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**Calm
Breaker**

• Wild Times with a •

Fake Fake

Princess

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Art by Kaori Fujita



Wild Times with a
Fake Fake
Princess
Calm Breaker



Shuuhei Nanbu
Kyouhei's father.
An international
trader.

Mizuhiro Hibiki
Kyouhei's classmate.
Loves standing out.

Sanae Murata
Kyouhei's (cringe?)
junior who yearns for him.

Kaoruko Houwa
Proprietress of the
Corvette cafe.

Kyouhei Nanbu
Our protagonist.
Dreams of living
a peaceful life.

Pamil
A self-proclaimed
body double android
of a princess.



“...Come on,”
he told her, lifting his covers.
Timidly, the girl slipped into
the space he’d made.

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Chapter 1 - Thus Ends the Peace

The Bergmann Kingdom. A name that the vast majority of people would frown and give a questioning look at.

It was a tiny, minuscule country in the Nordic region, and its name hardly appeared in lessons on World History, or even Geography. Aside from citizens of neighboring countries, no one in the whole world would know it by name, and an overwhelming proportion of people would have never even heard of it.

At least in countries such as Japan—those separated physically, politically, and culturally from it—it was a remote country whose very existence was forgotten.

However...

“The 33rd defensive line... has fallen!”

That country, in its forgotten corner of the world, was currently in the midst of a rebellion.

“General Ranbalt was killed in action... the Royal Guards have nearly been eliminated. Both the eastern and western gate guards, the second and fourth squads, have just lost contact—”

The report came from a soldier kneeling before the throne. His voice was filled with bitterness, and his expression was dark, the shame filling his heart clearly visible.

Regardless of his report, the situation was clear; the sound of gunfire and explosions had been audible in the chamber for some time now, and it was gradually getting louder. To put it another way, they were nearing the audience chamber.

The king had been listening to the soldier's report with his eyes closed and a peaceful expression, looking almost as if he were sleeping, but now his eyes shot open as he surveyed the room.

It was a magnificent chamber. The floor was covered with marble, with white pillars supporting the ceiling, from which hung an extravagant chandelier that

looked to be about three meters in diameter. The walls were lined with portraits of prior monarchs and countless paintings seemingly by famous artists, with sculptures interspersed throughout them.

It was perhaps the prototypical throne room.

But...

“It seems to be a matter of time before enemy forces storm this location!”

The only figures currently visible in the room were the king on his throne... and the reporting soldier. Ordinarily, there would be over 100 retainers servicing the vast chamber, but all that filled the space now were the explosions sounding like distant thunder and the somehow listless stretches of silence.



“...Thank you for your service,” came the king’s voice, sounding as if he had suddenly come to a decision.

“Your Majesty...”

“This will be my final order.”

As the soldier’s head shot up rapidly, he saw the king with an open smile on his face; the smile of a person who had resolved themselves to something.

“All forces are to immediately cease hostilities, and should then leave the palace and surrounding area with all possible haste.”

“Your Majesty, that—”

“Is an order. Repeat it.”

The soldier chewed his lip silently and cast his eyes down.

The situation was past the point of no return... that much was obvious to anyone, and so too was the reasoning for the king’s order.

“B-By your will!” the soldier shouted after a short period of indecision. “All forces are to cease hostilities, and then... leave the palace and surrounding area... with all possible haste...”

“Go.”

“...Understood.”

The soldier left the room with a stagger. The king watched his blood-and-ash-stained figure grow distant before standing calmly and straightening his velvet mantle. He leaned over his throne and pushed a switch that was cleverly concealed within the carvings on the armrest.

With the low rumble of rock moving over rock, a section of the floor slid to the side, revealing a rectangular hole beneath it, with stairs descending through the opening. The steps vanished within the faint light under the floor, but the king stepped unflinchingly into the darkness.

“So this is how it is to end? ...Driven out like a common rat...” murmured the king self-deprecatingly as he descended the stairs. After walking through the gloom for some 50 or so steps, his field of vision suddenly cleared to show a

space lit in white.

The place was a completely plain room, so plain that it was hard to believe it was even in the same castle. It was completely utilitarian, and decoration was utterly nonexistent. The walls and floor were bare, with the ceiling having a crisscrossing network of conduits for power and air-conditioning. The lighting was all provided by the harsh, flat light of a fluorescent tube.

And furthermore...

“Oh my,” came a sudden voice from behind the king, “things are coming to a head?”

The king turned his head to see a man standing behind him, a somewhat cynical smile upon his face. He looked to be well into old age, with both his long hair and beard appearing ashen with the amount of white hair mixed into them. The man wore a white robe and glasses rimmed with delicate silver. The displeased expression on his face would bring to mind an academic, and one who had strayed from the path at that.

The scenery around him strengthened the image all the more. The faint of heart may have even fainted were they to see it. Lined up under the fluorescent lights were countless glass cylinders with brains, spinal cords, intestines, limbs, eyeballs, and various other human body parts.

Surely no one would ever conceal an anatomical reference room under a throne room. What then, was this...?

“The revolutionary army will be here before long,” the king informed the man dispassionately.

His voice sounded as if he were taking a philosophical view of the whole thing, or else he had given up on everything. There was no hint of fear, regret, or unrest within his words; it just sounded like he was reading from a simple report of the facts.

“The fall was far quicker than I expected.”

“There is likely another country supplying them with weapons and strategic advice. Or perhaps this whole revolution itself was instigated by a third party,” explained the king.

“I see,” said the old man, shrugging his shoulders. He too had not an ounce of despair to his countenance. If anything, he seemed to be brazenly enjoying the desperate situation. “So, you will be using it immediately, I assume.”

“I had hoped to end it without doing so,” answered the king.

The old man handed over a box, retrieved from somewhere, to the king, who was still speaking dispassionately.

It was a contraption with a meaningfully red button on it. Atop the button was a plastic cover, neatly protecting it, with black and yellow hazard markings around it. And so... the object’s use was clear.

“...My apologies,” the king said as he lifted the cover with his index finger.

“Not at all,” answered the old man, “I could even see this as a positive thing. Both as a researcher, and as your friend.”

“...I see.”

The king nodded.

“Dolph Terrill Balor Bergmann!”

Hurried footsteps and that cry heralded the arrival of men wearing combat gear into the room. Their rifle barrels were all pointed at the king and old man.

“You’re under ar—”

“I think not,” the king informed the shouting revolutionary soldier, unflinchingly pressing the button.

There was a pause.

Then, in the next instant, a blinding flash of light enveloped the space alongside a thunderous roar, as the room itself was blown apart.

Four hours later:

The revolutionary army had quickly taken over the BNBO (Bergmann National Broadcasting Office) and used it to send out an address to the citizens that they were successful. In other words, that the royal family which had ruled for over a millennium was now dead, and that the monarchical dictatorship that the country had been governed by had now been abolished.

“Countrymen! We are victorious!”

This was the bell tolling the end of an era.

However...

“The royal family that oppressed us with their stagnant dictatorship is no more! Here and now, we declare the formation of a new, free nation!”

From a worldwide perspective, this was nothing more than a tiny, insignificant occurrence in some corner of some far-off land.

...On the surface, that is.

● ● ●

Kyouhei was gazing out of the window.

He wasn't looking at anything in particular, and indeed, there was nothing in the spot where his vision was focused; he was just absently watching the familiar streets through his glasses.

It was peaceful.

Today, much like the day before it, the streets were as ordinary as ever. As one should expect from Japan, a center of public security. The retort of gunfire and the roar of explosions were absent from the air. Flames and smoke weren't blocking his vision. It was simply the usual, completely ordinary scenery.

Kyouhei let out a long, satisfied sigh. A normal high school student would have tired of that view before even five minutes had passed... Kyouhei, however, had been gazing at the sight for close to 20 minutes. His expression could well be described as rapturous—or else that of an old man dozing off on a sunny veranda with a cat on his lap.

School had ended, and the students around him were already packing up to go home or getting ready for their various clubs. Amongst them, though, Kyouhei was savoring the enjoyment of looking out of the window alone.

He'd had an issue-free day at school, with nothing particularly memorable happening; he hadn't been involved in any arguments, and nothing unusual had confronted him. He'd had a wonderful, completely ordinary day at school, working through his lessons and reaching the end of the day!

God, thank you so much!

This was Kyouhei Nanbu, a seventeen-year-old high school student.

He loved the ‘peaceful everyday.’

You could also call it ‘normalcy,’ but regardless, the three tenets of his existence were ‘don’t stand out,’ ‘don’t rock the boat,’ and ‘be inconspicuous.’ The word obsession wouldn’t be a poor fit for his insistence on keeping to those basic principles. Anyways... he spent his days paying close attention to his clothes and words, keeping track of his typicalness and averageness.

Well, amongst high schoolers, constantly overly conscious about themselves, his aim itself was strange, but he didn’t have the slightest concept of that.

This is how he spent his schooldays: with nothing particularly strange or odd, savoring the normalcy while gazing at the scenery out of the window.

“Let’s go, Kyouhei.”

That voice, along with the owner’s hand, thudded into Kyouhei’s head. He turned and scowled. The bane of his very existence stood behind him; an invader destroying Kyouhei’s peaceful, ordinary, normal time.

Said invader had red hair, green eyes, and dark skin. He had an appearance that would lead you to question just what country he was from... but even so, he was still a full-blooded Japanese, and Kyouhei’s classmate.

It hadn’t even been a year since Kyouhei had transferred to this school, and he still didn’t have many people he could call friends. Amongst those people he knew, this flashy boy from a gaudy country spreading his extravagance was the one he had interacted with the most.

His name was Mizuhito Hibiki, an over-exaggerated, flamboyant showoff.

That on its own fundamentally described the person ‘Mizuhito Hibiki’; his appearance and actions both came together to fit the above description.

He was part of the Light Music Club and played—solely because it was the most eye-catching instrument—the guitar. And not only did he play it, he carried it with him habitually, regardless of there being any need to.

Of course, his hair and eye colors weren’t natural; he used dye and contacts

to change them to stand out. On top of that, his fingers and neck jangled with heavy silver accessories. He even had his eyebrows touched up and his fingernails painted pitch-black in a manicure. There was a pattern of some sort on his cheek that looked like some kind of tattoo. Of course, it wasn't a real one, just a temporary transfer. He actually wore the school's uniform as he should, but the sheer contrast from that made him stand out even more.

Shingyouji Academy was fairly lenient on uniform issues as long as the students maintained a decent grade, or perhaps it was fairer to say that they were live and let live with things. The teachers would give somewhat reluctant smiles and tell him to wind his neck in, but in most schools, his appearance would have resulted in the behavior officers and guidance counselors bursting a blood vessel.

On the whole, it was reasonable to call him the exact opposite of Kyouhei. Kyouhei based his life around the concept of being average and normal: he didn't wear a single accessory, his hair wasn't dyed or too long, he wasn't tanned, and his uniform wasn't modified at all. He was utterly unremarkable from head to toe.

And so, he turned to face Mizuhito properly, and gave a short sigh before he spoke.

"...Not with your club today?"

"Nope. Well, I'm skipping. I got work now."

Of course, someone that just played rock because it was fashionable would be like that; his rock spirit was dreadfully soft.

"Oh, right... work hard. Bye."

"Wah? So meeean! Let's go togetherrr, Kyouhei-chan!" he sing-songed.

"Don't call me Kyouhei-chan! Get off!"

"But I'll stand out next to youuu!" he protested. "Let's go togetherrr."

He certainly wasn't wrong. Putting someone as plain as Kyouhei next to someone as vivid as Mizuhito would make them stand out for better or worse, whether you called it a contrast or a synergy. They'd *jump out* at people, in fact.

But...

“...I’ve told you again and again,” complained Kyouhei as he pushed on Mizuhito’s arm from where he was clinging on. “Again and again and *again!* I like being normal, not standing out like you! Everyday! Normal! Peaceful! Common! Dull! And every other word for it! That’s my dream!”

“Man, you’re weird.”

“I don’t want to hear that from *you* !!” shouted Kyouhei at his friend, who was speaking completely earnestly. “If you want to stand out so damn much, just go and do a strip show!”

“Hmm, a strip show?” wondered Mizuhito, tilting his head. He got about 30 degrees into his rotation before saying: “I see, so that’d work?!”

“Don’t just go with it!!” Kyouhei yelled at Mizuhito as the latter eagerly reached for his belt buckle before giving an extended sigh. “...Why do I attract all the weirdos...?”

For whatever reason, there was a trend of eccentrics like Mizuhito who liked Kyouhei, leading to his surroundings being filled with folks that ran completely contrary to his desires for normalcy.

“Kyouhei,” said Mizuhito, putting both hands on his shoulders, “you heard the saying about birds of a feather?”

“Screw you! Just clear off, I’m going to enjoy the peace and quiet and *then* go home on my own. No matter what anyone says, I’ll keep at it.”

“Ehh? You meaaanie.”

“Meanie? I’m a meanie? Really?!” Kyouhei demanded as he kicked at his friend who was squishing his cheeks between his arms. Mizuhito swayed easily out of reach of Kyouhei’s indoor-shoe-clad feet as he answered.

“You really are a weirdo. Why don’t you just stand out, for once in your life?”

“I don’t want to!”

“Doesn’t it feel great though? Everyone’s focused on you, yeah? You’re taking their time, yeah? Doesn’t that feel just the best?”

“No, it doesn’t!” cried Kyouhei, slamming his hands onto the table as he got more and more irritated at not getting through to Mizuhito. “I’ve had enough of that crap.”

“Had enough of it?”

“I switched schools so many times when I was a kid, which makes you stand out, and for nothing! The phrases you say and things you do are all different, and even just that singles you out at school and in the town!”

“Oh yeah... ’cause of your old man’s work, right?”

“Yeah,” he grumbled.

A lot of Kyouhei’s philosophy had come from taking his father as an example of how *not* to live.

“Besides, I had more than enough weirdness when I didn’t know who my mother was!”

Actually... Kyouhei had only truly grasped the meaning of the words ‘mother’ and ‘wife’ when he was in middle school. Well, his father constantly took him to different places and had a local wife each time; Kyouhei had been traveling the world since he could remember. Given his circumstances, it’d make sense he didn’t know before.

All of this meant that Kyouhei still didn’t know who his mother was. When he asked his father, he’d said: “You just turned up next to me one day, I don’t know who it was.” It was awful.

“Anyway, about 80% of my issues can be put down to that utter moron. He probably just put down his logic and common sense somewhere and forgot about the damn things. Do you know how much I’ve suffered because of—”

“Hmm, but I’d like that. My dad’s just an office worker; I don’t wanna end up like that. You only get one life.”

“What are you on about?! Peace is the best—normalcy! I dare you to go on a trip with him, you’ll change your tune if—”

But that was as far as Kyouhei got before a chill assailed him. He shuddered.

“Huh, what’s up?”

“Nothing... just a shiver.”

“Same thing happened yesterday? You ’bout to start hacking up blood?”

“Don’t try to give me that dramatic crap! Besides, it ain’t a cough.”

“What is it then?”

“...I don’t really know,” he admitted, scowling as he rubbed his neck.

Behind Kyouhei as he did that was a girl watching silently from the slightly open door at the back of the classroom.

The first word that would come to mind to describe the girl would be ‘plain.’ Her black hair was neatly cut to shoulder length. She wore glasses with wide, thick lenses, and her makeup was very lightly applied, only to the level of a ‘natural look.’

At a closer look, she was fairly attractive, but she lacked any sense of self-confidence at all. Her fidgety behavior coupled with her expression, which seemed to be almost permanently a split second from tears, strengthened that impression all the more. A harshly spoken person would probably just sum her up with the word ‘gloomy.’

“...Senpai... Nanbu-senpai...” she muttered pitifully. Her cheeks were ever so slightly pinkened, like the petals on a cherry tree. The combination made it seem that the girl had some interest in Kyouhei, but... “...Senpai...”

Those mutterings and the object she was holding in her hand made things somewhat more doubtful: It was, to put it plainly, a strawman that seemed to have no other purpose than to have a nail hammered into it. How on Earth that came to be was a mystery.

“...Nanbu-senpai...”

As she clenched her fingers around the effigy, Kyouhei jolted within her vision.

Next to her, another girl, probably her classmate, was watching her with clear horror.

“...Sanae, you know...”

This girl was nearly the complete opposite of the one she had just called Sanae: she had eyes that were somewhat slanted like a cat's, and an air of unyielding will about her. Her long hair was tied back into a ponytail, which added to the impression of being active that she gave off. If Sanae was the quiet, reserved one, she was definitely the loud, boisterous one. Plus, she looked like she played basketball or something.

"I don't get what you see in that plain old guy, but if you like him that much, why not just tell him?"

"Eh...? Ah... I can't... that... that would be way too embarrassing..."

She shook her head as the red hue on her cheeks deepened by another level, still gripping the strawman.

"...Just watching from here makes my heart feel like it's about to burst..."

"Kay," answered the ponytail girl unenthusiastically, not sounding like she really cared much at all.

"...All I can do now... is possibly... use my feelings... and try to curse Senpai with all my might..."

"Why're you cursing the guy you like?!"

"...T-That's no good?"

"Of course not... probably."

Silence, not quite a heavy silence, but also not a light one, fell between the two girls. The ponytailed classmate was the first to break the quiet:

"Well, why not just go ahead and stalk him, peep on him, or just kidnap him? I'm heading off, they're showing *Orbital Gear Grendam* again at five."

"...Ah, wait. Wait, Youko-chan. Ahh, don't leave me alone. Ahhhhh, wait... If you don't wait, I'll... I'll... I'll curse you..."

"Quit it with the curses!!" The ponytailed girl, Youko, threw back over her shoulder as she walked briskly away, with Sanae trotting after her like a puppy running after its owner.

Well, as you can see above, Kyouhei was surrounded by people whose very

existences sneered at such things as ‘normalcy’ and ‘peace,’ as well as Kyouhei’s modest wishes.

Yep, that’s just how things are.

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“Anyway,” muttered Kyouhei as he walked alone through the coastal warehouse district, “if he was a bit more mature, with some common sense, I wouldn’t be so...”

The buildings were lined up like concrete boxes in the salty air. Every so often there was an abandoned wreck of a car rusting away, and the noises of steam whistles on boats along with cranes unloading and loading goods echoed through the area.

The location was ill-befitting a teenager in their school uniform, but Kyouhei wasn’t lost or going out of his way; this was his route home. His house was straight through this district.

Even so, there obviously wasn’t just a normal ‘house’ in the warehouse district.

In other words...

Kyouhei’s house was finally in his sight. It was excessively simple in appearance, with bare concrete walls, and a shutter in place of a door. There was no pointed roof, and on the whole, it was more or less a box.

Indeed, this was a house in name only... Really, it was without a doubt a warehouse.

Kyouhei stood in front of the building and punched in a code on the number pad next to the shutter.

“Authorization Code confirmed.”

“Deactivating defensive measures one through seven.”

“To continue, provide a fingerprint and vein pattern.”

Kyouhei put his index finger into a hole at the top of the device and waited for three seconds.

Finally, with a small grinding noise, the shutter began to roll up.

Someone seeing it for the first time might mock the security and call the place some secret base. Incidentally, if you were to slip up even slightly with this procedure, there was a wonderful system that would give you an electric shock with no warning. Kyouhei had come home in the past to find a thief convulsing in front of the shutter.

Well, all that aside, Kyouhei took a fortifying breath and ducked under the shutter.

Immediately, his nose was assaulted by the scent of dust. Grimacing, he flicked the switch next to the already closing shutter, instantly lighting the area with the harsh light of fluorescent tubing. Then, filling his vision were countless... boxes.

The boxes weren't built up into a tower, nor a wall, they just made the warehouse into a labyrinth. There weren't ten or 20, nor even one or two hundred; there were easily more like 1,000, though he hadn't counted them. The number was always fluctuating.

There were both wooden and cardboard boxes, and even metal containers. Many of them had things written on them in English or other languages, but Kyouhei did his best not to read them, lest he see something all too serious like 'AK74 Type Assault Rifle x50.'

All of these boxes were stock for Kyouhei's father's work. That was why the numbers fluctuated as the days went by.

His father, Shuuhei Nanbu, was what he called an International Trader that sold anything and everything. If he could make a profit on it, he'd sell it... regardless of country. And if someone would buy it, he'd sell it to whomever it was.

The lack of integrity was almost moving.

Some time before, he had sold old gaming PCs and combat sims as 'the latest military strategy computers' for a sum with seven zeros trailing off the end, in dollars as well. He'd also tried to sell a panda to a canned food company and was wanted by the Chinese police and army.

Well... doing that thing obviously led to more than a few issues. Having been carted around across the globe by his father, Kyouhei had been dragged into a variety of troubles too.

He'd first resigned himself to death when suspended above a boiling pot in a cannibal village, and he'd been chased off from an area of desert in a certain country, labeled 'Area 51,' by an armored vehicle equipped with a heavy machine gun. Yes, Kyouhei had narrowly escaped from certain death with his father.

The floor was packed with boxes and various items in bags, so despite the floor being huge in an absolute sense, there was nowhere for Kyouhei to step.

On top of that, Kyouhei lived on the second floor. Or more accurately, on the wide catwalks surrounding the inner walls of the warehouse, with the necessary furnishings and such in place to make a living area. To get to those catwalks, however, he would have to climb the stairs further inside the warehouse.

In other words, to put his bag down, to change clothes, to even lie in his bed, Kyouhei would have to traverse the chaos of the warehouse.

"...Seriously, he keeps picking up the weirdest things..."

He constantly had to hold back the urge to just toss the lot as he set out on his voyage.

The reason that he didn't lay a finger on any of the things in the chaotic warehouse despite his unceasing litany of mental complaints wasn't that he was being considerate of his father's work; it was just a matter of self-preservation.

If he decided to just start sorting or disposing of things, then who knew what he'd find. He knew from experience that there were plenty of things that might be better to not know the truth about, like certain leaves, flowers, or powders.

Well, that's why Kyouhei took the position of 'see no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil.'

However...

"What's he playing at...? He's not an international trader or anything; he's just

gonna get arrested.”

Something... shifted... under his feet as he muttered to himself.

He must have kicked something. It wasn't exactly a rare occurrence for something to go rolling across the floor in here, but—

“Ah... Wha?!”

The thing rolling its way across the floor was, by all appearances, a handgun. And, being in Shuuhei's 'warehouse,' it wasn't likely to be a harmless cap gun.

And so...

Bang.

“Uwah?!” Kyouhei yelled, instinctively covering his head.

The safety seemed to have failed on the cheap contraband gun, and it had discharged as it hit a box. The bullet had ricocheted around the room before coming to rest into another box near Kyouhei.

“That was clo...oooooose?!”

And on top of that, the burial-mound-like mountain of boxes had destabilized as the bullet had upset its delicate equilibrium. In the next moment, the leaning tower passed the point of no return in front of Kyouhei as his face contorted, then the tower began to collapse like a landslide.

“Ahhhhhhh!” Kyouhei screamed.

With the warehouse already reeking of dust... appearing for all the world to have not been cleaned in over a month, like the all-male household it was, the falling boxes raised a smokescreen of dust as they collapsed.

Kyouhei managed to avoid the murderously heavy boxes through all of that with essentially just intuition. If he'd been hit, he would have had broken bones at best, and at worst would have caved in his skull and died instantly. His senses were so sharp he might stand a good chance at getting through a minefield even.

After a few dozen seconds, however, Kyouhei was in almost some kind of yoga posture and breathing heavily.

“...I’m glad to be alive...”

He lifted himself up with that muttering, among others, before surveying the warehouse, the debris finally beginning to settle.

He then let out a *long* sigh.

“I seriously need to move out or something, for my health at least... Hmm?”

The mountain in the ‘warehouse’ had collapsed, and right in the middle of the aftermath was some strange-looking object.

It was oblong and made of some kind of black material.

“What’s that...?”

He blinked and looked more closely.

It was almost like...

“A coffin...?”

There wasn’t an epigraph or crucifix engraved on it, but... with its ominously black surface and roughly two-meter length and 70-centimeter width, it was about ‘the right size for a person,’ and made him think of a Western coffin.

“Seriously... old man, you’re... you’re not starting in that line of work...”

Maybe he wasn’t satisfied with the trading and had decided to move into the funeral business; Kyouhei couldn’t say it was impossible.

After all, his father had no concept of ‘normal’ or ‘common sense.’ Or maybe he did have it, but didn’t use it and couldn’t sell it.

The only things Kyouhei could say that Shuuhei definitely wouldn’t do were suicide, entering the priesthood, and philanthropy. He wouldn’t be surprised at anything apart from those, though; that was just the kind of person Shuuhei Nanbu was.

