busy.

The place was packed. There weren't any maid cafés around here, but everyone had cell phones. When people came to the new restaurant and found what the manager had called "a garden filled with cute fairies," word spread instantly. Since it was a Sunday and most people had the day off, a crowd gathered shortly after we opened.

The owner had gone a little overboard on the decorations, so there were only 30 or so seats available, but we'd had a full house almost the entire day. I'd just taken a glance outside, and there were still people waiting in line.

The prices and the dishes weren't too different from your average restaurant, but orders just kept coming in. The manager was somehow handling all the cooking on his own, which was amazing, but the waitresses were all busy running back and forth with the orders. I had my hands full myself, but I might've had it the easiest out of everyone there.

Would Lea be okay like this?

When I reached a break, I took another look out into the front. I'd been told not to let the customers see me, so I tried to be discreet.

Lea was just about to take a customer's order. She seemed to be attracting a lot of attention. Of course, from the kitchen I couldn't hear what she was saying, but it seemed like things were going okay. My idea of giving her a pen and paper instead of having her use a tablet to take down orders seemed to have paid off. The orders had to go into the tablet anyway to help determine sales at the end of the day, but I'd told her I'd help her with that later. It was the best thing I could think of to do for her.

Unlike at the supermarket, there was only one cash register

here. Until Lea got used to it, the other waitresses could ring things up for her. It just meant she'd have to work twice as hard at the things she could do to make up for it.

“Rekka, go hand this to one of the waitresses.”

“Sure.”

Things sure were busy, but the work at Linda Lovers seemed to be going well. And just when things started to calm down...

Clatter!

I heard the loud sound of dishes clanking together.

“Oh? Did someone drop something? Rekka, can you go take a look?”

“Is it okay if I go out there?”

“I’m too busy to go myself. Just put on that skirt.”

“What?!”

“I’m kidding. If you want to properly wear a skirt, you’ll need to some estrogen injections first.”

“I don’t want to wear a skirt, and I don’t want any injections!”

“Stop joking around and get going.”

He was the one joking around, not me. And I contemplated that irony as he pushed me out into the front of the restaurant.

I looked around to see what was going on and spotted Lea frantically bowing.

“What are you doing? It’s all stained now!”

“I-I’m so sorry...”

“Don’t tell me you’re sorry! Wipe it off!” the man yelled as he pointed at the stain on his pants... right near his crotch.

“O-Of course.”

“HOLD IT!”

What was wrong with this guy? And why was Lea agreeing to do it?! Did she just not know any better?

“I’m sorry, sir, I’ll bring a towel immediately...”

“What, are you going to make me wipe it off myself?”

“Th-Then I’ll wipe it off for you.”

“I don’t want you to wipe it off! I want her to! She’s the one who spilled it!”

There was some logic to that, but I knew exactly what this guy was trying to pull! I could tell from that grin on his face!

“Rekka, I’ll just...”

“Lea, shut up!”

Lea didn’t seem to see what the problem was, so I was having a hard time trying to get her not to do it.

“Oh, my, what’s wrong?” the manager asked as he came out from the kitchen.

“Oh, um...”

Good timing. Hopefully the giant man in a dress could handle this.

“Who the heck are you? Are you the manager? You’re creepy as heck!”

“Waaaaah!”

“B-Boss?”

Exactly the opposite of what I’d hoped, the manager dropped to the floor and started sobbing. I never imagined he’d be that delicate.

“Get out of here, damn it!”

“Ack!”

The man pushed me hard in my stomach. It knocked the air out of my lungs for a moment, but I managed to stay on my feet.

“Rekka! Sir, I’m sorry. This was my fault. But please don’t hurt Rekka.”

“Is he your boyfriend or something?” the man yelled. “I’m pissed off here! Take responsibility!”

“Of course. Just a momen—”

“Hang on.” I stopped Lea again. “Sir... I’m sorry, but I can’t have the waitresses doing something like that. Would you be willing to just let this slide?”

“You little...!”

The man must’ve finally run out of patience, because the next thing he did was grab me by the collar and lift me up.

Ugh! He was stronger than he looked, or maybe I was just weaker than I thought. I could feel it getting harder and harder to breathe, and I could hear Lea gasp.

“I’m sorry! This was my fault, so please let go of Rekka!”

“Shut up! I’m gonna teach this kid a lesson!” he shouted as his grip grew tighter.

Man, this wasn’t looking good. But then...

“Let go of Rekka!”

Lea grabbed the man by the face.

“Gah! Owowowow!”

The man let go of me and tried to squirm out of Lea’s grasp, but she was far too strong. After just a few seconds, he started to choke and went down.

“I’m sorry, Rekka. I did it again,” Lea apologized.

“...Huh?” I asked while coughing and trying to catch my breath.

“I didn’t want to cause any more trouble, so I tried to control myself... but I guess I did it again anyway.”

“Oh...”

Was she bothered by the fact that she’d gone too far at the supermarket? Is that why she’d tried to settle this peacefully?

“Then you really didn’t want to wipe his pants off.”

“Of course not. I don’t want to touch or be touched by anyone but you... I thought if I used a giant stack of napkins it would be okay.”

“ ... ”

That's right. She'd been really hesitant at first. Why did I just assume she didn't know any better? She was pretty upset about the situation, but she was so determined to do a good job that she just kept it in...

"You didn't have to do that."

I stood up and wiped the dust off my apron. Either way, what was done was done. We'd caused trouble on the clock again, so we were probably going to get fired again, too. I started to wonder what kind of job we should go for next.

"Lea! You're so strong!"

"Dwah!"

The manager suddenly leaped off the ground and shoved his creepy, excited face between us. I screamed. He then grabbed Lea by the hand and began to shake it up and down wildly.

"If you're here, we won't have to hire a man as a bodyguard! I'm so happy I hired you!"

"Um... Does that mean I can stay?" Lea asked sheepishly.

"Of course!" He nodded with a huge smile on his face.

Come to think of it, Linda Lovers was a fairy garden. It was supposed to be a home for cute girls. He'd said that he wanted to have an all-female staff, and he'd only hired me because he wanted some muscle around in case of trouble. It was true that if he had Lea there, he certainly didn't need any male bodyguards, but...

"But boss, what do we do with this guy?"

"Hm? Oh."

The man was starting to come around. I could see his eyes slowly opening. Whatever the reason, we were the ones who'd knocked him out. I couldn't see him just going home after something like that.

“Yes... You're right.”

“?!”

What was that?! The moment the manager put his hand to his cheek, a cold shudder ran down my spine like nothing I'd ever felt before.

“I think he and I need to go have a nice chat. I think he needs to understand that I'm not creepy at all.”

Boss, your smile is scaring me...

“Come along,” he said. “Right this way.”

“Huh? Huh?”

The man, who still wasn't fully awake, was dragged off by his sleeve towards the back of the store.

A few seconds later, we all heard a scream that sounded like a strangled chicken... but no one in the restaurant said a thing about it.



After safely (?) ensuring Lea's job security, we headed home.

“I'm glad you got a good job, Lea.”

“Indeed,” she replied with a nod. “Once you’re done looking after me, you can come as a customer. I’ll make sure you get great service.”

“Oh, um, thanks.”

I nodded, but I was sweating a little. When she was wearing that uniform, it was hard to look at her...

Well, as for the job, Linda was a little strange, but he was a good guy, and he seemed to like Lea, so I was sure things would work out. Lea would finally be able to earn a living. But... there was one thing that was bothering me.

“Lea.”

“Hm? What is it?”

“Listen...”

I wanted to ask her about it, but I was still hesitant. It felt a little too late to be bringing it up now.

“Did you maybe not want to work?”

Working. Making money. Living in a house. Using a washing machine. Those were all things that normal humans did. Things that are a basic part of our lives. Things that are so fundamental to us that we’d all kind of instinctively told Lea she needed to do them, too.

She’d done what we’d asked without complaining, but... Maybe she didn’t really want to do any of it. Maybe she’d just gone along with it because we told her to. It really was too late since I’d already made her do all this stuff, but I still had to ask. She’d almost gone through something awful because of it... and she might have to do something like that in the future. That, at

least, was what I wanted to prevent.

“Rekka.”

Lea looked at me and stopped walking. I stopped as well and turned to face her.

“I’ve never been bothered by your concern for me,” she said without a trace of hesitation. “I want to live alongside humanity. So doesn’t that mean that I have to live the way you live? Don’t you have a saying about this? When in... somewhere, do something?”

When in Rome, do as the Romans do, huh?

“I see... Okay, then.”

We both nodded and started walking again. The first thing we had to do was head back to Nozomiya and give Tetra and Tsumiki our report. We had good news this time, so there was a bit of a spring in my step as we walked along.

“Actually... There is one thing I have to take back,” Lea whispered.

“Take back?”

“I may have said this before, but what’s most special to me is you, Rekka.”

I-I didn’t know how to react to that!

“So, it’s not humanity that I want to live with, Rekka. It’s you.”

“W-W-Wait, L-L-Lea...”

I was stammering for an answer, but she was unfazed.

“Up until now, I’ve just been wandering around, but now it will be easier to find me, right? So feel free to visit me anytime.”

“You’re talking about your job... right?”

Lea didn’t answer. She just grinned.

“I’ll make sure you get great service.”

—*Fin*—

Chapter 2: The Upperclassman in the Nurse's Office and the Ghost Panic

Early that morning, I woke up with lots of pain in my joints.

“...Again?” I sighed.

I'd woken up upside down again. My eyes were still too bleary to see where I was, but I was guessing the living room. Lately I'd been experiencing an odd phenomenon where I'd wake up in random places in the middle of the night.

I moved my legs off the back of the sofa and stood up, rubbing my aching shoulder. I was sure I'd gone to sleep in my bed...

I looked around the dark living room, and just as I'd suspected, the door was open. I had no idea how I'd managed to get it open while I was asleep, though.

“R, you there?”

“What is it?”

“Gyah!”

Don't crawl out of the TV! It's scary!

“Don't scare me like that!”

“If you yell, you'll wake up Harissa.”

“Oops...” I quickly put my hand over my mouth.

I listened carefully for a moment to see if Harissa was awake now, and sighed in relief when I didn't hear anything coming from her room.

“So, what did you want to ask me?”

“I know we're going over this on a nightly basis now, but... Was I sleepwalking around the house again?”

“Yes, that's right.”

“Ugh...”

According to R, I would wake up in the middle of the night and start wandering around aimlessly. I'd heard this from her a bunch of times now. R was always near me, and she never slept, so I had every reason to believe her.

It wasn't always in this weird of a position, but I always woke up somewhere different. If I had to guess, it was most often in the living room, I think? Well, at least I was lucky in that I hadn't gone into Harissa's room yet. There was no telling what I'd do in my sleep like this.

“If I woke up in Harissa's room, Satsuki would kick my ass for sure.”

“I don't think Harissa would mind, though,” R said.

R never made any sense.

“What girl would be happy to find a boy trespassing in her room?”

“You never know.” R sighed and slumped her shoulders. “Why not head back to your own room, then?”

“Yeah, I guess I should get back to sleep. It’s now... ugh, 5:30?”

I was a little worried that I wouldn’t be able to get up on time for school at 7:30. Harissa might have to rip me out of bed again.

My whole body ached. Was I slamming into the walls while I was sleepwalking or something? That would be bad enough, but if I started falling down the stairs next, I might really hurt myself.

Sheesh. What was going on here?



As I expected, Harissa had to drag me out of bed when the time came. Thanks to her, I wasn’t late to school, but my lack of sleep caught up with me, and I ended up passing out in world history class. The teacher caught me napping, and I was ordered to take a bunch of teaching materials to the storeroom in the old school building as punishment.

“Ugh... These are so heavy.”

Lugging a tube with a world map that was bigger than I was inside of it, I quickly ran out of breath. If I was going to fall asleep, I should’ve done it in math class... This thing was seriously heavy. To make matters worse, I had to carry it all the way to the old school building.

It was an old building right next to the library. No classes were held there, so it mostly got used for storage. It was pretty far from the first-year classrooms, so I had to go through two connecting corridors to get to it. First, I had to go from the main building to the special classrooms, and then from the special classrooms to

the old school building. The connecting corridor forked halfway through. Going left would take you to the library, and going right would take you to the old school building.

“Whew... That was a long walk.”

I set the tube down in front of the door to the old school building and took a minute to catch my breath. Maybe I should’ve asked Iris for help. Well, next period was electives and a short field trip, so I would’ve felt bad asking her to take the time to help me.

“You know, he said it was punishment for falling asleep, but I bet the teacher just didn’t want to carry this himself.”

“That might be part of it, too,” R responded in her usual monotone voice.

Even though it was almost the height of summer, she was still wearing her heavy military uniform.

“What do you mean ‘part of it’?”

“Oh? You didn’t notice? When you were napping, Iris and Satsuki were having an argument.”

“Yeah, that sort of rings a bell.”

Actually, their argument had been what had woken me up. But wasn’t Rosalind there, too?

“Iris was poking you in the face while you slept to entertain herself, and Satsuki tried to stop her. Of course, Iris didn’t listen. So then Satsuki tried to wake you up and Iris got mad at her... Eventually, Rosalind ended up joining in the argument, too.”

“Huh...”

What were those three girls doing while I was asleep?

“Wait, I know I shouldn’t have fallen asleep, but why am I the only one that’s being punished?”

“Who knows? Maybe this has nothing to do with it, but that teacher is single, isn’t he?”

“...”

I really hoped that had nothing to do with it.

“I always thought one of the heroines would stab you someday, but maybe it’ll be a man who stabs you first.”

“So, I’m going to get stabbed no matter what?”

I sighed and ended the conversation. I’d taken enough of a break.



I picked up the tube with the world map in it and went inside the old school building.

The whole place just smelled old. The building wasn't so old that it was made out of wood, but the windows in the hallway were poorly constructed and rattled whenever the wind blew. The old building was in the shadow of the new one, so with the lights off during the day, it was actually pretty gloomy. It was exactly the kind of place you could imagine ghosts appearing at night.

I headed for the storeroom in the far back, feeling a little creeped out. I opened the door and went inside, still carrying the tube on my back. Let's see... I was supposed to put it on the second shelf, wasn't I?

"There we go."

I lifted the tube by its center and set it sideways on the second shelf of a wooden shelving unit. It wasn't quite long enough to hold the tube, so I had to slide it in carefully.

"...Ow!"

What? Suddenly, my hand hurt. I looked and saw blood on my hand like I'd scratched it on something.

"Ugh... Did I cut myself on something metal?"

I hadn't turned on the lights when I came in, and the shelves weren't very organized, so I couldn't really see what I was doing clearly. But there wasn't much time until next period, and the cut didn't seem that bad, so I thought about just washing it out and going to class.

"Hmm, I guess that won't work."

Next period was electives, which included art class. I'd hurt my dominant hand, so if I ended up dripping blood on my painting, I'd be ruining weeks of work.

"I guess I'll have to go to the nurse's office."

I took out my phone and asked Satsuki to tell the teacher I'd be late.



The nurse's office was on the first floor of the special classrooms building, right next to the old school building.

"Excuse me, I hurt my hand," I said as I opened the door.
"Wait, huh?"

There was nobody inside. That was strange. Normally the nurse should be there.

"Maybe she's sleeping on that bed?" R said, pointing towards one of the beds with the privacy curtain closed around it.

"No way. Well, if she's not here, then I guess she's not here."

I could disinfect my own hand. I thought I could, anyway.

"Huh? Where's the first aid kit?"

I looked around the desk and through the medical cabinet, but I couldn't find it. While I was searching, I heard the first bell for class ring.

"This isn't good. I'll have to hurry."

“.....i.”

“Hm?”

Did I just hear a voice?

“R, did you say something?”

“No, not a word.”

“Huh? Then who...”

I looked to the left and the right, but I didn’t see anyone. So then I turned around... and laid eyes on a girl who’d appeared out of nowhere.

“Uwah!”

“.....”

The girl—she was a second-year student based on the color of her necktie—looked at me and opened her mouth a little, but I couldn’t hear anything.

Her hair was in a ponytail so long that it almost reached her heels. She’d tied it up with a butterfly hairpiece that might have been an antique. It looked really gaudy. Wasn’t something that flashy against the school dress code?

“...i...”

She opened her mouth again, but I still barely heard anything. She looked at me with oddly sleepy eyes and a confused expression.

“U-Um... Where did you come fro—?!”

She suddenly grabbed me and hugged me! I had no idea why!

And wait, were those her breasts pushing up against me?!

“Oh, my. They’re much bigger than they look.”

You didn’t need to tell me that, R! I already knew!

She put her lips up to my ear and whispered, “The nurse is in the teacher’s office.” Her soft but husky voice tickled my eardrums.

“You... You don’t say...”

She pulled her head away and nodded. Was that what she’d been trying to tell me before?

“Thank... you.”

She held me tighter.

“You’re welcome.”

So, was she whispering in my ear because her voice was so soft? Whatever the reason, it was really bad for my heart.

“All of your fanservice events seem to revolve around hugs and breasts, don’t they? After all the time you’ve spent with these heroines, you still haven’t gotten a single panty shot... Perhaps your own tastes are affecting the power of the Namidare blood-line?”

Shut up, R! Nobody asked for your opinion!

“U-Um... I understand that the teacher isn’t here now, so do you think you can let go?”

After I said something, she finally moved away from me. And whew... It wasn’t a moment too soon. She’d really scared me.

“Wait, where were you until a moment ago?”

The room was empty when I first got there.

“.....”

She pointed at the bed behind me. The curtains were now open a little. Had she been sleeping there? That would explain why she looked so tired and why her uniform was a little... hiked up!

“Um, I can see your belly button.”

Her clothes had probably gotten messed up in her sleep, and the hem of her shirt had come untucked when she'd reached up to whisper in my ear.

“.....?”

She looked down, grabbed the hem of her shirt, and tucked it inside her skirt like she didn't really care very much. Maybe she wasn't the type to worry about that kind of thing...

“.....”

She then got up and went over to a small box sitting next to the medical cabinet. She removed the towel that had been covering it up, then lifted up the first aid kit to show it to me.

“Oh! So that's where it was!”

“.....”

She again whispered something in a voice too hushed for me to hear, and then she pointed to a steel stool.

“Um... Do you want me to sit down?”

She nodded.

I sat down on the stool, and she opened up the first aid kit and took out the disinfectant. Was she going to treat my cut since the nurse wasn't there?

"Thank you," I said.

I decided to take her up on her kind offer and held out my right hand to her. She put some disinfectant on a cotton ball and began to dab at the wound with it. It stung a bit, but I didn't say anything. When she finished, she put a piece of gauze over my cut. Now all she had to do was wrap a bandage around it...

".....?"

"What's wrong?"

I followed her gaze and looked down into the first aid kit. There was nothing inside that looked like a bandage.

"Did they run out of bandages?"

".....i."

She said something again. I wasn't sure what, but I could guess based on the frown on her face. But then she suddenly looked like she had an idea and took out a plain handkerchief from her pocket.

"Huh? No, you don't have to do that. It might get dirty."

I realized that she was planning to bandage my hand up with her handkerchief. I tried to tell her no, but she ignored me and wrapped it around the gauze. She was surprisingly forceful.

"Th-Thank y—?!"

She hugged me again! Her breasts, her breasts!

“Who were you talking to a moment ago?” she whispered.

Uh-oh. I didn’t think there was anyone in the nurse’s office, so I’d been talking to R. To anybody else, it must’ve looked like I was talking to myself... Please stop squirming when you’re hugging me!

“Can you see things that other people can’t see?”

“N-No...”

She wasn’t totally wrong, but I didn’t want her to think I was nuts.

“I’m really curious...” she said, staring me down at point-blank range.

H-Her face was too close!

Suddenly the door to the nurse’s office opened with a clatter. I struggled to turn around, and I saw a female teacher in a white lab coat looking at us with an exasperated expression from the doorway.

“Inappropriate public displays of affection?”

“No!” I yelled.

“I’m kidding,” she replied, laughing a little as she closed the door. “Tokiwa, you’re scaring the first-year student. Let him go.”

“.....i.”

She complied. Then she staggered back to the bed and flopped down on top of it.

“Tokiwa, don’t go back to sleep. Next period is history class.”

“.....”

She slowly lifted herself off the bed and dragged a desk over from the corner of the room.

“Um, ma’am, is Tokiwa...”

“Hm? She’s just what she looks like—a regular here at the nurse’s office. If I let her, she’d sleep like a cat all day until it was time for club, so I’m teaching her some things so that she doesn’t turn into an idiot.”

That was a pretty rude thing for a teacher to say, I thought.

“So? What did you come here for? To feel up Tokiwa’s breasts?”

“No! I just hurt my hand... You weren’t here, so Tokiwa disinfected the cut for me.”

“Don’t look at me like that. You enjoyed it, didn’t you?”

“I...”

The sad part was that she wasn’t wrong. I’m a teenage boy, after all.

“That aside, I think class started a long time ago, didn’t it?”

“Gah!”

I looked at the clock in shock and quickly ran out of the nurse’s office.



Lunchtime, three days later.

I was eating with Satsuki, Iris, and Rosalind like usual.

“A ghost in the old school building?”

“That’s right. A lot of the first-years have been talking about it lately.” Iris nodded at me with a smile.