“Well... E-Even if he did, well, there wo-wouldn’t be a body in there, right? Ha hah, ahahahahahahaha,” he muttered, practically asking himself.

It could well be a new, unused one, but he wouldn’t go out of his way to store a coffin with *something* in it. Probably. Definitely. Maybe.

Then Kyouhei noticed something.

The coffin—that's how he was thinking of it for now—seemed to be mechanical. Looking closely, he could see thin pipes and small machinery in several places on it.

"This is..."

One of the things it had was... a meaningful red switch.

It had the word 'CAUTION!' printed neatly under it and was furnished with a plastic cover. That meant that it had been made difficult to push, but with the absolute mess he accidentally created, it was almost begging to be pushed.

"...Haha. That's how it goes?" he laughed stiffly.

It didn't seem likely to be empty, and he shouldn't open it. He should just pretend to have never seen it, then there'd be no problems, like with all the other crazy things he'd seen.

That's right, normal high schoolers would see this and immediately know it was dangerous, and have nothing more to do with it. They shouldn't have anything to do with it, so they wouldn't. *Actually, Kyouhei told himself, it doesn't exist, so I don't know anything about it. I don't know anything about it, so I can't have anything to do with—*

He was backing away from the coffin as he told himself these things, but he was shaking slightly, so he rested his back against another mountain of boxes.

Before he could react, there was a *crack* sound. A lucky cat statue—Kyouhei had long since forsworn the pointless act of questioning the providence of such things—fell from atop the pile of boxes and broke the plastic cover on the coffin with eerie precision... hitting the red button.

"Gah?!" Kyouhei cried out in dismay. He had a bad feeling something was about to explode. That feeling only strengthened as the coffin began making mechanical noises before venting steam-like white smoke everywhere with a *whoosh* .

"C-Crap?!"

Without thinking about it, he jammed a helmet that had rolled near him, with

'Born to Kill' written on it, onto his head, and hid behind the same mountain of boxes.

"Wha... It... It's not going to explode?!"

There was no one there to answer him. And well, even if his father had been there to say it wouldn't, Kyouhei wouldn't have put any faith in his answer.

Instead, he *ever* so gingerly looked out, to see the lid of the coffin rising with a keening squeal, opening almost like a door.

Then, some strangely thin and pale things appeared on the rim of the opening.

"Eh?"

It took Kyouhei a moment to realize that those things were fingers, what with the angle he was looking from and the situation... But those fingers were white as snow, ever so pale, looking like something lifeless, probably just because of the atmosphere in the 'warehouse.'

Moments later, following the fingers was a hand, following the hand a wrist, following the wrist an elbow. The thin, pale thing was... an arm.

The arm was like the fingers, something that looked like a mannequin's... It had none of the softness or vibrancy of a human, but for that exact reason, it had an exquisite beauty to it.

The fingers gripped the edge of the coffin. Everything past the elbow was pulled out, the shoulder and the torso after it rose from the bottom of the large black box.

It wasn't a corpse, at least.

However, rather than reassure Kyouhei, that made him freeze with another fear.

There *was* something in the coffin.

It slowly rotated its neck and looked at Kyouhei.

"D... D..."

It was a girl as she was born; in other words, a girl not wearing a stitch of

clothing.

“Daaaaaaaaaad?!” Kyouhei yelled with an anger that would have brought down satellites at his father, who wasn’t there.

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“Damn it... Dad!” Kyouhei ground out with a horrified expression. “I thought you were an idiotic pervert with no morals, but I didn’t think you’d get into the slave trade—actually, wait, he hasn’t necessarily. Calm down. Calm down, Kyouhei Nanbu; think positive! Just thinking about the worst-case doesn’t help! Right, uhm, maybe it’s organ trafficking! Wait, that’s even worse!!”

The shock had Kyouhei pulling a double act all by himself.

Well, you couldn’t blame him.

There was a nude girl right there.

He’d have been lost for words if she’d politely greeted him by the door, but anyone would panic if they’d been confronted by someone appearing out of a coffin like this.

And...

For better or worse, the girl was beautiful. Her features made it obvious that she wasn’t Japanese. They were finely chiseled, with clear shadows cast across her face and prominent eyes. Her nose was well defined. She also had blonde hair and blue eyes, and her skin was as pale as snow. Judging by her features alone, she could be Nordic.

“This is bad this is bad this is bad this is bad...!”

This was no trivial matter. He didn’t know if she’d been kidnapped, smuggled into the country, or was to be experimented on. To put it bluntly, this would make the papers.

As he was thinking this, the girl spoke:

“Hm, wer bist du?”

“Eh?”

Kyouhei’s ears had just been subject to a foreign language he didn’t know. He

looked back to the coffin, where the girl had come from, and she was standing there looking blankly at him.

“Wer bist du?”

She probably thought he just hadn't heard, so repeated the same thing again, slowly.

“Ah... uhm...”

“Hm, der gesicht ist Japaner, dann...”

The girl knit her brows as if trying to look something up mentally. Her eyes and lips curved childishly before she finally seemed to have found what she was looking for. Then, her sparkling eyes looked at Kyouhei once more.

He felt his cheeks reddening.

She was cute.

He hadn't taken much notice because of the situation, but this girl was gorgeous.

And naked.



She didn't seem much bothered by this state of affairs, as she freely bared herself before him. Kyouhei then realized how uncouth he was being by staring so unreservedly at a naked girl like he was, and hurriedly averted his eyes.

When suddenly...

"...You are Japanese?" Fluent Japanese ushered forth from her cherry-petal pink lips out of nowhere.

"Eh?" Kyouhei looked back at her in surprise. The blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl was taking no notice of his embarrassment or discomfort, and had left the coffin and puffed her chest out—this might be wearing thin now, but she was naked—as she stood there proudly.

"My name is Pamil! The first child of the thirtieth king of Bergmann, Dolph Terrill Balor Bergmann, and first in line for the throne: Princess Pamil Terrill Karl Bergmann! Your head's too high!"

"...Huh?"

Kyouhei's mouth hung open. He had the feeling he had just heard an unbelievable combination of words, but...

The two of them looked at each other, before finally:

"...Youth, why do you not prostrate yourself?"

"...I'm sorry? Ah, are... are you talking to me?"

"Do you find my actions strange? Do I not appear the part? Are you saying I'm not a proper princess? I'm sure I did everything as the manual said..." The girl asked him with an unhappy expression on her face.

"Princess...?"

"Indeed. For I must act precisely as Princess Pamil does if I am to fulfill my role as her double."

"...No... but?"

"This *is* my first boot, so it's likely there are some bugs. Therefore, youth, I ask you, how was it? Am I not the picture of a princess? If not, then say how I am not."

The blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl pirouetted in front of him.

Her golden hair cascaded down her back in waves and bounced upon the alluring surface. It was, should Kyouhei put it bluntly, a little like one of *those* , and it made his heart race faster and faster.

“Ah... Uh, first of all, who are you? Your name’s Pamil? Where are you from?”

“Have I not explained?” the girl asked. “I am a substitute.”

“A substitute...?”

“The phrase ‘body double’ may be easier to understand.”

Kyouhei was speechless.

“My formal title is FR-MC09 ‘Pamil IX.’ The most common word that is close to my existence is ‘android.’”

“An... An android? Like a robot?”

Kyouhei looked at the girl once more.

Her face was adorable, and didn’t seem to be a manufactured thing at all. Her white, yet ever so slightly pink skin was completely like that of a person. And while it was modest, the swell of her chest looked soft and... (you get the picture).

“No... It’s just...”

The girl called herself a robot, but Kyouhei had never heard of someone making a machine to be so lifelike. If technology had progressed that far, even he should have heard about it in the news or on TV. Well, technology advanced rapidly, so it might not be too strange, but...

“You don’t look like anything but a human.”

“Of course! If I didn’t I wouldn’t be able to be a body double!” the girl declared proudly.

Kyouhei sighed at the circular logic.

However...

“...I see,” he said, nodding with a stiff expression.

The girl clearly had a screw loose and was so far from Earth that she was picking up signals from Cygnus or Andromeda. Not only did she call herself a princess from somewhere, but actually claimed to be that princess' body double robot. She really was too far out there, but trying to make sense of a space cadet's ramblings wouldn't help at all.

Just as Kyouhei decided this, the android beauty put her face right next to his and asked him:

"So, how was it?"

Kyouhei felt his heart speed up as he gulped.

This position was bad; to describe just how bad would lead to an 18+ certificate. Her chest was... (you get the picture).

"You still have not answered my initial question. How was it? Why do you not prostrate yourself? Do I not appear the part?"

A normal princess wouldn't just appear naked in this dirty warehouse, young lady. He wanted to use that rebuttal, but with her being such an airhead, careless words would be dangerous, so he remained silent. Regardless, she seemed to make a judgment from that on her own anyway:

"I must not then... Hmm, this is not good, I was built with being Princess Pamil's body double as my *raison d'être*! Youth, make your observations. What issues were there?!"

The girl moved even closer, putting both hands on the nape of his neck. The distance Kyouhei had been worried about to begin with grew even smaller; they were so close they could feel each other's breath on their skin.

"No... I..."

"What was wrong, the refinement? The appearance? Or my actions or word choices? Please, tell me, youth!"

"Uhm... Ah... I'll tell you... just... I have... one request... first," Kyouhei managed to get out as he trembled.

"Hmm, an agreement. Very well, what is it?"

The girl suddenly let go of him and tilted her head.

Kyouhei marshaled his willpower, turned away from her, and spoke:

“For now... put some clothes on, find something around here that’ll work.”

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And so, that’s how it happened.

The high school student Kyouhei Nanbu, who loved peace and quiet above all else, met with the (self-proclaimed) body double android of the first in line for the throne, Princess Pamil Terrill Karl Bergmann, FR-MC09 ‘Pamil IX’... just about like that.

Chapter 2 - Gradually the Grave is Dug

The postbox in the fourth block was Sanae's spot. Here she would wait for 'him' every morning. This was because her line of sight from the postbox allowed her to watch 'him' for a relatively long time on his way to school.

Of course, in an absolute sense, it was a mere three minutes and change. On top of that, 'he' probably didn't even know that Sanae existed; it was a relationship that consisted solely of one-sided staring.

Even that small amount of time, regardless of it being as far from a chance meeting as it could be, was the highlight of her day.

The time was 7:50—soon 'he' would be coming.

Sanae felt her heart pound. Even the simple act of waiting in the shadow of the postbox made her feel like her heart would burst.

And then...

She breathed in sharply. 'He' had appeared, approaching from the horizon; a boy walking slowly up the road, a school bag hanging from his left hand.

He was a plain figure. Part of it was to do with the utterly unremarkable beige blazer that made up the school uniform, but many other factors came together to lend that impression to his appearance as a whole.

His hair was undyed, and not grown out. He had no piercings, rings, or similar accessories. He was decent-looking, but not to any great degree. The most someone could pick out as noteworthy about him was his sharp eyes and the glasses that seemed to conceal them.

And on top of that... he was practically the poster child for a 'model high school student.' He walked with his back straight and his uniform impeccable, not even a single button was undone on his shirt. Even the school bag he used was the one specified upon entering the school, which he had kept for all this time.

He's wonderful , thought Sanae.

He was the average height for a male and had a relatively average physique, but all of those trivial normalities were special abnormalities to Sanae.

His name was Kyouhei Nanbu, the one and only senior that Sanae longed for.

“Ahh...” she let out, her heart racing with the suffocating pain. She’d fixed her gaze upon him so she wouldn’t miss even a single blink from his eyes.

And so, she noticed immediately.

Kyouhei was different than usual.

His grip on his bag was looser than usual, his hair was limper and less shiny. And on top of that, his glasses were 2.35 millimeters further down his face than usual...!

The things her scope-like eyes zoomed in on with the precision of a lovestruck girl were the clear signs of fatigue on his (in her opinion) beautiful, perfect face. His glasses made it hard to tell, but it looked like there were bags under his eyes.

“...Senpai...”

What on earth... had happened to Kyouhei? She wondered.

Her feelings grew conflicted, the worry made her unable to just stand there, but she didn’t dare to run over to him and ask what was wrong.

All she could do...

“...Senpai...” she murmured as she clutched at the strawman in her hand.

She didn’t have the courage to speak to him directly, so she would put all of her feelings into her nail.

“Send them to him...! My—”

“What are you trying to send?!”

Sanae felt a strike to the back of her head as she held the strawman to the postbox and hefted a wooden mallet.

“Ah, Youko-chan...” she said once she turned around.

“What’re you playing at with that strawman first thing in the morning?!”

This was one of Sanae's few friends, Youko Minebe. She was essentially the exact opposite of Sanae, who spent most of her time in a shrine at night, or hiding in the shadows. Youko seemed energetic and open, much like a vivid landscape at dawn.

"Uh... err... umm... Senpai looked kind of tired... so I thought I could kinda curse him maybe... you know?" Sanae asked as her cheeks flushed red.

"Curse him?!"

"I... I shouldn't...?"

"Of course you shouldn't! *That* being a question at all is the scary thing about you."

"But... when I think of Senpai, I can feel my heart squeezing... and I can't breathe," she said, putting her hand on her chest, "so I accidentally..."

"Accidentally... You accidentally made a strawman and hammered a nail into it?"

"You don't, Youko-chan?" Sanae asked with upturned eyes.

Even though she was asking seriously, it was still wrong and bizarre.

"I don't. I think most of the country doesn't, either."

"But, but, you know, you see it in magazines a lot. 'You too can get the guy of your dreams with this!'"

"Those aren't 'curses,' they're 'charms'!!"

Well, they *were* both magic.

"Anyway," she continued, "curses are forbidden."

"No... Youko-chan..." Tears welled up behind Sanae's glasses. "That's so mean..."

"Don't you think cursing people is meaner?!"

"But it's a longstanding tradition of Japan..."

"That kind of tradition needs to die out already!!" Youko cried out.

It was then that Kyouhei Nanbu passed by, sighing and still out of it.

“Nanbu-senpai,” Youko called to him, “Good morning.”

“...Huh? Ah, yeah, morning.”

Kyouhei had turned around at her greeting, but his expression was confused for a moment.

He was most likely trying to remember Youko and Sanae’s names, but of course, hadn’t memorized the names of a couple of girls who weren’t in the same year, class, or even club. They just happened to go to the same school.

“You’re...”

“I’m in first year, Youko Minebe. This is Sanae Murata.”

“Ah... right.”

His expression was clearly exhausted as he nodded.

“You look really tired for not even having gotten to school yet. Did something happen?” she asked.

“...Eh?” Kyouhei’s face, previously drooping with tiredness, suddenly stiffened as he spoke in a panic. “Ah... no! Not at all! Nothing happened! Everything’s completely, totally normal! Really!”

His words tried to gloss over it, but his expression told a different story.

“You just seem different than normal. Sanae-chan was worried and—”

“Y-Youko-chan!!”

Sanae’s face was bright red as she looked down bashfully.

Usually, this kind of situation would make someone realize that the girl might have an interest in them, but... Kyouhei was nearly at his wit’s end, and no such realization came to his mind, so he just shook his head.

“Ah, no, really, nothing happened! I’m fine, I’m fine, really!”

Then, with an unnaturally forced “See you,” Kyouhei quickly left them behind.

Sanae and Youko were just left standing by the postbox.

“See, you just ask what’s going on like that,” Youko told Sanae, turning to look at her.

The sight that greeted her was Sanae, still gripping the strawman, her eyes swimming with tears behind her circular lenses as she looked at one of her few friends, or more accurately, glared at her.

“...Youko-chan... you talked so much with Senpai... Not fair...”

“...What’s not fair, what?!” she cried out.

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Just as Sanae Murata had judged, Kyouhei Nanbu was indeed exhausted. He’d not slept a wink last night.

The reason was simple: Since last night, he had a (self-proclaimed) “body double android” staying in his home.

The girl, who called herself Pamil, had been inside one of the multitude of boxes, both wooden and cardboard, and cases that filled his (ware)house. The containers were from his father’s work. More precisely, she had been released from a particularly questionable-looking case that reminded him of a coffin.

...And she was completely nude.

All of this alone would have been weird enough, but she also claimed with deadly seriousness that she was “an elaborate android made as a body double for another country’s princess.”

No matter what, you couldn’t deny the strangeness. Regardless of how he looked at her, Kyouhei couldn’t see anything but a human. Furthermore, he’d not heard anything about someone making an android that could pass for a human.

She’s crazy? She’s crazy, right?!

That thought was the easiest to accept.

Even so, a girl like that was more than someone like Kyouhei—who had dedicated his life to the concepts of peace, normalcy, and being part of the lower middle class—could deal with. On top of her being a somewhat spacey girl of unknown provenance, the very idea of common sense was at least partially absent in her, and so...

She’d said something like: “Hmm... There is still much about this situation I do

not understand. I shall survey the area.”

Then she'd gone to leave his house.

Still nude.

Well, being in the middle of the warehouse district, there weren't exactly many pedestrians during the night, but it's not like the area was deserted either. It might have been a slim chance, but he couldn't imagine the kind of rumors that a naked girl just wandering out of his house would cause. Or rather, he *could* somewhat imagine them, which just made his head ache all the more.

That's why...

“W-Wait a minute!”

He had no choice but to stop her in a panic, even if he really wanted her to leave as soon as possible.

“What?” she asked, cocking her head.

The action itself was purely innocent, like a bird tilting its head, but her state of undress lent it an immense sense of perversion. Her appearance was far from average in Japan as well.

She had finely chiseled features with a high nose, vivid blonde hair, and pale skin. Her Scandinavian appearance, or actually somewhat otherworldly appearance, was the very picture of grace and refinement, even while clearly young.

Of course, she wasn't exactly voluptuous, but she had curves in all the right places, and her smooth skin made her look almost like a doll.

And so...

In 710 the capital was Heijou-kyou! In 712 the Kojiki was published! In 723 the Sanze-isshin Law was promulgated!

To avoid all of his blood concentrating in regions where it wasn't needed, Kyouhei began mentally reciting 600 years of Japanese history before grabbing her small, pale shoulders.

“...Put some clothes on, *please* .”

“Hm?” Pamil questioned. “Right, clothes. I see. I had forgotten.”

“Well don’t!”

“Right. A princess would wear clothes!”

“*Everyone* would wear clothes!”

He felt like he was doing nothing but digging holes and filling them back in.

Am I going to have to teach this muppet everything like this?! Hurry your arse back home, Dad! he cursed internally.

Kyouhei didn’t know how she’d come to be here, but should Shuuhei—his father and the one to bring in that coffin, a self-proclaimed International Trader (or a general merchant by another name)—come back home, then he would be able to ask him about the details.

Until then, however, he would have to look after the girl. She was not only deluded about being a “body double android,” but was also going to leave the house naked; who knew what chaos leaving her to her own devices would bring.

For someone like Kyouhei, who prayed for a peaceful life, the girl was akin to a bomb threatening to blow everything away. Moreover, she was a bomb with a broken safety, who—even if not maliciously—was ready and willing to explode.

“Why me...?”

He’d just gotten home and hadn’t even changed out of his uniform; of course he wasn’t expecting to have such a wild time of it.

“Let’s just get some clothes,” he muttered to himself.

He picked through the tower of wooden and cardboard boxes and found a partially buried chest of drawers. He began to search through it, making sure that opening each drawer wouldn’t cause another avalanche. It felt like he was the Thief in a dungeon and checking a chest for traps, but doing that in real life was more of a hassle than an amusement.

“Now then,” he said, lining up the spoils.

Then he just looked at them aghast.

None of these would work.

There was a maid uniform, a nurse uniform, bloomers, a waitress' uniform, a shrine maiden's costume, a school swimsuit, bondage gear, and even an Alice band with cat ears, which came with paw-styled gloves and shorts with a tail. He wanted to grab his dad by the scruff of the neck and ask what kind of cosplay café he thought they were.

"Why aren't there even any men's clothes here?! Only men live here!" he yelled.

Well, he wouldn't exactly doubt that these might be some product, or even Shuuhei's hobby.

Just please tell me he doesn't wear them himself, seriously.

While Kyouhei was occupied with his thoughts, the girl had come over.

"Hmm? There certainly is plenty. Which is most princess-like?"

There certainly was a lace dress like a princess might wear, but it wasn't much different from being nude in terms of how unusual it was. If a girl—a blonde-haired, blue-eyed beauty at that—wearing a dress that the majority of people wouldn't see outside of a wedding were to go walking about town, then she'd most certainly stand out.

"Isn't there anything, *anything*, better?"

He just wanted something a normal girl would wear. It didn't need to be the latest fashion, just something normal, that wouldn't pointlessly stand out. Was there nothing like that?

In the end, he found something mostly legitimate: a yukata, like one of those girls would wear to go to a summer festival. It had a red goldfish pattern on a white background; it was cute and colorful, but strangely gaudy.

He wanted to know exactly what his father was thinking. The next time they met, he wasn't entirely sure if he'd be able to resist the urge to crack his skull open to check if there actually was anything in there. Thus, while Kyouhei was hesitant to give her a yukata during the winter, the other outfits were even less suitable, so he had no choice but to compromise.

“Here, wear this.”

“Hm?”

She looked at the yukata that had been handed to her and began putting it on.

She was either surprisingly clever or dexterous, because despite the apparent difficulties as she began putting it on, after a few minutes, she was standing in front of Kyouhei wearing the yukata.

The sash was tied a tad strangely, but beggars couldn't be choosers. The clothing was also slightly bigger than he'd first thought, with the collar and chest both being rather loose on her. Frankly, it looked like you'd be able to easily take a peek at Pamil's creamy skin.

“Is this sufficient?” she asked, cocking her head once more.

Bearing her neck like that now meant that her chest was almost completely visible, so he hurriedly looked away.

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Well, that's more or less what happened.

“...The hell is that old bastard thinking...?!”

It was lunch break, and Kyouhei's exhaustion had reached its peak just as both hands on the clock were pointing straight up.

Honestly, if he'd just picked a few boring classes and slept in those the exhaustion would have abated. Or even if he'd just taken the one day off, it wouldn't have been a big deal. However, because he aimed for 'normalcy,' diligence, and being a model student, he couldn't do that.

Kyouhei pulled his phone from his pocket and hit his first speed dial slot. The screen changed to display “Old Bastard” and a phone number.

He raised the phone to his ear and waited.

For one minute. Two minutes. Three. Four. Five...

No answer.

“What kind of trader doesn't answer the phone?!” he yelled out, raising the

phone to throw it at the floor before narrowly catching himself.

The phone *had* rung, but that was all. His father, Shuuhei, showed no sign of answering. He didn't even direct him to the voicemail.

Kyouhei had actually called every time he'd had a break, but hadn't been able to get a hold of him at all.

In other words, the situation had not changed a bit.

"So, do I call the police now...?" he mused. "There might be a missing person report. Ah, but I can't! I'd get connected to his shady business. Transporting a person in a coffin or whatever can't be legal!"

Even if it had been by mutual consent, it'd be aiding in illegal immigration. If it *hadn't* been by mutual consent, then regardless of the legality of the immigration, it was kidnapping—a blatant crime.

If he stepped incautiously, then Kyouhei would end up arrested together with his father.

"Dammit, Dad, if you're gonna get arrested, do it on your own!!"

"What, your dad's back?" came a voice from behind him.

He turned around to find that Mizuhito Hibiki had arrived.

On top of his usual nationality-belying color scheme of red hair, green eyes, and tanned skin, he had an electric guitar dangling from his shoulder by its strap. Of course, it wasn't connected to an amp or any cables, so it was just like his piercings, rings, and bandana: a fashion statement.

Well, he certainly stood out that way. Not only did he have the guitar, but he was also carrying a yakisoba sandwich for lunch or something. Overall, he looked pretty surreal.

"Him not being back's the issue."

"Ain't that normal?"

That certainly was true.

"Yeah, but it's 'cause he ain't back that—" Kyouhei started before shutting his mouth.

That was close.

Letting Mizuhito know about Pamil would *not* be good.

Far from being a good source of advice, he would happily sell out friends and family if it would get him attention. He'd probably even complain that it was only Kyouhei getting the attention after selling him out to the media.

"What, did something happen?"

"No? Not really?" he said, feeling a cold sweat run down from his armpit.

"Hmmm? What're you hiding?!"

"I'm not!"

"Kyouheiii, why're you so mean?" he whined as he strummed at the guitar. Well, as mentioned earlier, it wasn't connected to an amp, so it wasn't too loud. "You're always hoarding the interesting stuff to yourself; I don't remember bringing up such a selfish child!"

"And I don't remember you bringing me up either!" he retorted.