“The old school building, huh? I was just there, and it certainly felt like the place was haunted.”

“Huh? Rekka, did you see a ghost?” Iris asked intently, leaning forward as she did.

“No, it just felt like a place where one would show up. I didn’t actually see anything...”

I took a miniature hot dog out of my lunchbox and ate it. The end of it was cut to look like the arms of a little octopus. Harissa had made my lunch today, and it was looking like she was getting even better with her cooking skills.

“I see. Anyway, get this. The ghost is supposed to have really long hair. She looks kind of like walking seaweed.”

“That actually doesn’t sound very scary...” I imagined a walking seaweed ghost and chuckled.

But it was a female ghost, huh? Well, that was a pretty common visual.

“They say if you go to the old school building after school, you can see her walking in the hallways. If you speak to her, she

doesn't answer and just vanishes."

"Huh... Hey, Rosalind, have you ever seen a ghost?" I turned towards Rosalind.

As a vampire, she'd lived a long time, so I thought maybe she'd seen a real ghost somewhere before.

"I've seen something that looked like a ghost, but I've never spoken to one. I can't even say for sure if it was really a ghost, to be honest," she said before taking another bite of her red bean jam bun.

So she couldn't be sure, huh? I guess none of us really had a sixth sense or anything. But... that did give me an idea.

"Hey, Satsuki, can't you use the Magic of Omniscience to find out?"

"Bwuh?! F-Find out what?"

"Whether there's a ghost in the old school building or not?"

Why was she acting so weird? She'd been quiet for most of this conversation, too.

"I don't know anything about ghosts! And the Akashic record only talks of things that actually exist! And there's no such things as ghosts because this isn't a fantasy world with ghostsdapyah!"

"Ghostsdapyah?"

So, I guess she didn't know then. Anyway, lunch break came to a close as we were talking. Next was gym class. It was pool day.

"Let's go."

"Yeah. Hey, be careful!"

I ducked underneath Iris's swimsuit as she swung it around. I then grabbed my own swimsuit before heading off to the gym.

"You know, I look forward to pool more than anything," she said.

"Yeah, I can understand that."

It was July now, but it was still humid. And more than that, it was just plain hot. Nothing felt better than jumping into the pool and washing away all the sweat.

"I don't like it that much," Rosalind said, looking a little perturbed.

Well, vampires didn't like water, after all.

"And this school swimsuit looks so stupid. A noble lady like me shouldn't be wearing something like this."

"Rosalind doesn't understand how powerful the combination of being tiny, having blond twin tails, and wearing a school swimsuit is, does she? Of course, the tiny body in an adult bikini combo was pretty good, too, but you can't beat the classics."

I tried my best to ignore R.

"I like the design, but the chest is a bit tight," Iris said.

"But that's what's great about it," R replied.

Nothing. I heard nothing. Nothing at all. I was definitely not listening to R!

"Rekka, you're grinning."

"Gah!"

I failed! I could feel Satsuki's cold glare like it was stabbing into me. I looked away, hoping to escape. But then...

"Huh?"

Was somebody just staring at me from the hallway? I lost sight of them almost immediately, and I wasn't even sure that there had really been anyone there at all, but... it looked like someone with really long hair.

"No way."

I thought back to our conversation over lunch, but I shook my head and drove the thought from my mind.



After school.

I was visiting the nurse's office.

"Excuse me!"

"Hm? Oh, you're the first-year student that Tokiwa was hugging."

"...Please forget that."

I walked inside the room really wishing there was something else she'd remember me for.

"I didn't realize it last time, but you're quite the problem child, aren't you?" She was grinning, and there was a light tone to her voice that belied her words.

“I’d like to think I’m an ordinary student.”

“I don’t know about that. I’ve heard you’ve gone after a bunch of the female students.”

“Bwuh?!”

What the hell?

“No way! Why would you possibly think that?”

“It came up at a faculty meeting.”

“Seriously?”

“There was a complaint letter sent to the student council that was signed by several boys.”

Ugh, that was definitely from some of my classmates. That part didn’t really surprise me, but I was honestly shocked to learn that the teachers thought of me that way, too. I just wanted to be a normal high school student...

“Don’t worry. I don’t care how many girls you chase.”

“I’m not chasing anybody!”

“So? What brings you to the nurse’s office, playboy? Are you here to seduce Tokiwa?”

“That’s not entirely wrong,” R said.

“No!” I yelled.

“Or are you after me? I can’t recommend that. You’re too young to waste your energy on a spinster like me.”

Oh my God. Somebody please tell me how to deal with this

teacher. I... I'm at a loss.

"I came to give Tokiwa her handkerchief back. Is she here?"

"As you can see, she isn't."

Well, that was a problem. I didn't know what class she was in, so I figured coming here would be the best way to find her...

"Do you know where she went? Did she leave for the day?"

"I don't think so. She's always in the old school building after school."

"The old building?"

"She's the president of the light literature club. The club uses the room in the far back on the third floor of the old building."

"What are they doing in a place like that?"

"The club was just established last year, and there weren't any other rooms available at the time."

"I see. Thank you."

I turned to leave.

"Make sure they don't catch you when you're feeling her up!"

"Goodbye!"

I shut the door, perhaps a little harder than I needed to, and hurried to the old building.



I went to the furthest room back on the third floor, just like the nurse had said. I took a deep breath before I knocked.

“...Huh?”

There was no answer. The room... It was definitely the right one. Had she already gone home? I stood there wondering what to do for a moment before the door opened and Tokiwa poked her head out.

And then she jumped on me!

“Wha—?!”

“Welcome.”

Oh... Yeah, that’s right. Her voice was soft. But please... Please get off me.

I made it into the room somehow, my heart pounding, and then sat in the wooden chair she offered me. The light literature clubroom was as old as the rest of the building, and there were piles of magazines everywhere.

“I heard this was the light literature clubroom. What does your club do?”

“.....”

Sh-She grabbed me again!

“Rekka, are you just talking to her because you like it when she presses her breasts against you?”

Of course not! But how was I supposed to talk to her other-

wise? Telepathy?

“The light literature club is a writing club,” Tokiwa said, ignoring the fact that I was sweating bullets. “So, what’s your name?”

She squeezed me tighter, pushing her chest up against me as she talked. Did I have to keep talking to her like this? It didn’t feel like she’d let go unless I answered her.

“R-Rekka Namidare.”

“Did you want to join the club, Rekka?”

“N-No. I just came to give back your handkerchief...”

“My handkerchief?”

“Don’t tilt your head when you’re clinging to me!”

It makes certain things brush against me!

“I-It’s in my breast pocket... Can you get off me for a second?”

After Tokiwa moved, I took the (now washed) handkerchief out of my pocket.

“H-Here. Thanks for your help earlier. B-Bye... Gyah!”

I tried to leave after handing the handkerchief to her, but she grabbed me again.

“Rekka, why don’t you join the light literature club?”

“Um, well... I’m not that smart.”

“Your grades aren’t what’s important. Just how hard you’re willing to work.”

“No, um... Wait, why me?” I asked.

There was a pause.

“There’s nobody in the club but me right now. The student council is getting rid of the smaller clubs, so at this rate the light literature club will be shut down.”

“Oh, I think I remember the student council president saying that...”

Our student council president was pretty memorable... but that was a story for another time. Anyway, it looked like there was a good chance her club was gonna get the axe for low membership. That explained why Tokiwa wanted me to join.

“So join.”

Well, I’d heard she spent all her time in the nurse’s office, so she probably didn’t have a lot of connections with other students. And anyone in the second- and third-year classes had already decided what clubs they were joining, so there might not be much point in asking them. She’d probably just invited me because I’d happened to come visit her in the clubroom.

“Please.”

Stop sitting on my lap, rubbing up against me, and whispering into my ear!

N-No... I needed to calm down and use all my self-control to think this through. I didn’t know what the light literature club was really like. It was something she’d created, and she was trying to protect it. It must have been very important to her. And since it was about to be taken away from her, I had to think very carefully about how I responded.

“.....”

Tokiwa was staring at me with sleepy eyes. That was probably her default mode. And then before I could answer...

“Is Rekka here?!”

The door suddenly flew open and Rosalind came barging in.

“Hmph! Rekka! What are you doing with that girl?!”

“Rosalind?! No, this is, um...”

I realized how it must look and quickly removed Tokiwa from my lap. The two of us weren’t so close now, but Rosalind still looked upset.

“Um... um... R-Right! Did you need something? It sounded like you were looking for me.”

“Oh! Right! The bakery we went to by the highway is having a ‘couple’s day’ special today. They have a new product they’re only selling to couples.”

As she spoke, Rosalind sidled up to me and subtly wrapped her arm around mine.

“W-Wait, not in front of Tokiwa...”

“What? You’ll let that woman sit in your lap, but I can’t even hold your arm?”

I felt an indescribable pressure from Rosalind when she looked at me that way.

“N-No, it’s not like that. It’s fine.”

“Indeed. That was the right choice.”

Rosalind smiled at me—then turned to Tokiwa and stuck her tongue out—before pulling me away.

“Okay! Then off we go.”

“W-Wait! Hold on!”

I wasn’t done talking with Tokiwa yet.

“Fool. What if they sell out? We need to hurry.”

Rosalind ignored me and pulled harder.

“.....”

Tokiwa was still staring at me with her sleepy eyes. She seemed to have no intention of stopping me from going.

“Come on! We’re leaving!”

“Nwaaah!”

I was no match for the strength of a vampire, so I couldn’t do anything to stop Rosalind from dragging me out of the room, either.



That night after I went to bed...

“...Hnngh!”

Something fell on my head and woke me up.

“Oh, it’s just the remote.”

I was in the living room again. I was starting to get used to this waking-up-in-strange-places thing. They say that you can get used to just about anything, but that really only made me worry more. This definitely wasn’t normal.

Bzzzzzt...

“Hm?”

I heard a high-pitched noise and realized that the TV was still on. Had I tried to watch it while I was asleep?

“R, did I walk down to the living room on my own?”

“Yup, you guessed it.” R was standing upright with her feet on the ceiling, looking down at me.

“Huh...”

I really needed to figure out what was going on here. I knew what sleepwalking was, of course, but I didn’t have any idea what could cause it. Unless... this was the work of a ghost or something.

“No, no way.”

Yeah, what a joke. Hahaha...

My mind must’ve been going in weird directions because of our conversation at lunch after Iris had brought up the ghost in the old school building. That whole story about a ghostly girl with long, black hair sounded like something straight out of a movie. Granted, the old school building was always dark, and it certainly felt like it was haunted. A place like that was probably a breeding ground for ghost stories. Someone probably just made it up after

going there and...

Actually, there was that girl I'd seen staring at me from the hallway. Thinking back, she definitely had long hair... Three months ago I would've laughed, but right now, I was feeling a little unsure.

Man, come on...

“Hahaha...”

I managed a feeble laugh and looked out the window.

“...It's raining.”

Dark rain was pouring down from the night sky.



Second period ended, and I was headed back to the regular classroom from the physics lab with Satsuki, Iris, and Rosalind.

“What's wrong, Rekka?” Iris asked when she noticed me looking around.

“It just feels like somebody's been watching me all day...”

It wasn't anything more than a feeling, but I couldn't shake the impression that someone had their eyes on me. Of course, it was probably just my imagination...

“Iris, about the ghost in the old school building...”

“What? Did you actually see something after all, Rekka?”

“I really don’t want to think about it... but was there anything more to the story? Like, does it follow you home if you see it?”

“Huh, let me think... Oh, right. If it catches you, it’ll trap you inside its long hair and swallow you up! Head first!”

Iris thought we were just talking and messing around, so she did her best to liven things up.

“Y-You don’t say...”

Swallow you head first, huh?

“Ghosts were once human, right? Do they really eat people? What do you think, Rosalind?”

“Hm? I don’t know. I don’t know anything about ghosts, but once in a while, you’ll find monsters born from human desires or anger.”

...Seriously?

“And ghosts are the embodiment of the regret you humans leave behind when you die, right? So perhaps they could gain superhuman powers, too.”

“But eat people? Really?”

“I suppose if it eats people, it’s more of a monster than a ghost, yes,” Rosalind said.

That distinction didn’t really change much, did it?

“So, why the sudden interest in ghosts?”

“O-Oh, it’s nothing. I was just curious...” I quickly looked away.

“You sure you don’t want to ask for help?” R asked, but I ignored her as best I could.

For starters, I couldn’t actually say I was being haunted by a ghost. All that was happening was that I was waking up in weird places in my house. And even if there was a ghost at school, my house wasn’t anywhere nearby. And on top of that, the whole thing had started before I’d seen anything weird at school. All of this was strange, yeah, but strange didn’t necessarily mean supernatural. There was a chance I’d just imagined seeing someone with long hair in the hall...

“Or is it just that you’re embarrassed to say, “There might a ghost, so please help me?””

Y’know, R was getting really good at figuring out just what to say to piss me off. Although... I’d be lying if I said it wasn’t embarrassing.

“Satsuki, even you don’t have any information on ghosts, right?”

“Huh?! I-I said that before, didn’t I?”

“Yeah...”

It would have been helpful to at least get a definitive answer on whether or not they were real.

As we were talking and walking down the hallway, we came across the world history teacher. He frowned when he saw me.

“Namidare, I’m glad I caught you. We’re using the world map next period, so bring it to the classroom for me.”

“What?!”

“I’m busy. You know where it is, right? Thanks.”

And then he vanished before I could refuse. Last time it was punishment for napping, but what was it this time? All I was doing was walking to class with the girls.

“Rekka, until you do something about that dense head of yours, you’re just going to keep making enemies.”

Please don’t say that.

Oh, well. It looked like I’d have to go get that heavy map again. The break after second period was a little longer than most, but I’d still have to hurry to make it to class on time.

“Oh, I’ll help you.”

“Really, Iris? Thanks.”

“Rats... She said it first.”

“If only I could use my magic, I’d help, too...”

Rosalind and Satsuki were both looking a little frustrated about not getting to help with my impromptu chore, but I couldn’t figure out why. Anyway, I said goodbye to them and went with Iris to the old school building.

“Happy you aren’t alone?”

Put a sock in it, R.

Honestly, I did get a little case of the heebie-jeebies when the teacher asked me to go back to the old school building. But once we got there and into the storeroom down the hall, Iris helped me pull the massive tube off the shelf where I’d left it.

“Okay, I’ll carry this side. Iris, you get the other.”

“Huh? I can carry it by myself.”

“No, I don’t think that’s a good idea...”

I was the one who’d been asked to do it, after all. And so, Iris and I each held one end of the tube as we carried it out of the storeroom. It was still heavy, but it was a lot easier to hold with two people.

“Thanks for helping, Iris. I really appreciate it.”

“Really? Then next time I go shopping, come with me. That’s how you can thank me.”

“Shopping? Sure.”

“Yay!” I could hear Iris say from behind me. She sounded happy.

Did she want me to carry her bags for her? She was so rich that there was probably a lot to haul back home when she went out shopping.

“I can tell by your face that you’ve got the wrong idea about something again,” R sighed.

Wow, sometimes I really had no idea what R was talking about. She was acting like I’d done something wrong.

“Hm hm hmmm!” Iris, on the other hand, was so happy that she’d started to hum.

Together, we made our way down the hall with the map. It was still raining outside, making the place even darker than it usually was. We made it to the entrance of the old school building with no trouble, though, and from there there was the connecting corridor back to the other building. I turned to warn Iris because it

was so dark...

“Oh, there’s a step here. Be careful—”

And that’s when I saw a girl with long hair. I froze, too shocked to scream. Her hair was almost freakishly long. I could just see the tips of her toes, but her face and body were hidden in dark shadows.

She was coming towards me, and it looked like her feet were just sliding across the floor. I could see that she had legs... but lately ghosts had legs in horror movies and stuff, right?

“What’s wrong, Rekka?” Iris asked as she turned around to see what I was staring at.

I was sure she’d see the girl, too, but she turned back to look at me as if nothing was wrong.

“Was there something there?” she asked, clearly confused.

She couldn’t... see it?

“.....i.....”

The strange girl took another step towards me. With each step she took, her long hair wavered. For a moment, I could see a single eye within the mass of hair.

“Gyaaah!”

“R-Rekka, what’s wrong?”

I was panicking too much to even answer Iris.



Lunch break.

“You saw a ghost?”

“I think so.”

Tsumiki seemed slightly exasperated as she stared at me. I flinched.

“A ghost in the old school building, huh? Well, I’ve heard the story about it.” Tsumiki took a sip of juice from her straw and paused. “But why are you coming to me? Wouldn’t Otomo or Rosalind be better?”

“I asked them, but they couldn’t really help. I thought you might know something.”

“Why would you think I’d know anything about that? You know I’m not into occult stuff, right?”

“Yeah, but you have a lot of friends, so I thought maybe you might have heard something.”

“Sorry, I don’t think I can help you. I don’t really believe in that stuff.”

“I see...”

Hmm... So much for that. I’d officially hit the bottom of my list of people to ask for help.

“Why not go to the student council room and ask the president?”

“Why would I go talk to her about ghosts?”

“Her family runs Kibi Shrine.”

“Oh, huh.”

Kibi Shrine was a local shrine and a popular New Year’s destination for most of the town, including me. Should I go ask for an exorcism or something?

“Are you absolutely sure it was a ghost you saw?” Tsumiki took another sip from her straw, then pointed an almost accusatory finger at me. “You said you were sleepwalking, too, right?”

“Yeah, but maybe that’s the work of a ghost, too...”

“Stop talking about ghosts for a minute, okay?”

Tsumiki was quick to cut me off—a little too quick—as she turned to throw her freshly emptied juice box into the garbage can.

“They say sleepwalking can be caused by stress and stuff. Maybe you’re so stressed-out that you’re hallucinating, too?”

“Hallucinating...”

That might actually be the most reasonable explanation. And... come to think of it, that made sense. The Namidare bloodline only brought me into contact with heroines who needed saving from bad endings. It didn’t mean I was doomed to be haunted by monsters or anything weird like that.

“After all that’s happened, I could understand if maybe I’d just started to see the unnatural as being normal...”

“Right? Well, I guess in your case, it might actually be a ghost.”

Great.

“For now, why not try investigating each possibility one at a time?”

“And how would you suggest doing that?”

“Hmm...” Tsumiki thought for a moment. “Why not get counseling?”



And so, at Tsumiki’s suggestion, I decided to pay the school nurse a visit.

“Sleepwalking, huh?”

The nurse nodded and stuck something long, white, and thin between her lips.

“It’s a candy cigarette. Don’t worry about it.”

She tapped her fingers on the steel chair as she pursed her lips, the candy cigarette tilting upwards.

“Sleepwalking’s usually got a psychological cause. Stress is a very real possibility. And so to fix the root cause, you’ll have to make some lifestyle changes.”

“Is there any way to tell if that’s all it is?”

If there was, maybe I could figure out if a ghost was behind it.

“That’s easy. Have someone in your family wake you up in the

middle of the night. If you find yourself going down the stairs or opening the refrigerator door, it's sleepwalking."

"I see..."

I sighed. That wasn't the answer I was hoping for. Iris hadn't seen the girl in the old school building, which meant that even with someone watching over me, they wouldn't know if I was just sleepwalking or if there was a ghost involved.

"Oh, and if stress is the cause, could that same stress also make me hallucinate?"

"Well, it's possible for stress to cause hallucinations, but that's an extreme scenario. You don't seem that stressed-out to me. Or perhaps..." she said. "Maybe your situation is just really complicated?"

"Yes. In the worst case, the whole world might be destroyed," R answered for me, even though the nurse couldn't hear her.

Hmm... So in the end, I couldn't be totally sure that it was stress, but I couldn't be totally sure that it wasn't, either. That meant I needed to look into the ghost possibility, too.

"I hate to change the subject, but do you know the story of the ghost in the old school building?"

"A ghost?"

"Um, yeah. There's this rumor..."

"Sorry. I couldn't say. I only started working here this year."

"I see..."

I crossed my arms and sighed again, but I was suddenly ac-

costed by a familiar squishy sensation.

“Uwah! T-Tokiwa!”

Tokiwa, who had snuck up on me without me realizing it, grabbed me from behind.

“Rekka, did you think about joining my club?” she whispered with her chin resting on my shoulder.

“U-Um... Not yet...”

Her breasts were on my back! They were touching me!

“Oh? Tokiwa, you certainly seem interested in him.”

Tokiwa nodded.

“That’s a little strange for you. You’re usually so shy.”

The nurse then suddenly slapped her hands together like she’d just realized something.

“I suppose this is exactly why you’re the biggest problem child in the school. You’ve already seduced Tokiwa, huh?”

“I have not! She just wants me to join the light literature club!”

“It’s still unusual. Does something about him catch your fancy, Tokiwa?”

Tokiwa didn’t really answer.

Was she really ordinarily that shy, though? She’d literally jumped on me the first time we’d met, so I hadn’t quite gotten that impression.

“I’m sorry, Tokiwa, can you wait a little longer for an answer?”

I'm dealing with a personal problem right now, so I haven't had time to consider it yet."

"I see..."

She sounded a little disappointed.

"By the way, Rekka, didn't you say you were looking into the ghost in the old school building?" Tokiwa asked, still clinging to me.

"Huh?"

"I overheard you talking with the nurse."

Oh, she heard all that, huh?

"Do you know anything about it, Tokiwa?"

"...Nope, I don't."

"I see."

"Well..." Tokiwa fell silent for a minute before opening her mouth again. "Why not go to the library?"

"To the library?"

"Ghosts are the spirits of dead people, right? If somebody died in the old school building, the back issues of the school paper should have some information on it."

Well, it couldn't hurt. There wasn't a whole lot else I could do at this point.

"Thanks for the idea. I'll go after school and see what I can find."

“You’re welcome.”

“...So, can you get off me now?”

“?”

It felt like it was taking all my willpower just to communicate with Tokiwa...



After school.

I was in the library, looking through old issues of the school paper.

“.....”

“Rekka, did you doze off?” R asked.

“...No.”

I really was tired, though. And this research wasn’t helping. It was surprisingly dull work. Most of the papers were just a long list of school events, followed by news about the weather and, for some reason, poems by the principal. There were also occasional stories about cats and dogs. The cute pictures were the one saving grace of the whole thing, honestly.

“Is there really anything in here that might lead me to the ghost...?”

“Who knows?”

R, as usual, was no help. Would it kill her to throw me a bone for once?

The library was quiet, and there were several other students around, so I had to be careful when I spoke to R. Really, I could have just not said anything to her at all, but I felt like talking was the only thing keeping me awake.

“...Oh, wait. I could just have Satsuki find this out for me.”

I was looking for something like an accident or a murder. The kind of traumatic, news-worthy death that might make someone haunt a place. And even if ghosts weren't of this world, the events that created them were. Satsuki should still be able to look up something like that for me no problem. Once I realized that, I sent my childhood friend a message asking if she had a spare minute.

“...‘I'm in a meeting with the student council,’ huh?”

“That's right. Satsuki's the class representative, isn't she?”

Yeah, I could remember her mentioning it when class was over. Something about a meeting and the lack of discipline among the students lately.

Well, whatever. I sent another message saying I'd be waiting for her in the library and then put my phone away.

“Okay... now what do I do until she gets here?”

“Why not do some more research on your own?”

I was too lazy for that.

“Then study, perhaps?”

That would just make me more tired... No, wait.

“I guess I can just go to sleep.”

After all the reading I'd done, I was pretty drowsy. I already felt like I needed a nap anyway, so I laid my head down on the table, using my arms as a pillow.



“...ka. Rekka!”

“Hmm...?”

I woke up to the sound of someone calling my name.

“Rekka, are you awake?”

“Satsuki... is your meeting over?”

“That’s right. It took longer than I thought, so I hurried over here, but then I found you asleep.”

She puffed out her cheeks a little in a pout.

“Sorry, sorry. I was doing some research...” I apologized as I choked back a yawn.

“Research? Oh, that’s why.” Satsuki seemed to realize why I’d asked her to come. “You want me to look into something, right?”

“Yeah, actually...”

Just when I started to answer her...

“The library’s closing soon,” the librarian said. She’d walked over to us without me even noticing.

I glanced out the window and realized it was dark. I must’ve slept longer than I thought. I looked back over and saw the librarian staring at the pile of school papers on the table I was using.

“I-I’ll put them back right away!”

I hurried to gather up the papers and stood up to put them away.

“I’ll help you, too,” Satsuki said.

“Thanks.”

Satsuki took a handful from the stack I was holding and walked with me over to the corner where they belonged.

“So? What is it you wanted me to look into?”

“Um, it’s about the ghost in the old school building.”

There was a waterfall of paper as Satsuki suddenly dropped everything she was holding.

“What’s wrong?”

“I-It’s nothing.”

We both knelt down to pick up the papers.

“So, about that ghost...”

“I told you before that I can’t use my magic to learn anything about ghosts, remember?”

“No, it’s not the ghost I want you to look into. It’s about if

there were ever any accidents or murders in the old school building.”

“Wh-Why do you care about that?”

“You know, if there’s a ghost, there must be a reason, right? I want you to find that out for me.”

“Wh-Why do you want to know so badly?”

“Huh?”

Oh, right. I hadn’t told her yet, had I?

“Well, um... I think I might’ve seen that ghost.”

“Pigyah?!”

Pigyah...?

“Satsuki, what’s wrong?”

“N-Nothing!”

Satsuki stuffed the papers onto the shelf, a little more violently than she should have, and quickly stood up.

“W-We’re done putting away the papers, so let’s go! We need to leave immediately! Now! Right this second! And if you take even a single step away from me and go off on your own, you’re definitely going to die, so don’t even think about it! Got it? Now stand up!”

“Huh? What?”

“Hurry!”

“Right!”

Satsuki had never yelled at me like that before. I was a little taken by surprise, but I quickly stood up and did as she said. She grabbed me by the hand and yanked me towards the entrance. The librarian was still going around the room and checking to make sure all the doors were locked before closing up.

“Um... You can use your magic to find out what happened in the old school building, right?”

“No!”

“Huh? Wh-Why not?”

“Because I said no!”

Satsuki seemed intent on us leaving school and going straight home. She marched right out of the library, opening the door with her free hand and nearly shutting me in it as she slammed it behind her.

“Hey, careful there.”

“.....”

“Satsuki?”

I tried talking to her, but she didn’t respond at all. Confused, I looked around. That’s when something down the hallway caught my eye.

It was the ghost with long hair.

Both Satsuki and I froze in place. Wh-What were we supposed to do...? I wasn’t expecting this. I still hadn’t done any research. Think, Rekka, think...

“Huh, let me think... Oh, right. If it catches you, it’ll trap you

inside its long hair and swallow you up! Head first!”

Crap! Wasn’t that what Iris had said?

“Satsuki...”

I tried to get between her and the ghost, but...

“Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

Satsuki suddenly screamed—wailed, really—and pushed me out of the way with all her strength.

“Huh?!”

She then took off in the other direction, towards the old school building and away from the ghost.

“Hey, wait! Satsuki!”

I hurried after her. I took a quick glance behind me as I ran and saw the ghost dragging its feet along the floor as it followed us. I was lucky it was so slow, but where had Satsuki gone? I ran after her into the old school building, but I didn’t see her anywhere inside.

“She’s never this fast! Where in the world did she go?!”

“It’s all because you startled her, Rekka.”

“It’s my fault?!”

I was yelling at R, but I heard the door to the building open behind me. The ghost was definitely chasing me. It was slow, but it was still going to catch me if I just stood around.

“Tch!”

I headed upstairs, crossing my fingers that the ghost wouldn't see me... if it even worked like that. I made it to the second floor and then the third. I was hoping to run into Satsuki in the hallway, but she didn't seem to be on either floor.

Was she hiding in one of the rooms? If only she'd run back into the library or out into school courtyard... I guess she couldn't do that because she was still wearing her school slippers. So, she was still the serious, well-mannered type even as she was running for her life, huh?

Squeak...

I heard the sound of rubber-soled slippers on the stairs. It was coming from below. The ghost was coming after me... and if it caught me, it was going to swallow me up head first.

"I need to get out of here and find Satsuki..."

"Good luck, Rekka!"

"You don't even care, do you?!"

R was enjoying the show. Couldn't she just take over for me or something just this once?

I tried to open one of the sliding doors on the third floor, hoping I could duck into a classroom and hide while waiting for the ghost to pass, but the door just rattled in the frame and wouldn't budge. No one really used the building, so most of the rooms were locked up tight. And since no one really used the building, I couldn't just try doors at random hoping that someone had accidentally left one unlocked...

No, wait. I was going about this the wrong way. Nobody really used the building, so the teachers probably didn't patrol it that often. And that meant there was a good chance there wasn't any-

one checking to make sure things had been locked up properly at the end of the day. What rooms in this building had been used recently and might still be open?

“...The social studies storeroom on the first floor and the light literature clubroom...”

That was it. I’d opened both of those doors myself, so I was sure of it. There was a good chance Satsuki had to be hiding in one of those two rooms.

Squeak...

Crap! The ghost was getting closer. I could hear it on the third floor now.

First I’d go to the light literature clubroom to see if Satsuki was there. If she wasn’t, I’d wait for the ghost to pass and then head back down to the storeroom on the first floor. Once I settled on a plan, I made a mad dash for the clubroom.

“You’re running faster than usual. Did you know that?”

“Now’s not the time!”

She was definitely enjoying this!

When I reached the light literature clubroom, I said a little prayer as I reached out for the handle to the door... and it opened! I stepped in and tried to lock the door from the inside, but I couldn’t find the lock. I wanted to turn the lights on, but I felt like that would give away my location. I gave up on the lock, but even in the dark, I’d been in the room before, and I had a decent handle on the layout.

“...!”

Thinking about it, I remembered that the only real place to hide in here would be the locker for cleaning supplies in the back! I hurried across the room as quickly and quietly as I could, trying my best not to knock over the piles of magazines scattered about.

Click!

I opened the metal locker and laid eyes on just the person I was looking for. My childhood friend was hiding inside.

“Aa—!”

“Satsuki! Shhh!”

I put my hand over Satsuki’s mouth before she could scream. It was dark enough that she’d probably thought I was the ghost, so I brought my face close to hers so that she could see it was me. I saw the tension leave her body as she relaxed. Then I had her scoot over so I could fit into the locker with her.

It was... a little cramped.

I’d never been so irritated to be sharing a space with a mop and bucket in my life. The slightest movement made them clatter and rattle, so I couldn’t even move them out of the way without making a bunch of noise.

“...Oof!”

“S-Sorry...”

Satsuki sounded uncomfortable, so I apologized. We were so close that I could feel her warmth and even her breath. The sensation was starting to make my head spin...

“Even in the middle of a horror movie sequence, you’re still enjoying yourself, huh? Your power to turn anything into a ro-

mantic comedy never ceases to impress me.”

R, you really never change, do you?!

She just says whatever she wants because she knows that nobody but me can see her... Wait, nobody but me can see her...

Come to think of it, when I'd run into the ghost with Iris, she hadn't been able to see it... or so it seemed. So how come Satsuki was able to? I didn't have time to think about it.

Rrrrrattle...

Satsuki and I both jumped at the sound of the door to the classroom sliding open. All we could do was hold each other tightly.

Squeak... Squeak... Squeak...

The sound of slow footsteps got closer and closer, and I heard someone put their hand on the handle to the locker.

Ka-chak!

The door flung open, and I saw the ghost standing there, its face hidden by its long hair.

I turned to Satsuki and tried to shield her with my body. I didn't know how much good it would do, but I couldn't think of anything else to do trapped in a locker like this.

I felt the ghost touch my shoulder.

“I...”

I closed my eyes in terror... and then I felt warm breath against my ear.

“Rekka, I caught you!”

“...Huh?”

I knew that voice. It was a low, husky voice I was quite familiar with.

“...Tokiwa?”

“That’s right.”

The long-haired ghost—Tokiwa, apparently—put her chin on my shoulder and nodded.





And so it turned out that the ghost Satsuki and I had seen was really just our upperclassman with her hair down.

“But why’d you let your hair down in the first place? Surely you can’t see anything like that.”

“A teacher fussed at me.”

Tokiwa explained that it was because of the flashy butterfly hairpin she wore. It was a violation of the school dress code, so one of the teachers had almost confiscated it from her once. After that, she only wore it while she was in the nurse’s office or the clubroom. Apparently the nurse didn’t care one way or the other. I asked her if she couldn’t just wear a different hairpin, but she said that the butterfly one was a gift from her grandmother and that it was very important to her.

“I’m wearing it until I can make my debut as an author. It’s the same with my hair.”

“That’s why you don’t cut it?”

That explained the length.

“So... By the way, Tokiwa, why are you clinging to Rekka like that?”

Now that she’d finally calmed down, Satsuki was staring at me rather dubiously.

“Um... Tokiwa can’t speak very loudly.”

“Then she can write on a piece of paper!”

“My handwriting’s bad,” Tokiwa said—not that Satsuki could hear her—as she held me tighter.

“Y-You...!”

Satsuki pointed a trembling finger at me, but with Tokiwa holding on to me like she was, I couldn’t even move. I just stood there in a cold sweat.

“U-Um, Tokiwa... I have a question.”

“What?”

“Um... Sorry if I’ve got this wrong, but were you waiting outside the library to ambush us?”

“...Why do you think that?”

Tokiwa was holding me so close that I couldn’t see her expression.

“You were the one who suggested I go to the library... and you were supposed to be in the clubroom after school, so it’s weird that you weren’t coming from the direction of the old school building, isn’t it?”

If she’d just finished up for the day and happened to be passing by the library, she should have been walking in the opposite direction. She never would have ended up cutting us off like she had.

“You’re pretty smart, Rekka.”

She quickly admitted that she’d done it deliberately.

“Can I ask why?”

She quietly let go of me... and then pinched my cheek.

“Rekka, you said I was a ghost.”

I guess she must’ve been mad, because I could hear her even though she wasn’t speaking directly into my ear.

“Oh...”

Did she mean back at the nurse’s office? Well... that’s fair. From her perspective, someone she’d just met had bumped into her in the old school building, then screamed and ran off. Even worse, then I went to the nurse and said I’d seen a ghost right in front of her. Even a quiet girl like Tokiwa would get mad at that.

“I’m sorry...”

I apologized as soon as I realized what I’d done. Tokiwa leaned forward to whisper to me again.

“Apology not accepted.”

“Then what can I do to earn your forgiveness?”

“It’s simple.” She paused to take a breath. “Join the light literature club.”

“I see...”

I should have known that’s what she was going to say.

“Can I ask you one thing before I answer?”

“You’ve already asked several.”

“Then one more.”

“Okay, but just this one.”

All right, then...

“Why me?”

The nurse had said that Tokiwa was shy, so I wanted to know she was so intent on getting me to join her club. If it was just to keep it from getting shut down, that was fine.

“You were talking to something I couldn’t see in the nurse’s office, right?”

“Huh? Th-That was...”

That’s right. She’d caught me talking to R. I’d totally forgotten about that.

“That got my attention.”

“Is that all?”

“No. At that point, I was just curious about you. I followed you a little to try and learn more about you.”

So, the girl with long hair I saw in the hallway was Tokiwa, too. Wait... did she just admit she was stalking me?

“I needed club members to keep the club from being shut down, and you came to return my handkerchief anyway, so I worked up the courage to invite you to join.”

But that apparently wasn’t everything.

“You were seriously considering joining when I asked you, right? I realized how nice you were, so I really wanted you to join the light literature club after that.”

“Nice? No way. I’m just a normal guy.”

It felt like she was giving me too much credit, so I averted my eyes as I answered. I heard her laugh a little.

“You’re really popular with girls, aren’t you, Rekka?”

“Huh?!”

“You’re always surrounded by them.”

“No, there’s a lot of reasons for that...” I stammered.

Sure, the bloodline of the Namidare meant I met a lot of heroines, but it’s not like they liked me... Wait, now Satsuki was scowling at me like a demon. There was no telling what would happen to me later if I didn’t get Tokiwa off of me somehow.

“You see, I want to write a novel about you.”

“Huh?!”

Tokiwa... Tokiwa wanted to write a book about me? That had to be one of the most embarrassing things anyone had ever said to my face.

“That’s why I want to spend more time with you. So, will you join my club?”

She must’ve felt like she’d said all that she had to say, because she took a step back and stared up at me expectantly. And with that earnest look in her eyes... I couldn’t turn her down, could I?

But I decided to get back at her a little for scaring me.

“If you’re okay with me being a ghost member.”

And speaking of ghosts, I later asked Iris about the one we encountered in the school building. She said all she saw when she looked behind me was Tokiwa in the process of taking her hair

down, and that's why she hadn't thought anything of it. It was just a girl. Of course it wasn't a ghost.



Wait... Even after all this, I still hadn't solved my sleepwalking problem, had I?

"Well, I guess it doesn't matter," I mumbled to myself as I flopped on my bed.

In the end, the ghost thing had all been a big misunderstanding. The sleepwalking was probably due to stress after all. I figured I'd go talk to the nurse about it again, or maybe just wait to see if things would get better. I closed my eyes, sleepily wondering how I would explain this all to the nurse.



"TEN GIRLS AT ONCE?! What the hell is wrong with you?"

"I'm not dating ten girls at once! Give me some credit!"

"...Really?"

"It's more than that."

"Die!"

...What's going on? And who's talking? It sounds pretty

heated...

I wasn't even sure if I was awake or dreaming, but the pressure on my head sure felt real. It was like I'd fallen asleep upside down on the sofa again. If this was reality though, where were those voices coming from?

I opened my eyes. Just as I expected, what I saw was an inverted view of my living room. It looked like the furniture was on the ceiling. There was what looked like a dubbed foreign show on the television, too, and watching it intently... was R.

“...”

Question: Who was it who said I'd been “walking around on my own” all night? Answer: R.

Between that and what I was witnessing now, I had all the evidence I needed. I slowly righted myself, careful not to make any noise. Then I stealthily snuck up behind R. She was so focused on the TV show that she hadn't even noticed I'd woken up. Now then...

“R!”

“Huh?!”

Got you!

“So, it was you the whole time?!”

“Waaaaah!”

“Man, your cheeks stretch a long way! Ahahaha! Look at you!”

“Stop. Shtop! Shhhtoppiiiiit!”

After a good ten minutes of stretching out R's cheeks as far as

they'd go, I sat her down across from me.

“So, what were you doing moving me around like that?”

“I can't touch anyone but you, remember? So...”

Apparently that was R's excuse. She'd been really into watching TV lately. There was a certain late-night program she wanted to see, but it aired well after both Harissa and I went to bed. R was only demi-material, so her hands passed through the remote and she couldn't turn on the TV on her own. But there was a special exception. There was something she *could* touch: me. She could use my fingers to press the buttons.

“And so you brought me down here to the first floor after I fell asleep?”

“That's right.”

“You know, I'd feel better if you actually sounded at least a little sorry.”

She'd even used my hand to open the door to the living room. And this explained the body aches I had in the mornings. She'd basically been dragging me down the stairs.

“Sheesh. My body isn't some toy for you to play with, you know?”

“Yeah, I know, but...”

“But what?”

“When you can't sleep, the nights can be pretty long.”

That's right... R didn't have any need for sleep, so it wasn't something she'd been designed to do. She couldn't even if she

wanted to. A whole night, huh? I'd never thought about it, but that was a long time to spend with no one to talk to and nothing to do.

“...I'll buy you a portable TV then. If I put it next to my bed, you won't have to drag me downstairs, right?”

“Oh, my. Is there even enough money in your wallet to spring for something like that?”

“I'll have my dad send me extra. But keep the volume down, okay? I can sleep with a little noise, but you might wake up Harissa.”

“...Huh.”

“What?”

“I was just thinking that you're being awfully nice to an artificial life-form like me.”

“That doesn't really matter, does it?”

Who cares if she's artificial or not?

I sighed. R did too and seemed to relax a little.

“I knew it. I'm your main girl.”

“No way.”

Chapter 3: School Life Comedies Can Be Deadly?!

One Sunday morning, Harissa and I were cleaning out the storehouse out back behind the house. It wasn't a particularly big unit. My dad had gotten a loan to build our house, and when he did that, he'd brought the storehouse—foundation and all—in from the country. It was filled with various random things my ancestors had picked up over the years as members of the Namidare family. It was also where I put the Hero's Sword I'd brought back from Harissa's world.

“...What's this thing, though?”

I held up a strangely spiky stick and looked at it scrutinizingly. Any magical girl who used something like that to transform was probably a big fan of physical attacks rather than magical ones...

“Ugh...”

Thinking about magical girls still made me shudder a little after my own “transformation.”

“I guess I can just leave it here for now.”

I wiped the dust off the stick and set it back on the tarp I'd laid out in the yard.

“Rekka, I've finished cleaning the inside of the storehouse.”

Harissa came out of the storehouse carrying a dusting brush and a rag in either hand.

“Oh, thanks. I’ll finish dusting the rest of the stuff inside, so you dust off what I brought out here.”

“You got it!”

“I’ll take care of the heavy things myself later, so just skip that stuff.”

“Okay.”

“Also, you don’t have to touch anything that looks dangerous. Or anything you don’t understand.”

“Okay...?”

What was up with my family that I had to give her instructions like that just to clean up our storehouse? Never mind. I already knew. I just wished my dad and my ancestors hadn’t put such weird stuff in here.

“W-Well, just be careful.”

I took off my gloves and patted Harissa on the shoulder before going into the storehouse myself. Harissa had already dusted the place, so now all I had to do was wipe it all down with a wet rag.

“All right, let me see if I can get this done before noon.”

“Please do. Even better, try getting it done before the morning variety shows start.”

Of course, R, who didn’t (couldn’t) help with the cleaning, was reclining in mid-air and telling me what to do. She’d gotten really into watching TV, and lately she even wanted to spend a lot of time at the rental shop. At this rate, I figured I might end up having to buy her a portable DVD player.

“Hey, you’re just standing there. Get to work! Do you ever want to finish this?”

“Yeah, yeah.”

I soaked a rag in a bucket of water and rung it out, then started cleaning from top to bottom. My mom usually did this stuff, so it was the first time I’d done it on my own in a long while.

“There’s an awful lot of dust in here considering how well the place was sealed up,” I said. “Where does it all come from?”

“It seems like it’s falling from the ceiling, actually.”

“Is this what they call house dust?”