Mizuhito wasn't a bad person by any means, it was just that his entire value system was based on whether something would stand out or not, so they were often at odds. Frankly speaking, it was a mystery to Kyouhei himself how they'd even become friends.

"Anyway, nothing happened! Everything's been completely, utterly normal!! Today's the same as yesterday, and tomorrow will be the same as today, with me having my fill of a completely routine day!!"

"Man, you're boring."

"And hearing that from you puts me at ease," he retorted again.

At the least, Kyouhei didn't want to live a life that Mizuhito could call interesting.

"By the way, Kyouhei."

"What?"

"Lunch'll be over soon; you eaten?"

“...Ah.”

Now that Mizuhito mentioned it, he realized he'd been too busy trying to call his father and had forgotten to eat. He hadn't brought lunch with him, so the only option Kyouhei had was to buy something from the cafeteria or school store. Looking at the time, though, it was only five minutes before break would be over.

“Kuh, it'll have to be the store?!”

Even if he headed there now, there probably wouldn't be anything good left, but it'd be better than finishing off the day with no lunch.

Well, that's how it went.

“See you laterrr!”

With Mizuhito's carefree voice following him, Kyouhei rushed towards the school store.

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Meanwhile, elsewhere...

Pamil had been left behind in the warehouse going by the name of “the Nanbu household,” and was sitting on the floor blankly watching the TV.

“Hello, everyone.”

“Indeed, hello,” Pamil nodded politely in response to the news reader's voice.

The TV in front of her was an old-style one that had been dug up from somewhere or another... It was one thing that it was using CRT technology, but the channels didn't even change using buttons; it was a knob that clattered around.

“This is the afternoon news.”

“I see. I have no objection with that.”

“First, there has been a fire in a plastics factory in the Osakan city of Sakai—”

“Hmm? Report on world affairs first.”

“...at approximately 11:28 this morning—”

“I told you to report on world affairs—”

“...An explosion occurred, and the fire then—”

“Hmph, are you ignoring me?”

Pamil’s face scrunched up into a frown.

A beat later, there was a burst of noise, a *pew* , as a flash of light issued forth.

The intense ray of light struck the TV where it was still—unsurprisingly—ignoring Pamil’s demands, and the next instant, the old TV fell apart with a thud.

This was certainly an event that would give Kyouhei palpitations if he were to see it.

However...

“How impolite. Have you come to realize the power of the royal family?” muttered Pamil before suddenly looking around in realization.

...she didn’t seem to be surprised by the bizarre event.

“This is a problem. I cannot hear the rest.”

Of course she couldn’t.

“Hmm, Royal Searcher Eye!!” she exclaimed before surveying the area.

It wasn’t like literal searchlights shone from her eyes, but she made a short noise of satisfaction and easily found another TV in one of the cardboard boxes. She then took it out, happily replacing the broken one.

Well, that’s about how it went. It took the sacrifice of three more devices before Pamil had the realization that she was dealing with a machine that allowed single-way communication, or in other words, a TV.

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“What do I even do?” Kyouhei asked himself as he walked along the route home, still carrying his hunger and smoldering anger.

Incidentally, the store had ended up being sold-out, and so he had subsisted on a milk carton from a vending machine for his afternoon lessons.

He'd considered buying something on his way back home, but scavenging something out of the fridge when he got there would be quicker and cheaper. Effectively, he'd been living alone for two years now, since his father was always away working, so he was well used to cooking for himself.

Checking his black watch as he walked, he saw that it was four o'clock. The sun was on its way down, and the shadows were beginning to lengthen.

"I can't just leave it like it is..."

It went without saying that he was talking about Pamil.

Actually, it wasn't certain that there would *be* a status quo to leave it in. When he'd left the house, he'd repeatedly impressed upon her the need to not go outside, but had his doubts that she'd really taken it on board.

Those thoughts meant that Kyouhei had to rush home.

And thus, he passed through the warehouse district until he reached the warehouse, that is, the *house* in question.

There were no police cars or media people crowding it, so it seemed that there hadn't been an uproar at least.

"Thank goodness..." Kyouhei breathed in relief.

Then, there was a noise along the lines of *pew!!*

It wasn't a sound he knew, but his instincts still told him it was dangerous, and it sounded like it'd just skimmed his head.

Slowly, he turned to look behind him in shock...

And there, right in the middle of his line of sight, was a lamppost, screeching as it listed to the side. The pole was clearly made of metal, and yet had a lump gouged out of it that was roughly half the diameter of the support. It looked like a laser beam had scored a direct hit on it.

Then, suddenly:

Pew! Pew! Peeew!!

This time Kyouhei saw beams of light that looked like some sort of optical weapon traverse the space in front of him, several of them.

“Wah...?! Wah...?!” he got out, crouching down instinctively, “What the hell is this?!”

Obviously, there was no response to his yell. Instead...

Pew! Pew!!

More terrifying light beams spread throughout the area, all fired from the warehouse. They weren't aimed at anything; it was as if they were being fired randomly, in all sorts of directions.

While he wasn't being aimed at, the rays of light had easily gouged out a section of steel, so it didn't bear thinking of what they would do to a human body.

“Ahhhhhhhhh?!”

As he screamed, the lasers dug furrows into the ground that were about three centimeters wide.

Covering his head, he cast his eyes around for the source, only to see that they seemed to be coming through the wall of the warehouse he was even now returning to.

And the clincher? The dull roar of an explosion that sounded as several of its windows shattered.

Something must have exploded inside. It wasn't exactly a surprise considering the place was packed with weapons, ammunition, and drugs with no regard to the law or even common sense. Firing a beam or something off in there would be more likely than not to cause an explosion or two.

“Pa...” he began, being lost for words for a moment.

And then, after a pause:

“Pamil?!” he yelled, rushing over.

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Kyouhei waited impatiently for the security system—still working even in the face of explosions—to let him in.

“...What happened?”

The inside was already filled with smoke. It didn't smell bad though, so it was probably just dust that the explosion had kicked up, rather than something burning.

"Pamil! Hey, Pamil?!" he called.

He didn't know what had happened, but was at least fairly sure that it'd involved her.

He held his handkerchief up to his mouth and pushed through the smoke, deeper into the warehouse.

He found her standing there, stock-still and silent.

The blonde yukata-clad girl really did look like a robot that had just stopped, standing motionlessly with her eyes open.

Surrounding her, there were damaged boxes scattered around that had clearly fallen victim to the earlier laser. It rather looked like she was the source of those light rays.

"It can't be..."

The slowly clearing smoke didn't reveal any other silhouettes, so it didn't seem that someone had managed to get in past the security system.

"Pamil! Hey, Pamil!"

He rushed over to her and looked into her face.

The self-proclaimed "body double android" was staring vacantly into space, in a daze.

The collar of her yukata had slipped, so her pale shoulder was now exposed in the same way as her neck, and it seemed but a moment away from exposing her chest as well, though she showed no sign of that bothering her. Of course, she wasn't concerned about that to begin with, but it seemed to be even more the case now.

She at least seemed to be unhurt.

But...

"Pamil...?" he called to her, waving his hand in front of her face.

She didn't react, not even to blink.

And then... she suddenly began to move, like a video that had been unpaused.

Her gaze—albeit still somewhat hollow—was focused on a TV that was still working, even while buried under a mountain of boxes. The screen showed an elderly presenter facing out and talking about something.

It looked like a news program...

“...It's gone,” Pamil muttered quietly.



“Huh? What was that?”

“I said it’s gone...”

“It’s gone? What is?”

“My country,” she choked out, “that’s... what I’m saying... the Bergmann Kingdom... is gone.”

“...Eh?”

Even as he turned to look at the screen again, the news had already moved on to another headline, and the presenter was now dispassionately talking about some company’s tax evasion.

“It’s gone? What? The Bergmann Kingdom, that’s...”

That was the name of the country Pamil had said. The country that, if he was to take her at her word, had the princess she was modeled after, and the country that created her.

“It’s gone? How?”

“There... There was a revolution. Actually, that was a month ago... so...”

She slumped there... hanging her head in sadness.

That meant that when she had ‘booted’ yesterday, the country had already been gone. Apparently, she was at a loss now that the inspiration for her fantasy had disappeared.

Well, as far as Kyouhei was concerned, if it made her go back to normal, it would be for the better.

“...Never mind that, how’d this happen?!”

“...Hm?” Pamil blinked.

“What the hell happened? A terrorist attack?! There was an explosion a minute ago; did someone get in?! Or did—”

“...Ah, sorry,” Pamil muttered, looking away, “I was shocked, and accidentally fired my beams.”

He had no answer. She just said “beam,” right?

“Being a body double android for the princess, I am equipped with functions to deal with terrorists targeting her. The Royal Beam, Diffuse Royal Beam, Royal Thunder, Royal Fire, and others are all ways in which I can attack.”

Apparently the fantasy was in full flow.

“Ah, don’t worry,” Pamil said with a shy, feeble smile after she saw his expression, “they have safeties so they won’t normally fire, rest assured.”

There was another reason that he couldn’t rest easy right now, but he couldn’t say that, and so stopped his questioning for now. Realistically, the possibility that something among his father’s things had just happened to explode was far higher, anyway.

Following that line of thought, he was thankful it had ended with such little damage. Shuuhei being how he was, it wasn’t unlikely for there to be actual bombs or small nuclear reactors in his inventory, and if one of *those* had exploded, then you could forget Pamil escaping unharmed; the entire warehouse would have been blown away.

Of course, that didn’t explain those murderous beams, but he decided to leave those be for now.

“However...” Pamil said, once more dropping her gaze, “all those functions are meaningless...”

Kyouhei had no answer for her.

“...The princess I was to double for and protect... shared the fate of the rest of the family and the castle...”

“The Bergmann Kingdom...” he said to himself. It wasn’t a name he’d heard much, but...

What is it? I’ve heard that name before. Did I go there with Dad or something?

Pamil had mentioned the name the day before, but his memory was from longer ago.

“W-Well, let’s look it up on the internet,” he proposed, since Pamil was looking so down. Besides, if it was a real country, then there might be a clue to her origins. “You might have misheard, we should check it.”

“I... indeed,” Pamil nodded.

In that moment, she didn’t look crazy, or like a robot; she looked like a lonely, abandoned kitten.

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Kyouhei got the information on the Bergmann Kingdom soon after searching.

“Hmmm...” he murmured.

He was fiddling with a laptop on the second floor (as he called the catwalks), in an area he had made into his room with a bed, desk, and various other furnishings.

The warehouse, or rather ‘house,’ was equipped with Wi-Fi, so he could use the internet anywhere with his laptop.

The search engine found around 50,000 hits; a surprising amount. ...Or perhaps not for an actual country that existed.

Of course, many of them were pictures from people who had visited it, or random chat logs where the name had happened to come up. So next, Kyouhei added the word ‘politics’ to his search and found news sites.

The result was...

“A coup d’état... A revolution, then.”

Pamil had heard correctly: the kingdom had been at the center of a coup d’état halfway through the last month, and the military had taken command.

In fact, the country known as the Bergmann Kingdom no longer existed; a new country provisionally called the Republic of Holand had taken its place.

With both the name and policies of the country having changed, it certainly seemed to oppose the continued existence of the previous rulers, the Bergmann royal family.

Well, all that aside...

He turned to look at Pamil, who was sitting in the corner of his ‘room’ and holding her knees.

That position in a yukata did make her bare legs almost completely visible,

and would normally be perhaps tempting or strange, but Kyouhei didn't feel any excitement at the sight because of how sad she was.

The haughtiness she had shown the day before had vanished, and there was no energy in her voice, no strength in her gaze; her eyes were red and puffy.

She'd been crying.

When he'd asked her about it earlier, she'd claimed it was a result of firing her beams—according to her claims, the Royal Beam came from her eyes—but that was probably a lie.

He had some thoughts about androids not being supposed to lie, but beating at her delusions any more would just lead to depressing her further, so he avoided asking for any particular details.

"I... have nowhere to go... What... What do I do?"

"A body double android for the Bergmann princess" was her 'identity.' Even if it was a mere fantasy, it seemed to hold great importance to her at least.

"I don't know what to tell you..." was the only response Kyouhei could give her.

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Dinner took place with an awkward atmosphere around them.

The place was already a mess, so he only tidied up the spaces that would have an impact on day-to-day life, and used a dustpan and brush to clean the corners that didn't look immediately dangerous.

Both while he cleaned and cooked, Pamil stayed crouched in the corner of Kyouhei's room, not even showing an inclination to stand. He didn't want her to help, but the thought of sharing a roof with such a gloomy girl was really depressing.

Moreover...

Pamil didn't even lay a finger on the food he set before her.

He'd made sure to be considerate of the fact that she seemed to be a foreigner and gone for something orthodox in the form of a steak, salad, and

fried egg, also providing a knife and fork, but she didn't seem inclined to eat.

Kyouhei was trying to be respectful, and so couldn't just stuff his face by himself. Therefore, he was contending with both the glum face of the girl in front of him and his empty stomach.

He couldn't see a way to fill the gap.

Give me a break... he sighed mentally, gazing at his steak as it grew cold for no reason.

But then, unexpectedly: "...Kyouhei," Pamil called his name, suddenly looking at him.

Her blue eyes were fixed firmly on his face.

"W-What?"

"I have something I want to ask. How have you lived until now?"

"...You what?"

His expression solidified into puzzlement.

The only way he could answer that question was something like "one day at a time." Someone that'd lived half their life might be one thing, but as a student who hadn't even been employed yet, he had no real answer for that question.

"What have you had as your goal?"

"...Ah."

So that's what she meant, he realized, getting an idea of what she wanted to say.

Apparently, her goal in life had been—regardless of whether it was a good or a bad thing—playing out this fantasy of being a "body double android" for a princess.

"Well, I don't really have a goal or anything," he told her.

"...You don't?"

"I've just been dragged around by my dad. Until I moved here, I'd been to all sorts of countries. Dad was doing his yakuza trading, so that's how it went."

“Yakuza trading?”

“Dad’s an International Trader. Essentially, he’ll sell anything and buy anything.”

“...I see. I don’t really get it, but that’s yakuza trading.”

“No, that’s not what I...” he began.

“...Regardless, you went to so many places for your father,” she rephrased quietly.

“That’s what I said.”

“...I see, so you have memories in all sorts of places,” she imagined, almost enviously.

“...What did you do before you came here?”

“Nothing, I was first started here.”

“You’ve got no memories?”

“I was made as an android to be a body double for the princess, and was first booted here.”

“...That’s not what I mean.”

“My startup was meaningless though. I don’t have... a reason to exist anymore.”

Her fists were clenched and her lips trembling as she seemed to be holding back tears. The words themselves were as crazy as ever, but they were truly compelling.

It made Kyouhei not want to get involved in it.

Whether it was fantasy, delusion, or whatever else... the girl was clearly suffering in truth.

No place to go, huh?

He didn’t know why she’d come to hold that delusion... even her being slightly *off* had to have some kind of cause. A happy person wouldn’t break. A person would take up a delusion to shield their heart to avoid being hurt by their

surroundings, as a way to deny the environment they were in.

But if the place they belonged through that delusion was taken away...

He could see himself—pulled from this place to that with no space to breathe—in Pamil's depressed form.

She didn't seem to be in pain, but she did seem lonely. So...

Kyouhei let out a short sigh.

"Humans don't live for a goal, generally speaking."

"I'm not a human though," Pamil protested. "There's no meaning in a machine without a purpose—"

"But," he interrupted her, "you're a robot that acts like a human, right?"

"...I am."

"Then, copy that too."

That made her blink in surprise.

"I... But..."

"Just do what you want until you can choose your path."

He felt like he was being too kind, and needlessly merciful, but how could he turf out a girl making a face like that?

"My path...?"

"I mean that you can stay here until you find your place... your goal."

"I really can?" she asked, her face breaking into a smile.

It was almost like the sun.

Even if she was crazy.

Even if she was a self-proclaimed android.

Her smile was still purely adorable as far as Kyouhei was concerned.

"Now, let's eat. Even if it's stone cold."

Pamil nodded, and then had an idea.

“I’ll heat it up with the Royal Fire!”

Strangely, even one of her crazy lines just sounded like a lovable suggestion now.

“Just hurry up and eat,” Kyouhei said with a strained smile, picking up his own knife and fork.

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Well, that’s how it went.

Thus, the bizarre life together of Kyouhei and the self-proclaimed FR-MC09 ‘Pamil IX’ gradually began.

Chapter 3 - Logic and Reason, Forget Your Place

Now, here's the question:

If rain falls in the evening, it's called an evening shower.

What, then, is rain falling in the morning called?

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Kyouhei Nanbu was a healthy 17-year-old boy. And well, there are certain physiological responses that are normal for a 17-year-old boy. Problem is, those around the lower half aren't at all conscious.

Once he got into the busyness of the morning, it would normally have softened— I mean, been forgotten within five minutes, so he'd not really thought much of it.

However...

Greeting him upon opening his eyes was... something pale and soft. Two somethings actually, filling his vision. Sleep clogging his mental gears meant that processing it took... five seconds.

He realized what had happened.

With a strangled cry, he immediately shot up as he skittered back in his bedding. He could feel his heart clattering away; it was like a steam engine that had been given coal before it was actually needed. With that pounding in his ears, Kyouhei looked down next to his futon.

There was another futon next to his, and within it, a sleeping blonde.

All of this was comprehensible.

Kyouhei's 'house' was just a building that should actually be called a warehouse. The place was only *used* as a house, but it wasn't one. The whole thing was constructed of a huge roof and simple walls to cut it off from the outside. There were no partitions, and the majority of the floor was covered in Shuuhei's products. So on the whole, there wasn't much space to use.

All that meant that the second floor—actually just a relatively wide catwalk—

was Kyouhei's room. It had the bare minimum furniture and such, and was a room with barely any privacy. Well, his father was very rarely home, so he may as well have lived alone. Therefore, it hadn't been a problem...

Until now.

Now he was living with... he was *roommates* with a blonde-haired, blue-eyed beauty. Her looks were great, but her mind was always out of sync with reality.

Real name: unknown. Nationality: unknown. Age: unknown. Next of kin: unknown. Anything and everything: unknown.

All he knew were her claims of being an android body double for the princess of another country. Everything realistic was completely absent from what she had told him.

Which meant that everything about her was risky.

Very risky.

The girl stirred with a soft sound.

Uncomfortable in her position, she'd kicked the covers off and was curled up next to him. Her sparrow yukata was in disarray around her chest because of the twisting and turning as well.

Risky, *very* risky.

In more ways than one as well.

"...Uhh, 'tha rhine in Spine stys minely in tha pline,' 'tha rhine in Spine stys minely in tha pline,' 'tha rhine in Spine stys minely in tha pline!!'"

Kyouhei tore his gaze away from the two mounds laid bare. Chanting the cockney English spell repeatedly calmed him down.

It took about a minute for his heart to slow. The spell was very effective. Unsurprising considering it had been used to make a downtown flower girl into a fair lady.

Meanwhile, the 'change' in his bottom half would have been difficult to explain, but let's just say that it took about three minutes for it to go back to normal.

“Thank you, Professor Higgins,” he murmured, giving a vague thanks to no one in particular, then he sighed. “...Ngh.”

She had no inkling of the hard struggle—or whatever you’d call it—that Kyouhei had just fought and continued her exposure with a peaceful expression. She had a distinct lack of decency and perfect willingness to walk around nude, but when she slept, things took a turn towards more danger, with her almost *asking* to be eaten up.

This was bad.

If this continued, Kyouhei was sure something would break.

Well, there were people willing to become the wolf and take advantage of others’ lack of wariness. Kyouhei’s life was founded on ‘peace,’ ‘the ordinary,’ and ‘normalcy’ though, and so he had no intention whatsoever of becoming a sex offender.

And he *certainly* had no intention of any of that with someone that far out of their head. He didn’t fancy Cossack dancing on a minefield, thank you very much. No matter how adorable she was at first glance.

But on the other hand, his nethers were... more honest.

Said region worked all the time regardless of its master’s wishes. If things had taken a turn for the worse and she had seen that reaction, he had a feeling that he would have lost something important to humanity.

“Though yeah...” he muttered to himself.

There *were* clothes that wouldn’t slip off no matter how she slept in this warehouse... but they were all things like swimsuits and bunny outfits though, dangerous in their own way.

“I really need to get clothes soon...”

He glanced at the girl sleeping soundly next to him... then let out a sigh.

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Pamil.

Official name: FR-MC09 ‘Pamil-IX.’ An extremely hi-spec android built to act as

a body double for the Bergmann Kingdom's Princess, Pamil Terrill Karl Bergmann.

...Or so she claimed.

Incidentally, the country in question had recently been destroyed via a coup d'état.

It went without saying that Kyouhei had no one to question. If he were to believe her entirely, she now didn't even have anywhere to return to.

Well, that's what happened.

That's how Kyouhei came to reluctantly offer a roof over the girl's twigging-out head.

He'd considered going to the police. Unfortunately, though, she had appeared from amongst his father's—the International Trader Shuuhei—things. If something was said to the authorities, he'd probably end up wanted. That wouldn't necessarily end well for Kyouhei either. He wouldn't be able to live his peaceful and normal life, at least.

He had no choice.

Although...

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"...I screwed up..."

It was 30 minutes since they had left, and Kyouhei had his head in his hands.

"What's wrong, Kyouhei? Japanese Encephalitis?"

"No!"

He gave a long sigh after his obligatory retort to her curious question.

She didn't have enough clothes. He also couldn't just keep her shut up in his house.

This led to them being out to buy various necessities, particularly clothes. He'd made the judgment that even if she was a bit off, she wouldn't do or say anything too weird with him watching. Or if she did, he'd be able to stop her in time.

That judgment though... was naive. That much he now fully understood.

They were smack bang in the middle of a shopping district. It was a 30-minute walk away from the house, and was one of the traditional ones you'd find in any town. Larger outlets in the suburbs and mail-ordering had been drawing customers away each year. Even so, there were a fair number of people for a Sunday. Considering it was still before noon, the number would probably only grow later in the day...

So there were all the more opportunities for her to draw someone's eye.

That's when she...

"Pamil, it's for sale! You can't just pick it up and eat it!"

"Hrmh?"

Pamil blinked her blue eyes at him. In her hand was a tomato.

A tomato she'd bitten into with relish.

A tomato that had until a few seconds ago been with the rest of the greengrocer's products. At the same time as Kyouhei had noticed them, she had reached out and started eating it, as if she were just picking something out of the fridge at home.

"Ah, right," she said, nodding deeply, "I shouldn't have... Sorry, Kyouhei."

"...You know what you did?"

"Indeed. I shouldn't have eaten something not tested for poison first. Here."

"Don't you 'here' me!" Kyouhei yelled, glaring at the tomato she was offering him. "You need to pay for it first!! Understand? Pay! With *money*!"

"Huh...?"

Pamil crossed her arms and tilted her head.

What on Earth went on in that head of hers?

Incidentally, her clothes right now were Kyouhei's. She was wearing a shirt and a pair of jeans of his, both rolled up. While he was only of average height for a male, Pamil was petite. It made them rather baggy on her... Well, that was cute too from a certain perspective.

Also, because of how they fit, no one knew that she wasn't wearing a bra... Probably.

"Well, it's understandable. She isn't from around here so she wouldn't know how things work in Japan, would she?" the greengrocer interceded with a strained smile, even though he was the victim here.

That was probably one of the benefits of a place like this; the shoplifting didn't cause a huge stir or anything right away. Everyone knew the faces of people around here, after all. Although the real reason for the greengrocer's lack of alarm was probably that he was just taken aback at her daring.

"S-Sorry," Kyouhei apologized to him.

Even foreign countries would have some form of monetary economics. As long as you lived in civilization, you'd have some form of market forces. However, Kyouhei didn't really feel like gainsaying him on that.

"Anyway, Pamil," he continued after paying the greengrocer and apologizing with a bow of his head, "don't just pick up whatever you feel like!"

"Hrm..."

"Besides, what kind of princess just picks something up and starts munching? If you're a double, why don't you act more like it?!"

"Hmm, they don't?"

"No! They don't!"

Well, not that Kyouhei knew any actual princesses.

"Hmm... Understood."

"Honestly..."

Even while he muttered, he was beginning to get the hang of making her listen.

Essentially, he could just claim that something was "more princess-like" to get her to listen.

Crazy as she may be, that craziness had a logic to it. Or at least some consistency. If nothing else, she was conscious of being a "body double android

for the princess,” and so as long as he used that form of speaking, she’d accept what he said.

If she’d accepted it, then she wouldn’t act against it; you could call it her diligence or integrity.

Well, it’ll probably be fine, he thought as he followed Pamil, who was walking briskly away.