“Don’t worry. As far as I can tell, none of it is poisonous or dangerous.”

“You can tell that?”

“I may be small, but I’m multifunctional. I just don’t use most of my functions.”

Isn’t that kind of a waste? But I guess if she couldn’t touch anybody but me or be seen by anybody but me, there wasn’t all that much she could do with those functions, anyway.

“Look, you stopped moving again.”

“Right...”

Did she want to see those variety programs that badly? Actually, when I said I’d try to finish the cleaning before noon, I knew I was being overly ambitious. With just me and Harissa, it was probably going to take a half a day. It certainly would have gone faster with my mom and dad around. Maybe I could take a break

around lunchtime...

“Kyah!”

“Harissa?!”

I dropped what I was doing and rushed outside the second I heard Harissa scream.

“What’s wrong?”

“Oh, Sir Rekka!”

Harissa turned towards me. She was holding a rag, and sitting in front of her was some kind of urn.

“I heard you shout. What’s up?”

“It felt like this urn moved on its own...”

“The urn moved on its own?”

Was there a rat inside or something? Hmm, no, that couldn’t be it. It had a lid on it.

“Um, I accidentally broke the piece of paper that was sealing it when I was cleaning. And then...”

“A piece of paper?”

I looked, and sure enough there was a long strip of paper running over the lid of the urn and onto the body, basically taping it shut. It was so black that I thought at first it was just a charcoal stain or something.

“Hmm...”

What a weird piece of paper. It was rectangular and a little

bigger than my palm. Of course, the lid of the urn was much bigger. If you really wanted to use that piece of paper to seal the urn shut, you would've had to cut it up into three or four pieces. But the paper, as it was, was only on one side.



And actually, the lid was seated quite securely in the urn itself. There didn't seem to be a need to seal it at all. If someone was worried about something inside getting out though, they certainly should have sealed it with more than a single piece of paper. But... Harissa said it had moved on its own. Did that mean there was something weird inside?

“Harissa, get back. And let me have that duster.”

“Okay.”

I took the duster from Harissa and motioned for her to step back. I lifted up the lid of the pot, but only a little, and then slid the end of the duster underneath it. Then I stepped back as far as I could and used the duster to flip the lid up like a lever. I tensed up, ready for anything to come out, but after waiting one second, then two... and then ten, nothing happened. Hesitantly, I looked inside the pot, but there was nothing there.

“This stupid thing really scared me for a second there.”

“Is everything okay?” Harissa asked as she walked back over to me.

“Yeah, it's empty. Maybe you just imagined it moving?”

“Yeah... I guess so.” Harissa nodded, a little relieved.

“...Huh?”

As I went to put the lid back on, I noticed there was something written on the inside of the urn. Was it Chinese? Or maybe just really old Japanese? I couldn't tell. I couldn't make heads or tails of it.

“Is something wrong, Sir Rekka?”

“No, it’s nothing.”

I figured there was nothing to really be worried about and put the lid back on the urn.



The next day. 10:20 A.M.

Like every Monday, I’d gone to school and was sitting in my seat in class. It was second period break, and I was killing time waiting for the next class to start.

“So, Rekka, what’s up with this light literature club you joined?”

“It’s a long story. Right, Satsuki?”

“Don’t talk to me about it... It’s not something I care to remember.”

I was trying to have a nice chat with Satsuki and the other girls, but I suddenly heard something unusual from out in the hallway.

“What’s going on?”

“Sir Rekka!”

Much to my surprise, Harissa entered the classroom. She stood out since she wasn’t wearing a school uniform, but she was also shouting loudly and waving around her wooden staff that she used to cast spells. It was enough to startle the other students, who all cautiously stepped back. The tiny sorcerer then made her

way over to me, anxiously tapping the end of her staff against the floor.

“Come, Sir Rekka! Let’s return to Aburaamu!”

“A-Aburaamu?”

That was the name of Harissa’s homeland, wasn’t it?

“Did you find a way to travel back there?”

“No! Not yet! But since we don’t know how, let’s go figure it out!”

“Um...”

What was going on here? Did she suddenly get homesick? Is that why she was so determined to go home? This was just so unlike her...

“Hey, Harissa! You’re not taking Rekka anywhere!”

“Th-That’s right, Harissa. What’s gotten into you?”

“What’s going on here? It’s awfully brazen to show up out of nowhere and then start making such a fuss.”

Iris seemed angry, Satsuki sounded worried, and Rosalind was clearly annoyed. But despite their different reactions, each one of them was curious about the sudden change in Harissa’s behavior.

“Harissa, really, what’s going on here?”

“It doesn’t matter! Just come with me!”

Harissa cut me off and, with strength I couldn’t believe she had in her little body, yanked me out of my chair and dragged me out of the classroom.

“Wha... What?”

I was so confused that I just went along with her.

“Hey! Where do you think you’re going?”

“Harissa, wait!”

“Just what do you think you’re doing, Rekka? Why are you letting her take you... No! Don’t tell me you like little girls!”

“Don’t yell something like that! Also, that’s not true!”

“You prefer girls with larger breasts, don’t you? Actually, if you were into lolicon, that would make Rosalind happy, wouldn’t it?”

R, if I had a rag or something, I would stuff it in your mouth!

That aside, our escape (?) would probably be brought to an end pretty quickly. We were trying to run from Iris, an alien, and Rosalind, a vampire. Both of them were insanely strong. And Harissa had even less stamina than an average girl her age, so they would catch up to us before long. Or so I thought.

“Ealim Nekram!” Harissa chanted.

I knew that spell. It was her invisibility magic. Nobody could see us now. I was familiar with it because she’d used it to save us several times before. Of course, Iris and Rosalind knew exactly what was going on, too.

“Rosalind! Do that bat thing and find them!”

“I’d love to, but I can’t use my powers in front of all these people! I won’t be able to go to school with Rekka anymore after revealing myself like that!”

But as it turned out, they had no way of finding us if Rosalind

wouldn't turn into bats. That being said, if I did something as simple as call out to them, they'd immediately know where we were.

“ ... ”

But with the way Harissa was staring at me, I couldn't do something like that. For starters, I hadn't gotten to the bottom of what was going on with her. I had no idea why she was suddenly so insistent on going home. And in hopes of finding out, I let her pull me along, away from Iris and Rosalind.



Harissa took me into a second-year student classroom. The bell had already rung by then, but there was nobody there. Maybe they were out on a field trip or something? Either way, if a teacher found us, we'd be in trouble. But... I guess I didn't need to worry about that with Harissa's invisibility magic.

“So, Harissa, what's going on, exactly?” I asked, more worried about her than anything else.

I'd told her before that she wasn't allowed to come into the school without permission. Moreover, she would normally just wait until I got home if there was something she needed to talk to me about. But not only had she barged into the school, she'd shown up in my classroom talking about weird stuff and then dragged me off in front of all my classmates. It was pretty out of character. Had something happened that made all of this so urgent?

“If something's happened, then I'll help you. You can tell me

anything.”

“Okay...” Harissa gripped her staff tightly and looked up at me. She almost looked like she was going to cry. “Um, I...”

“Yeah?”

“Um...”

Harissa kept mumbling and stammering like she was having trouble getting the words out, but...

“I can’t hold it in anymore.”

Then she started to say something weird.

“...What?” I tilted my head, confused. “I’m sorry... Can you break that down for me some?”

“My heart can’t take any more.”

“I... I still don’t understand what that means. Also, Harissa, you’re a little too close for comfort.”

Each time she managed a few words, Harissa moved a little closer. The next thing I knew, she’d backed me up against the window to the room.

“Harissa?”

“Sir Rekka, am I really that unattractive?”

Unattractive? Huh? Was she asking if she was cute?

“No, I think there’s a lot to like about you.”

“That makes me so happy, Sir Rekka!”

“Uwah!”

Thud!

Harissa suddenly grabbed on to me with such force that I lost my balance and fell backwards onto the floor.

“Sir Rekka!” She was on top of me, speaking in a soft voice. “I’m so happy I get to live in the same house with you.”

“Y-You are? That’s good. By the way, if you could get off me, I’d appreciate it...”

“But sometimes it’s frustrating,” Harissa continued, ignoring my request.

Frustrating...? Did this have something to do with what she was going on about?

“Sir Rekka, we’re old enough to get married, right? But even though we live under the same roof, we sleep in different rooms and don’t do anything! Isn’t that strange?” Harissa asked impatiently while running her finger along my collarbone.

“No, that’s just in the world you’re from, right? In Japan, you’re not old enough to get married yet...”

“Hmph! That’s why I want to go back to Aburaamu! Then we can get married!” Harissa yelled as she started to pound her hands against my chest. “And who cares what the law says?! Sir Rekka, what do you really think about me? If you really like me, then why won’t you sleep in the same room as me? I want you to take responsibility for all the frustration I feel every night!”

“H-Harissa! Calm down!”

Harissa started to pull at my hair and clothes. She was still on

top of me, so if anybody saw us like this, it would look really bad...

“Rekka! Where are you?!”

“There’s no use in hiding! Come on out!”

“Both of you, be quiet! It’s the middle of the school day!”

I could hear three voices I recognized coming from the hallway. Wait, crap! It would’ve been bad enough if Satsuki, Iris, and Rosalind had found me before, but if they found me now... My blood ran cold just thinking about it.

“H-Harissa! Please just stay quiet!”

“Mmmfmmfh...”

I put my hand over Harissa’s mouth—it looked like I was committing a crime, but I didn’t have much of a choice—and hid in the corner of the room. I’d just wait for them to pass by...

“Hmm... Seems like they’re in this classroom.”

I’d forgotten about the Magic of Omniscience! The three of them opened the door and waltzed into the classroom. Fortunately (...or unfortunately?), even if they knew we were in here, they didn’t seem to know exactly where we were or what we were doing.

Still, this was bad. I needed to get out of here without them finding me. I put both my arms around Harissa and focused exclusively on staying quiet as I crawled along the floor, headed for the door opposite the one the other girls had come in from. But...

“Where do you think they are? I suppose I can find them for us.”

Rosalind was going to turn into bats now?!

“Yeah, try that.”

Satsuki, stop it! Even if there’s nobody here, that’s gotta be a bad idea!

As I thought about trying to plead with them, I looked up and saw how genuinely terrifying each of them looked. They were all so calm. And just when I thought I’d be a dead man for sure...

“You three, what are you doing in an upperclassmen’s classroom?” a new, fourth voice asked.

When I took a peek, I saw a girl with her hair tied up. Most notably, however, she was wearing an eyepatch over her right eye. It was, without a doubt, the student council president of our school, Mitsuhashi High. Her entrance had stymied the other girls, but now my exit was blocked. I stayed put, basically stuck between a rock and a hard place.

“Mmmhmmmm mhmmmm!”

Harissa, please stay quiet!

I’d crawled with her in my arms across half the classroom, so both of us—clothes, hair, and all—looked even more disheveled than before. I wouldn’t even have a chance to make excuses if anyone caught us like this. They’d probably go straight to calling the cops on me.

“Um, well, you see...”

Satsuki must’ve come back to her senses. She politely tried to stammer out an excuse for her upperclassman.

“We’re looking for someone. Don’t bother us.”

Rosalind, however, didn't seem to care at all. She was as flip-pant as ever, and more than willing to simply boot the student council president out of the room in order to get back to business. Iris didn't say anything, but she seemed like she was ready to side with Rosalind.

"Looking for someone, huh? I don't know the details, but is it really important enough that you have to skip class?"

"Of course it is."

"I see. You're not even going to pretend like you know you should be in class then..." The president crossed her arms. "But you know, I'm supposed to be a role model for other students, especially my juniors. I can't just let you skip."

"Hmph. You're quite arrogant. In that case, I have a question for you... Why aren't you in class yourself?"

Actually, that was a good question. What *was* she doing here? The president was a second-year, so it's possible that she was just walking down a hallway in this part of the school building when she'd heard voices. But Rosalind still had a point. Since we were in the middle of class time now, shouldn't she have gone to get a teacher to handle something like other students skipping? It seemed odd she'd try and handle it herself.

"You've got me there, but this is an emergency. At least, it's not something I'm at liberty to talk about."

"Then we won't tell anybody we saw you if you don't tell anybody you saw us," Rosalind said.

"You think this is a negotiation? That's too bad. Unfortunately, what I'm doing is only going to take a minute."

The student council president took what looked like a talisman

out of her pocket, then lifted the eyepatch over her right eye up just a little. She turned her now exposed right eye towards me and Harissa. Wait... Why was she looking our way? She shouldn't be able to see us.

“There, huh?”

But nonetheless, she walked straight over to where we were on the floor and held the talisman up to Harissa.

“Hwah?!”

Suddenly Harissa started to spasm in my arms. For a moment, I swore I saw something floating up out of her body.

“...Huh? What am I doing here?”

“Harissa? Are you okay?”

“Huh? Sir Rekka?”

I was surprised by the way she'd started to twitch, but it looked like she was okay. She looked up at me in shock... but then she began to tremble again before she froze like a stone.

“Harissa?”

Did something else weird happen...?

“Rekka!” I heard Satsuki, Iris, and Rosalind all shout at once.

For some reason I didn't want to look up. I really, really didn't. If I had to, I was ready to spend the rest of my life here on the floor just looking at the ground.

Except... when I looked down, I was freshly reminded that Harissa's clothes were a mess. Several of the buttons on my shirt were undone, too. And we were on the floor like this in each

other's arms...

“...What are you doing?” the student council president asked in shock.

Yup, there was no doubting it. The invisibility spell had been broken. In other words, I was exposed in front of everyone, looking like a criminal...

Basically, it was time to beg for my life.





“Gyaaaah! Please! Forgive me!”

“Oh, you’re awake?”

“...Huh?”

What happened? And where was I? I felt like I’d woken up from a nightmare... One so terrifying that I couldn’t even remember it. I wasn’t even sure what I was doing here, but looking around, I seemed to be in the nurse’s office. The nurse was sitting at her desk like usual, sucking on a candy cigarette.

“I found you lying just outside the door. I don’t know why somebody would bring you here and dump you, though, or who did it, for that matter.”

“I don’t know, myself.”

“Sounds like you’ve got a lot going on. Well, I patched you up, so don’t worry. Your life isn’t in danger.”

“Wait... Are you implying that it might’ve been?”

“I can’t answer that. Liability and all that.”

Wasn’t that basically the same as admitting it? Well, whatever... I went to get out of bed, but I put my hand down on something incredibly soft.

“...Oh.”

“T-T-Tokiwa!”

“Oh, yeah, I forgot to mention Tokiwa was in the same bed.”

“Why?!”

I was so surprised that I froze stock still. In my hand was Tokiwa’s breast... Well, not exactly in my hand. It was too big to fit.

“I didn’t think there was anybody who wouldn’t realize a girl was sleeping next to him, then somehow end up grabbing one of her breasts,” the nurse said.

“Rekka will grab any breasts he sees. That’s just who he is,” R responded.

So now I was getting double-teamed?

“.....no.....”

Tokiwa woke up, grabbed my wrist, and moved my hand off her breast. W-Was she going to get mad at me? I bet she was...

I waited for her to start yelling... but instead she grabbed on to me! Her breasts were pushing up against me again! This time they were up against my chest!

“Good morning, Rekka.”

“G-G-G-Good morning, Tokiwa!”

“Mmm...”

Maybe she was still sleepy, because she began to stretch and rub herself against me. Please stop!

“It’s the middle of the school day! Shouldn’t Tokiwa be in class

with everyone else?!”

“What are you talking about? School ended a long time ago.”

“Huh?!”

Just how long was I out?

“Rekka, let’s go to the clubroom.”

“Um, okay.”

“Oh, wait. I had a message for you,” the nurse said, pulling the candy cigarette out of her mouth like she’d just remembered it.

“A message?” I asked.



“From the student council president. She wanted you to come to the student council room after school.”

What did she want with me...? Either way, since I now had somewhere to be, I turned Tokiwa down and left the nurse's office.



Hmm... I'd arrived at the student council room, but for some weird reason, I was scared to go in. I took a deep breath and knocked.

“Excuse me!” I said, perhaps a little too loudly, as I opened the door. “I'm Rekka Namidare. I was told the student council president wanted to talk to me.”

“Oh, you're here?”

I looked around the room and saw that the student council president was the only one inside.

“Well, come on in,” she said.

She still had her eyepatch on her right eye, so she was pretty easy to recognize. Um, her name was... Momone Kibi, right? She motioned for me to come inside.

“O-Okay.”

I stepped in and closed the door. Now I was alone in the room with her. It felt like I'd stuck my head in a tiger's mouth. It was weirdly intense.

“Now, Rekka Namidare, do you know why I called you here?”

“Um... No.”

“You really don’t? There are two reasons.”

“Huh?”

There were two?

“First, you brought a girl who wasn’t a student into the school and tried to strip her clothes off in an empty classroom.”

“What?! When?!”

“You don’t remember?”

“No, I really don’t...”

“...Well, you did get hit pretty hard.”

She looked away for some reason. Because of her eyepatch, it was impossible to read her expression once she turned to the side.

What exactly happened during the hours I couldn’t remember?

“Well, I’ll let you off the hook for that.”

“Th-Thank you?”

“You’ve already been punished enough. It would be cruel to do any more.”

Seriously, what happened to me? I wanted to ask her, but she wasn’t done talking.

“But it does have something to do with the other matter. You said you don’t remember... but what’s your relationship with that girl named Harissa?”

“Harissa...? Um, she’s a girl who stays at my house.”

“That makes things even more difficult,” she sighed. “You’re every bit the problem child the rumors say you are, Rekka Nami-dare.”

“I just want to point out that plenty of rumors have no basis in actual fact.”

“From the way I saw your female friends behave, I think there’s plenty of truth to this one.”

Great. Now not only the teachers, but the student council thought of me that way, too? That was kind of depressing.

“Well, it doesn’t matter. Let’s stay on topic here. We can have a long talk about your relationship with the opposite sex later. The problem right now is Harissa.”

“What’s wrong with Harissa?”

“It would appear that she was possessed by an evil spirit.”

“An... evil spirit?”

I blinked a few times in surprise. I wasn’t honestly sure I’d heard her right.

“You may not believe it, but it’s true. I don’t know if you’re aware of this, but my family runs a shrine. I know a little more about this kind of thing than the average person.”

It felt like she was playing it up a little, but this was probably

how she had to sell it to people who didn't believe in spirits.

"Don't worry. I believe in that stuff," I said, hoping it would make things a little easier.

After all, I'd just been caught up in a ghost scare... even if it had all turned out to be a big misunderstanding.

"That's helpful."

"Um, so where is Harissa now? Is she okay?"

"Yeah. Don't worry. I got rid of the spirit and sent her home. Although... I didn't realize that that meant your house."

"A-Anyway, is she okay, then?"

"She is, but there's one problem. I got the spirit out of her, but let it escape," she sighed. "That's why I called you. I wanted to see if you had any idea where it might've come from. For better or worse, she lives with you, right? So, do you have any idea what might've caused that spirit to possess her?"

"Hmm..."

Nothing came to mind immediately, so I had to think about it for a second.

"Um, what did that evil spirit do, anyway?"

"I just told you. When I found you, the both of you were half-naked and grabbing at each other on the floor."

"Bwuh?!"

I was doing WHAT with Harissa?! And the president saw us?! That sounded like the kind of thing that could put my school life in serious jeopardy (although, as I've said before, I don't remem-

ber any of it), but I had to put it aside for the time being because I needed to focus on Harissa. That's right, Harissa... What had we been doing recently?

“Oh.”

Come to think of it, yesterday...

“We were cleaning out the storehouse.”

“A storehouse? That's an odd thing for a normal house to have.”

“My family's always collected weird stuff... I mean, a lot of it is *really* weird, so maybe that had something to do with it.”

It wouldn't surprise me at all if some of the stuff in there was haunted.

“I see.” She nodded and stood up. “Then show me the way to your house.”

“You're coming over now, president?!”

“The sooner, the better. And stop calling me by my title. I have a name. Momone Kibi.”

“Um... President Kibi then.”

“President Momone.”

“Fine, President Momone.”

“Good. I do love hearing the sound of my own name. Especially when it's coming from a younger boy.”

She was definitely a bit of a narcissist...

“But I guess it only sounds half as good coming from our school’s number one playboy and problem child. You’ve essentially negated half my charm. I’ll have to bring that up at the next school assembly.”

“Let’s get going to my house! Let’s go right now! And let’s solve the problem! I’ll help you all I can, so please don’t!”

“Idiot. It was a joke.”

I was a little unconvinced. I was starting to see why they called her things like “the Samurai Student Council President” and “the One-Eyed Student Council President.” She was like Date Masamune. And just as I was contemplating that...

Bam!

The door to the room suddenly flew open.

“Rekka!”

“T-Tsumiki?!”

Why was she so pale? And what was that in her hand...?

“I made something new! Try it!”

“Mggh! Mggwaaaah!”

More dark matter?!

And a new kind? It was surprisingly crunchy. My limbs began to go numb... It was taking effect fast this time!

“Hmph! You’ve got guts to show yourself in front of me, evil spirit!”

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see President Momone

readying a talisman. Did that mean the evil spirit had moved to Tsumiki? It was doing something really different than what it had with Harissa, though.

“Just give up and pass on!”

Just as the president was about to place the talisman on her...