Though, of course, he came to realize the naivety of that... before even three minutes had passed.

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“...Senpai...”

Contrary to Kyouhei’s hopes, their passage down the street ended up garnering at least some attention.

In addition to her being a beautiful blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl, Pamil’s behavior was eccentric, and something that was bound to draw attention.

Her looks, though, the blonde hair and blue eyes coupled with her pale skin and features, made her seem foreign. That appearance made the majority of people pass off her weird behavior as just cultural differences.

All that meant that they didn’t draw *undue* attention.

With one exception.

That exception being... a girl with bobbed hair and round glasses, Sanae Murata. She was watching them fixedly from the shadow of a vending machine.

Her stare was strong enough that, if it had held a physical force, there would have been scorch marks on the back of Kyouhei’s head. Whether her gaze was considered as virtuous or bizarre would depend on the person describing it. If they didn’t know the details, though, most would decide on the latter. Actually, they probably would even if they *did* know.

“Mama... that girl’s—”

“Shh! Don’t point!”

It wasn’t particularly surprising that there’d be people like that mother and

child passing next to her.

Sanae was good-looking in her own way. If you limited the choices to attractive or not, there wouldn't be many that answered "not."

However, the problem was that she didn't realize that herself. Not to mention she had some questionable hobbies, or possibly idiosyncrasies.

To put it another way, no matter how she looked... wearing that plain blue dress, hiding behind things, and clutching her strawman as she stared at someone made her nothing more than unnerving.

Moreover, she also had a pouch hanging from her shoulder with her spike and mallet, as well as her 'uniform' of candles and headband in it.

That was Sanae—prepared 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.

Let's ignore how she used that preparation though.

"...Who is that girl...?" Sanae muttered, her eyes tearing up, "They're... getting on so well!"

Kyouhei was doing things like grabbing her collar to stop her from doing something strange. Or he was dragging her along, or grabbing her shoulder in annoyance, but from Sanae's perspective, it was an 'intimate' relationship.

The filter of a girl in love had no objectivity or logic.

Despite that, she...

"...No, I need to calm down... That's what Youko-chan always says..." she mumbled to herself as she looked at the strawman in her hand. "That's right... that's not necessarily his girlfriend... Right... No... I need to calm down... She might be his sister, or cousin, or familiar, or shikigami too...!"

Kyouhei's response, had he heard her, would have doubtlessly been: "How'd you even come up with those last couple?!"

"Ah... but Japanese law lets you marry a cousin...! No... that's awful!"

No one other than Sanae was likely to know just what was awful, but a girl in love had... (you get the idea).

"...What do I do?! Ah... if I knew who she was... Got it!"

Sanae was thinking gloomy thoughts next to her vending machine when suddenly she smiled widely and nodded.

“If I don’t know, I just need to ask...!”

Sanae Murata had reached an exceedingly obvious logical conclusion, which made her smile broadly. Then, she knelt down and started readying a divination board.

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Unknowing of his junior preparing some ceremony behind him, Kyouhei gritted his teeth as he walked past the shops.

“...Don’t snap, don’t snap. Hang in there, she’s a girl...”

That was almost like some kind of spell as well. He had already realized how wrong he was.

Or perhaps it would be better to say that he’d realized how many things were common sense in this life.

Why? Because every ten meters or so Pamil would do *something*.

Certainly, she wasn’t picking things up and eating them anymore. However... she’d happily pick things up from storefronts and just walk off.

Books, toys, shoes, crockery, watches, accessories, *etc*.

And, of course, she didn’t pay for them. Kyouhei was carrying the wallet, so she couldn’t either.

And so... each time he would hurriedly take it off of her and return it to the store. They weren’t food, so it was mostly fine. However, there were things that she’d fiddled with and broken, either the product or its packaging. In those cases, Kyouhei had to buy it.

“I apologize, she’s a foreigner, so Japan is strange to her.”

He’d already used about ten lines like that as he bowed to the shopkeepers. He was never quite sure that they’d accept the excuses either.

All this meant that even though they’d only walked about 100 meters, it had taken them nearly half an hour. If the rest of the trip followed the same pattern,

it'd take a whole day for them to get from one end to the other.

"I just need to find a clothes shop...!"

If he could at least get some clothes, he could deal with the intricacies of society later.

Unfortunately, this kind of situation is where Murphy rears his head.

As a rule, Kyouhei didn't mind much what he wore as long as it was decent, so he bought his personal clothes from a supermarket.

That supermarket, though... was gone.

It had moved at some point, and the store he had entered countless times now had a "For Sale" sign in its window.

"Dammit, am I gonna have to go to that fashion place by the station?!"

Going 100 meters down the road *here* was tough enough. He couldn't imagine what taking her somewhere with even more people and things to draw her attention would be like... Well, actually, he could, which just depressed him all the more.

"Ugh... We'll have to. Pamil, listen, we're go—" he started, turning to his side.

Then he noticed that the blonde who had been next to him a few seconds ago no longer was.

"What?!"

He looked around frantically before stopping in astonishment.

There she was.

In the road.

It was also a road with heavy traffic for its size. She wasn't on a crossing, and the light wasn't green for her. The area wasn't pedestrian-only, even on a Sunday.

So...

"...Hey! Pamil!"

The screech of his voice... was drowned out by the screech of several cars'

brakes.

The cars had stopped when they saw Pamil just wander out into the road like it was an empty field. Their faces were originally surprised, but the drivers soon grew angry and started blasting their horns.

Meanwhile...

“Kyouhei, what are you doing? Hurry up!” Pamil yelled, completely ignoring the situation.

“You moron!” he roared at her.

Now wasn't the time to worry about standing out; this could lead to a death.

“Hm? Why are you angry?”

Then, thinking he wanted her, she began trotting back across the road she had just crossed.

“You idiot, what are you—”

Then the blast of a horn interrupted him.

“Ahhhhhhhhh?!”

Kyouhei screamed again.

A truck had come hurtling along.

It wasn't a small truck or a van; it was a large truck with a big loading capacity. Piled up on it were about a dozen steel frames.

“Pamil!!”

A large truck like this had more inertia due to its weight, so it took longer to stop than a car at the same speed.

Its huge bulk rushed towards her with deadly speed, the horn and tires squealing through the air.

Kyouhei rushed towards her. His mind was almost blank; he rushed out to try to save her almost without thought.

But despite his efforts...

I won't make it!

That hopeless conclusion passed through his mind.

The huge metal vehicle advanced on her.

Its massive weight would doubtlessly obliterate her small body. That cruel premonition made him want to vomit.

And then...

“What’s wrong?”

Everything had gone quiet.

“...Eh?!”

It had stopped. The truck had stopped.

It had been right on the verge of hitting her.

Looking closely, there wasn’t even 50 centimeters between Pamil and the truck’s grill. Her right hand was resting on it as well.



It was almost as if she had stopped it with her hand.

A feeling of unease warred with his relief.

“N-No way...”

Indeed, no way.

She wasn't Superman, stopping a car with one hand. It was probably just a coincidence and the truck had just happened to come to a stop with her hand on it.

That much was obvious.

“...Kyouhei?”

Pamil tilted her head, unknowing of the feelings that had just assailed Kyouhei to make him shudder.

She looked very cute like that, but...

“Give me a break...”

He wanted to cry.

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“Hmm, is this fitting?” Pamil asked.

“Yes, I think it suits you very well; it looks really cute,” replied the saleswoman.

“Hmm, I see. I would like to hear Kyouhei's opinion though.”

“Right, your boyfriend. I'll call him over. Boyfriend!”

“I'm not her boyfriend!! And don't call me over!!”

Well, there was an issue with an air-headed saleswoman that went something like that. They had managed to buy everything needed by lunchtime though.

A set of Western clothes that'd last five days, from underwear to outerwear.

That should be enough, more or less.

Of course, his allowance wasn't enough for buying so much, so he'd paid by card. Said card was linked to his father's account, so he didn't use it often. In

this situation, though, there was no need to refrain.

Now...

“Well then, I could go for lunch... let’s stop somewhere.”

“Hm? You want to stop even though you want to go? Kyouhei, are you all right in the head? Mental illnesses are scary.”

“I don’t want to hear that from you! Anyway, I mean let’s stop at some restaurant.”

“Hmm?”

“We should stop and eat.”

“I see,” she nodded.

“Is there anything you’d like?”

“I need a fair amount of energy for my organic parts. As long as it’s high in calories, anything is fine.”

“...I don’t think anyone goes out of their way to make low-calorie stuff these days, unless it’s on a diet menu...” Kyouhei was thinking as he spoke, and after about ten seconds said: “I wonder if the Corvette would work.”

Then he nodded and guided Pamil as they walked off.

“Hm? An escort vessel? Ah, is it a naval diner?”

“Nope, it’s just the name of the place,” he clarified, turning off the road.

They walked a bit from the shopping district and around a park. The trip took about three minutes to get to a café that was on what seemed to be the border between the commercial and residential districts.

“CORVETTE” was written on a roughly hewn wooden sign.

The building looked like a log house. It was rather conspicuous compared to the standard houses around it.

“Hm-mmh?”

“It’s a café, somewhere to enjoy a drink. They have light food as well though, so this should work.”

“We have to work for it?”

“No... I mean it’ll be tasty.”

As he spoke, Kyouhei pushed the door open, the cowbell attached to it jangling.

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Meanwhile, Sanae Murata...

She was silent with anguish.

Asking the board “Is that blonde girl Nanbu-senpai’s girlfriend?” had resulted in her ten-yen coin stopping between “yes” and “no.”

“Mama... that girl’s—”

“Shh! Don’t point!”

● ● ●

“Welcome,” greeted a soft, lilting, gentle voice as they walked through the door.

The interior was similar to the exterior in style. The counter was irregular in shape, with wood grain and annual rings flowing throughout it. Underneath it were seats that looked like tree stumps.

There were two tables, and together with the counter, there weren’t even 15 seats. That was the full extent of the Corvette’s seating.

And behind that counter... was the owner.

“Oh my?”

She was a trim and tidy looking beauty. She had tawny brown hair that was tied up with a white ribbon. Her eyes were her defining feature; they were large and somewhat lidded in a way that brought herbivores to mind.

She wore a flaxen shirt and a long, olive-brown skirt. On top of all of that, she wore an apron with the word Corvette on it.

Kaoruko Houwa was her name, and she was the owner and manager of the Corvette.

“My, my, well, well... my, my, my, my.”

When she recognized Kyouhei, her droopy eyes opened wide in surprise, and she smiled. It was a soft and warm smile that the recipient couldn't help but return.

However...

“It's awful,” Kaoruko started, “we don't have *sekihan* on the menu, you know?”

“What do you mean? Really,” Kyouhei returned with a tight smile.

“Eh? That wasn't what you wanted?”

“No, really, what are you on about?”

“Wellll... you brought your girlfriend here... I thought I should celebrate with *sekihan*. Ah, she's a foreigner though, so is cake fine?”

“Not at all.”

“So you'd rather have *sekihan*?”

“That's not what I mean; she's not my girlfriend.”

“Ehhh...?” Kaoruko tilted her head and looked at Pamil. “...But, Kyouhei-kun,” she continued with a puzzled expression, “don't you think you're a little young for a sex slave?”

Kyouhei pitched forward but barely managed to catch himself on the counter.

“Are those the only two choices in your head?! Is there even an 'old enough' for that either?!”

“I'm joking,” she laughed, waving a pale finger as she smiled warmly.

Kyouhei let out a sigh and sat down at the counter, Pamil sitting next to him.

“What is she if not your girlfriend then?”

“Uhhh, I guess... a roommate?”

“A roommate... I'm sure that Shuuhei-san is usually away for work, isn't he? So aren't you two essentially living together? ...Yet she's not your girlfriend.”

“No, listen—”

“So she *is* your sex slave?”

“No, dammit!” he cried out.

Then, the person in question spoke:

“I am not a slave; I have the position of a princess.”

The blonde loon made things even more complicated.

“Oh, that’s it.”

“What d’you mean, ‘that’s it’?”

“So you’re the slave, Kyouhei-kun?”

“No, I’m not!!”

“But you’re being stepped on by a princess, aren’t you? My, my, well, well, kids these days are very advanced.”

As she spoke, Kaoruko gave both of them a moist towel.

“Indeed, I’m the culmination of the latest technology,” answered Pamil, misunderstanding yet another thing.

“Uhhh, could I ask your name?”

“It’s Pamil Terrill Karl Bergmann.”

“My, my? You have the same name as the princess of that country that just collapsed.”

“Indeed. To tell the truth, I’m an android created to be a body double for her,” Pamil said bluntly.

Most normal people would recoil at that.

For better or worse though... Kaoruko wasn’t normal, just as her appearance implied.

In more ways than one.

“Oh my,” she exclaimed with wide eyes. “Then, you’re a robot?”

“I am,” she answered, straightening in pride.

“Wonderful,” Kaoruko said, looking off into the distance.

“Uh, Kaoruko-san?”

Kyouhei’s groan didn’t seem to reach her; her eyes were sparkling as she spoke to Pamil.

“You’re a mecha then?”

“That’s right.”

“You’re a robot... and a machine... so you can’t cry, right?”

“I do have a function to wash my eyes?”

“Ah... then... then... You’ve got such delicate arms... and they move silently, so you must be like those newer mecha with ball bearings, carbon frames, and miniature actuators inside them, right?”

“Indeed. I don’t know the exact components, but I do know that I’m the culmination of the latest technology.”

“Ahhh...”

Kaoruko’s body shook as she looked into the air.

“...K-Kaoruko-san?” called Kyouhei, trying to get her attention.

“Pamil-chaaan,” she said, leaning over to Pamil and not seeming to hear Kyouhei. “Pamil-chan, I have a request for you.”

“Hm? What is it?”

“Could I,” she began, reaching into the pocket of her apron, “take you apart? Just a little bit?”

“...Wha... Wait a minute!” Kyouhei interrupted as she fanned out a wrench, knife, screwdriver, and pliers as if she were a magician.

“What is it, Kyouhei-kun?”

Kaoruko looked questioningly at him.

“Kaoruko-san! She’s obviously a human! And don’t take your clothes off, Pamil!!” he yelled out, grabbing Pamil’s hand as she went to happily take her shirt off.

“You meanie, Kyouhei-kun. You’re just going to keep the poking around inside

her for yourself, aren't you?"

"I will not?! And please don't take her seriously!!"

"Eh?" She looked up at him unhappily.

Kaoruko looked like she was in her late twenties, but had a habit of doing childish things like that.

Even though Kyouhei was taken aback for a moment, he carried on loudly:

"It's not possible! Robots don't look this realistic!!"

"But technology advances really fast. Look, even though it's so small, you can still fit 200 songs on this," she said, taking out a cylinder roughly the same size as an AA battery.

"That's not even close to the same thing!"

"Besides, it's pretty common to mistake someone for a human when actually they are a cyborg, right?"

"On what planet?!"

"Uhhh... like in *Westworld*?"

Kyouhei made an inarticulate noise. He didn't really get what she meant, but just *no*, in many ways.

Exhausted, he let himself lie on the counter.

"Forget it... I don't care. Two croque-monsieur meals please."

"Coming up."

She did at least seem to remember how to run a café... Her warm and soft smile was rather incongruous with her absurd request and the tools she was carrying around, though.

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Once again, meanwhile with Sanae...

"...Huh?!"

Suddenly, she looked up and around from where she was glaring at her divinations.

Of course, she couldn't see Kyouhei and Pamil; she'd been mumbling about things for way too long.

"Where are they?!"

• • •

Having eaten their special croque-monsieur meals, Kyouhei and Pamil took their leave from the Corvette.

Kyouhei was thinking as they walked.

Could she...

Fragments of the past passed through his mind.

The coffin thing.

The mysterious destructive light beams.

The truck just stopping.

No... but...

Common sense sneered at his imaginings.

It was impossible.

A human-like android was impossible. The closest modern technology had gotten was some car company's hunch-backed bipedal robot. Certainly nothing that could hold a conversation, bizarre as it might be, and be mistaken for a human.

And yet...

It's... kinda like I'm hooked.

He couldn't help but feel he was sitting next to a huge bomb.

He was aware that Pamil was a threat to his peaceful life, of course. He wasn't quite aware of how naive that realization was, though. It was just a hunch.

Even now, he didn't intend to kick her out, but he was beginning to wonder if making preparations and readying himself for *that* kind of thing might not be for the best.

As he considered that, he spoke:

“Hey, Pamil.”

But...

“...Pamil?”

It was then that he noticed. Pamil, who had been walking next to him, had completely vanished.

• • •

At the same time, somewhere else:

“Hm?” Pamil said. “Hmhmm?”

She’d broken off from Kyouhei and was wandering the streets.

Of course... many things drew her attention.

Whether you believed that she was a ‘newly booted robot’ or not, Japan was completely new to her. Each board, each sign, even the shape of the buildings looked strange to her.

And so, because Kyouhei was wrapped up in his thoughts and couldn’t stop her, Pamil had gone back and forth and gotten a long way away.

“Kyouhei?”

She looked around and he was nowhere to be seen.

“Hmm, where did he go?” she muttered in confusion. “Even the Royal Searcher Eye can’t find his direction.”

She wandered around while mumbling to herself. Apparently, the idea of just staying still and waiting, or asking for help from the police or something, didn’t cross her mind.

What happened then was...

“Hey, pretty lady?”

Pamil certainly was beautiful. She had blonde hair, blue eyes, pale skin, and pretty features. You couldn’t call her full-figured, but her limbs and body were slender and dainty.

Coupled with her appearance, she was just wandering aimlessly around the

town like someone from the country that'd just moved to the city. Of course she would stand out.

"Whassup? You lost? Looking for something?"

Approaching her was a group with the typical air.

One of them wore a T-shirt printed with a skeleton, as well as a beanie hat.

The other had several piercings in his face.

And the third wore sunglasses and was chewing gum.

These three youths made up the group.

You could just call their appearance part of their hobby, but the actual problem was the look in their eyes. It was plenty suspicious.

They were looking through her in a way you could describe as upturned eyes, or looking at the person in front of them while looking down. It wasn't a look you'd give an equal.

The crass smirks the three of them had doubled the suspicion. They looked like the type to bundle a girl into a car given half a chance.

And right in front of them was a girl giving them plenty of chances.

"Hm? Indeed, I am looking for Kyouhei," she answered.

Even talking to a person who had appeared out of nowhere, that she didn't know, Pamil didn't have an ounce of alarm.

"Mmmm, Kyouhei? Ah, yeah, yeah, Kyouhei."

The youths looked meaningfully at each other.

"I know 'im."

"Me too."

The youths said, laughing.

"I know where he is now too, y'know?"

"Really? Then please lead me to him," asked Pamil with a bow.

"Sure. This way," said one of them, grabbing hold of her shoulder

overfamiliarly, guiding her away from the main road.

After a while...

“This way.”

They had arrived.

There was a big van waiting there, with tinted windows that practically screamed “kidnapping.”

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Naturally, Kyouhei was searching for her.

“Ah, dammit. Where the hell is she?! Crazy damned girl!”

After all, he didn’t know what would happen were she to be left to her own devices.

Her just taking food from stores would be fine. Well, not fine, but solvable by paying, apologizing, and explaining it wasn’t intended maliciously. However, if she went into the road again, then it might not end up with just angering the drivers.

Depending on his perspective, this could have been a good chance. He could just leave her behind and go home; he might never have to deal with her again then. But Kyouhei didn’t even consider that.

He was, at heart, a good person.

That was why he was rushing around trying to find her.

“...Honestly,” he muttered, “you’re not even like a robot. If you were, you could try to use comms systems or lasers or something to let me know where you were.”

And all of a sudden, as if prompted by his words...

Pew!!

With a feeling of almost déjà vu, he saw a beam of light pass by his nose.

He silently turned to look.

Next to him was a stop sign, snapped right in the middle.

He felt a cold sweat across his body.

And then...

An explosion.

“Wh-What?!”

Hurriedly, he looked back where it had come from.

There was a small alley there. Apparently, the beam had gone through the alley and out the other end.

The next instant, he saw some kind of fireball down that back street.

“Wh... Wh... Wh-Wh-Wh-Wha...?!”

It was a car.

Well, that was fine then. No, it wasn't, but...

“Royal Beaaaaaaam!”

Another blast of light split the air along with a familiar voice.

But it didn't stop there...

“Gyaahhh?!”

“Royal Firrrre!”

“Hyaaaaah?!”

“Royal Thunderrr!”

“Aghagagagag?!”

And so on.

The yells were inexcusable, and made him want to just turn around and go home.

Though, that said, he of course couldn't.

“You!!”

He ran to the 'scene' down the alley, only to be greeted by an awe-inspiring sight.

There was a blonde girl taking down a bunch of wannabe gangsters.

In addition, there were beams, fire, and lightning.

Beams blasted through the air.

Fire billowed out.

And lightning flashed.

...They were all coming from the girl's small figure.

A big van was burning away in front of Kyouhei's shocked eyes. The three youths were also being chased away.

By a half-naked girl.

It went without saying that the girl in question was Pamil.

"This is..."

It was only a guess, but they had probably taken advantage of Pamil's lack of street smarts. Then, they'd gotten her into the vehicle and tried to take her. Her shirt being torn, making her half-naked, was the proof.

Anyway, that much was fine.

Not *fine*, but understandable.

The issue was that Pamil's eyes, hands, and forehead were—in complete disregard to logic and reason—letting off beams, fire, and lightning. What on earth?!

Assuming it wasn't a sleight of hand, a human couldn't do that.

Then, what *was* doing it?

Kyouhei watched without even trying to stop it, when...

"Oh, Kyouhei, I was looking for you."

She turned and smiled at him.

She was the same as ever.

Her face was as cute as ever.

Her beautiful blonde hair and blue eyes were the same.

But looking at those eyes, all Kyouhei could see was the things that had fired beams of destruction from inside themselves. Well, if he'd looked closely, he would have seen that they had actually come out from just above their surface.

"You..." The smiling girl almost felt like a loaded gun pointed at him.
"...You're... not human...?!"

"Hm?" She tilted her head at him. "I told you, several times... I'm an android."
Her tone was just asking why he was bringing it up after so long.

"This was good timing," she continued, "I had been wanting to check if all my weapons were working correctly after my boot."

He said nothing.

At some point, those kidnappers had vanished; they'd probably fled. Well, obviously they would.

The van next to them, probably belonging to the youths in question, merrily burned away.

With the hot blasts of air buffeting him mercilessly, Kyouhei pinched at his cheek and pulled, making sure he wasn't seeing things.

Chapter 4 - The Family is Growing for Some Reason

There was something white visible in the darkness.

A girl, naked, facing away.

Her curvy, but still not fully grown figure stood out against the inky blackness.

There was a period of silence.

The girl slowly turned this way.

Her hair swayed around with her movements as if she were underwater. The sight was magical, and very beautiful.

However...

“...You SaW.”

The girl had no face.

Well, that wasn't quite right. She had a face. It was not the face of a human, though.

Where there would normally be pale smooth skin, there was instead a bare metal frame, like a murdering machine that had been in a certain movie... The metallic skull had many small parts and wires attached to it, and formed a bizarre caricature of a person.

“.....You SaW?” the machine-faced thing asked as the whine and chattering of its movements filled the air.

The disparity between the mechanical face and the human body from the neck down was enough to make the target of her look freeze.

“YoU sAw?”

It was impossible to tell what was going through the mind in that metal skull. It seemed to take the lack of response as an affirmative though, and so the machine-faced girl took a step forward.

Then...

“EyE DeAtH rAy!”

Following the easily understandable declaration was a mysterious ray of light. A ray that pierced through the person standing before it as they stood unmoving from shock.

● ● ●

“Uwaaaahhhh?!”

His own scream woke him as he burst up like a jack-in-the-box. That was when Kyouhei Nanbu noticed that he was drenched in a cold sweat.

“...What a dream... man...” he muttered, focusing on the pounding of his heart as it thudded away far faster than needed.

Why had he seen such a dream? The logic was mostly obvious. Yesterday’s events had been so shocking that they had even permeated his unconscious mind.

Those events being...

A self-proclaimed android body double of a foreign country’s princess firing strange beams from her eyes and launching fire and lightning from her hands. Then she’d used those to crush some gangsters.

It was impossible; that’s what Kyouhei’s common sense told him.

A hunch-backed, jittery robot that some car company had made was about the limit of modern science.

Science might progress constantly, but... leaping the intervening development and creating an autonomous robot that was indistinguishable from a human couldn’t be true.

For example, the vivid, honey-colored hair. The pale, porcelain skin. The soft, pink lips. The delicate lines of her back from her shoulders. Even from close up, they all looked vibrant; there was no way such a cute girl could be man-made...

With those thoughts in his head, Kyouhei couldn’t keep from acknowledging the reality of what laid next to him.

That reality being the girl lying a scant dozen centimeters from him. She was like a dog trying to get into its owner’s bed, happily sleeping away without a hint of concern.

His thoughts halted.

And all of a sudden...

“Pa...!!” Kyouhei threw himself back up against the wall.

Then, he patted himself down and made sure his pajamas were still on.

“Pamil!!”

That name... was the root cause of his recent nightmare.

● ● ●

“I’ve told you so many times! Don’t just climb into my bed! Just listen to me, please!”

The person climbing into his bed was the girl who had just started living with him, Pamil.

Age: unknown. Nationality: unknown. Lineage: unknown.

She had introduced herself as the body double to, and an android of, a princess. She had caused many issues, but because she had come from within the mountain of things that Kyouhei’s father, Shuuhei Nanbu, had for work, he couldn’t just throw her out... All things as they were, she had ended up living in the Nanbu household.

Pamil ate the same as any human, used the toilet, and even slept. She introduced herself as an android, but there was no proof of that. Thinking logically about it, there was no way someone could make a robot that could be mistaken for a human just like that.

That all meant that Kyouhei had thought of her as a person who was under the delusion that she was a robot, and so he had pitied her.

...Until yesterday.

Until he had seen that impossible scene for himself.

“A book I read said that sharing body heat worked well when it was cold.” Even in the face of Kyouhei’s anger, Pamil didn’t shy away at all, and just looked questioningly at him. “Didn’t you say it would be cold last night?”

“I did, but it’s hardly going to be cold enough to kill you inside! You shouldn’t

get into a guy's bed!"

"You're not a guy though, you're Kyouhei?"

"I *am* Kyouhei, but I'm also a guy!"

"Hmm?"

Perhaps not unexpectedly considering her introduction, she had no common sense. Despite that though, she had some unusual bits of knowledge, which often caused its own troubles.

"Ah, I see," she nodded with an expression of understanding. "I don't have any body heat because I'm an android."

"No... that's..."

The conversation was going nowhere fast.

Well, ordinarily, no one would have blamed Kyouhei for losing his rag, but Pamil was completely and utterly serious, so even he couldn't really get angry at her. She at least wasn't showing any sign of teasing him or being purposefully disobedient, and that much was clear from looking at her.

"Anyway! From now on, you're forbidden from getting in my bed! Completely!"

His yell was nearly a shriek, but then he stiffened.

Pamil was looking steadily at him, watching him with her blue eyes.

Kyouhei had personally witnessed those eyes unleash devastating beams of light the day before. He'd gotten into his usual flow of yelling, but if Pamil felt like it, she could blast her way through metal. If he offended her too much, she might turn her sights on him.

...Is she really not a human...?

His thoughts drifted between common sense and his own experiences.

Whatever she thought he was thinking, Pamil clapped her hands and made a noise of understanding.

"I see, got it. That's where you keep your secret documents. Of course you would want people away from them to maintain security. Understood," she

nodded.

“What do you mean, secre—”

“Aren’t these secret?”

As Pamil spoke, she rustled around and fished out a book from near the bed, or more accurately, from the gap between the bookcase and the wall.

The book being...

“Geh?!”

The book was a magazine that his friend at school, Mizuhito, had lent him, which had many pictures of rather exposed women (to put it politely).

“Eh... ah... uhm... that’s...!”

It wasn’t that Kyouhei collected that kind of book. He’d just mentioned to Mizuhito that he didn’t have any of its ilk in his room... and he had given him five. Kyouhei had attempted to say that he didn’t want them, but had them forced upon him (from his perspective).

Obviously, he couldn’t go with something like “If you really don’t want ’em, just send ’em back in the post or chuck ’em?” He couldn’t.

An adolescent’s mind was a complicated thing.

However, the girl in front of him didn’t understand that *in the slightest*, and just nodded at something.

“It’s a secret that you like these kinds of naked women, roger that.”

“Don’t you ‘roger’ me!”

“Don’t worry, everyone has their hobbies.”

“Geh, she’s the one teaching me now?!”

Kyouhei despaired as he cradled his head.

Regardless of the misgivings he held, their lives were more or less as normal. ...At least until now.

● ● ●

Kyouhei had woken up so early that he still had plenty of time before he

needed to be at school. Normally, he would get a sweetened bun and eat it with milk on the way in, but that day he ended up making some breakfast.

Using the water service point in a corner of the warehouse along with an induction hob, Kyouhei cooked some toast, bacon, and eggs. He had some lettuce and tomato in the fridge, so he used them to make a simple salad as well.

It went without saying that this was a simple meal that could be learned in a single cooking lesson, but perhaps it was unusual to Pamil... she was certainly watching his actions keenly.

Dad... thought Kyouhei to himself as he nimbly flipped the eggs to make sure they were cooked on both sides, *when are you going to get back...?*

His father, Shuuhei, had shown neither hide nor hair of himself since Pamil had started living in the warehouse.

Well, as a self-proclaimed International Trader, he was always in some country or another, and often unreachable. Kyouhei was well used to that.

But... he wouldn't be able to find out who Pamil actually was without asking the one who put her in that capsule and brought her to the warehouse. That was why since her 'boot' Kyouhei had phoned Shuuhei dozens, no, hundreds, of times... He still had yet to get through, though.

Seriously... he's never here when it matters... Damned old man...

With those thoughts passing through his mind, Kyouhei plated the eggs.

...

It was at that moment that a noise rent the air.

"Huh?"

Switching off the heat, Kyouhei looked towards the entrance.

It's been mentioned several times, but Shuuhei had rather cryptic pastimes. The noise was hardly what one would think of as a doorbell. Incidentally, the source of the sound was from a baryonic rifle from *Orbital Gear Grendam* .

"...Who's that?"

Checking the clock on the wall, Kyouhei saw that it was still just after seven, a little early for the post, and he couldn't think of any friends or acquaintances that would visit at this time of the morning. Well, Mizuhito might.

Gesturing to Pamil that she should hide inside for a bit, he approached the entrance area, or rather, the loading bay.

Said loading bay had a three-meter-wide shutter that was designed to allow a lot of goods to be moved directly inside. The closest to a 'front door' that the Nanbu household had was this shutter.

Checking that Pamil had hidden herself behind some boxes, Kyouhei reached out for the opener.

Before he could touch it, however, he got a shock as the shutter began moving on its own.

The person outside had probably opened it, having disengaged the lock, which was on par with military security.

And, standing there...

"Hmphmm... It's been a while, my son."

...was Shuuhei.

● ● ●

Shuuhei Nanbu.

A salesman that called himself an International Trader.

If you wanted it, he'd get it and sell it to you, from packs of tissues to nuclear ICBMs; that was his trade. Or at least that was his boast.

It's clear from that description, but... he wasn't exactly the most decent of people. Coupled with him not knowing who Kyouhei's mother was, you could get a decent picture of the kind of person he was.

He was the antithesis of Kyouhei, who lived his life by the tenets of 'ordinariness,' 'peace,' and 'normalcy.'

"Dad..."

Shuuhei had changed considerably in the time since Kyouhei had last seen

him, but in other ways hadn't changed in the slightest.

The last time he had seen him, Shuuhei had been wearing camo gear on his tall frame, making Kyouhei want to yell about whatever kind of war he was planning on fighting in.

But now...

"You're back, then?" asked Kyouhei.

Shuuhei was wearing a black suit, sunglasses, and had a long white scarf hanging from his neck.



He looked... like he wouldn't be out of place in a shootout with dual pistols around Hong Kong.

The basic concept of his explosive shadiness hadn't changed though. On a previous occasion, he had actually turned up in a cowboy hat with a white guitar on his back.

Anyway, let's put that aside.

"I got tired of the stench of gambling dens..." he complained. Kyouhei had no words. "Anyway, been keeping well, my son?"

There was a cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth, which upon closer inspection turned out to be a tobacco substitute. Keeping it in his mouth, he raised one hand like a gangster.

First, Kyouhei had to deal with the torrent of abuse swirling around his head. After that, he took deep breaths for five seconds before yelling.

"Don't take the piss out of me!"

"Huh? You wet the bed at your age? That's not good."

"No! I called you so many times, and you didn't even pick up the damn phone! Where the hell were you?!"

"Hahaha, you wanted to hear your dad's voice that much? ...You've always been so spoiled."

Shuuhei rubbed at the back of his head in apparent embarrassment.

Seeing his nonchalance made Kyouhei's blood boil as he yelled at him.

"Would you listen?!"

"I am," Shuuhei said calmly, sidestepping his son's rage, "Well, y'know, a lot happened, a *lot*. I had some blood-pounding adven— Well, forget all that. It's hardly the first time I've left you to watch the house and not answered the phone, is it?"

"It's not—" Kyouhei started to answer when...

"Kyouhei?" came a voice from behind him. Pamil, of course.

Before Kyouhei could turn to look, Shuuhei had already done so.

“Oh, Kyouhei, you’ve got someone here?”

Pamil’s head was poking out from behind the boxes when Kyouhei frantically turned to look. Even though he’d told her to hide, she had probably been curious about the shouting and stuck her head out.

“...Yeah.”

An expression of understanding made its way onto Shuuhei’s face.

“I see! You brought your girlfriend home, ’course you’d want to know when I’d be back!”

“That’s not it!” he yelled, stamping his foot.

“Apologies, it looks like you’ve been stuck caring for my foolish son. I’m his father.”

“I see. I’m Pamil. Kyouhei has been caring for me too, so it goes both ways.”

And more or less just like that, Shuuhei and Pamil accepted each other without a single question, then shook hands in greeting.

“Dad!”

“Kyouhei, calm down a bit. Going through life constantly angry is just boring, isn’t it?”

“Shut it! Why’re you talking like you’ve never met?! You’re the one that shoved her in that capsule and brought her here!”

“I did...?”

Shuuhei brought his hand to his chin.

The second hand on the clock made a full revolution as he ruminated.

Kyouhei was on the verge of violence when Shuuhei finally came to some conclusion.

“...Ah, I see. Right. I got it. Roger that... Well, it’s all good.”

“It’s not all good! Don’t just wave it off! Explain why you’re acting like a slaver!” he yelled as he grabbed his father’s collar.

“...Do I *haave* to?” asked Shuuhei, clearly finding it too much of a bother.

“Of course you do!”

“Kyouhei,” he began with a sudden sense of exhaustion about him, “there are... things you’re better off not knowing in life...”

“And when they come knocking anyway, that’s no help!” Kyouhei was glaring at his father with fire in his eyes. “Anyway,” he continued, “stuffing someone in that thing and bringing them here is a crime, a *crime*! They ain’t gonna let it go if I just say ‘Sorry, I didn’t know’!”

“Listen, Kyouhei. Crimes aren’t a bad thing. Crimes that are *discovered* are bad things. If a crime is undiscovered, no one loses, and no one is harmed or inconvenienced. Because a crime is not actually a bad thing in and of itself; if no one finds out about it, it’s the same as it never having happened. Right and wrong is ult—”

“I don’t want to hear your dodgy morals! And regardless, you can’t guarantee that it’ll *never* be found out!”

Shuuhei let out a sigh, still acting like it was more trouble than it was worth, even as his son was shouting at him with hands on his collar. He stuck his left pinky finger into his ear and wiggled it around as he capitulated.

“...All right. Fine, fine, an explanation. I’ll give you one, but let me come in first. Then we can finally eat together again, maybe have a bath, deepen our manly friendship—”

“Right now!!” Kyouhei bawled, taking Shuuhei’s scarf in both hands and tightening it around his neck.

● ● ●

The Bergmann Kingdom.

Once he let his father talk, he found there was some logic to him having heard the name, despite it not appearing even once during geography lessons.

“It’s because of the family Akemi married into,” was Shuuhei’s explanation.

Akemi was Shuuhei’s cousin, so Akemi Nanbu, who had married someone with a connection to the Bergmann royal family.

It wasn't something Kyouhei could immediately remember. He saw his own cousins, aunts, and the like as 'relatives,' but... once you went as far as his father's cousin, they were only relatives on paper, and practically unknown to him.

However...

"Because she married them, I got a lot of work with their royalty."

Apparently, his family marrying into the royal family's associate's meant that Shuuhei could become a purveyor of goods to the royal family.

Of course, despite the country's size, the royal family had a long history... and so they had official supply routes for normal, legitimate goods and services. There was then no gap in the market for Shuuhei to slip into.

However, more *delicate* instances of trading, like those relating to each of the family members' personal hobbies, frequently came to Shuuhei.

Akemi had passed away from illness several years prior, but the relationship between Shuuhei and the royal family had continued.

"I got a good deal selling them manga and anime. DVDs and models too. I even once sold a perfect grade DOC from *Orbital Gear Grendam* for \$600, you know?"

"...That's a rip-off," Kyouhei interjected.

Currently, the three of them—Kyouhei, Shuuhei, and Pamil—were seated around a table usually used for meals.

It still felt uncomfortable because even now they were surrounded by the various boxes, but it was strangely suited to their current confidential discussion.

Kyouhei was listening to the explanation as he split the two-person breakfast three ways.

"Then," Shuuhei continued, bread in one hand, "there was that revolution."

The revolution had wiped out the royal family, so he couldn't collect his unpaid dues.

Even dust would form a mountain if you piled it high enough, so even though each monetary amount was small, the system of just getting a single lump sum at the end of each year meant that he was suddenly short of a lot of money.

“So, after the coup, I had to take the stuff from the palace’s dump instead of money.”

“...Hey, you’re acting like a looter!”

“It’s fine, I got permission by letting the soldiers keep the money.”

“That’s not getting permission, it’s bribery!”

As always, Shuuhei straddled the line between legality and illegality. Even if that made him unbearable to be related to.

“Pamil’s capsule was probably amongst that stuff. I filled three trailers with that crap, so I don’t know exactly what was there.”

“Why are you so irresponsible...?” Kyouhei moaned, falling over the table.

“Hahaha, you’ve got to be irresponsible sometimes, don’t worry ’bout it!”

“It *does* worry me!” he cried.

Pamil looked quizzically at him from his side, watching the back and forth between them. Maybe she didn’t realize that they were talking about her.

“Then...” Kyouhei began, glancing at her, “...is she really a body double android for their princess?”

“Well... I don’t know that either, but she’s not a normal person; she was put in that thing and thrown away after all. If she says she is, it’s definitely likely.”

“...Is that even possible?”

A human duplicate robot was still over-technology in the current day.

But as he was having those doubts...

“The Bergmann Kingdom was pretty advanced, you know?” remarked Shuuhei. “I wouldn’t be surprised if there were an android or two. Actually, the scientific facility affiliated with the royalty was knee-deep in patentable stuff. I think the new government’s going to use them for funding.”

Kyouhei could only stare. The vague sense of entrapment was suddenly constricting. It wasn't because of some insignificant little thing; Kyouhei had thought that his dad coming back would lead to everything being solved. It wasn't that he now wanted to throw her out... but this vague and uncertain situation was a real concern for him.

On top of that...

She's definitely not normal, and... she'll be gone someday...

She wasn't some pet, and a half-hearted attachment would be pointless, because then parting would hurt all the more. Those feelings came from Kyouhei's heart... he'd learned from being dragged all around the world by Shuuhei.

"So...?" Kyouhei grumbled out.

Shuuhei just blinked his eyes behind his sunglasses and looked at him in question.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"So what's going to happen with her?!" Kyouhei yelled, flinging his hand out to point at Pamil.

She too looked at him in question, staring at where his finger was pointed at her nose.

"Uhhap?!"

Kyouhei let out a strange noise as he felt something warm and thick against his finger. When he looked at it, Pamil had her pale pink lips around it.

"What are you doing?!"

"You pointed your finger at me, so I thought you wanted me to lick it."

"What are you, a dog?! Do you lick anything that goes near your nose?! What the hell's going on in your head?!" he cried as he yanked his hand back.

"That's an android for you, strange in the oddest of ways... hahaha!" Shuuhei chuckled.

"Stop your laughing! Start thinking how to help!"

“Hmm, but I had no idea there was an android inside...” he mumbled, scratching at his forehead.

There was no uneasiness or sense of urgency on his face though, nor sign of him even trying to think of something to help.

He was silent in consideration for about a minute.

“...Kyouhei,” he finally said.

Shuuhei tapped at his plate, now devoid of toast, as he looked steadily at his son from behind his glasses.

“What?”

“Seconds, please.”

“...Make it yourself!”

No, he hadn’t thought of a single thing.

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“Honestly, damn him...!” Kyouhei muttered as he walked with his bag in one hand.

He had obviously had no inclination to make ‘seconds,’ and so had thrown a bundle of takeout leaflets at Shuuhei and left for school.

Despite that, he couldn’t calm down. He had originally been sure that everything would be fine once Shuuhei got back, but now he’d been told that there was no more information for him and nothing had changed. His despair and sense of having wasted his time had both grown.

“Fuck!”

His anger overflowed, and Kyouhei punched at a nearby sign. It was a standard sign that you’d see outside any café or restaurant.

“Hyah...?!” the board cried.

No, it was someone behind the board.

Eyes wide, Kyouhei took a closer look... Unexpectedly, there was a familiar girl behind it.

“Ah... um?”

Who is this again? he thought, searching his memories. She was in the year below him at school... Murata, if he remembered correctly, though he couldn't recall her forename.

“Murata...san?”

“...Ah...”

The girl had bobbed hair, reminiscent of a *zashiki warashi*, and her dark eyes were watery behind her glasses.

“Ah, s-sorry, did I hit you?” he asked in a panic, looking between the girl and the sign, worried he'd hit her at the same time.

However... the girl just shook her head rapidly.

Why were her eyes watering then...?

Obviously, he had no idea that she was just moved by him remembering her name.

All Kyouhei knew was that somehow a girl was crying because of him; he didn't even stop to wonder what she was doing in a practically deserted warehouse district.

Spurred on by guilt, he offered a hand to her.

“Uh... Anyway, sorry, can you get up?”

The girl looked at his hand in shock for some reason, but in the next instant clung to it.

“...Up we go.” Off-balance for a second, Kyouhei helped her stand. “I don't really know what happened, but sorry. You sure you're not hurt?”

“Ah, yes,” the girl nodded.

He hadn't really looked at her before, but she was fairly pretty. In some ways, she was the exact opposite of Pamil, a girl with a very 'Japanese impression,' but she was beautiful in the same way as a Hakata doll was.

“So, uh... shall we... head to school?”

They'd met on the way to the same school, and going out of his way to leave her behind would have been weird. Kyouhei wanted to get on with the journey to try to shake off his unease, but...

"Ah... right!"

For some reason, still teary-eyed, the girl nodded energetically.

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Meanwhile, in the Kyouhei household.

"I wonder where I went wrong bringing him up," Shuuhei complained as he munched on a frozen pizza that he'd heated up in a microwave, despite the early hour. Incidentally, in his left hand was a can of Heineken.

Across from him, also eating pizza, as you would expect, was Pamil. She, though, was holding it in both hands and nibbling away at it, in marked contrast to Shuuhei. She looked like a squirrel peeling a sunflower seed. And her drink was a cola.

"Hmm, you brought him up?"

"Well, brought him up, he grew up... something like that."

"Hm, something like that."

It might not be much of an actual conversation, but the two didn't seem to be worried about that.

"He was always so good."

"He's not now?"

"Well, I guess you couldn't call him rebellious," he admitted, folding his arms and thinking. "Maybe he did need a female parent..."

That clearly wasn't the problem for the Nanbu family... but there was no one there with the common sense to be able to refute him.

"A female parent?"

"A mother."

"...Female parent; mother. Male parent; father."

Pamil rolled the words over her tongue as if they were foreign to her. Well, for Pamil, Japanese *was* a foreign language.

“Whatever, he’ll wander around for about half the day and then come back when he feels better.”

His tone was easy, but Pamil looked at him doubtfully and asked:

“Hm? How do you know that?”

Shuuhei blinked.

“I mean, we *are* still father and son.”

• • •

Sanae Murata had never even dreamed that she would be going to school with Kyouhei. She was frantically keeping her outward appearance calm as she walked, while on the inside she felt like she’d gone to heaven.

Currently, she was thanking the gods, major and minor alike. From the Buddha and Christ all the way to Nyarlathotep—if she could think of them, she thanked them. Obviously, no one was aware of the opportunity to jump in on that last one. Regardless though, she walked next to Kyouhei for the rest of the trip.

Incidentally, it was no coincidence that she was near his house. The scene she had happened upon yesterday—that being him walking with an unknown blonde—had bothered her, and so she had lain in wait near his house.

“Uh... Uhm...”

The two had exchanged generic pleasantries every so often as they walked, but... Sanae suddenly gathered her courage and changed the subject in one of the lulls of the conversation.

It was a good chance; she could ask about that blonde now.

“C... Can I ask you something?”

“Sure, what?” he answered easily.

However...

“Um... Yesterday... I saw... you walking with a blonde... girl...”

...her question made him suddenly tense up.

Sanae's foreboding strengthened—if they were unrelated, he wouldn't react like that.

"Is... Is that blonde... girl... your... your... g-girlfriend...?"

She almost didn't want to hear, but she couldn't take it back now.

The response, though, was just utter puzzlement.

"Huh? My girlfriend? Pamil?"

His voice was so surprised that Sanae could tell she probably wasn't. At the same time, she also found out that the girl's name was Pamil.

"Ah... No, she's..." he started off chaotically, but then a slight yet pained smile made its way onto his face. "She's a relative's kid... just, some stuff happened, so I'm looking after her."

"Ah... I see," she said in relief.

Not sure what to think of her reaction, his pained smile stayed on his face as he replied:

"And well... just like she looks, she's a foreigner, so she really doesn't get how things work here... If I take my eyes off her, who knows what she'll do; it's awful. I'm exhausted because of it..."

"I... I see."

"And you know what else? Dad brought her here, and he's really irresponsible... I really don't get what's going on or what I should do."

"...Right..."

"That's why I hit the sign you were by; sorry about that."

"Ah... no, it's fine!" Sanae insisted, shaking her head.

For Sanae, that was what had allowed her dream of going to school with Kyouhei to come true; it wasn't something he should apologize for.

"That makes me wonder though, Murata-san... is your house in that direction? You don't see many people walking around there at all."

The area around Kyouhei's house was a warehouse district, so there weren't many residents. The roads were filled with trucks during the day, and there were a few shops like convenience stores for the workers to get food and drink, but not many people walked the streets.

"Ah, um, I, uh," Sanae panicked.

She couldn't tell him that she was peeking on his life. Because her friend Youko Minebe had patiently explained things to her, she knew that that sort of claim would drive people away.

"I, uh, like the view in the area... umm," she said, giving a rough-and-ready excuse.

Anyone that heard it would think that something was off, especially with the lack of logic, but Kyouhei...

"Huh, fair enough."

He just accepted it easily.

The people around Kyouhei—Mizuhito, Shuuhei, and Pamil—were all strange people, so someone making a hobby of looking at warehouses was nothing worthy of mention for him. ...Though obviously, Sanae didn't realize that.

In any case... the school was now in sight. Sanae's blessing had come to its end.

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...My relative's kid...

As he parted from Sanae, he mentally repeated the sudden excuse he'd given. It wasn't a bad excuse for being thought up on the spot.

Shuuhei's cousin: Akemi. The Bergmann Royal Family. The princess. A body double. Putting all those phrases together, "a relative's child" was the most reasonable outcome one could possibly come up with.

However...

A... relative...

Now that he considered it, the only person that Kyouhei had had a continuous

relationship with was Shuuhei.

He didn't know his mother's face or name even. He also had no long-standing friends due to Shuuhei dragging him across the world.

For a child who couldn't freely use a phone or letters, a 'foreign country' was much too far away. Many of the friends he had made couldn't receive emails either, so each time he moved countries, he couldn't help but become estranged from friends and acquaintances, and even relatives.

And nowadays...

He didn't even see Shuuhei every day lately; the vast majority of his time was spent alone.

Therefore...

...What am I on about...? Kyouhei thought, still with a pained smile.

Pamil. Leaving aside whether she was a human or an android... she probably had nowhere to go anymore.

If she was an android, her legal owners, the royal family of the Bergmann Kingdom, no longer existed.

Even if she was just a citizen of that country that had gotten caught up in some issues, it seemed unlikely that she had any family that would take her in. She *had* been put into that coffin and placed with the rest of the trash, so...

"Hey, morning," Mizuhito greeted him as he entered the classroom.

Even as he responded with the usual greetings... Kyouhei's mind was occupied with Pamil.