“You’re in the way.”

I heard a voice that wasn’t mine, Tsumiki’s, or President Momone’s. President Momone then dropped her talisman and clutched at her stomach.

“Ugh...! What did you do?”

“.....”

The strange voice fell silent.

“Hey, problem child,” President Momone said in a strained voice, cold sweat dripping from her forehead. “Don’t die for a while.”

She then dashed out of the room like the wind, leaving me behind... with Tsumiki on top of me, fully armed with more dark matter.

“Come on, there’s a lot more left. My cooking is filled with love, so eat a whole bunch!”

Turns out this was just the beginning of the nightmare.



“...Bwargh!”

The terrible dream I had this time was something about poisonous mushrooms swallowing up the whole world. I was their first victim...

“Mmph...”

“Tokiwa?!”

Was I lying in a bed? Was I back in the nurse’s office? More importantly, why was Tokiwa sleeping right next to me again?!

“She’s wrapping herself around you again, huh?”

“Why don’t you ever put us in separate beds?!”

I yelled as loud as I could, but the nurse just ignored me and yawned.

“It wouldn’t matter if I did. Tokiwa would just crawl into yours. She said something about staying up all night to work on a draft, so she’s especially sleepy today. She wanted a body pillow to hug, I guess.”

“I’m a body pillow now?”

“Sure, why not? I’m jealous. You look comfy. I’m getting tired, too. Hahh...”

This nurse was beyond saving!

“Wait, why am I in the nurse’s office this time?”

“What, you forgot again? The student council president brought you here.”

“The student council president did?”

She was pretty unmistakable, so I guess even the nurse recognized her.

“You got called to the student council room... and you ended up right back here less than 30 minutes later. I’ve never seen a student have to be carried to the nurse’s office twice in one day.”

Then the door opened. It was the student council president—the girl we’d just been talking about.

“Hey, problem child. What do you think you’re doing?”

“Huh? Uwah!”

That’s right! Tokiwa was still clinging to me! Tokiwa slowly turned towards the student council president.

“Good morning, Momo...”

“Huh?”

“Stop calling me that, Midori.”

“Huh?”

Did they know each other?

“President, you can hear Tokiwa when she talks?”

“My hearing is really good. And I told you to call me President Momone.”

Were we really close enough for me to start calling her by her first name? I was pretty sure the answer was no. My head was pretty fuzzy, but I didn’t think anything had happened that would have warranted that. But putting that aside...

“Are you two friends?”

“Yup.”

“Well, we’ve known each other for a long time.”

Both Tokiwa and President Momone nodded. Apparently they were childhood friends. But then...

“Then why did you try to shut down the light literature club?”

“I didn’t try to shut it down specifically. I just wanted to get rid of the clubs that weren’t actually doing anything, and save money on club expenses,” she answered. “Our school doesn’t really have anything special going for it. I’d like to do something unique, but I need more budget funds to do it.”

So she wanted to cut down on club expenses in order to use that money for the student council?

“But isn’t Tokiwa...”

“We’ve known each other for a long time, but that’s got nothing to do with this. I have things I want to do, and Midori has things she wants to do. Sacrificing what you want for someone else doesn’t really make you friends.”

“Momo’s always been really serious about her job.”

So even though that part of President Momone rubbed some people the wrong way, Tokiwa didn’t mind it.

“Besides, if she didn’t want her club shut down, she could just fight back. She could try to destroy the student council instead, for instance. I’d be more than willing to accept her challenge. But she cleverly kept the club running by seducing you so you’d join. After all, if she was the kind of girl who threw a fit instead of fighting, I wouldn’t be her friend. If you want something, you have to fight for it. Anyway...” she said, crossing her arms and

glaring at me. “Can you stand, problem child? If you can, we need to get going.”

“Um... Sorry, where are we going?”

“Hm? You still don’t remember? Well... I guess you were flopping around on the floor for quite a while.”

What the heck happened to me...?

“Some first-year—I think her name was Tsumiki Nozomuno—jammed some weird black thing down your throat.”

Oh, yeah. That actually explained a lot.

“After that, I was able to banish the evil spirit within her. But it escaped again, so we need to go to your house and figure out exactly what we’re dealing with here.”

“Hmm... Yeah...”

That sounded a little familiar. Things were faintly starting to come back to me. I thought I could remember going to see the student council president, and her saying something or another about an evil spirit. We were supposed to go back to my place to see if we could find out more about it.

“I remember most of it now,” I said.

“Good. Then let’s go.”

She uncrossed her arms and started walking.



I was walking home the way I usually did, but without my usual group of friends.

“What? Is there something stuck to my face?”

“No, that’s not it... I was just curious as to why you’re doing all this for me.”

“Because I’m the student council president, of course.”

It sounded like a reasonable answer, but I wasn’t sure...

“The student council president is the elected representative of all the students, and since the school belongs to the students, that means the school belongs to me. If someone’s snuck in, I need to find them and make them pay for it.”

“Pay for it...?”

There was something really weird about her.

“Well, I suppose my right eye is another reason.”

“Your right eye? The one under the eyepatch?”

“Do I have any other right eyes?”

Momone moved her eyepatch to the side so that I could see her eye. Compared to her left one, it was a little... What exactly was it? The color was more saturated? No, the color was different? I tried to take a closer look, and then I realized that her eye seemed to be flashing and constantly changing colors.

“...It’s very mysterious,” I said.

“That’s a nice way of putting it. But I appreciate that.” She put her eyepatch back. “Since the day I was born, I’ve had the ability to see spirits with this. Spirit sight, I guess you could call it.

Sometimes people in my family are born with eyes like this, but mine is especially powerful. I had a pretty tough time of it when I was little.”

So, having a hard childhood was what made her into the bold person she was today? I felt like I could understand that.

“Then it’s because of your eye that you were able to see the evil spirit that possessed Harissa and Tsumiki?”

“That’s right. It was quite a shock, though. At first I thought it was just a stray spirit that had wandered into the school, but when I banished it, I found a half-naked girl lying on the floor. Was it the spirit’s power that turned the girl invisible? If so, that’s a big problem. But the spirit itself couldn’t disappear, so I’m not sure what the point was...”

Momone’s voice faded into mumbling as she started pondering the evil spirit’s abilities. Was the evil spirit able to use the powers of anyone it possessed, like Harissa’s invisibility magic? That made it sound like the spirit could control people, and if that was the case, then there were some things that didn’t make sense to me.

“Harissa tried to um... crawl all over me... and Tsumiki tried to feed me her cooking, right?”

“Yes, why?”

“I’m pretty sure the spirit’s target is me, but then what does it want? Harissa and Tsumiki acted totally different while they were possessed.”

“Hmm...”

I couldn’t figure out what the evil spirit was trying to accomplish by controlling them. President Momone had spirit sight, so

if she said that they were both possessed, I believed her. But I still didn't understand the details. Was the spirit really in complete control of them?

“That's a pretty clever observation. I guess you're not just a problem child.”

Was it safe to take that as a compliment...?

“Brother Rekka!”

As I was walking down the shopping street talking with the student council president, I suddenly heard someone call my name from behind me. I turned around and saw Rain and Fam waving as they approached. They were both wearing the uniform of the local junior high school, Hoshikawa Middle School.

“What are you two doing here?”

“I was buying ingredients for dinner with Fam.”

“We're on our way home now!”

After they answered, both Rain and Fam turned to look at President Momone.



“Who’s this?” Rain asked.

“She’s the student council president at our school.”

“Momone Kibi. And you’re...?”

“My name is Rain Waterchild.”

“And I’m Fam!”

After everyone introduced themselves, Rain and President Momone bowed to each other, but Fam ran up to me and jumped on me.

“Um, Rekka...” Rain walked over to me and whispered in my ear, “Is she... caught up in something, as well?”

“Hmm... I guess so.”

Rain was probably asking if Momone was another heroine. We were certainly caught up in a weird situation, but this evil spirit thing didn’t strike me as a typical “story.” The Namidare bloodline always got me involved with stories that were in dire peril—ones that were going to end horribly if I didn’t save them. This didn’t seem like it was on that level.

Granted... that meant that I’d gotten to the point where I was getting caught up in other people’s trouble without the help of my bloodline. I wasn’t exactly thrilled about that, but I decided to worry about the implications later.

“There’s nothing really dangerous going on here like what happened on planet Berano, though. So don’t worry.”

“I see. I’m glad to hear that.”

Rain sighed in relief, and then I suddenly felt someone tugging

on my ear from the other side of me.

“Hey, problem child.”

“Um, do you think you could call me by my real name? That’s starting to really hurt—”

“Shut up.” President Momone cut me off and glared daggers at me. “Don’t tell me you’re not satisfied with the girls at our school so you’re going after middle schoolers now...”

“Of course not!”

“But that Harissa girl didn’t seem to be any older than...”

“For the last time, I am not into lolicon!” I was so frustrated that I actually raised my voice.

“I see...” the president said, reluctantly dropping the subject.

I was glad to set the record straight, but the next thing I knew, it looked like the world was spinning.

“Oww!”

Ouch... The back of my head really hurt. I must’ve hit it on the ground when I fell backward. At least the sky was a pretty blue today. But as for the person who’d literally just swept me off my feet...

“Fam! What was that for?”

“Brother Rekka...”

Fam was kneeling over on top of me and staring down at my face. Wait... Were those hearts in her eyes?!

Smooch!

“Aaah!”

I was surprised, but it was Rain that screamed as Fam continued to kiss me all over my face.

“Wh-What’s going on?!”

I managed to keep her from touching my lips, for both of our sakes, but I was so caught off guard that I couldn’t do much else.

“F-Fam! This is the second time you’ve done something like this...!”

The shopping bags she was carrying fell out of Rain’s hands. She began to clench and unclench her fists, and I could see her brow furrowing. I could tell she was angry, but she wasn’t the one I was concerned about.

“I knew it! You WERE going after middle schoolers!”

The president swung back her leg like she was going to kick me right in the head.

“No, wait! You’re gonna kill me! If you kick me like that, I’m literally going to die!”

“Then die already!”

But just before she was about to punt my head like a soccer ball...

“...Gah!”

She suddenly doubled over in pain.

“Tch! You...!”

“President Momone?”

She started moaning in pain.

“Y-You...! Don’t think that trick will work on me twice!”

The president clenched her jaw, and I could see sweat pouring from her forehead. She took out a talisman and smacked it onto the back of Fam’s head. If she was using a talisman, did that mean that Fam was possessed, too? I was wondering why she’d suddenly started acting so weird on a public street...

“...Hmm? Brother Rekka, what are you doing?”

Fam started to blink in confusion. She must’ve come back to her senses.

“That’s what I want to know...” I relaxed.

“Ugh...”

“Oww...”

Fam was normal again, but President Momone seemed to be in pain. When I looked over, Rain was grimacing, too.

“Rekka... Fam... I’m going home ahead of you!”

She then suddenly took off, leaving her shopping bags on the ground. I didn’t know that a girl who’d lived in a palace her whole life could run that fast. She seemed really flustered for some reason, but I had no idea why.

“That stupid evil spirit! It got away again!”

President Momone was grinding her teeth and cursing. She looked mad, but it also looked like she was holding something in... What did you hold in when you clutched your stomach like that?

“President Momone, don’t tell me...”

“One more word and you’re passing on to the afterlife before that spirit does.”

That didn’t sound like a joke. President Momone turned and walked away.

“Where are you going?”

“I’m going home alone.”

“Home?”

“Next time, I’m going to catch that thing... but first I have to prepare. I want you to find anything in the storehouse that could be related and leave it out front. I’ll know it when I see it.”

“O-Okay...”

“...That bitch is going to pay for this!”

With a roar like a wounded tiger—or maybe one with a bad stomachache—Momone headed off in the direction of Kibi Shrine, her home.

““That bitch’?”

I shrugged, then did as I was told and headed home to search the storehouse.



I went home and changed out of my school clothes first. Then

I had Harissa help me drag anything that looked suspicious out of the storehouse, which, to be fair, was a lot of stuff.

“Sir Rekka, we just cleaned this. Why are we taking things out again?”

“Well, it’s complicated.”

Harissa looked at me with a puzzled expression.

I only knew because the student council president told me, but Harissa had been possessed. Thankfully, her memories of what happened during that time were fuzzy. If I’d actually done what President Momone said I did... I wouldn’t even be able to look at Harissa. I can’t imagine how awkward she’d feel, either.

“You’re having a lot more fun than usual this time, aren’t you, Rekka?”

R, who’d been watching us bring things out of the storehouse, was sitting on my head and kicking her feet. She weighed absolutely nothing, but it was still annoying.

“All the heroines are so aggressive now. All it’s done so far is get you knocked out, but since my mission is to hook you up with one of them, I’m happy it looks like we’re starting to make some progress.”

“They were only doing weird things because they were possessed,” I said quietly so Harissa wouldn’t hear me. “Besides, I don’t even really remember what happened myself...”

“You don’t? But Momone told you what happened with Tsumiki and Harissa, right? And you were conscious the whole time for what happened with Fam.”

“Tch... But they don’t remember it, either, and they didn’t even

do it of their own free will, so it doesn't count."

"Maybe not. I would've preferred that they remembered myself, but I guess I can't ask for everything. Anything that gets you a little closer to overcoming your dead-fish attitude towards the heroines is a win for me."

Dead-fish attitude?

"Your legs are in the way. Get off me!"

"Yeah, yeah." R jumped off my head and did a barrel roll in the air.

And just then...

"Hey, lust demon."

Someone marched into my yard and called me by a very hurtful name.

"I'm not... a lust demon..."

"What?"

My voice trailed off when I saw that President Momone had let her hair down and was now wearing a miko outfit. She even had her eyepatch off, so she almost appeared like a completely different person. It was the look on her face, confident smile and all, that gave her away as the student council president I knew.

"Why are you dressed like that?"

"Form is very important in ritual. If you want to get rid of a bratty little ghost, you need a pure miko like me."

"A 'pure' miko...?"

“You got a problem with that?”

“No, not at all!”

For a moment I thought I saw the silhouette of a tiger behind President Momone. It was scary... Wait, don't tell me she walked across town dressed like that.

“It looks like there's something else you want to say. Well, whatever. Let me give you this first,” she said as she handed me a talisman.

“What's this...? ‘Demon sight?’”

On the part of the talisman where something like “safe commute” or “good grades” was usually written, it said “demon sight.”

“The ‘demon’ in this case is a spirit. As long as you're carrying that, you can see supernatural beings. That bitch has been getting away, so we're better off if you can get a good look at her.”

“You're saying... the ghost is a girl?”

“At least from what I'm seeing. Just don't let go of it, okay?”

I put the talisman in my pocket like she told me to.

“Now then... it's that urn, isn't it?”

President Momone scanned the things I had set out in the yard, and she immediately walked over to the urn and knelt down in front of it.

“Hmm...” She flipped open the lid and frowned.

“Did you learn anything?”

“You idiot!”

“Ow!”

She whacked me with the edge of the lid! It really hurt!

“The inside of the lid tells you exactly what this evil spirit is! And look at this broken talisman! It’s for sealing evil spirits! Why did you break it?!”

“Because I don’t know the first thing about evil spirits! You can’t even read what’s on the inside of it unless you open it anyway!”

Not to mention that even though the text inside was Japanese after all, it was so old that I couldn’t even read it.

“Hmm... It seems the name of the spirit is ‘Princess Sakuya, the Spirit of Dying Love.’”

“Of dying... what?”

“Just remember the name Sakuya.”

“Okay.”

“It’s a spirit born from the combined unfulfilled desires of maidens who failed in love. It possesses young girls and tries to get what it couldn’t have in life.”

Unlike me, the student council president actually studied. She could read what was on the inside of the lid with no trouble.

“Unfulfilled desires?”

“Well, their unfulfilled desires in love, obviously.”

“No, I get that, but... why target me?”

I couldn't remember doing anything that would make any spirits named Sakuya want to come after me.

"That's a good question. Why is she coming after you? Hmm... Who opened the urn?"

"It was me."

"Then maybe it's because you broke the seal."

"Huh? No, that can't be it. Harissa was actually the one who broke—Ow!"

President Momone cut me off with a hard chop to the forehead.

"Harissa's a girl! And actually, it might not even matter who she falls in love with."

"What do you mean?"

"Sakuya is made up of the desires of a lot of different girls. And since she's a byproduct of other people's feelings, she doesn't really have any feelings of her own. The only thing driving her is the desire to make love come true."

So it was a ghost who'd never fallen in love, but longed for love more than anything else?

"This is just a guess, but maybe Sakuya picked you as the object of her romantic desires, and now she's just possessing all the girls around you to make that love a reality."

"Hmm... But then that means Sakuya was in control of them, right? So why did Harissa, Tsumiki, and Fam all behave so differently?"

If they'd all been possessed by the same spirit, it sounded to me like they should have been acting the same way while under the spirit's control.

“Good question. My guess is that Sakuya doesn't have the power to fully control a person. It's more like she synchronizes her own mind with the mind of the person she's possessing and tries to fill them with fake feelings of love.”

“Fake feelings of love? I see...” I nodded, convinced by President Momone's explanation.

“Rekka, do you really understand what Momone just said?”

“Of course I do. Sakuya filled their heads with a strong desire for love, so that's why they were acting so weird,” I whispered back to R.

“You've got to be kidding me...” she sighed.

Why did her face look like somebody who'd just been hit in the head with a sea cucumber? Whatever. I figured it was safe to ignore R for now since I had more important things to think about.

One thing in particular was bugging me. Why did one of my ancestors put the urn with Sakuya in it in the storehouse? If they were able to seal her away, couldn't they have just...

“Time for the next step, problem child.”

“R-Right.”

Momone's voice snapped me out of my thoughts before I could get any deeper into them.

“Now we know that evil spirit's name and her true nature. We can use that to lure her out and capture her. Help me with this.”

“But we’ve already driven her off three times, right? Won’t she be too cautious now?” I asked.

President Momone snorted.

“It’s simple. We just need to use bait she won’t be able to resist.”

“Bait?”

“Yup. She’s made from the desires of countless maidens who failed in love...” The president’s lips curled up into a grin. “Which means that she has to be incredibly jealous.”



Not long after, I found myself sitting on a bench in the park near my house as part of President Momone’s plan.

“I don’t like this at all...”

“Why not? It’s a chance to set that almost criminally dense head of yours straight.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about half the time, R, but for some reason, it’s always really hurtful.”

I sighed and looked around me. It was an older park, and all the benches and playground equipment were rusted. It wasn’t very popular, so no one was around. Well, besides me and the student council president who was hiding behind some bushes, that is. But then...

“Rekka.”

“Hi, Satsuki.”

I waved to my childhood friend as she appeared at the entrance to the park.

“What’s wrong? You asked me to come out here all of a sudden... and there’s nobody else around...”

“Oh, well... Sit down, I guess.”

“S-Sure.” Satsuki seemed surprised, but she sat down next to me. “So... what’s up?”

“I’m in love with you.”

R, would you please SHUT UP?

“Um... This is kind of hard to talk about, but...”

“I’m listening.”

I started mumbling some to try and buy a little time, but Satsuki must’ve sensed my nervousness because she started to tense up, too.

“I don’t know how to say this...” I said, trying my best to think of something to talk about.

“Rekka!” Iris shouted as she bounded over the park fence and greeted me cheerfully.

“Huh? Satsuki?”

“What? Iris?”

Iris and Satsuki were looking at each other, confused.

“Rekka... didn’t you want to talk to me?”

“That’s my line! What’s going on here, Rekka?”

“Wh-What? I said I’d called everybody...”

“You did not!”

“You did nothing of the sort!”

“Yeah, you totally didn’t.”

Great, now even R was chiming in to back them up. Wait, if R realized I’d walked into a trap, why didn’t she tell me sooner? And then...

“Rekka!”

“Rekka!”

“Sir Rekka!”

“Rekka!”

“Rekka!”

Tetra, Rosalind, Suzuran, Rain, and Shirley—all the girls I knew who could come quickly if I called them up—arrived at the park, as well. I’d brought them all here to make Sakuya jealous. President Momone had already bested Sakuya three times, so I didn’t think it would be easy to get her to show herself again. But since Sakuya was a jealous spirit, she wouldn’t be able to resist it when she saw me surrounded by so many girls. She would be sure to show up in one form or another... at least, that’s what President Momone had said.

“Rekka! What’s going on here?” Rosalind yelled angrily.

“That’s right. I’d like an explanation for this, but I’d also like to hear your reason for kissing Fam this afternoon,” Shirley said

with a look in her eyes that was cold as ice.

“You were WHAT?!” several of the other girls screamed in unison.

Luring out Sakuya was supposed to be the challenge here, but now I had to try and calm down the girls somehow.

“Um, I don’t know the best way to explain that...” I broke out in a cold sweat as I tried my best to dodge the hail of questions that came down upon me.

Sakuya’s goal was to vicariously experience love, so President Momone said there was a good chance she’d choose one of the girls around me. But even carrying the talisman she’d given me, I couldn’t see anything unusual about any of the girls. Did that mean that she was possessing someone who wasn’t here? She’d already tried Harissa, Tsumiki, and Fam, so it was probably safe to rule them out. Hibiki lived several stations down, and Chelsea wasn’t even in the country. That only left one person...

“Rekka!”