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"I'm back."

Kyouhei had opened the excessively secure entrance and stepped into the warehouse.

He was then welcomed by...

"Oh, Shuuhei was right." Pamil had come pattering out like a dog greeting her owner, leaving the dungeon of boxes. "Welcome back, Kyouhei," she said with a

bright smile.

He just stood there.

“What’s wrong?” she asked curiously.

“Ah, nothing,” he responded with a faint smile. “Where’s Dad?”

“He said he remembered something he had to do and went out.”

“...He’s always off like a damned shot!”

Even if he’d come back, he couldn’t just sit still.

Kyouhei headed further in, to the kitchen, and put away the shopping he’d bought on the way home with a sigh.

“Kyouhei,” Pamil suddenly spoke to him as she watched him.

“What?”

“You and Shuuhei are fun.”

“Huh?”

He looked back at her in surprise at the sudden opinion. The self-proclaimed android was looking at him with sparkling eyes.

“What you say and what you do don’t match at all. You act like you hate each other, but it’s the opposite.”

“...D-Do we?”

“It’s funny. Is that what having a parent is like?” she asked earnestly.

“Eh? Well, if you’re asking about parents, what—”

He was about to reflexively ask about her own, but stopped himself. He wasn’t sure how she would take it, but she actually just smiled back at him.

“I don’t have a father. I mean, I do have a father-type android, but we were never booted at the same time, so I’ve never seen him.”

“...You can call that a father?”

Even with his sarcasm, he had a sudden thought.

Whether androids existed or not... had she been forced into loneliness?

She couldn't even really recognize a parental relationship.

"I'm back," came the call from Shuuhei as Kyouhei considered that. "Oh, you're back, Kyouhei. I see, I see."

Shuuhei nodded in satisfaction as he fanned his face with a brown envelope.

Kyouhei... had a slight sense of unease.

"Dad, what's that envelope?"

"Huh? Ah, our family records," he answered with a booming laugh.

"Our family records?"

"Yup."

So saying, he flung the envelope away and put a hand on both Kyouhei and Pamil's shoulders.

"W-What have you done?"

"Uh-huh. Kyouhei, you've been pretty alone up until now, but that changes today!"

"Huh?"

"We have more family now! More!" Kyouhei just looked at him. "Pamil," he continued, "you don't need to worry about what'll happen to you anymore. Kyouhei and I are your family now!"

"...Huh?! What the hell do you mean, old man?!"

"Hahaha, everything'll be fine if you leave it to your strangely reliable dad, Shuuhei! The records are perfect! On paper, you are without a doubt my daughter! I kinda wanted a daughter as well!!"

He moved both of his hands to rest on Pamil's shoulders and clapped them happily twice, then a third time. After that, he put his right hand on his chest and stretched his left towards the ceiling.



“Our family life begins from tomorrow!” he declared.

“Wait a damned minute!”

“All right! Now, to practice being father and daughter!” Shuuhei proclaimed, completely ignoring Kyouhei’s yell. “Could you call me ‘Papa’?”

“I can, Papa.”

“Good, good, well done!” Shuuhei cried out, engulfing her in a hug.

She didn’t seem too unhappy with it, and was smiling slightly like she was being tickled.

And then what happened was...

“Right, next up! Would you call Kyouhei ‘Onii-chan’?”

“Would you quit it?!” Kyouhei yelled, making them both look at him blankly.

Then, Shuuhei clapped his hands.

“I see, Kyouhei, would you rather have a cheeky *tsundere* sister that calls you ‘Aniki’?”

“Would you, Kyouhei?”

“No!”

“Hmm, then,” Shuuhei began, folding his arms and thinking, “let’s go with ‘Onii-tan.’”

“That’s even worse!!”

“Hmm, what’s wrong, Onii-tan? Tell me, Onii-tan!”

“Stop! It! Now!!”

Even as he yelled, Kyouhei was sort of enjoying himself.

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Well, that’s how it went.

On that day, Kyouhei suddenly obtained a sister, Harumi Nanbu. A little sister that looked nothing like him and had blonde hair and blue eyes, with an unclear past.

Chapter 5 - No Respite, Even at School

In most circumstances, humans couldn't deal with long periods of stress; they couldn't remain constantly braced for the next impact. However mentally resilient a person was, they needed time to recover from the mental fatigue... Well, to put it simply, they'd need time to rest their mind.

And, for Kyouhei Nanbu, that time came when he was at school.

For him, a guy living and putting up with a weirdo that proclaimed herself to be a body double android for a princess, school was the only place where Kyouhei could feel like a normal person in an ordinary society. Well, actually, he now thought she was an android, but she just looked like a blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl that could launch beams, lightning, and fire.

At any rate, he had no idea what the next moment would hold once he went home, with that weird girl utterly lacking any common sense. Not to mention she had more firepower than any individual could ever need.

Of course he couldn't rest there.

On the contrary, being far from home at school, from the start of the lessons to their end, was an indispensable time for mental recuperation for him.

However...

"...Pamil," he groaned out.

Pamil, the weirdo in question. The adorable girl, the source of Kyouhei's headaches and stomach ulcers, was looking back at him curiously.

She really *was* adorable. If she just sat there silently, then her appearance was perhaps as her claim would imply. She was sweet and pure-looking, with a slight hint of refinement even. If she had wings on her back, people could even mistake her for an angel.

The dry leafy color of her blazer contrasted nicely with her pale skin and vivid hair—

...

Blazer?

“What’s with... that outfit?”

It was just before he would head off for school in the morning. Kyouhei had gone to the kitchen—well, the corner of the warehouse with the cooking utensils—to make breakfast. Pamil had then appeared in front of him, changed out of her sleeping clothes.

“With what?” Pamil returned, looking down at her clothing.

She was wearing a tawny blazer, and a similar skirt, and a white blouse. Bringing it all together was a dark red tie.

Nothing that made up the outfit was particularly strange.

For Kyouhei, it wasn’t a rare sight either. In fact, he saw it enough to be tired of the combination. That was because... it was the school uniform from his high school.

“It’s a uniform, as you can see,” she told him.

“That’s what I mean... what’s with it?! Why are you wearing my school’s uniform?!”

“Kyouhei,” she began seriously.

“W-What?”

“I’ll tell you something useful.”

“...Oh yeah?”

“There’s a saying, ‘When in Rome, do as the Romans do,’ and in Japan there’s the saying, ‘Follow the rules of the village when you’re there.’”

“...And?”

“I was admitted to the same school as you, so if I didn’t wear the same as the girls there, I would stand out more than needed, would I not?”

“That’s what I mean!” he cried. “Why are you going to the same school as me?!”

“Because they finished admission procedures.”

“Well, yeah, but... Wait, who started them?!”

Kyouhei hadn't done it at least; he wouldn't, as it would chip away at his peace and quiet.

“Shuuhei did.”

“Daaaad!!”

As he yelled, he looked around in anger for him, but then Pamil said:

“If you want Shuuhei, he left late last night. He said he wouldn't be back for a while.”

“...Again?!”

The established pattern in the Nanbu household was that Shuuhei would disappear off somewhere ‘for work’ and Kyouhei would have to pick up the slack.

“Why are you angry?” she asked curiously.

The action itself had a pure innocence about it, like a bird tilting its head, but...

“Obviously, because you—”

“Am I not allowed to go to the same school as you?” she interrupted downheartedly.

“Ah... no, uh, you...?” Kyouhei's anger withered in front of her sadness.

Shutting her up inside the house all week except for the weekends would probably be a problem... and letting her wander around aimlessly would just increase the risk all the more, for both Pamil and her surroundings.

“I'm your little sister now, aren't I?”

“Well... yeah.”

‘Little sister.’ It was a strange-sounding phrase for Kyouhei, him having always been an only child, but not an unpleasant one at all.

“Now that I'm your sister, I should rip up love letters that other girls give me for you, come to your classroom and go: ‘Onii-chan, you forgot your lunch,

didn't you?!' and wait by the school gate and say: 'Let's go home together, Onii-chan,' right?"

"...Where did you learn all that crap?!"

"From Shuuhei."

Kyouhei just let out a sigh, deciding that he'd beat his father like a drum the next time he was home.

"It's okay, Kyouhei," Pamil reassured him with a nod, patting him consolingly on the shoulder, "I know all about time, place, and occasion. I'll make sure to call you 'Onii-chan' when we're at school, so don't worry about it."

"That's not the issue!!"

At any rate, Pamil going to school seemed to have already been decided. With the admissions procedures being done *and* her already having the uniform, pulling out now would just make things more complicated.

"Ahhh... my... It's fading... my normalcy... my peace and quiet..."

Pamil watched his grumbling and mumbling blankly.

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Kyouhei slid into school just on the verge of being late, seconds before the bell finished ringing.

This was rare for him; he usually had plenty of time to spare when he got into school, but that wasn't feasible today, because he'd had to make a cheat sheet for Pamil. It read as follows:

Don't talk about anything more than you were asked.

If you don't quite get something, don't answer.

When introducing yourself, only give your name; nothing about being an android or a body double.

Beams, lightning, and fire are all forbidden.

If you're in trouble, tell them you don't know how things work in Japan.

...And so on.

Kyouhei had taken Pamil to the staffroom, then immediately passed her off to the first-year teacher before finally letting out a sigh and rushing to his own classroom.

The teacher was already taking the register and frowned at him, but Kyouhei's normal diligence seemed to have helped, so they didn't scold him too much.

Regardless, he'd done all he could.

He couldn't follow her to her classes, so all he could do now was pray that she didn't do anything she shouldn't.

Wishes aren't fishes... but well, that's just how the world is.

● ● ●

He should have seen it coming.

"Hey, Nanbu," a classmate called out to him.

It was the break after the first period. Kyouhei had worked his way through the class and was now enjoying the peaceful scenery from his seat next to the window, as ever.

"...your sister's here."

He felt like he was about to pitch over, then whirled around like a criminal wanted for murder that had just been called by name, only to see the petite, blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl at the classroom door.

"...Wha...?!"

Even after I told her so many times to stay away from my classroom!

He certainly was somewhat worried about what she'd do, but he couldn't watch her around the clock. That being the case, he had decided to avoid rumors being spread as much as possible, and come up with the idea of them having as little contact as possible at school.

And yet... barely an hour after the day had started, his deep, insightful (or whatever you'd call it) plan had come to naught.

As a result...

"Kyouhei's sister?!"

Of all people, it was Mizuhito that responded first.

Mizuhito Hibiki, an utter idiot that would not only sell his soul to stand out, but would then brag about his business sense. He dyed his hair and had piercings, of course, but he also habitually carried a guitar and pretended to be a rocker.

Without even allowing Kyouhei the chance to make an excuse, he rushed over to Pamil and began examining her.

“Hmm... A sister... A little sister? Kyouhei, you had a sister?”

Ahhhhhh, see, this ain't gonna work, Dad!

He was at his wit's end, even if it was already too late. Obviously, anyone would doubt it if you suddenly got a sister whose very appearance made her look like a foreigner.

Actually, there were school staff that had dealt with her admission; had no one questioned it?

Now he's just going to dig and dig—if she gets found out...

All his efforts to date would have been fruitless, and in the worst case, the police might even get involved.

“Uh, uhm, she—!”

“Mmh, Harumi-chan, huh? Hahaha, you don't look anything like Kyouhei,” pointed out Mizuhito, worsening the situation.

Pamil, though, wasn't perturbed in the slightest and nodded.

“Indeed, we only became siblings the other day.”

“I see, that makes sense then!”

“That convinced you?!”

Mizuhito looked back at him strangely.

“What's up, Kyouhei, not happy with your night life?”

“Why just the *night* life? Anyway, no,” he cried out before pointing at Pamil. “Wouldn't you think it's at least a little strange if you were just introduced to a

sister like her out of nowhere?!”

“Why would I?”

“Because... I...”

He was dead serious.

Kyouhei looked around again. Lots of people were watching, including the student that had informed him she was here, but none of the boys or girls seemed to have a problem with her presence.

“Uh...”

“Hahaha, Kyouhei,” laughed Mizuhito, tapping him on the shoulder, “if a ‘sudden little sister’ event is all it takes for you to lose your cool, you won’t last long in this business, you know?”

“What business would that be?!”

“Anyway,” he continued, ignoring Kyouhei’s protest and scratching at his cheek, “your dad just turning up with a foreign daughter in tow ain’t that much of a surprise to us.”

Kyouhei fell silent as the rest of the students nodded in agreement.

“Right, right, that seems like him,” remarked one.

“Yeah, he’s always off somewhere, right?”

“The PTA can’t get hold of him either; Mom was complaining about that.”

“Right, I wouldn’t be surprised if he had a couple of illegitimate kids abroad.”

Kyouhei’s energy left him, and he just sank back down.

Well, now that he’d regained his composure, he was almost thankful for his father’s strangeness.

“Kyouhei—ah, I mean, Onii-chan,” Pamil called to him, suddenly seeming to remember something, “I don’t really get it, but it looks like everyone understood, so that’s great.”

It *was* good, certainly hundreds of times better than people finding it suspicious, but was that his imagination or did he feel his basic tenets of

‘plainness,’ ‘normalcy,’ and ‘ordinariness’ racing away at subsonic speed?

And just when he was starting to feel uneasy...

“Wait, Harumi-chan, you live with Nanbu-kun?” asked a classmate, suddenly realizing that. Then, of course, Pamil nodded without hesitation.

“I do, why?”

In the very next moment, the classroom erupted into noise.

“Under one roof!”

“With this blonde beauty?!”

“Impossible!” cried out Mizuhito.

Apparently, it was believable that Shuuhei would have a child with a foreigner and bring her back out of nowhere, but it was inexcusable for Kyouhei to have a blonde beauty like her for a sister.

“You get pantyshots every time she gets out of bed?!”

“Do you accidentally run into each other in the bath?!”

“Does she get in your bed because she can’t sleep?!”

“You’re dirty, Nanbu-kun!”

“You’re a beast!”

“So sexy! Are you a dating sim protagonist?!”

“Spit it out, how many flags did you raise so far?!”

“And how many runs does this make?! Answer me, you damn...!”

Mizuhito and the other students (mainly boys) advanced on Kyouhei as he floundered.

“T-The hell?! Like I’d do that!” Kyouhei denied in a panic.

Of course, she’d set his heart racing several times... but if he admitted that, his classmates (mainly Mizuhito) would happily read too deeply into it and exaggerate it. By the time school had finished, it’d probably have evolved into ‘Kyouhei Nanbu raped his stepsister, then ****d her and sold her off to Hong Kong.’

“Not with a—” he started protesting before suddenly stopping. However valid his descriptions might be, they could hurt her. Despite being able to fire beams from her eyes and fire from her hands, a girl was still a girl.

But then...

“That’s right,” Pamil nodded, “Onii-chan lusts after a different type of woman. Actually, under his bed—”

“Shut up, just shut up already!” he yelled.

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It went without saying, but...

“No...”

Their conversation was also overheard by Sanae, who usually spent half of her break time watching Kyouhei passionately from the shadows.

She was petite and had a bobbed haircut, her eyes covered by round glasses that were rather out of date. If you looked really, *really* closely, then you could see that she was cute, but she looked exceedingly plain at a glance.

“...Nanbu-senpai, you...”

Sanae had already heard from him that Pamil was a ‘relative’s child,’ but when faced with a beauty like her in reality, Sanae couldn’t stay calm.

“...You’re living with a girl under the same roof...”

Whether she was a relative’s child or his sister, a girl was a girl.

Plus, them not having lived together as a matter of course, Kyouhei’s recognition of her as his sister would be faint. Her usual stalking... ‘passionate observation’ of Kyouhei meant that she knew that, at least until last month, Kyouhei had lived alone.

So, with that considered, there was the question of how long Kyouhei’s composure could hold. If Shuuhei were still around, then he would act as a deterrent, but he was always away going all over the place, unfortunately.

“That means...”

Sanae’s mind started showing raging R-18 fantasies...

...

The room was filled with silence.

Because of that, the sounds, slight and somewhat hesitant as they were, drew Kyouhei's attention.

Turning in his bed, he opened his eyes to see a pale-skinned girl in the faint darkness, with vivid blonde hair and blue eyes.

"...Onii-chan," she mumbled, fidgeting as she stood in her pajamas. They were over-sized though, making her look even younger and more innocent. "Onii-chan," she murmured again, embarrassed and unable to hold his gaze.

"What do you want this late at night?"

"Uh... I..." she began hesitantly, "Can I... sleep with you...?"

"W-Where did this come from?"

"...I can't sleep," she explained as her cheeks flushed.

She *wasn't* a child anymore... so admitting that she couldn't sleep with a different pillow must be embarrassing, although that didn't seem to be the only reason for her rosy cheeks.

"And I'm lonely..."

Silence fell between the two of them.

Her blonde hair... was draped across her slightly shaking shoulders, like a thread.

Kyouhei let out a short sigh.

"...Come on," he told her, lifting his covers. Timidly, the girl slipped into the space he'd made.

Their eyes met.

"Onii-chan."

"...What?" he asked, noticing her watery eyes.

Kyouhei might have realized what she was about to say. She might be his 'sister,' but the girl within his arms was, without a doubt, 'the other sex.'

“I like you,” she whispered.

Kyouhei tensed with a start. The girl paid it no mind and drew closer to him.

“I really like you...” she repeated.

“...Ah... umm...” he was lost for words. He didn’t know whether to avert it with anger or laughter.

He didn’t have the option of completely accepting it or completely rejecting it; that wouldn’t be allowed in this situation. Or at least, that’s what Kyouhei thought.

“I love you,” the final blow spilled forth from the girl’s pouting lips.

There was no averting it, but he still tried:

“What are you talking about? ...We’re siblings,” he reminded her, forcing a smile over his lips.

The girl, having awakened to the ‘woman’ inside her, caught the undertones in his voice though.

“Even if we are related by blood, it’s only half in the end...” she tempted him. Kyouhei stayed silent. “Onii-chan, please, look at me. Look at me as a girl. I’ll let you... do anything.”

...

Fantasies like that.

“Ah...”

No one had prompted it, but she had imagined a terribly cliched ‘forbidden love’ between siblings scene, and been depressed by her own fantasy. She was a rather imaginative girl.

And so...

“No... that’s...!!”

She ran off, shaking her head in denial, while passing students looked oddly at her.

If you questioned her reasoning, even Sanae wouldn't have been able to explain the string of events.

Well, that was the case for most things; a person did what they did instinctively a lot of the time, and their actions often couldn't be explained logically. If you were to narrow it down though, it would come down to a single greeting.

"Morning," he had said easily as he handed over the bag Sanae had dropped as she fell by the school gate.

It might not have been anything really worthy of note, and to Kyouhei it was an obvious action and greeting.

But...

For a second, Sanae had frozen in shock.

How many people nowadays would reach a hand out to a girl that had fallen? Most people wouldn't ridicule the girl purposefully, but they would ignore her, or decide they had nothing to do with it. Even if they glanced as they passed, they wouldn't reach a hand out and greet her.

It might have just been because she happened to fall right in front of him. It might have been that he happened to be in a good mood...

But he had greeted her easily enough and given her her bag.

It didn't need to be special.

There weren't many people who could follow their principles like that. Even if they knew it was the right thing to do, a lot of people would decide it was annoying, or lame, and not act.

Sanae was one of those people.

Would she ask an old woman having trouble at the traffic lights if she wanted help? Would she ask a child crying in a crowd what was wrong?

She might.

But she also might not.

It was probably...

“...Mh? Are you all right?” Kyouhei had asked with a puzzled expression, seeing her freeze up. He probably thought she’d sprained something.

“I-I’m okay, I’m okay...!” she had cried out flusteredly.

It was probably that moment.

The moment when wonder and admiration for Kyouhei Nanbu took root in the girl named Sanae Murata.

It hadn’t taken too much time for it to turn into longing.

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“So,” started Youko Minebe.

It was the second break, and Youko, one of Sanae’s few (to put it politely) friends, was looking exasperatedly at her.

They were in a passageway into the courtyard.

There was a single tree where she was looking... and next to that tree was a not-quite-but-nearly fully equipped Sanae.

“...what are you doing?”

“Ah, Youko-chan,” Sanae answered from where she was standing, with two candles in a headband, her expression tired, “I’m, uh... making a talisman.”

“Yeah, I can see that.”

Associating with Sanae for even half a month would mean that you could tell just by looking, even if you didn’t want to.

“I don’t know who you’re cursing, but it’s a bit early for the witching hour, isn’t it?”

As you might expect from the witching hour being associated with talking to the dead, it was usually in the dead of night, around two or three in the morning to be more precise.

“Will this even work if you do it in the middle of the day?” she asked.

“But... the park’s scary... at night...” Sanae admitted, fidgeting and looking at her feet.



“...Right,” Youko empathized, nodding calmly and suppressing her retort that she was more scared of Sanae than a dark park, “Who are you cursing then?”

“Um... Nanbu-senpai’s sister.”

“...Right,” she nodded again.

Youko had heard about Kyouhei’s ‘sister,’ the blonde-haired, blue-eyed foreigner that had just joined the school. Well, it wasn’t exactly a huge school, so the gossip of a foreigner attending would spread pretty quickly.

“But she’s his sister, right?”

“Youko-chan... you can’t let your guard down,” advised Sanae, shaking her head with tears in her eyes. “The forbidden love between siblings might be dangerous, but it’s also luscious... There are people who do that, right...?”

“But if Nanbu-senpai *was* that kind of person... wouldn’t you have no chance to begin with?”

She blinked.

Several seconds passed in silence.

“Ahh?!”

She’d only just realized. Though what she thought cursing the sister would do was unclear.

Despite the general malicious and dangerous (in several ways) impression made by hobbies like sorcery and black magic, when it came down to it, Sanae was optimistic and a good person. That was why Youko was her friend, so she probably wasn’t trying to actually kill Kyouhei’s sister.

Asking for logic from a girl in love, though, was probably a mistake...

She looked closer at the strawman, which had been hammered into the tree with long nails—she bothered the tree a fair bit too—and also had lots of amulets (is that the right word?) attached to it. The amulets had ‘Sister repellent,’ ‘Blonde repellent,’ ‘Forbid pillow-carrying visits,’ ‘Forbid bath coincidences,’ and other things written on them, making it look more like a bagworm than a strawman.

Youko was ignorant in the ways of curses, but it was still clear to her that there was a lot wrong with this scene. Therefore, she understood her dismay.

“What... What do I do then?”

“I dunno.”

“Then, uh... Then, who should I curse?”

“I dunno that either!!”

The two of them looked at each other for a while... until Youko got tired of the staring contest.

“Just do what you like then? It’s chemistry next, and Sasazawa-sensei’ll get on you if you’re late or skip. Well, I don’t fancy that, so I’m going. Bye.”

“Wha... Wait... waiiiit... Youko-chan...” Sanae protested as she hurriedly began clearing her things away.

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Now, with Sanae’s personality...

It was... inevitable that she’d be tossed about by the throng of people around the school shop, like a leaf in a hurricane.

“One yakisoba bread!”

“Croquette for me!”

“Cutlet sandwich! One cutlet sandwich!”

“A super-thick cream bun!”

“I want a chocolate banana sandwich!”

The students had flocked around the shop with hands and money outstretched. The scene was like something out of a religious painting, with disciples surrounding their religion’s founder. The woman at the front of them all was skillfully taking all of those orders.

But amongst them...

“...Ah... uh... uh... one... one hatcho miso cream bun... please...”

Obviously, Sanae’s feeble voice wasn’t audible to the saleswoman.

Both of her parents worked, so Sanae didn't want to be a monetary or temporal burden on them, that's why she would only take 200 yen each day and buy a cheap bun and carton of milk.

However...

This was a true battle royale. The amounts were limited, of course, but on top of that, the things that were both tasty and cheap sold out first. Students like Sanae with limited funds frantically tried to buy slow-release foods.

"...Uh... one hacho miso... cream..."

The tides of people tossed her this way and that as the main products all sold out. After the storm had passed, Sanae was usually like a crumpled-up handkerchief and would pitifully point at the leftovers and ask for a bread roll.

The reason she kept going to the school shop despite her experiences was that she was still growing, and so she needed food. The canteen didn't have many things that she could get for 200 yen, and having the same thing day in and day out would get boring.

"Mgh... A natto cream strawberry bun would do..." Sanae pleaded as she was spun around like clothes in the washing machine. She *had* the choice to just give up and go without, but she wouldn't last the day if she did.

That particular day, she had PE... and then a report for the next class. Classes were usually fairly noisy, so her stomach grumbling wouldn't be heard, but that wasn't the case when someone was presenting. Just imagining the moment her stomach broke the silence of the room made her want to die from embarrassment.