And that was when Lea appeared... dressed in her Linda Lovers uniform.

“Why are you wearing your work uniform?!”

“I’m on my break! I ran here to meet you!”

“You ran through the city wearing that?!”

“I didn’t have a choice! I wanted to see you as soon as I possibly could!”

Ugh! She sounded so serious, but it was embarrassing! She was yelling and everything! It was so unlike her... Wait, was this

because she was possessed? If so, then where was Sakuya?

I clenched my fist around the talisman in my pocket and focused. When I did, I saw something hazy floating behind Lea. Sakuya took the form of a young girl with a pretty face and freckles. She also had golden eyes and hair. I'd been expecting something more horrifying, so I was a little caught off guard by the sight of her.

“Lea, are you trying to seduce my Rekka in that indecent outfit?!”

“Since when was Rekka yours?! But I do agree that that uniform is playing dirty!”

Rosalind and Iris were pointing at Lea's maid café uniform and yelling, their faces bright red. They both looked like they were ready to pounce on her, but...

“You're in the way,” Sakuya sneered.

Suddenly Rosalind and Iris turned pale.

“Wh-What...?”

“Owowow!”

But it wasn't just them. After they started groaning, the other girls all started clutching their stomachs, too.

“Wh-What is this...?”

“Ugh... I can't take it anymore!”

One of them took off and the others all followed in a mad dash for one of the park's facilities. Which one, I won't say. Sakuya had the power to cause terrible stomachaches. At first I thought it was

stupid, but maybe it was actually really powerful.

“Rekka...” Lea said, blushing as she walked towards me.

Her eyes were dewy and her cheeks flush. Add that to the sexy uniform, and it made for one hell of a combination. To be honest, even knowing that Sakuya was behind this, part of me still wanted to jump into her chest... No! What was I thinking? I was having dirty thoughts. I needed to get a hold of myself.

“Rekka, come with me.”

“Wh-Why? What are you going to do with me?”

“Remember how I said that if I wanted to stop being a pure maiden, I’d choose you?”

“Y-Yeah, but what is that supposed to mean?”

Hibiki had told me to look it up, but I’d never bothered.

“Heehee, you’re really going to make me say it, huh?”

Seriously, what was she planning?!

Ack! I moved back to get away from her, only to catch my foot on the bench behind me. I fell backwards, slamming my back into the bench. Now I was practically trapped.

“Rekka, there’s nowhere to run now.”

“You’re right...”

I turned my gaze from Lea to Sakuya. She looked confused to find me staring straight at her. But that’s just what I wanted!

“Take this!”

I quickly leaned over and shoved my hands under the bench to pull out what I had hidden there—the urn. When she saw it, Sakuya’s eyes, which had been half-closed like she was sleepy, suddenly opened wide in shock. She tried to get away from Lea, but...

“Too slow, fool!”

President Momone jumped out from behind the bushes. With a wave of the long sleeves on her miko robes, she began to draw a strange figure in the air. A second later, there was a loud snapping sound as if some kind of power had activated. The next thing I knew, a cylindrical barrier formed around the bench. Now there was no way for Sakuya to escape.

“Wh-What is this?! Please don’t get in my way!”

Sakuya began to scream, but President Momone just ignored her.

“Back in the urn with you!”

“What did I ever do to make you hate me?”

President Momone drew another figure in the air. Sakuya was torn away from Lea’s body and began to spin around the cylinder like a leaf in a whirlwind before at last settling into the urn I was holding. My eyes met hers the moment she landed inside.

“Problem child! The lid!”

“Right!”

I took out the lid that I’d hidden next to the urn and quickly put it on top. Then I took the talisman President Momone had given me and used it to seal the lid.

“...Hmm? What’s going on? Why aren’t I at work?” Lea asked.

Based on her astonishment at her current situation, it seemed she’d gone back to normal.

“Lea, if you don’t get back to the restaurant soon, your break’s going to end.”

“Rekka? What am I doing here? Wait, break’s almost over? Where did the time go? I don’t know what happened, but it looks like I need to get back. Thank you, Rekka.”

“You’re welcome.”

I sighed loudly as I watched Lea run off again in her Linda Lovers uniform. If Linda scolded her later, I’d do my best to have her back. I sat down on the bench and stretched. President Momone came up and snatched the urn containing Sakuya out of my lap.

“It’s time for her to pay.”

“What are you going to do... to Sakuya?”

“She’s made a mockery of my maidenly pride. I’m going to crucify her, burn her at the stake, and then have her tied to a horse and dragged through the city! Rather... that’s what I’d like to do. But she’s an evil spirit in the end. I’m going to have my grandfather exorcise her for good.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means sending her to the next world so she can never come back.”

Wait, what?

“I’m off to go see my grandfather, so you can go home now,” she said.

She turned to go, but I grabbed her hand.

“Hang on.”

“What?”

“That urn... It was in my family’s storehouse. Please give it back to me.”

“Hmm?” President Momone’s eyes narrowed as if she wasn’t sure what she was seeing. “Sure, once the exorcism is done. But that evil spirit is still inside right now, you know?”

“I’d like it back anyway.”

“Wait, are you kidding me?”

Her eyes narrowed even further. She looked like she was ready to break my jaw if she didn’t like the next thing I said.

“My family’s got a history of getting caught up in weird things, you see...”

She still didn’t look happy.

“I think it was probably one of my ancestors who sealed Sakuya away. But isn’t that kind of strange?”

“Strange how?”

“I mean, he was able to seal her, right? So why keep the urn instead of giving it to a specialist like your grandfather to be exorcised?”

I had no way of knowing what kind of story my ancestor had

been caught up in that ended with him sealing Sakuya away. But ever since I'd learned that there was an evil spirit sealed in the urn in the storehouse, I'd thought that something was wrong.

"I don't know what your family's like, but... maybe he just didn't know anyone right for the job. Maybe that's how it ended up in the storehouse."

"Maybe. But maybe not..."

"Oh?"

Suddenly her tone changed. She sounded almost interested. She looked at me with one eyebrow raised, as if testing me.

"All right, let's hear it. If it's 'maybe not,' then what *was* the reason?"

"I think... my ancestor wanted one of his descendants to save her."

Now she looked even more interested.

"That sounds like optimism and wishful thinking to me. Do you have any evidence?"

"The lid."

I pointed to the urn she was holding under her arm.

"What about it?" she asked.

"You said it's got her name on it as well as a bunch of information about her, right?"

"Yeah, it does," she said with a nod.

"But why did my ancestor put all of that information on the in-

side of the lid? If he sealed her away because he couldn't find anybody to get rid of her, why didn't he just write 'there's a dangerous evil spirit inside' on the front?"

"Hmm..." President Momone pensively raised a hand to her chin.

My point was that if you had to open the urn to read the writing, it didn't seem like it was meant to be a deterrent. Surely if Sakuya was actually dangerous, there would have been a more obvious warning.

"I think my ancestor put all that stuff on the bottom side of the lid because he wanted one of his descendants to deal with her in a different way than he did."

"I'm afraid I wouldn't know anything about your ancestors, but..."

President Momone suddenly tossed me the urn.

"Uwah!"

Whew, I almost dropped it! I had to fumble for it and ended up falling on my butt.

"It seems like you know more about how they feel than I do." She laughed and looked down at me. "Problem child. No... Rekka Namidare. After all you went through, why would you want to help her?"

"Well, part if it is that I'm lucky enough not to remember most of that stuff, but..." I smiled as best I could. "If she's made from unfulfilled desires, then I think it might be better to make those desires come true."

"You're an idiot, but at least you're an entertaining one," she

said as she turned around. “I like you. Come back to the student council sometime. I’ll give you a warm welcome.”

She waved without looking back, and then disappeared from the park. She really was quite the character...

“I’d say that’s a very promising start to a relationship.”

“Hmm? R, what was that?”

“Nothing. Nothing at all.”

I had a feeling R had said something weird again, but whatever. At least everything was over now. This was pretty rough, considering there was no story or heroine involved. Wait... Why was I suddenly feeling chills down my spine? I turned around slowly to see seven wrathful spirits.

“Since when are you friends with the student council president? And why was she wearing miko robes?”

Satsuki was looking down at me with an expression I’d never seen before.

“I heard something about sealing evil spirits. Did you call me here to use me for that?”

Rosalind was in full vampire mode, with both of her arms transformed into red and black wolves.

“You’ve brought shame to me not just once, but twice now...”

Rain was probably talking about what had happened at the shopping street. But wait, that wasn’t my fault. And it certainly wasn’t deliberate...

“Oh, Rekka...”

I heard a click as Shirley loaded her medical gun with a strange looking drug. In the face of all these terrifying women, all I could do was curl up like a pill bug to try and make myself as small as possible.

...Who was it who said nobody's life was in danger this time? This was the worst danger I'd been in since the day I turned 16!

But after that, my memory goes black again. I still don't remember what happened.

—*Fin*—

Chapter 4: Hibiki's Big Date Plan

One Saturday.

I was meeting Hibiki at the fountain in front of the station near where she lived. I'd just gotten off the train myself about ten minutes ago, and I was killing time shooing away R as she tried to poke my cheek. Eventually, I saw Hibiki jogging over to me.

"Sorry I'm late, Rekka."

"No, you're right on time," I said as I found myself unconsciously staring down at her body.

"I-Is something wrong?"

"No, just... why are you wearing a sailor uniform?"

Was that her school uniform? Our school used blazers, so it struck me as a little different, but wait... It was Saturday. Why was she wearing her uniform when it wasn't a school day?

"D-Don't worry about it! I'm doing it for personal reasons."

Huh? What kind of personal reason would require you to wear a sailor suit?

"..."

"..."

We both fell into awkward silence. I-I really didn't know what to say...

“...Let’s get going, Hibiki.”

“Y-Yeah...”

It was still awkward, but we agreed to start walking into town. This marked the start of the first real date I’d ever been on in my life. To explain how things led up to this, I’ll have to go back to three days ago.



It all started with a call I got from Hibiki late one night.

“The Couples Afro Incident?”

“That’s right.”

“That sounds like the name of a bad comedy duo.”

“Just hear me out.”

The incident Hibiki described to me was... well, there wasn’t a good word to describe it.

“So, a couple is walking along the street when all of a sudden the man grows an afro.”

“...”

“...Are you still there? Why’d you get so quiet?”

“Um, listen...”

I held my phone a little farther away from my face so I could

rub my temples.

“Hibiki, have you been under a lot of stress lately?”

“I’m just fine!”

No, but...

“Are you absolutely sure this is actually happening? It’s not a rumor, or maybe just a joke?”

“Yeah. I guarantee it.”

If she was that sure, then maybe there really was something to this. I mean, despite how crazy it sounded.

“Well, I’m not sure I buy it, but what are you planning on doing about this ‘Couples Afro Incident’?”

“Solve it, of course.”

“...Why?”

It was hard to imagine that growing an afro counted as a bad end, so this didn’t sound like something the Banjo bloodline had gotten her involved in. When I asked her about it, Hibiki sounded a little flustered.

“I-It’s happening in my hometown. It wouldn’t feel right to just ignore it, and it’s possible it’s just a part of a larger conspiracy!”

Yeah, an afro conspiracy. Right. I had no idea why Hibiki was so insistent on this, but...

“Well, whatever. You’ve helped me out a lot before, so I guess I can return the favor. What exactly do you want me to do?”

“A-About that...” Hibiki started to mumble.

“What? You’re a little hard to hear...”

“...e with... me.”

“Sorry, can you say that again?”

“...te.”

“I’m sorry, I really can’t hear you.”

When I asked for a third take, I could hear her take a deep breath on the other end of the line.

“Go on a date with me!” she yelled.

It was loud, too. M-My ears were ringing...

Wait, more importantly, what did she just say? Did she say “date”?

“Hang on. Why do we have to go on a date to solve the case?”

“Tell me what the name of the case is.”

“The... Couples Afro Incident?”

“That’s right. The *Couples* Afro Incident.”

So, this was an undercover operation.

“Um... I see. I guess. Sure.”

“Really?!”

She sounded happy for some reason. Did she want my help that badly? I was a little embarrassed to have someone counting

on me like that.

“Didn’t you say something about whoever’s behind the Couples Afro Incident targeting couples who act like they’re really in love?” I asked, feeling like I was starting to get into it.

“Well, that’s just from the perspective of the victims, but that’s how it sounds.”

“Hmm... Oh?” I realized something. “Hey, Hibiki.”

“What?”

“Have you ever been on a date with a boy?”

“Bwuh?!”

Suddenly it sounded like Hibiki was choking. It took a minute or so of coughing for her to get herself back together.

“A-Are you okay?”

“What kind of question is that?! Of course not! I don’t even have any male friends!”

Come to think of it, I’d asked that question once before...

“Wh-What about you, Rekka? Have you ever... been on a date with someone?”

“Sorry. Me, neither.”

“You haven’t? I see... Wait, why are you apologizing?”

“Well, I figure that without any experience, it might be harder to lure out the perpetrator.”

If he knew we were faking our date, the perpetrator would

probably just ignore us.

“Hmm...”

Hibiki really seemed to be counting on me for this. I wanted to help her, but without a real plan, there wasn't much I could do.

“...Okay,” I said.

“Okay what?”

“I'll come up with a date plan.”

“Really? Y-You don't have to come up with anything special. I just want to go out with you...”

That was nice of her to say, but it only made me want to do this more. Unfortunately, I didn't have the skills to put a plan like that together. At times like these, however, I knew the best thing to do was ask an expert.



“You want me to help you plan a date?”

“Yes.”

Tokiwa seemed confused by my request. Today she was grabbing me from behind, so the back of the chair kept her breasts from touching me. It at least kept me from getting worked up while I was talking to her.

“You're going on a date?”

“Actually...”

I told her about the Couples Afro Incident going on in Hibiki’s hometown, and how I was going to help solve it.

“Hmm, that sounds fun.”

“So, will you help me?”

“Sure, that’s fine. But I have one condition.”

“Yeah? What is it?”

“Can I go with you? It should be great inspiration for my novels.”

“Okay.”



And so I had Tokiwa come up with my date plan for today’s date with Hibiki. Since it would be weird for three people to be on a date, I had Tokiwa follow us at a distance.

After about a five minute walk from the station, we came to a big shopping area.

“Wow, it’s really busy on Saturday.”

“This place is always like this on weekends.”

Hibiki’s town was bigger than mine, and certainly a lot more populated. It was especially obvious on the weekend. This place was also a favorite date spot for local students, supposedly. I saw

two or three other couples just looking around offhandedly.

“Most of the victims of the Couples Afro Incident are students, right?”

“Yeah, so most of the attacks take place around here.”

If this was a hotspot, it was probably the best place to try and lure out the perpetrator, huh?

“So, how does this guy turn somebody’s hair into an instant afro, anyway?”

“I-I don’t know...”

Hibiki turned away from me and started looking around frantically. Was she searching for the perpetrator already? That was Hibiki for you.

“Okay, let’s go.”

“Y-Yeah...”

And so we headed out into the shopping area to solve the Couples Afro Incident.

“Where to first?” Hibiki asked.

I gave the memo in my pocket a furtive glance.

“The first thing you usually do on a date is go to a movie, right?”

According to plan, we walked down to the movie theater.

“What do you want to see, Hibiki?”

I hadn’t really picked a movie, so I thought I’d ask her.

“This one... No, this one!”

Hibiki had started to point to a Hollywood action movie, but then she pointed to a romance flick instead.

“Hm? I don’t mind seeing the action movie.”

I’d envisioned Hibiki as more of an action movie kind of girl, anyway.

“No, that’s not it...” Hibiki mumbled a little.

“...It feels more like a date this way, right?” she said, blushing a little.

It did seem more romantic to go see a romance movie...

“Okay, we’ll go for that one, then.”

And so I bought two tickets and handed one to Hibiki.

“Hm...?”

When I glanced at the ticket, I noticed it had an “R-15” age rating on it. I-It was kind of embarrassing to be seeing a movie like this with a girl my age...

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

Maybe Hibiki wasn’t embarrassed at all about it. If anything, she looked confused as to why I was. I figured if she was okay with it, then I had nothing to worry about.

“It’s nothing. Let’s go.”

I handed my ticket to the attendant, my heart still beating a little fast.



And not long after the movie started...

“Oh... oh... Aaah!”

There was a woman in a beautiful outfit moaning erotically on-screen. Was this really R-15? I mean, the important parts were all hidden, and they didn’t explicitly show what they were doing, but there was more than enough material for my teenage imagination to work with.

“Oh, she has such pretty breasts, doesn’t she?”

R, true to form, was staring at the actress’s breasts as she floated next to me. She seemed to be enjoying herself.

I’d agreed to this movie because I thought it would be fine, but now I was blushing so hard it felt like my face was on fire. Hibiki had said that this was more of a date movie, but is this really what couples went to watch all the time? If it was, then I admired their endurance.

“Oh, aaaaah!”

Ack! Watching the movie was getting so difficult that I needed something—anything—to distract myself. It might have been a little rude, but I decided to break the silence and try talking to Hibiki. I didn’t want to bother anybody else, so I leaned over and whispered to her.

“Are you okay with movies like this, Hibiki?”

“ ... ”

“Hibiki?”

“ ... ”

“Hello?”

“Huh?!”

She must’ve really been concentrating on the movie because, even whispering right into her ear, I had to try pretty hard to get her attention.

“Wh-What’s wrong, Rekka?”

“Hibiki, you’re being a little loud.”

Maybe I shouldn’t have tried talking to her in a theater, but I warned her to keep her voice down.

“S-Sorry... What were you saying?”

“Not much. I was just asking if you were okay with movies like this.”

“I-I-If I’m o-o-okay?”

She was tripping over her own tongue. Even in the darkness, I could tell her face was as red as a tomato. Her bangs were stuck to her forehead with sweat, and her eyes seemed to be looking in all directions at once. I’d thought she’d chosen this movie because she was okay with stuff like this, but I suddenly realized there was another possibility.

“Did you not notice it was R-15?” I asked a little reluctantly.

“Wh-What?! O-Of course I did.”

I could tell she was lying because the next time the actress on screen let out a loud moan, she yelped a little.

“I-I’ll go buy us something to drink. What do you want, Rekka?”

“Anything’s fine, I guess.”

“Got it. Okay, I’ll be back.”

She quickly stood up and left the theater.

The age rating stamped on the ticket was awfully tiny. Hibiki must not have noticed when she’d chosen it. I should’ve said something.

“Rekka.”

“Owaah?!”

I screamed as two arms suddenly wrapped themselves around my neck from behind. I was angrily shushed by everyone around me. I was a little embarrassed to turn around, but when I did, I saw that it was Tokiwa grabbing me.

“Tokiwa, I didn’t realize you were so close.”

“Probably because it was so dark, right?”

Well, that was true.

“So, what’s up?”

“Well, the memo I gave you only had a list of locations on it, so I figured I’d give you some more advice.”

I still had that memo in my pocket. It was the date plan Tokiwa had drawn up for me, but it was basically just an itinerary

for the day. I'd gladly taken it since it was more than enough for my purposes, but Tokiwa made it sound like there was more to it and seemed happy to help me out.

“Rekka, what do you think a couple is supposed to do at a movie theater?”

“I don't know.”

“Kiss—”

“K-K-Kiss?!”

“—ing is a bit too difficult for a beginner, so I can't recommend it.”

Sh-She was teasing me?! This wasn't good for my heart...

“Instead, a beginner like you should go for holding hands. Try doing it when the movie gets to the exciting parts.”

“Hold her hand?”

Come to think of it, I had seen a lot of scenes in manga and stuff where the hero held the heroine's hand at a movie theater.

“Just put your hand softly on top of hers... Oh, look, she's back,” Tokiwa said as she unwrapped her arms from around my neck.

Hold Hibiki's hand, huh? That was going to be embarrassing in a different way from the movie in front of us.

“Can a chicken like you really do that, Rekka?”

“Ugh...”

What R said ticked me off, so I decided to show her what I

could do.

I'd already suffered enough embarrassment coming here and pretending to be part of a lovey-dovey couple. At this point, I was willing to do whatever it took to catch the perpetrator. I wiped the sweat off my hand and continued watching the movie. At last, the movie finally reached its climax.

“Catherine!”

Was this it? Was now the time?

“Eduardo!”

Man, when was I actually supposed to do it?

“I LOVEEEE YOUUUU!”

Damn it! It's now or never!

I reached out towards the arm rest where Hibiki's hand was resting. I put my hand on top of hers and squeezed. I felt her tense up for a moment before she curled it into a fist.

“Kyaaah!”

“Gwah!”

An uppercut from below knocked me up out of my seat.





“I’m sorry. I just didn’t expect you to grab my hand.”

“No, it’s my fault.”

As we left the movie theater, there was a thick cloud of awkwardness floating just over our heads. Grr... Now the perpetrator behind the Couples Afro Incident was probably just laughing at us. I needed to make up for this somehow. I took the memo out from my pocket and looked at my schedule for after the movie.

“Okay! Hibiki, let’s go into that café!”

“Got it.”

We went into a café that had a sign outside advertising 500-yen lunches—something that I was extremely grateful for as a poor student. We sat down and ordered, but I was a little stumped from there. Um... Was I supposed to talk about the movie we’d just seen now?

“How’d you like the movie, Hibiki?”

“Um... I-I don’t really remember it. What about you?”

“Sorry. I wasn’t really watching it, either.”

I actually did remember most of it, but all the scenes were too embarrassing to talk about with Hibiki. Maybe she felt the same way.

For lack of anything better, we started to talk about things that

were happening at school. Since we went to different schools in different towns, there was actually plenty to talk about there.

“My school’s student council is talking about the Couples Afro Incident, actually,” she said.

“Huh. I didn’t know that the student council cared about stuff like that.”

“Part of it is just the student council president’s personality, but it’s also a discipline thing. Our school’s really strict on students dating.”

“I see.”

It wasn’t necessarily the fact that couples were being attacked. The real problem was that most of the couples were students.

“Actually, I heard that my student council president and yours are actually good friends... Oh, sorry, give me a second.” Hibiki excused herself.

“Whew...”

I’d failed at the movie theater, but my café mission seemed to be going better. Did we look like a lovey-dovey couple to the people around us? I finished the rest of my food, hoping that we did.

“Hmm?”

A single cherry tomato rolled across my plate. I was pretty sure I’d eaten all the tomatoes first, but then there was a second, a third, a fourth... Flabbergasted, I watched more tomatoes roll across my plate.

“Hmm?” I turned around. “Tokiwa, stop that, please.”

Tokiwa looked up from the fork she was using to drop tomatoes on my plate, then tried to grab on to me. I was determined not to let her do it in public, so I tried to dodge her, but the tines of her fork snagged my shirt, effectively keeping me from going anywhere.

“Uwah!”

“Why are you running?”

The instant I stopped moving, Tokiwa grabbed on to me. Wasn't she supposed to be frail and sick? How was she so fast?! For a moment, I wondered just how sickly she really was, but then I was confronted by a bigger problem.

“T-Tokiwa, please get off me!”

“This is the only way you'll be able to hear me.”

“I've been meaning to say this for a while, but please think about the people around you! Look! That waitress is staring at me like I'm garbage!”

More precisely, her eyes seemed to be saying, “The instant one girl gets up to leave, you start hanging all over another one? I hope you die, you cheating pig!” Seriously, if looks could kill...!

“Forget her. Say ‘aah!’”

“Mguh?!”

She jammed a tomato in my mouth with her fork, and since I didn't see any way of getting out of this, I swallowed it... Wait, wasn't that the same fork she was using?

“Since you ate my tomato for me, I'll give you some more advice,” Tokiwa said. “This place has a special couples-only menu

item. Tell the waitress you want the special.”

“Okay, the special! Got it! Now please get off me! I’ll do anything! I’ll get down on my knees and beg!”

“Oh, you don’t need to beg me,” Tokiwa said calmly, then went back to her seat.

“Um... excuse me. I’d like to order the special, please.”

“One special coming right up.”

The waitress’s voice was ice cold. It felt like I heard her swear at me under her breath just before she turned around. Thankfully, Hibiki came back shortly thereafter.

“I’m back... What’s wrong, Rekka? You look really tired.”

“Don’t worry about it...”

I was just mentally exhausted. I sat groggily in my chair until the “special” came.

“Here you are. This is our couples-only romantic drink for two.”

Hibiki and I were both speechless. It was one of those drinks with a straw shaped like a heart that had two openings, one for each person.

“Rekka... why did you order this?”

“I guess you could say I was trying to get out of the frying pan and jumped into the fire...”

Was I really supposed to drink this with all these people around? Did the person who came up with this actually try it himself...? Even worse, this was right after everybody else had

seen Tokiwa grabbing me (and she was still sitting behind me, too). This was pretty close to torture. But still, I couldn't leave without drinking what I'd ordered.

"Let's drink it, I guess."

"Yeah. I'll take this side, I guess."

"Then I'll take this one..."

The soda came up the straw with a loud slurping sound. It was sweet and cold, but my whole body was sweating like I was drinking something hot and spicy.



Hibiki and I were walking next to each other, both of us completely drained.

"Hibiki... do you think we look like a couple in love right now?"

"I think we look more like a couple of kids whose houses just burned down."

Well, that certainly wasn't what we were going for. But clearly since I didn't have an afro yet, that meant that we hadn't managed to get the attention of the perpetrator behind the Couples Afro Incident. After everything I'd suffered (there was no way I could ever go back to that café), I didn't want to go home empty-handed. I wanted to do something, but nothing was coming to mind.

“Oh? Is that you, Hibiki?”

Suddenly I heard someone say Hibiki’s name from behind us. When I turned to look, there was a girl there in a white dress carrying a sun parasol. She waved at Hibiki and walked up to us.

“Kanae,” Hibiki said. “Weren’t you supposed to be at physical therapy today?”

“I just finished. I thought I should take a walk before I headed home.”

Therapy... Oh, right. This was the girl Hibiki had gone to the hospital to see. I’d only caught a glimpse of her from the door to the hospital room, but I remembered the braid she had slung in front of her right ear.

“So, Hibiki, who’s this?” Kanae asked as she turned towards me.

“This is Rekka Namidare. I think I’ve told you about him...”

“Oh, my! So, you’re the Rekka I’ve heard so much about?”

Hibiki hadn’t even finished her sentence, but Kanae raised her voice in surprise and looked at me with stars in her eyes.

“U-Um... I think I’m that Rekka, yes.”

“Are you two dating?”

“Bwah?!”

“Bwah?!”

Both Hibiki and I were caught off guard by her sudden question.

“I-I told you that things aren’t like that with Rekka, remember?”

“Oh? But that’s just your side of the story. How about it, Rekka?”

“W-We’re not really anything like that...”

“Really? Then what are you doing here?” she said as she pointed to all the couples walking around enjoying themselves.

“That’s because, um...”

Kanae knew about the bloodline of the Banjo, right? Surely if I told her the truth, she wouldn’t think it was all that weird.

“We’re actually looking for the person behind the Couples Afro Incident...”

“The Couples Afro Incident? Isn’t that what happened to Hibiki?”

“Huh?”

“Wait! Kanae, don’t say that!”

“Oh, I’m sorry.” Kanae stuck her tongue out at her.

“W-Wait a second. I thought the perpetrator only went after couples...”

But Hibiki said she’d never been on a date with a boy, right?

“N-No, Rekka! It’s not like that!”

What I was thinking must’ve shown on my face, because Hibiki frantically tried to explain herself.

“No, I’m not really mad over a little lie like that.”

“No! I’ve never been out with a boy other than you! This is my first date!”

“Then what did she mean?” I asked.

Instead of answering, Hibiki grabbed at her hair with both hands. She was acting like she knew, she just didn’t want to tell me. Kanae watched her for a moment before she broke out into a grin.

“I was walking down the street with Hibiki a while ago when she was mistaken for a boy and attacked.”

“...What?”

Someone thought Hibiki was a boy?

“KANAE! Don’t tell him that!”

“Oh? But you don’t want him to get the wrong idea, right?”

“Aaaaah!”

Hibiki began to stamp her feet, as well. She looked, well, more like a little child than usual. I’d heard that Kanae was Hibiki’s best friend. I guess this is how she normally acted when they were together. Anyway...

“I’m, uh... sorry to hear that, Hibiki.”

“Shut up! Don’t try and make me feel better!” she yelled back at me, almost in tears.

So... had she worn that sailor uniform so that she would look more like a girl? Sure, she talked like a boy, and she usually dressed kinda like one, but still...

“The perpetrator must be blind.”

“Huh?”

“I mean, you’re pretty girly, Hibiki.”

She was definitely cool and strong, but she didn’t like bugs or slimy things, and she had lots of really girly weaknesses. She even looked great in a swimsuit. And... I was too embarrassed to say it to her face, but she was really cute.

“Huh? Wha...” Hibiki stared at me.

Hmm... I’d tried my best to choose my words carefully, but I was getting a little embarrassed seeing her react like that. Kanae just giggled.

“Well, I can understand how the perpetrator made the mistake. Hibiki always likes to show off, and she tends to act rather like a boy around me. She even wraps a cloth around her chest to hide her breasts.”

“I couldn’t help that. The clothes you bought me were so tiny that if I just wore them without doing that, you would’ve been able to see my stomach.”

“Then you could’ve just worn something else. I understand that you wanted me to see you wearing them, though.”

“Hmph...”

Hibiki pouted and went silent. Kanae giggled again.

Kanae totally had the upper hand here. Whether it was just their personalities or how long they’d known each other, I couldn’t tell, but Hibiki seemed much less strong-willed around her best friend. Kanae, for her part, must have really liked Hibiki.

Even after being caught in the middle of one of Hibiki's "stories," she was still good friends with her.

"Well, that explains why you're so anxious to solve this weird case. You must be mad after what happened, right?"

I made my guess based on what I'd just heard, but for some reason Hibiki said nothing. I thought that maybe she'd gotten upset because I was right, but...

"Oh, that's not right at all," Kanae said.

"Huh?"

"It's true that she was upset, but it was my idea that she go talk to you."

"Why?"

Kanae put her hand up to her cheek and said, "Because it gave her the perfect opportunity to ask you out on a date, didn't it? She talked about you every time she came to the hospital, so I couldn't help but think—Mmrphhh!"

"Kanae! Stop it!" Hibiki shouted as she covered Kanae's mouth.

Hibiki cut her off, but I wasn't following what Kanae said. Sure, it would be easy to ask me out on a date (a sting, more like it), but why did that matter? And what was Hibiki so upset about it?

"Anyway, I suppose it's time for me to be going."

"Get lost!" Hibiki yelled, but Kanae left with a smile on her face.

“Well, let’s get going, I guess...” Hibiki said as she turned back to me.

“Yeah.”

Hibiki was a bit unhappy, but it felt like our encounter with Kanae helped relieve some of the awkwardness. It was now time to resume our mission. And then suddenly... I felt two small, soft mountains pressing up against my back.

“Rekka...”

“T-Tokiwa! What’s going on?!”

“I got lost in the crowds, and now I feel sick...”

“A-Are you okay?”

“I don’t feel good...”

“Waaah!”

Tokiwa could barely stand, so she was leaning into me with her full weight. Her body (specifically her breasts) were pressed much more snugly against me than usual.

“Rekka... who’s that?”

“H-Hibiki?”

Hibiki’s voice was cold and angry. A shiver ran down my spine. And then to make things worse...

“Oh, if it isn’t Midori and the school’s biggest problem child!”

“P-President Momone?”

Approaching us was Momone Kibi, our eyepatch-wearing stu-

dent council president. She was wearing her eyepatch now, and she too was dressed in her school uniform even though it was Saturday. And for some reason, she was also carrying a bamboo sword slung over her shoulder.

“What are you doing here?”

“There’s some kind of strange phenomenon going on here people are calling the Couples Afro Incident. A lot of our students come here, so I’m working with the local school’s student council to patrol the area.”

So President Momone and the student council were trying to solve the case, too?

“I’ve been trying to prevent any more incidents by sending home any couples I come across from our school... Are you three on a date?” She looked first at me, then at Tokiwa, then at Hibiki. “Looks like you’re enjoying yourself, problem child.”

“N-No, it’s not like that...”

I tried to think of a way to explain the situation, but I was too slow. President Momone grabbed me by the hand and yanked.

“Normally I’d say it’s none of my business, but I’m on patrol right now. And I can’t have you cheating on someone I know well. Come with me.”

“Wait!”

President Momone tried to drag me off, but Hibiki grabbed my other hand to stop her.

“Why do we keep getting interrupted...? Today was my chance to finally be with Rekka...”

Hibiki trailed off, but she refused to let go of my hand. It didn't seem like there was any way she was going to let President Momone cart me off.

"I'm afraid this is my job today. I'm taking him whether you like it or not."

"I won't let you!"

"Interesting. If you want to try and resist, then I accept your challenge."

President Momone glared at Hibiki with an intimidating smile. She put her hand on the hilt of the bamboo sword she was carrying as Hibiki reached for the police baton she had hidden behind her back.

"I'm gonna fall over..."

Amid the tension, Tokiwa—who was in an entirely different dimension by herself—rubbed up against me as she tried to lean into me more.

"Things are getting rather chaotic, aren't they?" R, who was watching me with her usual unconcerned demeanor, said in a relaxed voice.

Things had gotten so far out of hand that now it was like all three of them were trying to fight over me. Didn't it kind of look like I was cheating on three girls at once? I could feel the people around us staring at me. And then, just as Hibiki and President Momone went to draw their weapons...

Poof!

It sounded like there was a small explosion over my head. What on earth was it?

“R-Rekka, your hair...”

“Hm? Well, would you look at that.”

President Momone and Hibiki were now both looking at me with shocked expressions.

“Rekka... Your head feels hot,” Tokiwa whined as she slumped a little more against me.

I looked at my reflection in the window of the closest shop. And there it was... I was now the proud owner of a splendid afro.

“What the hell?!”

I was screaming, but I already knew what was going on. I’d been a victim of the Couples Afro Incident. The perpetrator must have seen the argument and thought that was I cheating on the girls.

But I’d really grown an afro with no warning at all, huh? Just how had that actually happened? I figured I’d have to catch the guy to find out. There was no way I was going to let him get away after all this.

I spun my afro-covered head around to look at the people watching me. One of them had to be the perpetrator, but who? Were any of them suspicious...?

“Hibiki, did you see anybody who looked suspicious?”

“Huh? Oh, um... not really.”

For some reason Hibiki’s response was kind of... flat. Was the afro really that shocking? I mean, sure, my hair was about five times its normal size, but...

“...Hmm?”

Suddenly President Momone raised an eyebrow.

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s faint, but I sense a strange presence...”

President Momone lifted up her eyepatch to activate her spirit sight. Was there a ghost nearby? She looked around, her eye gradually changing color.

“Found it.” She then took out her sword and took a swing.
“Hyaaah!”

The blade came down hard on something invisible.

“Gyah!”

I thought I heard a scream.

“...What did you do?”

“That was a technique called the Reigenitto. It’s basically a way to slice a spirit in half. I’m still training, though, so the most I can do is hit them.”

Being hit by her probably hurt a lot. Wait, did spirits feel pain?

“But even if there was a spirit there, why hit it?”

“Because they have to be the one behind the Couples Afro Incident, obviously.”

“No, I don’t see how that’s obvious at all.”

“What, you don’t have the talisman I gave you?”

“I don’t normally walk around with it, no.”

“Why not? Well, whatever. I don’t think I was wrong.” President Momone pointed towards where she’d swung her sword—where there was probably a spirit writhing in pain—and said, “They’ve got an afro, too.”



We followed President Momone to Kibi Shrine, her family’s shrine.

“I can’t believe that you guys were trying to solve the Couples Afro Incident, too.”

“Yeah, well... I guess we were.”

“You guys like getting caught up in weird stuff, huh? If I weren’t the student council president, I would’ve laughed the whole thing off as either some stupid rumor or an idiot’s idea of a prank. Looks like it turned out to be more than that, though.”

Momone stopped laughing and looked at the boy with the afro—allegedly the one behind the Couples Afro Incident—who was lying on the floor of the shrine. Both Hibiki and I had borrowed talismans from her, so we could see his afro now, too. It was a really funky one. I’d had the same hairstyle not long ago, but thankfully it had only lasted for about ten minutes.

Since we’d been looking into the case, too, President Momone had offered to let us interrogate the subject. (Tokiwa wasn’t feeling well, so she just went home.) After a bad first impression, however, Hibiki was still sulking a bit.

“Hibiki, cheer up.”

“You don’t even understand why I’m upset.”

“Huh? Well, sure, President Momone can be aggressive, but you don’t have to get that mad at her.”

“Yeah, you totally don’t understand at all.”

I was trying to defend President Momone, but I guess I’d just made her angrier. Had I just put it the wrong way?

“Sometimes I think you’re doing this deliberately,” R sighed.

Wait, doing what deliberately?

“I’ve put a barrier up around the shrine, so I guess we can wake afro boy here up safely.”

President Momone raised her sword, just like she’d done before.

“Wake up!”

“Gyaaahu!”

The afro ghost screamed and jumped up like he’d been bitten in the butt by a dog.

“Wh-Where am I?”

“A shrine,” President Momone replied. “You’re the one who’s been turning people’s hair into afros, right? Admit it.”

“Y-You can see me?”

SMACK!

“Gyaaahu!”

“Of course I can.”

Was there really a need to punch him then? I wanted to ask, but I decided against it. She’d probably just felt like hitting him. The afro ghost was holding his butt with one hand and his head with the other, lying on the floor and looking up at President Momone.

“Wh-What do you want with me?”

“Because of you and your antics, we lost a valuable Saturday. We need this Couples Afro Incident thing resolved so I don’t have to waste my time with these patrols anymore.”

Part of that seemed more like a personal thing... or was that why she was really doing this?

“So, why did you do it?”

“...”

SMACK!

“Gyaaahu!”

“Out with it.”

She was merciless...

“Um... I think you should just tell her, okay? She doesn’t know how to hold back and stuff.”

I was trying to help, but the ghost just looked at me and pursed his lips even tighter. That seemed to annoy President Momone, who then started to tap her bamboo sword against the ground.

“If you don’t tell me, this time I really won’t hold back.”

“So you *were* holding back before?” I asked.

“What? I’m a very compassionate woman. I was going easy on him.”

“How?”

“Like this.”

“You’re just spinning the sword around. That doesn’t tell me anything.”

“.....u,” the ghost suddenly mumbled quietly.

“Hm? Did you say something?” President Momone asked.

And then the afro ghost’s head snapped upwards.

“It’s because of people like you!” he screamed as he pointed at me.

“Huh? What? It’s my fault?” I pointed at my own face, confused.

“It’s because of people like you that I died without ever being popular with girls!” he screamed, breaking into tears.

“...”

“...”

“Wh-Why are you all silent all of a sudden?”

Well, because...

“This is stupid,” Hibiki sighed.

“I-It’s not stupid! Do you know how much I suffered because I didn’t have a girlfriend?”

The afro ghost yelled, but Hibiki’s expression didn’t change. To be honest, I was thinking mostly the same thing she was.

“Actually, I can see how you’d get the wrong idea after what you saw, but I’m not actually that popular with girls, either.”

“Feel free to ignore that idiot,” Momone said. I didn’t understand why.

“Why afros, though?”

“My afro is natural. No matter what I do to my hair, it always goes back to being an afro... Do you know how many times girls have rejected me because of it? So I’m making other people share my pain.”

“I see. But that... doesn’t actually make sense.” She looked down at the ghost. “Is that going to make girls like you somehow?”

“Uwaaaaah!”

That was the final blow for the ghost, who then collapsed to the floor in a fit of hysterics. The rest of us looked at each other, uncertain of what to do.

“Okay, let’s just get rid of him and his stupid ideas!” President Momone yelled.

“No mercy at all?!” I said, slightly terrified. “Isn’t it a little mean to just erase him?”

“What would you suggest, then? He’s a ghost now. How’s he going to get a girlfriend?”

“Hmm...”

It would be hard for a ghost to date a living person, yeah...
Ghosts and dates, huh?

“Wait...”

I suddenly had an idea. I might know exactly the girl for the job.

“President Momone, can you help me with something?”

“Help you with what?”

“Help me persuade Sakuya.”



In front of the Namidare storehouse.

We'd left the afro ghost inside the barrier at Kibi Shrine, and now the three of us were all standing around the urn that had Sakuya sealed inside.

“Do I just take the talisman off the lid?”

“That's right. I put a barrier up around the area so she won't be able to get away even if we release her. If that bitch tries to do anything, I'll whack her on the head,” President Momone declared, spinning her bamboo sword around.

I ripped the talisman off the urn, hoping I could resolve this as peacefully as possible. For a moment, the urn shook as if the spirit inside was awakening, then it floated upward and fell next

to me.

“Sakuya, I need to talk to you. Can you come out?”

A blonde ghost with narrowed eyes poked her head above the rim of the urn.

“...Do you want something?”

She was almost glaring at me, although I could understand why she'd be suspicious of the boy who helped seal her away again.

“I think it's something you'll like. Will you at least hear me out?”

“Something I'll like?”

Sakuya poked her head out of the pot just a little more.

“Hey, Sakuya, want to go on a date?”

“What's a date?”

“I think this might be closer to an arranged marriage,” Hibiki said.

“A-An arranged marriage?!” Sakuya yelled.

She'd been sealed so long that maybe she didn't know what a date was? Well, it wasn't like any of us knew all that much about dating, either.

“Yeah, something like that. There's somebody who really wants to meet you. Do you think you could go talk to them?”

“What? No, no, no, no!” she yelled as she began squirming and flailing.

“All right, then, seems like the bitch wants to meet him, too.”

“Huh? She looks really against it to me...” I said.

“Idiot. She’s just scared. She actually can’t wait to meet him.”

“Is that how it works...?”

“That’s how it works. Right?”

“U-Uh...”

Sakuya shrank back into her urn under President Momone’s glare. From the look on her face, maybe the president was right.

“Listen, Sakuya. You want to fall in love, right? But is that something you can really do just by possessing someone? Don’t you want to choose for yourself and fall in love on your own?”

“...”

“I mean, I won’t force you, but would you at least talk to the guy?”

“...I can’t,” Sakuya squeaked.

“Gaaah! We went to all this trouble, and you’re too scared? If you’d rather sleep until you grow moldy in the corner of a filthy storeroom, then maybe I should just send you to heaven right now!”