"Ah!"

Sanae was pushed to the edge of the crowd, and then further back, which made her fall to the floor.

Whoever had pushed her was already lost in the chaos, but it probably wasn't done maliciously, and they may not have even realized it happened.

As she was on the floor, she wanted to pull out her strawman and hammer into it a piece of paper with 'everyone here but the saleswoman and me.'

That's when...

"Hmm..."

Sanae wasn't sure why she could hear the sound of that voice; it wasn't particularly loud amongst the din. Someone talking right next to you or an angry yell would probably get lost amongst the racket as well.

And yet...

"This is awful," the voice continued calmly.

That might have been the reason, come to think of it—the detachment from the overall tumult stood out.

Sanae looked back blankly.

She'd heard that voice before.

"His sister..."

The girl she had just recently tried to curse. Kyouhei's stepsister, Harumi Nanbu. Seeing her from up close, she looked even more beautiful. Her blonde hair shone like the sun off of water, and her round, blue eyes were fierce, but still somehow innocent.

With her overall dainty build and immature yet still well-shaped chest, she would certainly charm the opposite sex.

She contrasted with Sanae's plainness; they were like light and shadow.

"Hmm..."

The girl, Kyouhei Nanbu's sister, looked dubiously at the crowd around the saleswoman for a while...

"Oooooooooookaaaaayyyy!"

Then, she burst into pent-up motion, and in the next instant, yelled: "Stun Gun!!"

There was a crackle and string of sparks.

At least... that's what it looked like to Sanae. It happened in a split second, so she didn't know for sure.

“Wha...” she let out, frozen in shock.

In front of her was a pile of bodies. Even if they weren't dead, the lightning had knocked out over half of the students, and the rest were busy comparing their losses.

“Argh! I'm dying! No, wait, I'm burning...! My hair, nooo!”

“My hair took two hours to style; it's way more important!”

“No, my precisely adjusted uniform is more important!”

“No, no, no! My modified skirt that goes to the golden position of 15 centimeters above my knees is more important! I iron it every night!”

...And so on.

Kyouhei Nanbu's blonde little sister stared down at them and then proclaimed:

“Organized looting, huh? I had heard that Japan was an orderly, polite, and faithful country, but... what are the teachers here educating their students in?”

“Huh?” Sanae said.

Nobody could hear Pamil's complaints, let alone Sanae's puzzled voice.

Then, moments later...

“You mooorroooooooooonn!!”

Kyouhei came rushing over, his yell stretched out by the doppler effect as he chopped at the back of his sister's head.

“Ugh! What are you doing, Kyouhe— I mean, Onii-chan?”

“I told you to behave, over and over and over, didn't I?! What are you doing?! You just went for food; why does it look like a bomb site?!”

“But, Onii-chan,” she tried to explain, “the crowd of students was trying to steal food from that older woman; that is far from how people should be behaving, is it not? Royalty must correct the misdemeanors of the masses. I may be an android, but I cannot—”

“Shut your face!!” he yelled. “What are you on about? Looting? This is a shop!

They were buying!! Besides, even the saleswoman's collapsed, so now what?!"

At the end of Kyouhei's finger was the white-aproned woman, convulsing on the floor.

"It's okay, Onii-chan," the blonde assured decisively, "the Royal Stun Gun is non-lethal."

"Show a little shame!!"

"And they were bothering this girl; they pushed her over," she argued, pointing at where Sanae was still sitting on the floor.

Kyouhei whirled to look at her.

"M-Murata-san."

"Hi..."

"D-Did you see?!"

"Eh? Ah... yes."

She didn't know exactly *what* he was asking about her seeing, but his forcefulness had her instinctively nodding.

"Come here a minute, please... You too, Pamil!"

So saying, he took each of their hands and withdrew from the scene of the tragedy.

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It'd been found out. Without a doubt.

And, beyond all his expectations, on the very first day.

"What do I do...?" Kyouhei asked himself, holding his head in his hands. He had brought both girls with him behind the school building.

The image of both him and Shuuhei being arrested was already playing in his head, with *Donna Donna* as the background music. They may not have intended to kidnap Pamil, but falsifying the family record was definitely a crime, and would certainly be a matter for the police if it came to light.

Plus, if they discovered she could fire beams and lightning, who knew what it

would cause.

Fortunately, everything around the shop had happened in a split second.

For the rest of the students, they could possibly go with something like: “Hahaha, people can’t fire beams and stuff, you probably all just hallucinated!” For Sanae, though... who had witnessed the entire event, conversation, and aftermath, that wouldn’t work at all.

But as he was troubled by these thoughts.....

“...Um... Nanbu-senpai...?” Sanae spoke concernedly.

“M-Murata-san,” Kyouhei started, pulling himself from his thoughts and putting his hands on her shoulders.

“Y-Yes?!” she cried out, her voice high-pitched from the shocking contact with her beloved Kyouhei, who was holding her shoulders. Obviously, Kyouhei had no idea about how she felt.

“Listen up closely.”

“I-I will!”

“It probably shocked you.”

“Yeah... it did.”

“This will probably surprise you even more,” he began, “but it’s even deeper than the Mariana Trench, so um, anyway...”

“It’s the first time I’ve seen such powerful sorcery.”

“I’d really appreciate it if you... What?”

His reaction was delayed by his surprise at her reaction.

“Normally, the effects would be much more ambiguous, and you’d need lots of tools and stuff... your sister has a lot of spiritual energy...”

Kyouhei had no response.

“It was wonderful,” she concluded.

“...Um.”

It was then that Kyouhei realized the kind of person Sanae was.

“Murata-san... did you...” he began hesitantly, “think that Pamil just...”

“Used lightning magic, yes! I’ve read about it in books, but—”

“No, it was the Royal Stun Gun,” Pamil interrupted, correcting her.

“Pamil, you’re making this worse, just be quiet for a minute.”

“Hmm?”

“...Umm, anyway, that’s... That’s what it was?” he asked Sanae.

“Wasn’t it?” she asked back.

“Uhh...”

“I am the body double android for the thirtieth king of the Bergmann Kingdom, Dolph Terrill Balor Bergmann’s eldest daughter and heir, Pamil Terrill Karl Bergmann, the FR-MC09 ‘Pamil IX,’” she explained easily.

“Arghhh,” Kyouhei cried and cradled his head.

Pamil had utterly destroyed the excuse that Kyouhei had managed to mentally construct.

However...

“O-Oh, I see!” Sanae nodded enthusiastically in understanding.

“No, wait, what?” Kyouhei raised his head in confusion. “Didn’t that make you think something like ‘That’s weird,’ or ‘Freaky,’ or ‘Is she a bit off?’ or something like that?!”

“Eh...?” She blinked.

“Do you really think there are robots just walking and talking like any other human?!”

“But... there’s stuff like puppets that have hair that grows, or look like they’re smiling at night, or move around on their own... Ah, my Ed-kun and Charles-kun talk like people, even if it’s just at night.”

There was a lot Kyouhei wanted to say to that, too much in fact, and he didn’t know where to start.

“Ah, i-it’s okay, Senpai,” Sanae hurriedly assured him, not sure what he was

thinking, “I won’t tell anyone.”

“Eh? Ah, y-you won’t?” Kyouhei asked, almost anticlimactically.

Well, if she wasn’t going to say anything to anyone, then he didn’t mind what she thought...

“That... would be a real help,” he told her with a sigh of relief, even though he wasn’t quite happy with everything.

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“So, what happened with Nanbu-senpai’s sister?”

They were on the way home from school when Youko had suddenly brought up the question.

“Ah... yeah, that,” Sanae answered with a smile. “It’s... fine now...”

“Is it?”

“Yeah... probably.” She nodded. “I don’t get what’s going on still... but I think... I’ll stop cursing for now...”

Harumi Nanbu; Pamil.

The three of them had spoken for a while, and Sanae had decided that she couldn’t curse her, nor hate her.

Well, whether she was an android, a powerful esper, or something else... Sanae was immensely happy that she had been entrusted with their secret, and it had eased her vague jealousy.

The fact that, as far as she could see, there was no room for a strange relationship between the two of them was another balm to it.

The biggest one, however...

“Organized looting, huh? I had heard that Japan was an orderly, polite, and faithful country, but... what are the teachers here educating their students in?”

“And they were bothering this girl; they pushed her over.”

...was that she had said those things.

She had easily said what she thought was right, and Sanae couldn’t hate a girl

who resembled Kyouhei in that respect.

That's why...

...I can't... let my guard down...

The girl was beautiful after all, but...

...I wonder... if we'll end up being friends... just like with Youko-chan...

"What...? What are you grinning about?" asked her friend next to her.

"...N-Nothing! Nothing at all!"

Even as Sanae panicked, she was still somehow happy.

Chapter 6 - Even That Has Somehow Become Normal

Pamil.

That was the name of the self-proclaimed body double android of the Bergmann Kingdom's princess.

She was a blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl who, whether she was crazy or whatever, probably had a rather complicated background.

Kyouhei Nanbu had more or less gotten used to living together with her—just as roommates, of course.

In other words, he had half forgotten her strangeness and unclear origins.

It had happened out of nowhere, like an unexploded bomb he'd left behind himself.



"Cut it out!" yelled Kyouhei Nanbu, pointing at the target of his ire.

Staring questioningly at his extended index finger was a petite, blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl.

From her silken hair to her porcelain skin, she looked almost like a pretty doll, in a good way. Anyone and everyone would call her cute, and in a few years would probably be describing her as beautiful.

This was Pamil. He had ended up calling her by that name, but she had introduced herself as "a body double android of Princess Pamil," so he still didn't actually know her real name.

Of course, by his father's manipulation of the family register, she also had the name "Harumi," but she had been called Pamil for longer, so he rarely used her Japanese name.

Well, with her practically carrying a sign describing her as a foreigner, using the name Harumi would feel somewhat amiss, so that was also a reason not to.

Though, that being said, he couldn't use her own self-designated names, "FR-

MC09” or “Pamil IX,” either. If he followed along with her delusions, it might make the symptoms even worse.

Although...

Was she really an android? Certain things had happened to make him question that, complicating the matter. At the end of the day, a normal human wouldn't be able to fire lightning from her hands, nor beams from her eyes.

And so...

“Mgmh,” Pamil grumbled as she blinked. “What are you angry about, Kyouhei?”

“I've told you over and over! Don't just fire off your beams all willy-nilly! We ain't gonna cope if you do it every time you sneeze or hiccup!”

If Kyouhei or Shuuhei were in her line of sight, then they wouldn't fire. Whether that was a safety feature or just a subconscious avoidance, he couldn't tell. However, every time she was surprised or had some form of psychological damage, she would fire beams all over the place.

“Mgh, but it's a part of the spec—”

“Don't talk like you're a software dev! You buggy mess!”

Behind Kyouhei's yelling figure was a partially roasted bookcase.

It went without saying that it had taken a direct hit.

“But, Kyouhei, you're not inj—”

“You trying to say it's fine as long as I ain't hurt?!”

“It's not?” she asked confusedly.

Up until that day, Kyouhei hadn't been seriously angry with her, even when she decimated parts of the warehouse. This was the first time that she had seen him seriously pissed, so... it made some amount of sense that Pamil was confused.

Still, though...

“Of course it's not! People care about more than just their bodies!”



The sky stretched endlessly overhead, irresponsibly blue and clear.

Kyouhei had told Pamil that she could wander around the neighborhood on Sundays, so she was doing just that.

“...Hmm.”

By the by, the reason that he had specified Sundays was that it was a day off for the local warehouses, so there were only minor signs of life.

On the contrary, during the week, the movement of goods led to a vast increase in the number of people around. Therefore, he’d decided that increasing the chances of her strange ‘android-play’ being seen in public wasn’t for the best. Either way, during the week they went to the same school, so she wasn’t in the district much anyway.

Now, then...

Pamil’s expression was somewhat dark as she walked alone.

The reason was simple: Kyouhei was angry with her. She’d gone out on her walk for the same reason as well.

“...‘People care,’ huh?” she murmured to herself.

“People care about more than just their bodies!”

Of course, he had meant it as a general statement, but with Pamil declaring herself to be an android, it took on another meaning.

“...I really am...” she muttered, “a temporary guest.”

She was part of the Nanbu household due to how things had developed, but this wasn’t where she was supposed—or where she assumed she was supposed—to be.

She was out of place here.

That would certainly cause conflict; that much was obvious.

In the first place, Kyouhei had said: *“You can stay here until you find your place... your goal.”*

That meant it was a place she would eventually have to leave.

She folded her arms in thought.

“Hmm?”

It was at that moment that a car turned into the warehouse district.

It was ill-fitting for the area, being an expensive passenger car. It was black, with harsh lines and tinted windows. It was like something the yakuza, or some VIP businessman, would use. In other words, the type of car you'd instinctively keep your distance from... But, of course, Pamil lacked that common sense, and so unflinchingly surveyed it as it came to a stop in front of her.

“...What?”

The doors opened on both sides, and two people stepped from the car.

They were both violently out of place.

They were both women.

Both with red hair.

Clothes-wise, they were wearing dark suits and sunglasses, like the men in black, like they were about to collect an alien and take them to Area 51.

The car alone was enough to prompt countless sarcastic remarks, but coupled with the women that got out of it, the whole scene was so surreal that Kyouhei wouldn't have even known where to start.

Although, in this case, the girl watching them was Pamil, who lacked all of that knowledge, so she had no remarks to give.

And then...

“Ah, well,” sighed the woman who had stepped from the right-hand side.

She looked around 20. Her expression, perhaps because of the sunglasses, was mostly unreadable. The main distinguishing feature she had over the other woman was the length of her hair.

The right-hand one had short hair, the left-hand one long.

The short-haired redhead spoke, a hand to her chest over the black tie that

hung across it.

“It’s about your father; please come with us. It’s serious.”



Kyouhei let out a sigh as he plucked a book from the bookcase.

It was the book that had taken the brunt of Pamil’s earlier beam.

When he opened it, it was clear that it wasn’t a book from a store, but an album with dozens of photos inside it.

There were many different types of pictures.

The places and people were different, yes, but the formats were all different too. Some of them were discolored sepia and some were monochrome, possibly all forming a chronology.

They had only one thing in common.

They were all of Kyouhei.

Since he was young, until he was in his mid-teens.

The people in the photos with him were all different. The places where they were taken too. Even Kyouhei’s age was clearly different in each one.

These were pictures taken during the period when he was being dragged around the world by Shuuhei. The people in the photos with him were all friends and acquaintances he’d made around the world.

That’s right.

‘Were,’ in past tense.

Amongst them... were unreachable people. Who knew if a letter would get to them. Many didn’t have a phone or telegram service, let alone internet access. Some of them might have even forgotten about him.

At any rate... those photos were the only proof of the days they had spent together.

That was why he’d been angrier than usual when Pamil’s beam had hit it, childishly so.

Just...

If he were to be honest, the album was somewhat of a complicated thing for Kyouhei. On the one hand, it was filled with people he didn't want to forget. On the other, though, when he looked at those photographs, many, many things he didn't want to remember also came back to mind.

That's why he didn't normally look at it.

It was something he wouldn't look at, but also wouldn't get rid of, so he stuffed it in the bookcase and left it there.

"...Man," he said, looking at the blackened photos, "I hope... we still have the negatives."

With that final murmur, he closed the album.

• • •

"Serious?" Pamil asked.

"That's right," the redhead answered, nodding her head.

The woman's voice was completely flat.

Ordinarily, this would clue you in that something was off, but Pamil, whether through conscientiousness or naivety, took the words literally.

"You're talking about Shuuhei?" she asked.

She lived with both Shuuhei and Kyouhei, and for convenience, they were listed as family officially. Currently, the only 'father' that Pamil had was Shuuhei.

However...

"Shuuhei certainly can be rather serious," she mused.

"That's not what we mean!" exclaimed the other woman.

This was the long-haired one.

With their clothes being the same, and their eyes being hidden behind sunglasses... that was essentially the only difference between them.

"We mean he's in a tight spot!" she clarified.

“Hmm, he’s stuck in traffic?” Pamil tilted her head.

“No!” cried out the long-haired redhead angrily. “I mean he’s not well, and is on the verge of death!”

“Hmm? ...He is?”

Shuuhei hadn’t actually been back for a few days.

“Yes, yeah, that’s it!” the short-haired one exclaimed, strangely happily.

The two of them might have been thinking that they weren’t managing to persuade her, but then...

“In that case, I need to let Kyouhei know...” Pamil said, turning back to leave, making the two clearly panic.

“We’ve already notified him! He’ll be there later!”

“We just need you to come with us. It’s urgent!”

“Hmm, I see.”

Pamil’s lack of doubt was both a good and a bad part of her personality.

Well, she was just an honest person, fundamentally.

If Kyouhei had been around, he’d have been yelling at her to keep it in moderation.

“Got it, show me the way,” she nodded.

Well, Shuuhei certainly did work in dangerous places, and could indeed be accused of fraud, so it was hardly unbelievable for him to suddenly be on the brink of death.

Though, that said...

“Ah, but first...” The short-haired one suddenly proffered a pair of handcuffs. “Your father is in a serious condition, so please put these on.”

“...Is that what they’re for?”

If Kyouhei were there, he’d have probably yelled something like ‘like hell!’ Unfortunately, though... Pamil’s external common sense circuits weren’t present.

“It is.”

“Very well then, take care of it,” she agreed, presenting her wrists and prompting the redhead to hurriedly cuff them.

“Right, right, this way.”

As she spoke, she was guiding Pamil into the back of the car.

Once she had gotten obediently into the car, the redhead held something black out to Pamil.

It was an eye mask. Or, more bluntly, a blindfold.

“...What?”

Pamil was, of course, dubious, but the redheaded woman explained:

“Well, uh, you know, he’s in *real* trouble... so use the blindfold.”

“...So that’s what it’s for?”

“That’s what it’s for.”

If Kyouhei were there, he— (you get the idea).

“Very well then.”

At her nod, the redhead somewhat nervously put the eye-mask over Pamil’s eyes.

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“...Kidnapped?!” Kyouhei yelled when he realized the possibility.

It was about half an hour since their earlier breakfast quarrel.

For some reason, his friend, Mizuhito Hibiki, had come to visit and just casually brought it up.

“Well, I saw Harumi-chan with handcuffs and a blindfold getting into a black car. She got a new hobby?”

“Like hell!!” he yelled as he punched Mizuhito. Then, he began fretting: “Crap...”

“What was that for?” Mizuhito protested. The faux-rocker with the slightly off

fashion and guitar was rubbing his head as he got back up. He was a pretty hardy guy.

“*Start* with that kind of thing!”

“What?”

“That was obviously a kidnapping!”

“Ah...” Mizuhito’s expression switched to one of realization as he scratched his cheek. “They were dressed up like the MIB though, with sunglasses and a luxury car. I figured they were probably doing some cosplay, or messing around.”

“Get it into your head that not everyone thinks like you!”

“They looked like they’d fit right in with your old man.”

“Guh...”

Well, that was hardly unlikely.

This is bad... This is really bad...

What should he do?

Officially, on paper that is, Pamil was his little sister.

However, that was because Shuuhei had completely and utterly legally fiddled (to put it indirectly) with census records to add her to the family.

If things came to light, and that modification were also discovered by the police, then Shuuhei would be arrested. Kyouhei might even be arrested for aiding and abetting as well.

And...

“Right, kidnapping,” Mizuhito said with a nod, possibly beginning to understand the situation, “Harumi-chan’s... really cute.” Kyouhei looked silently at him. “She couldn’t resist if she were cuffed. A blonde in cuffs and a blindfold... Hnnng—I mean... Oh no!”

“Don’t tempt fate like that!!” Kyouhei yelled, taking his friend’s guitar and hitting him with it.

Pamil's chastity was... *not* the focus of Kyouhei's panic; it was the criminals' lives.

Both of her hands might be in cuffs, she might be blindfolded, but she could probably still use her beams, fire, and lightning. The earlier incident with the guys hitting on her had ended 'well' because of his early intervention, but the scene was such that, if he hadn't, it may have ended with deaths.

"This ain't funny..." he said with fear.

If things remained as they were, it was eminently possible that Pamil could end up being a killer. One of her beams would scorch the target into charcoal; they wouldn't be able to just claim it was self-defense. Probably.

The second hit had set Mizuhito's eyes spinning as he laid there. Kyouhei tossed the guitar on top of him and rushed out of the house.

● ● ●

Black clothes, sunglasses, a black luxury car.

They might be embarrassingly stereotypical, but... on their own, they weren't even slightly helpful as a clue.

It was about ten minutes after his rush from the door that Kyouhei realized this.

How should he search for her?

In the city center, there would be more than a few black luxury cars driving about, and if you looked, people in black clothes and sunglasses weren't all that rare. The skies being clear today meant that the sun was rather bright, so there were even more people wearing sunglasses than normal.

"What do I do...?"

Kyouhei stopped with a sigh.

After his sprint, he had already left the warehouse district behind, and was now in the business district. While it was Sunday, there were more people around than usual. They paid the panting teenager no more mind than a curious glance or two as he stood there at a loss.

Then, suddenly...

His phone began to ring.

He hurriedly answered.

“Kyouhei Nanbu, yes?” came the voice, a near murmur clearly modulated by some device.

“W-Who are you?!”

“I’ll give you a warning.”

He couldn’t even tell if it was a male or female voice. The only clear thing was that they weren’t Japanese.

Even if the voice was being masked, rhythms and inflections couldn’t be altered. They had an obvious, although slightly distorted, accent characteristic of non-native Japanese speakers.

“It’s something you should forget. Don’t do anything stupid,” they continued.

“What?”

“That girl was never a citizen of your world. You live in different worlds. It was an unusual situation to begin with. So, if you just forget it, your peaceful life will return. If you want to live out the ordinary, peaceful life of a high school student, then don’t involve yourself any further; just go back to your usual life.”

Kyouhei was silent.

“Who are you?” he asked again, this time in a low voice.

However...

“I... warned you.”

With that last statement, they hung up.

Kyouhei stared wordlessly at the display.

Needless to say, the only register was “unknown caller.”

He didn’t know who it was, but...

“Fuck!”

He was on the verge of flinging his phone to the ground, but he stopped himself.

What am I panicking about?

His mental voice was calm, or perhaps 'cruel' would be a better adjective. If this were a movie, it would doubtlessly belong to a titchy demonic mini-Kyouhei with bat wings and a trident.

Right? Wasn't that what I wanted? Peace and quiet with no one getting in the way? I should be happy about this, surely.

That was exactly the case. The loopy girl had tumbled into his life because of Shuuhei's work.

Her claims were ludicrous.

She fired beams from her eyes.

And on top of all that, she was haughty.

It was a fact that she had caused him a lot of trouble.

If it's beyond my control, there's nothing I can do. It's not like I chucked her out myself; I don't need to worry about it. I don't know who it was, but that person on the phone was right. I should just pretend nothing happened, go home, sleep, and leave it at that.

This was all true.

It was true, but...

"I can't do that!" he yelled at himself, punching a nearby postbox.

"Ahh?!"

Kyouhei was assailed by a sense of déjà vu as a girl's cry reached his ears.

He turned to look and saw a familiar girl on the ground behind it.

"...Murata-san?"

It was Sanae Murata, the girl with dated round glasses and a bob-cut hairstyle; Kyouhei's junior.

She had long since become an acquaintance he knew by sight, and since he

had shared Pamil's secret with her, she had gone from "one of the crowd" to "a close acquaintance."

"...Nanbu-senpai..." she muttered faintly.

She was wearing a floral white dress and slender brown sandals, and was carrying a wicker handbag.

"Uh... Ah... what a surprise to see you here..." she began hesitantly. "Uhm, ah, uh, well, actually, it's more like a coincidence. It's not like I've been always behind you the whole time, trying to take photos of you if I could. Not at all, you know?"

"Huh?" He frowned at her ambiguous words for a second, but... "Ah, right, Murata-san. Have you seen Pamil... I mean, Harumi?"

"Eh, Pamil-san?" she asked, blinking in surprise. "She just got in a black car and left, didn't she?"

Her tone suggested that he ought to know that already.

"Did you see it?"

"Ah, yes."

"Which way?! Which way did they go?!" he demanded, leaning in.

"Eh? Ah, um..." Sanae grew flustered, both from Kyouhei's sudden intensity and from surprise. "I think it was that way..."

"Damn it...!" he yelled angrily, looking in the direction she pointed.

That direction held both trunk roads and highways. A car heading that way could be in the next town or prefecture over rather quickly. In other words, it was all over for Kyouhei, who had no form of transportation.

"Uh... what happened?"