“President Momone, calm down! I just cleaned the storehouse. It’s not that dirty.”

I tried to calm her down, but she took out a talisman anyway. When Sakuya saw it, she screamed.

“B-But...”

“But what?”

“I-I’m... I’m not cute,” she answered in a voice I could barely hear.

“I don’t think that’s true at all...” I tried to say.

“I-I don’t want your sympathy...”

But it just made her more depressed. She was apparently seriously self-conscious about her appearance.

“...But you do want to meet him, right? What can I do to make it happen?” President Momone said, her arms crossed.

She was definitely the type to fight for what she wanted, so maybe she didn’t like it when other people gave up without even trying. As for me, I didn’t know what would happen, but at least I wanted the two of them to meet. If it didn’t work out, nobody was that worse off.

“Um... If I had that outfit, maybe I’d do it,” Sakuya said hesitantly.

“What outfit?” I asked.

“The girl I possessed before... the one with the red hair... she had a cute outfit,” Sakuya answered, her face bright red.



The next day. Sunday.

It took a whole day for us to get Lea to ask Linda for one of the

café's uniforms and have President Momone prepare it so a ghost could wear it, but we managed to get it all together before the weekend was out.

From there, we all gathered at Linda Lovers to introduce the two spirits to one another. They didn't like the light by the window seats, so we ended up taking a table by the wall. Me, Hibiki, President Momone, and the afro ghost were waiting for Sakuya to change into her outfit in the staff room.

The afro ghost seemed nervous. He hadn't said anything for a while now. He was actually sitting at the table with us. He'd taken a physical form, so we could see him without talismans right now. But he hadn't come back to life, President Momone explained. She'd just cut out paper in the form of a doll to give him a body.

"It's only a temporary body, so it won't last the day. It was my grandpa that actually cast the spell, not me, so it won't outright fail. But since the body's made of paper, any contact with water will break the spell. So avoid water and things like juice, okay?" was what she'd said.

"Sakuya's sure taking her time. Did she get scared again?"

With her left eye, President Momone glanced towards the staff room. Lea was in there helping Sakuya get changed.

"Well, it's probably her first time wearing clothes, so I can understand why it might take some time."

She'd been wearing clothes as a ghost, but that was different. She was created with those, so today was her first time ever having to take off or put on clothes.

Eventually the door to the staff room opened. Lea came out first with Sakuya following behind her. Lea was so tall that it was hard to see Sakuya, but I caught glimpses of her blonde hair.

“Here we are! Huh? What’s wrong?”

Lea tried to introduce Sakuya, but...

“...I-I’m so embarrassed.”

She was still a little shy. She grabbed hold of Lea’s uniform and tried to hide behind her back so we couldn’t see her.



“This is getting nowhere! Just come on out!”

President Momone couldn't take it anymore, so she grabbed Sakuya's hand and dragged her out from behind Lea.

“Oh!”

Sakuya's skirt almost flipped up, so she quickly reached down to grab the hem and hold it in place.

“Wahoo!”

The afro ghost shouted excitedly when he saw her. Honestly, I thought she was cute, too. When she looked up and saw that we were all looking at her, she instantly turned red and looked back down.

“W-Well, come sit down.”

Sakuya nodded and President Momone led her by the hand to the table. She sat down across from the afro ghost, but neither one of them said anything.

“Why not introduce yourselves?” President Momone asked.

“I'm Princess Sakuya.”

“I'm sorry. I forgot my name when I became a ghost.”

“Then let's call you Afro Taro,” President Momone suggested.

“I-I'm Afro Taro, then.”

He was really okay with that? I had to wonder. Maybe he just wasn't thinking properly. I could almost feel the heat coming off his afro from embarrassment. Well, Sakuya wasn't much better.

“Where are you two from?”

“I don’t know.”

“Around here.”

“What are your favorite foods?”

“I don’t have one.”

“I liked croquettes when I was alive.”

President Momone was trying to get a conversation started, but they’d just answer her questions and fall silent. If left unprompted, they wouldn’t say anything at all. They couldn’t even make eye contact with each other. They were both spirits, but Sakuya hadn’t even been human to begin with. It seemed like they were having trouble connecting.

I looked at Hibiki as if to say, “This isn’t working, is it?” She shook her head.

“By the way, that outfit looks good on you, Sakuya.”

“Huh? I-It does?”

“It sure does. Isn’t it cute, Hibiki?”

“...Yeah.”

Hibiki didn’t look happy for some reason, but she nodded.

“R-Right? Don’t you think so, too, Taro?”

“Huh? Yeah. D-Definitely...”

“Th-Th-Thank you...”

Okay. At least we'd gotten them talking. Lea then came over to our table with a memo pad and a pen.

"Have you decided on your order?"

"Um, what does everybody want?" I asked.

"I'll have apple juice."

"Coffee for me."

President Momone and Hibiki answered immediately.

"I-I'll..."

Afro Taro tried to answer, too, but President Momone poked him and called him an idiot.

"If you drink anything, the spell will break. I just told you that."

"O-Oh, right." Afro Taro bowed his head.

Sakuya looked a little disappointed when she heard that. Maybe she wanted to try something.

"Okay, so one apple juice and two coffees." I gave Lea our order.

"All right. By the way, Rekka..." Lea finished taking our order, but she didn't leave.

"Wh-What is it, Lea?"

"I heard you praising Sakuya in her outfit, but you've never done that for me. Do I not look good in it?" Lea asked. She sounded a little sad as she played with the hem of her skirt.

“N-No, that’s not it at all! You look great! Yeah. Honestly, you look so cute it’s kind of hard to actually look at you... but you really do look cute!”

“I see.” She smiled happily.

“...You say everyone looks cute, don’t you?”

“Huh?”

Why was Hibiki making that pouting face? She and Sakuya were both looking at me skeptically.

“No reason... Actually, you only said I was girly. You never called me cute, so I guess I can’t say you call everyone that.”

“Huh? Um... Well, Kanae was there, and I think girly kind of implies cute, too...”

“You don’t need to force yourself to say it. I know I’m the kind of girl that gets mistaken for a guy.”

She laughed, but there was no happiness in her eyes. Why was she so mad? R let out an exasperated sigh next to me.

“She put all that effort into planning that date, and then the whole thing got wrecked by the ghost and Momone. I’m sure that pushed her over the edge.”

Huh? Wasn’t the goal of that date to catch the ghost to begin with? It seemed like a success to me. I looked to R for answers, but she just ignored me.

“You already have lots of cute girls around you. You probably just think of me as a convenient little tomboy who goes to a different school...”

“No! That’s not true! You’re cute, too! You looked good in your sailor uniform.. and your swimsuit on planet Berano was great, too!”

“Particularly her boobs and navel.”

“Yeah, particularly your boobs and navel... What?!”

R! Why the hell did you have to whisper that in my ear?!

“M-M-My breasts and navel?! What are you talking about?!”

“N-No, I didn’t mean that! The devil made me say it! I definitely didn’t mean to sexually harass you...”

Hibiki went red and crossed her arms across her chest. I tried my best to come up with an excuse, but I had nothing.

“Rekka, I don’t know about navels, but I think my breasts are kind of nice, too,” Lea said as she lifted her breasts up with both arms so that I could see them better.

“I see. So the problem child thinks a woman’s worth is decided by her breasts, huh?” President Momone nodded.

“I do not! Please don’t slander me like that!”

“But you joined the light literature club because of Midori’s breasts, right? She doesn’t eat much, and she sits at a desk all day, so I don’t know how her breasts got so big. I guess it’s true that kids who sleep enough grow up right, maybe?”

“You’ve got it all wrong!”

“But you know, Rekka Namidare, a girl’s worth more than her breasts. My breasts are average, but I’ve trained my biceps and thighs with kendo, and I’m quite confident in them. Want to see?”

Where was this discussion even going now?!

“How about it? If you join the student council, I’m willing to show you just what’s under the inside of my skirt,” she said with a grin.

“Rekka, why not try touching them?” Lea said as she pushed her breasts together.

“Lea, you get back to work! And Rekka! You really need to...” Hibiki yelled at Lea, and then turned her attention back towards me.

Wh-Why was this happening? R seemed to be saying it was my fault, but I couldn’t figure out why. And just as we’d forgotten why we came here in the first place...

“Knock it off!”

“Knock it off!”

Sakuya and Afro Taro both yelled at us, then picked up water glasses from the table and dumped them on themselves. The water was enough to break the spell, so they both returned to spirit forms and pointed at us angrily.

“Get a stomachache!”

“Grow an afro!”

Poof!

Suddenly Lea, Hibiki, and President Momone went pale, and there was something of a small explosion over my head. Sakuya and Afro Taro had probably just cursed us all. The three girls gasped and ran off, which seemed to confirm my theory. Now it was just me, my afro, and two very satisfied looking spirits.

“Wow, that felt good.”

“It sure did! Acting all lovey-dovey like that right in front of me... They should just explode!”

The two spirits smiled and laughed with each other.

“Aren’t we supposed to be the center of attention here? But they’re just ignoring us! Is that bullying? Are they bullying us? Or just showing off? Ugh, drop dead!”

“You know, it reminds me of the last day of the school festival when I got left all alone in the classroom. The whole class paired off with each other and went to eat lunch... Damn you, Tanaka! I thought you were my one friend!”

The two of them began to talk about all the things they’d done to get even with couples.

“I saw a boy and girl walking along sharing a crepe. I was really angry, so just before she could finish the last bite, I gave her a stomachache!”

“Oh, that’s a great idea. I saw a boy and girl walking home in the rain under an umbrella, so I turned his hair into an afro so big that he couldn’t hold the umbrella anymore. It was so awkward!”

“Hahaha! That’s great! How do you come up with something like that?”

“Well, I just remembered how hard it was for me to hold an umbrella sometimes when I was alive...”

However odd the circumstances, they seemed to be getting along now. They continued to talk for a while, and by the time everyone got back to the table, they’d happily wandered off together. So I guess... it worked? I explained to the girls that, some-

what awkwardly, our mission was complete.



Monday. After school.

I'd come to the light literature club to tell Tokiwa how things had turned out.

"...So, that's about the size of it."

When I finished my explanation, Tokiwa nodded a little and began to tap away at her keyboard rapidly. Now that Sakuya and Afro Taro had each other, they'd probably stop giving people stomachaches and afros. Things had gotten a little weird along the way, but the case was solved, at least. And it looked like it had inspired Tokiwa, too. She suddenly beckoned to me.

"What is it?"

She briefly pointed to the screen and then began typing again.

She had another text file open apart from the story she was working on.

"By the way, was the date fun?" it read.

She'd probably typed it out so she could still communicate with me while she worked on her story. It would be hard to grab on to me and talk to me while she was typing. That was good news, actually, but I had a feeling she'd still grab me the next time I was in the nurse's office.

"Um, the date was fun. You were a big help with it all. It was

thanks to you that we were able to solve the Couples Afro Incident, too.”

I waited as she typed out more. This time it read, “I see. I’m glad. I pulled the plan from a date scene in the novel I was reading, so I’m glad it worked.”

“...Huh?”

She took it from a novel?

“So that wasn’t a date plan you came up with?” I asked.

“I’ve never been on a date.” she typed. “My only lover has been my writing.”

Tokiwa was still writing her novel... but then she thought for a moment and clicked back to the document she was using to talk to me. She typed the words, “But it felt like I was going on a date with you, too, so it was fun.”

I was caught off guard by this sudden confession, but Tokiwa didn’t take her eyes off the screen. What was I even supposed to say?

“She’s hard to read, isn’t she?”

For once, I had to agree with R.

Then there was a knock at the door. It was rare for there to be any visitors. I wondered who it could be as I got up to open the door, but then whoever it was opened the door for themselves.

“Hey! Rekka Namidare!”

“P-President Momone?”

She barged into the room red with rage, then grabbed me by

the collar and put her bamboo sword to my throat.

“Wh-What’s going on? I don’t think I did anything today...”

“That’s not what I’m here for! I’m talking about that bitch and her afro friend! You said that it was all dealt with, right? So I was all excited to come to school and finally be free of those stupid patrols! But...!”

“B-But?” I asked, finding it a little hard to breathe.

“I just got a message from the other school’s student council! There’ve been six new cases already, except now the boy gets an afro and the girl gets sick, too!”

“Seriously...?”

I-I thought they’d calm down now that they were getting along, but apparently we had double trouble.

“So I’m back to patrols this week! And who do you think I should take it out on, huh?”

“Please don’t take it out on me! I’ll die!”

“Well, then...” Tokiwa suddenly leaned in as she wrapped her arms around my neck. “If you want to make it up to her, why don’t the three of us... go on a date?”

“What?”

Tokiwa giggled as she watched our eyes go wide.

Chapter 5: The R Report

Greetings. This is your cute and cool observer, R.

Did you like that introduction? Well, it doesn't matter. Just think of it as your silly acquaintance R's way of saying hello. Anyway, it's time for the usual report.

Observation Target: Singularity Branch Point Holder.

Name: Rekka Namidare. No changes.

Sex: Male. No changes.

Age: 16 years and 3 months. Number of days has been removed for brevity.

Several minor changes to height and weight that will be skipped, as well.

Location: Japan, the Namidare household. No changes.

Present health status is good.

I always ask myself this, but is there any real need for this long list of basic info? It's really boring, so can you ask my superior if it's okay to skip it?

Now on to the good stuff. I'll start with the heroines I've re-

ported on so far. Satsuki is still as devoted as ever, isn't she? She continues to keep her position next to Rekka, despite the increasing number of heroines. Lately she seems to be trying to find ways to put little hearts into the lunches she makes without others noticing.

Harissa is much the same. She has the handicap of looking like a little girl, but she's still doing her best. Sometimes I see her in front of Rekka's room carrying a pillow, but she hasn't worked up the courage to ask to sleep next to him yet. I think, however, if she really tried to sell him on her being childlike, he might agree to it.

Iris is always aggressive. Rekka's also quite weak to breasts. If she was a little smarter about it, she could win him over easily, but she can be surprisingly innocent in that regard. She prefers to keep things romantic in her attempts to appeal to him.

Tsumiki has some difficulties being honest about her feelings—the people of this era would call her a “tsundere,” I'm told—and seems to be lagging behind the others. It's quite moving to see her looking so depressed in the kitchen after Rekka chokes on her food, though.

Tetra's main obstacle seems to be how busy she is. She only occasionally sees Rekka at Nozomiya, but she seems to believe in Rekka more than anyone else.

Lea was a very difficult person to understand, but she's revealed a surprising part of her character. She's very mature mentally, so I was surprised to see that her lifestyle is such a mess. Personally, I think that kind of incongruity is great. Lots of opportunities. She also has the biggest boobs.

Hibiki, sharing a bloodline similar to Rekka's, has built a different relationship with him. One of trust. It's been strictly pla-

tonic so far, but lately she's been wearing more feminine clothing, which is very cute.

Rosalind, due to the nature of her story, is a very complicated figure. Her devotion to Rekka borders on dangerous. She seems to see a lot of his ancestor in him, and the resulting guilt makes her hesitate around him. Once she spends more time around him and Rekka simply becomes Rekka to her, she'll go after him as strongly as anyone, I expect.

Suzuran is definitely drawn towards Rekka, I believe, but she's spent so little time as a human that she doesn't know what her feelings are. She's very devoted, and—lucky for her—a maid. Once she has a firmer grasp on the human heart, she may find it easy to make Rekka hers. Every man loves maids, after all.

Chelsea is a very caring girl, perhaps because of her little brother. I've heard that boys Rekka's age love to be surrounded by the kind of gentleness she offers. But because she travels around the world so much, she doesn't spend much time with Rekka. That puts her at a significant disadvantage, but the double threat of the big sister type with big boobs is a powerful weapon, I believe.

Rain, like you'd expect from a mermaid, is young and beautiful. Any boy would jump at the chance to marry a girl like her... except for Rekka, who is dense and an idiot.

Fam is, mentally at least, the youngest of the lot. Whether her purity turns to an advantage or not... Well, that depends on how much into lolicon Rekka is. It's a classic debate. Is he into loli, or does he like big boobs? Perhaps he likes lolis with big boobs?

Shirley seems to have calmed down a great deal after her story's conclusion, but is that really the case? I don't know what's in her heart, but it seems that she has no intention of abandoning the

fight for Rekka. She's probably the most calculating of the group, which means that it's impossible to tell what part she may play in the battle to decide the fate of the future.

This concludes the report on the existing heroines. A good bit of this is my personal opinion, so please remove that before passing it on to my superior.

Now, on to the primary topic of this report. The new heroines for this report are Midori Tokiwa and Momone Kibi, but they both have something that makes them different from the other heroines. Neither one has their own individual story.

There were some interesting events surrounding how they met Rekka, but compared to the other heroines, it was all on a small scale with no risk of a bad ending. In that sense, it does not seem appropriate to refer to them as heroines. This means that it is safe to assume, however, that both Midori Tokiwa and Momone Kibi are characters in my own story. The special nature of my story, where Rekka chooses someone to save the future, appears to have worked to my benefit. The War of All occurred because Rekka failed to choose from any of the heroines. That's why I want him to choose one of them, so that the war can be avoided. That is the premise of my story.

What's important there is that when Rekka chooses a heroine, the other heroines must become aware of this. Since no one can see me, that means that I cannot become the heroine of my own story. And thus, other heroines are needed...

If, hypothetically, Rekka had heard about the future and gotten too scared to resolve my story, as long as he remained a part of my story, he'd continue to encounter other heroines... The researchers used this theory to spend two years developing me, yes? And it seems their plan paid off.

Well, it doesn't matter now. Rekka didn't run away. He chose, for better or for worse, to confront my story instead of running. In the end, their little insurance policy was unnecessary. But, and I can say this now when I couldn't before, I believe that this was their real goal.

It has to be, correct? Rekka's specs are, at least in terms of numbers, no different than any boy his age. The only things that make him unique are the bloodline of the Namidare and his extreme obtuseness concerning women. I didn't expect him to risk his life to save these stories. He's a very strange boy, Rekka is.

He has normal physical abilities, normal values, normal sensibilities, and no special powers... but for some reason his decisions and his actions have changed many people's fates. With untrained fists, an average brain, and average courage, Rekka continually overcomes bad endings. He's like a walking butterfly effect. With his tiny power, no greater than a butterfly flapping its wings, he can change destiny.

He has no ultimate magic, no incredible psychic powers, and no exceptional strength. There is nothing about him that makes him a hero, yet he continues to do the heroic. Is it because he is a Namidare? Or is Rekka Namidare perhaps simply the most unique exception of all? Honestly, he doesn't look like it.

But... yes, over the last three months I've spent living with him, I realize that he's just like you said he was. I can only say this now, but I'd honestly imagined that you were overestimating him. Either way, as his observer, I'd like to continue to watch Rekka. Until the day the future is saved, that is.

This concludes my report. Forward it to the doctor.

Afterword

This is the sixth volume of the battle royale romantic comedy whose catchphrase is “You get more girlfriends! Hooray, Rekka!” Hello again to those of you who have followed me from volume five, and greetings to all of you who bought all six volumes at once.

At long last, we’ve got 15 heroines. They could form a whole soccer team and even fill the bench! Their team name could be “Namidare Japan!” I bet they’d spend more time fighting over the manager (Rekka) than the ball.

Since I’m out of space already, I’ll just go straight to thanks. Thank you to Nao Watanuki who drew these wonderful illustrations. I didn’t expect Sakuya, who was just a vengeful ghost, to be so cute (lol). To Nanbu, my editor, I’m sorry it was late again. Thank you also. To Koji Hasegawa, the comic author; the editing and sales departments at HJ Bunko; and the bookstores who put this book on their shelves, thank you all. And to those of you who are reading this, I hope you’ll continue to read the *Little Apocalypse* series.

I'm Nao Watanuki, the insert art illustrator. I'm here for the afterword!

Sakuya was fairly popular among the designs I came up with for volume 6. She has a simple but eye-catching color palette that I personally enjoy. I especially like that shade of orange.

She has different sleeves in the draft here so I could show both to the editor at once and ask which he liked better.

It's actually very common for the characters to have these asymmetrical designs while we're working on them. Sorry! She'll keep on wearing different socks, though!

Thanks for buying this book. I'm sorry my handwriting is so terrible, but I look forward to seeing you in the next volume. Good work and thank you to the editor and to the author. I'm glad you liked Hibiki in her sailor uniform!

Nao Watanuki



挿絵担当・和狸ナオと申します。
あとがきお邪魔させていただきます！

6巻は今回出したデザイン案の中で
比較的好評を頂きましたサクヤです。
シンプルながら目を引く色設定で
私的にもお気に入り！

山吹色って良いですね

ラフ画の袖が左右と違うのは
いっぺんに案を見せ「どちらが良いでしょう？」と
編集さんにお尋ねする為です。

ウラではいつもこんな感じで
烈心たちが不揃いな格好をさせられて
いるんですね。横着者ですまめ…！

でも これからも左右別々の装下はいて下さい

お手に取って下さってありがとうございます。
乱文乱筆で失礼致しますが6巻も再び元気で
お会えますように。まさかの響セーラー実現に
度肝を抜いて下さったなめ先生、編集様方。
お疲れ様&ありがとうございました！

和狸ナオ拜