"Well... you see..." hiding it from her wouldn't help, so... "it looks like she's been kidnapped."

"K-Kidnapped?!"

Naturally, her eyes went wide at his pronouncement.

“Yeah, some guys wearing black and sunglasses bundled her into a black car, apparently. In cuffs and with a blindfold too.”

“I did see that, now that you mention it,” she recalled, reflecting on the events. “I thought it was just some new hobby or som—”

“Like hell it is!!”

Of course, he couldn’t hit her like he had Mizuhito, but his voice was almost anguished as he yelled. Was it just that everyone around him was *like that* ? Or was it just that everyone would make the same assumption?

“Ah, s-sorry.”

“...No, it’s my bad.”

Getting angry with Sanae wouldn’t help matters.

“If I at least had transport...” he muttered with a short sigh.

It was hopeless without some form of transport. They were in a car, so even if he knew where they were, catching up on foot or by train would be tough. Even if he *did* catch up, if they escaped again, then that would be the end of it.

In which case...

“Right.” He nodded, before rushing off.

“Ah, wait, Senpai!” Sanae called, running after him in a panic.

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Meanwhile, with Pamil’s abductors.

The short-haired redhead, Emmitt Storer, let out a long sigh and looked at the blonde girl sitting in the middle of the room.

It went without saying that the girl was Pamil.

She was in the same state as when she had been brought there, cuffed and blindfolded, and was sitting peacefully in a chair.

Any normal person would have long since started to have doubts, but the blonde showed no signs of unease or suspicion.

“...She came along after we told her to put on the handcuffs and blindfold

because her father was ill. That's just weird by itself..." ruminated Emmitt.

It was simply because the girl had been so defenseless that she'd gone along with it and tried to kidnap her. She hadn't expected the girl to just accept her claims, though.

While Emmitt hardly had the right to complain, it was certainly abnormal.

Well, if she was a bit off mentally, then that wasn't any real problem, but... Emmitt had an odd sense of foreboding, like they were missing some vital piece of information and had made a terrible mistake.

It felt like they were carrying a bomb with a dodgy fuse in a rattling car.

"Hmm? Did you say something?" Pamil asked.

"Ah, no, no, nothing at all," Emmitt said in panic.

"I see. Incidentally, are we still not at the hospital?"

"Ah, we've just got to go through some formalities. Please wait a little longer, sorry," she answered, smoothing over things with business-speak.

"Very well, discretion is important," the girl agreed with an oddly haughty nod.

Watching her...

"Have we... kidnapped someone crazy...?" Emmitt asked herself uneasily, speaking quietly again.





Kaoruko was in front of the house.

Kaoruko Houwa. She was currently wearing her tawny hair up in a white ribbon. Her eyes were lidded and a light brown as well. She was well built for a woman, but the soft and gentle lines of her body gave her a sense of motherliness. Her clothing consisted of an immaculate white shirt and a flared beige skirt.

She stood in front of the Nanbu house, or rather, the warehouse bearing that name.

“Kaoruko-san!” Kyouhei called as he rushed up to her.

Kyouhei had phoned her and asked her to meet him there. Amongst the people he knew, Kaoruko was the only one with both transport and at least a little knowledge of Pamil’s secret.

“Kyouhei-kun, I brought a fast car like you asked for.”

She looked back towards said car as she spoke. It was a convertible.

A Caterham Super Seven to be precise.

The car itself looked like an old-fashioned convertible, but even now it was an overwhelmingly powerful sports car. It was a vehicle that *every* car fan would know.

“You have something urgent to do?” she asked.

“...That... That’s right...” he wheezed out as he rushed past her and jabbed in the code on the number pad.

Once he saw that the computer had accepted the code, he inserted his index finger into the small cavity above the keypad, which read his fingerprint and vein patterns.

Once the security was unlocked and the shutter began to squeal its way up, he turned back to Kaoruko.

“There’s... uh... an emergency...”

“An emergency...?” the woman asked, almost like she’d never heard the

word.

“So... I need you to... help me look for Pamil.”

“Look for Pamil-chan?”

Leaving her there, Kyouhei entered the house.

His goal was Shuuhei's products.

The mountain of dangerous goods he would usually stay far away from.

Living in the warehouse meant that he roughly knew where most things were, though.

And so...

“Man, I didn't want to touch this again,” he muttered to himself as he opened a wooden box and removed a lump of black metal from it.

It was a Browning Hi-Power automatic pistol. Then, he took out an Uzi.

They weren't model guns or air guns.

They weren't even real guns that had had their firing mechanisms fused for display.

They were rather old models, but they were real, and their firing mechanisms worked. They were rough and ready, still used by some military. Just having them put him at risk of being accused of contravening firearms laws.

Right, he thought to himself.

He certainly didn't know what circumstances she was in. According to Shuuhei, though, she had indeed come from the Bergmann Kingdom. And via a coffin-like thing that was in the palace dump.

In that case...

It might have something to do with that revolution, or with the government...

Kyouhei knew the kind of thing that could be.

He knew just how easily large scale movements could lose sight of the health, survival, property, and dignity of individuals.

He'd learned that in the same place where he'd learned how to handle these

kinds of guns. In the countries Shuuhei had taken him to, whether he'd wanted to or not, he'd had to learn.

That was why...

That's why I wanted to live in peace.

So he should probably have just pretended not to have seen any of it, and kept himself uninvolved.

To protect the peaceful life that he longed for.

So what the hell am I doing?

He almost felt like crying as he briskly used a loading mechanism to fill magazines.

...She's just a damn android.

She ate like a human.

She bathed like a human.

She went to the toilet like a human.

Her skin was soft like a human's.

Her hair was silky like a human's...

So he was sure.

If she were shot, she would be hurt. If she were stabbed, she would also be hurt.

She'd be hurt, suffer... and then die. Whether or not she was human.

It's taking too long...!

"...Senpaaaai... w-wait... you run too fast...!"

He turned around to see Sanae, her face flushed red as she gasped for breath. She must have followed him all this way.

"Uh, Senpai," she carried on as she caught her breath, "if you're looking for Pamil-san, I might be able to help."



“Eh? B-But that’s absurd!” Emmitt’s partner, her sister Elsia, cried into a phone in obvious dismay.

Apparently, she had called their employer for further guidance, but...

“That’s a different matter! Eh? No, that’s not what I mean! You have your own specialisms, right?”

There seemed to be some disagreement.

Incidentally, this whole conversation was taking place in German.

“No, it’s not a problem with the money! You just told us to kidnap her, we’re —”

“Kidnap?” asked Pamil, intrigued.

Elsia thought that by speaking in German, Pamil wouldn’t be able to understand the conversation over the phone.

“Ah, this is bad...” murmured Emmitt.

On further thought, the girl was blonde-haired and blue-eyed, so no matter how well she spoke Japanese, that didn’t mean she couldn’t understand English or German. Or rather, it wouldn’t be at all strange if she *could* .

Elsia didn’t seem to have noticed, though, so she kept talking seriously into the phone:

“Killing isn’t our area! Surely that’s *your* specialism, Colonel!”

“...Hey,” Pamil called, looking straight at Emmitt despite the blindfold still being across her eyes, “... you kidnapped me?”

Emmitt stiffened.

She looked at her partner, who was even now talking rapidly into the phone.

“S-Sis!”

“I’m telling you—ah, Emmitt, I told you not to call me that while we’re working. Oh, no, sorry, I was talking to someone else,” the long-haired woman apologized flusteredly.

Meanwhile...

“Ah... Ahhhhh...!”

Emmitt’s eyes were wide open as she witnessed the reality in front of her.

The cuffs...

“And killing as well? That’s hardly polite.”

...broke into pieces.

The girl had just moved her hands outward and the chain between the cuffs had broken like a child’s toy.

“Answer us. Did you or did you not abduct us? Should that be the case, then appropriate measures must be taken.”

As she spoke, Pamil took the blindfold off.

The cover removed, her sapphire blue eyes fixed Emmitt in their sight.

“Wah... What... What are you?!” Emmitt demanded as she frantically drew a gun from her pocket.

“Hmm... You kidnapped us despite lacking that knowledge? Truly, you are foolish kidnappers,” Pamil told her pridefully, heedless of the gun pointed at her.

“We are called Pamil! We are the first in line from the thirtieth king, King Dolph Terrill Balor Bergmann, Pamil Terrill Karl Bergmann,” at that point, her voice dropped, “s body double android, FR-MC09 ‘Pamil IX.’”

“Wha...” Elsia had also realized the situation and looked back, also pulling a gun from her pocket. “Colonel! What... What is she?!”

“Encouraging justice and punishing evil is the royal family’s duty. Criminals will not be given allowances.”

At that, light burst from her blue eyes.

● ● ●

Kaoruko Houwa, contrary to her appearance, had a passion for machines.

She could usually control herself when it came to regular devices, but cars were her weak spot.

The café she ran, the Corvette, also took its name from a car, and behind it, she had a single-story car park with about a dozen automobiles in it.

Who knew from where a café owner got so much money, but she had cars ranging from a Subaru 360 to Ferraris, Humvees, and so on.

Well, let's forget that for now.

"Sanae-chan, which way next?" the woman asked from the driver's seat.

"T-This way!" she gave directions, her eyes spinning dangerously behind her glasses.

The word 'dangerous' fit Sanae in several ways to begin with, but her holding L-shaped wires in both hands above the Super Seven and being in some kind of trance made the word all the more appropriate.

It was inevitable, though—right next to her, pressed into her side, was her unrequited love, Kyouhei.

The Super Seven was a two-seater, so it was obviously overloaded with both her and Kyouhei in the car in addition to Kaoruko.

Kaoruko had suggested returning to the Corvette and switching cars, but Kyouhei didn't want to waste even a second, and had demanded they all just get in the two-seater.

As I'm sure you're aware, the L-shaped metal wires in Sanae's hands were 'dowsing rods.' They were used to look for underground water and veins of ore. They were dubious tools with unknown operating principles.

Honestly, Kyouhei had strong doubts that such an occultish thing would find Pamil, but Sanae was dead serious, and he had no other options.

So far, they had agreed with the direction that Sanae had led them in...

"That way, that way!"

He looked at her when she yelled, seeing the dowsing rods somehow spinning like radar dishes.

Regardless of the overloading, the car was approaching the docks in the next city over.

The area was filled with warehouses for the storing of goods coming on and off the ships, and was almost... nostalgic.

Despite the usual activity during the weekdays, it was a typical Sunday there too, so there were few people.

That's when...

"There!" Sanae yelled, her eyes spinning along with her dowsing rods.

They pointed towards a single warehouse.

With a screech of tires, the car came to a stop.

And at the same time...

Pew!!

Another familiar thing entered Kyouhei's senses as a light blasted through the wall.

"Waaah?!"

He ducked.

As a result, Kyouhei ended up over Sanae, who started to overheat and let out strange noises like "unyah," and "myah."

That aside, though.

"...Well... we really did find her..." he groaned.

Dowsing wasn't something to take lightly then.

"Kaoruko-san, Murata-san, wait here," Kyouhei urged them as he jumped out of the car.

He pulled the bolt on the Uzi and made it ready to fire. Then, he ran towards the warehouse.

When all of a sudden...

"Arrrrrrghhhh?!"

The door burst open with a scream, and two women raced out of the warehouse.

Their black suits were scorched in several places, and bits of their hair had been burnt away, or curled up from the heat.

The two of them rolled past Kyouhei... but they still seemed to have some fighting spirit, as they both pointed their guns back towards the warehouse.

They were clearly abnormal guns, each of them having four barrels.

“I-It’s a monster?!”

The two of them pulled their triggers.

Two almost simultaneous *phut* sounds could be heard, a noise unlike any gun, as they launched wires with sparking needles on the ends.

They were non-lethal weapons that would disable their targets with high voltage.

Contrary to normal guns, there was no danger of shooting through walls with them, so they could be used even during a flight in a plane. They were being considered for adoption by many airline agencies and special forces to use against hijackers.

But...

Before they could reach their target, both wires were blown away, having been hit by a beam in mid-air.

“Pamil...” Kyouhei muttered in shock.

She was striding out from the warehouse, the intensity almost visible as sound effects floating around her. ‘She’ was, of course, the self-proclaimed body double android, Pamil.

Kyouhei had prepared himself for a gunfight, but still wanted to pull an about-face and head home at the sight.

“S-Shit...”

Apparently, that was their final shot, since they threw their tasers at her.

Pamil obliterated those with a beam in mid-air as well.

However, their goal was actually to have Pamil’s sights, the ‘Royal Beam,’ away from them. While Pamil’s blue eyes were facing the guns, the silhouettes

of the two women made a run for it and vanished between the warehouses.

“You shall not escape!” Pamil yelled, dashing to pursue them.

She was clearly in a rage against her kidnappers, and went past Kyouhei without sparing him a glance.

“Pamil,” he called, grabbing at her hand.

Her head shot back around to look at him.

The crystal-like spheres that had just obliterated the guns, those two blue eyes, caught Kyouhei in their glare.

Only then...

“Kyouhei?” She blinked, like she’d just woken from a dream.

She *really hadn’t* noticed him until now.

“Why...?” she began...

But that was where Pamil stopped. There were many things she could have followed the ‘why’ with, but she didn’t seem to know which to use.

Then, after a pause...

“Anyway,” he said, pulling at her hand, “let’s go *home* .”

For a while, she didn’t answer nor move, her eyes fixed not on Kyouhei, but on the gun in his hand.

“Why do you have that?”

Kyouhei’s eyes followed hers to the submachine gun in his hand.

“...I was in the middle of a survival game,” he replied somewhat unhappily after a short silence.

“...You were?”

“I was.”

“...Hm.”

Whether she accepted the rather unreasonable explanation or not, she nodded and took his hand again.

“Let’s go home then, Onii-chan.”

Her expression seemed somewhat happy, though it might have been his eyes playing tricks on him, as her faint smile seemed somewhat shy as well.

He let out another long sigh.

“Don’t call me that,” was his only response.

Chapter 7 - It's Still Tough Though

It was just before the first period.

"Achoo!" Kyouhei sneezed in the entrance to the first-year classroom.

It was the month Kisaragi, now known as February, traditionally a time of year to put more clothes on.

Midwinter... It was always the coldest part of the year, but the global warming stuff that's always in the news might have been why the temperature was all over the place.

Just when you thought that the unseasonably warm days would last, you'd get a sudden cold snap. There were more than a few people who made the mistake of dressing too lightly and got ill. Kyouhei was one of those.

"Hmm?" spoke a girl, blinking her blue eyes at him.

Her flowing golden hair and porcelain-white skin made her look like a work of art. Her face was innocent as well, almost adorable, and in a few years, anyone would call her beautiful.

However...

"What's wrong, Kyouhei? Are you having some kind of fit?"

"Whad abou' dis loogs like a fid? Id's just a sneeze," he told her, his voice announcing the cold he'd come down with. He coughed several times. "And I've had a temperature all morning..."

"Hmm?"

"Anyway, here."

Kyouhei held out a Japanese-English dictionary along with a normal one.

Pamil didn't have any real issues with everyday conversations, but she'd need a dictionary if she had problems with formal writing and essays.

Even Kyouhei had similar problems, though to a different extent, having come back to the country from abroad, so the two of them shared the dictionaries.

"You said you had a writing lesson today, right?"

“Hm, so you brought them all the way here? My thanks.”

Pamil’s behavior was what you might expect from someone calling themselves a princess’ body double. Even her thanks sounded like she was being magnanimous, and were almost haughty. Kyouhei was already fairly used to it by now and... with Pamil, at least, it was like a child standing on their tip-toes, and he almost enjoyed seeing it.

“Oh, Kyouhei,” Pamil started, suddenly remembering something, “the classroom has been strange this whole morning.”

“Huh?”

Kyouhei followed her gaze back into the classroom.

The whole classroom certainly did have an odd atmosphere, like they were all tense... Everyone was fidgeting and couldn’t calm down.

There were guys tidying their desks, others polishing their lockers with brand new cloths, and the girls were all in a corner having some kind of discussion. They looked like they were about to head off to battle.

“...Right,” said Kyouhei with a faint smile, “it’s already that time of year. I’d forgotten.”

“Time of year? Is there some kind of event going on?”

“Something like that,” he confirmed, the reluctant smile still on his face.

The first-year classrooms weren’t the only ones in a strange mood; the third years, occupied with exams, were tense in another way at the moment... but the first-and second-year classes were both in similar states.

The next day was a special day for both the boys and girls.

It was an event called a “crusade of love,” Valentine’s Day.

Though, even so, that didn’t mean that each and every person prepared for said crusade. There were also those maintaining their composure and ignoring it. It was impossible to tell at a glance whether they really didn’t care or were just keeping up a façade.

Incidentally...

Well, nothing to do with me.

Kyouhei was one of the former.

He'd spent his childhood outside of Japan, in countries that didn't even celebrate Valentine's Day. That special day just wasn't a cause for excitement for him. Last year, Kaoruko had given him chocolate, along with Shuuhei, but he still didn't really get it.

Originally, by the way, the day existed to commemorate a martyred Christian saint, Valentinus. Valentinus was known as the patron saint of lovers, and the day of his martyrdom, February 14th, took its name accordingly.

All that aside...

"Valentine's Day?"

"Yeah, you've heard of it, right?"

"...Indeed." Pamil nodded. "It's the radiation belt made of protons and electrons that the Geiger counter on Explorer 1 discovered. They say that the particles released in the solar wind are caught by the Earth's magnetic field and —"

"That's the Van Allen belts," Kyouhei cut off Pamil's dictionary recitation, fulfilling his duty as the one with common sense. "Anyway, why do you know about that but not Valentine's Day?"

"Hm, so it's not the anniversary of their discovery?"

"No, it's not. Well... it *is* a kind of celebration. It was a Christian holiday to begin with," Kyouhei explained.

"Hmmm, I see, a holiday."

"It isn't too important, so don't worry about it."

He had no idea what she might have done if he hadn't given her the warning.

"Got it." She nodded, quiet at the oddest of times.

Indeed, Pamil had no real concern over Valentine's Day at the time.

But...



A little time had passed since then, and it was lunchtime.

“I ledh my guardh downh...” mumbled Kyouhei congestedly on the way home.

He was *not* walking under his own power though.

He’d been put in some wheelbarrow and was being rolled down the road home. It felt like he’d been shoved in a pram, almost like an embarrassing punishment game.

“Huh? You say something, Daigorou?” asked the one pushing the wheelbarrow, a red-headed, green-eyed youth.

Obviously, they weren’t natural, they were the products of dye and colored contacts. He also had piercings and a chain around his wrist, along with an electric guitar pointlessly on his back. He wore an ordinary school uniform with all of that, which made the clothing look all the stranger. A school with proper morality committees and guidance counselors would probably sentence him to 200 years of hard labor.

This was Mizuhito Hibiki, a youth who adored flamboyance, and who was currently escorting Kyouhei home.



Kyouhei had suddenly gotten much worse around the third period and been taken to the school infirmary. Or, more accurately, his coughs and sneezes had gotten annoying and he'd been forcibly isolated there. Then, after a simple examination, he'd been sent home.

Kyouhei had been intending to go alone, but the nurse had called for someone to escort him when they saw his unsteady gait.

Then, Mizuhito, having been the one to take him to the infirmary for isolation, had become responsible for taking him home as well.

“Who you callin’ Daigorou...?”

Obviously, with Mizuhito being someone who'd fire a volley of fifteen nukes solely for the attention, they couldn't just travel normally. Instead, he had fetched a wheelbarrow from somewhere and shooed Kyouhei into it before starting to push it.

The passersby would look at them in surprise as they passed, as you might expect. The frowning and gossiping housewives were particularly painful and merciless.

To put it bluntly, it was torture.

When Mizuhito had started bawling a rock version of *Lone Wolf and Cub* , Kyouhei had tried to kill him with his gaze alone.

Shelving that, though...

“But, y’know, Kyouhei. How come you didn’t go to the infirmary earlier? You didn’t have to wait ’til you could barely walk. ...Unless you’re a masochist?”

“Like hell...”

Even Kyouhei's retorts were pitiful. His head was spinning, and he couldn't stop shivering. He probably had a pretty high fever.

The thoughts passing through his head were of Pamil. She was also the reason that he'd held on as long as he had.

...And it was all going so well...

Even she, lacking in common sense as she was, had been getting used to

school. She was in the same year as Sanae Murata and Youko Minebe, and looked to have made friends with them... While she was still over the top in terms of words and actions, it seemed like she was enjoying her school life without any major issues.

Kyouhei had hoped that she'd be able to learn how to live normally like that. Regardless of her life up until that point, when he thought of how she had arrived at the Nanbu household and the recent kidnapping, he couldn't imagine it was particularly pleasant.

It would be an ordinary, peaceful life.

Rejoicing at the most pedestrian of things.

Experiencing those pedestrian events.

But that, *that* was important.

Kyouhei had wanted to let Pamil experience the 'normalcy' that he had savored so much.

But... even if at a glance she seemed at home in her current situation, at her core—her proclaiming herself a body double android and letting loose with weird beams, fire, and electricity—she hadn't changed in the slightest.

Telling him not to worry would be absurd.

He couldn't keep watch 24/7, obviously, but so far he'd managed to intervene quickly if something had happened.

However, now Kyouhei was heading home first, which made it impossible for him to stop her. Even as he thought it would be fine, there was still a sense of unease that he couldn't shake towards the worst-case scenario.

I'm begging you, please behave... he muttered mentally as he was bounced around in the wheelbarrow.

"How about *Donna Donna* next?" Mizuhito sing-songed, unknowing of Kyouhei's feelings.

"I'll kill you... One day, you're dead."

Kyouhei wrote Mizuhito's name into his mental Vengeance Note.



Meanwhile, at school.

In the artificial darkness, created by closing each and every curtain in the food preparation room...

“Fu... fufufufufu... fufufufu... fufu,” a mysterious being, or really, a girl, laughed in a low voice as she worked alone.

It was suspicious, superbly so.

A child that caught sight of it would be traumatized for life.

She looked like a witch brewing a potion. She was hunched over the pot, stirring the bubbling dark liquid within like a woman possessed.

The girl’s name was Sanae Murata.

She was in the year below Kyouhei and was a maiden in love with him, though it might not have seemed like it.

She had a bobbed hairstyle, rare nowadays, and rounded glasses that looked like they might have been custom ordered.

She was certainly not ugly; if anything, her features were rather fair. If you looked more closely, you could even call her beautiful.

However...

“Ufufufufu... fufufufufu...”

The only people that might call her cute or pretty right now were probably rather perverse, or people with poor habits. The hooded black robe she was wearing drew attention far more than her base appearance.

Her overall look just yelled out that she was performing black magic. With said pot, whether you called it suspicious, bizarre, or dubious, she’d have been burned at the stake by the Inquisition during the Middle Ages.

Indeed.

“Fu, fufu... Add 80 grams of butter to the melted chocolate... brown and granulated sugar... then a little vanilla extract...”

While it sounded like an incantation, it was only a recipe for chocolate sweets. The smell emanating from the pot also supported that fact with its sweetness.

“...Fufu... fufufu...”

Sanae was ordinarily weak-hearted.

Due to her timidity, even though she'd fallen for Kyouhei, she couldn't approach and talk to him herself. Despite noticing her feelings, she'd only been able to keep watching him from behind things.

But recently...

Various coincidences had led to the two of them growing closer. Of course, it still wasn't anything more than a friendly acquaintance, but it was still a big step for Sanae.

Furthermore, whether it was heavenly disposition or a devil's trap, soon it would be Valentine's Day.

She'd be able to give him chocolate with her feelings, or she even could... and so on her soaring heart went.

Her fierce initial assumptions meant that she couldn't just stop, so she'd done absolutely everything she could as she toiled to make her Valentine's chocolate.

What a courageous maiden she was.

Even if she didn't look like it.

“And now,” she murmured, pushing up her steamed-up glasses, “the secret ingredient: charred newt...!”

“Stop right there,” came a voice, coupled with a chop to the back of Sanae's head.

She pitched forward and almost fell into the pot, but managed to stop herself and looked back.

“Ah, Youko-chan.”

Youko Minebe, a lively-looking girl with a ponytail, was standing behind her.

“I got worried, and what do I find? I thought you were making chocolate brownies?”

“I... I am...”

Youko let out a long sigh at Sanae’s pleading look.

“On what planet do they put charred newts in chocolate brownies?”

“It’s a traditional love potion...” Sanae told her sadly.

Well, it was true that both Japan and China had used newts and geckos for love potions and aphrodisiacs. Of course, it was associated with the occult, and their efficacy was highly suspect. (So don’t try it at home, kids.) “That’s just superstition. Do it properly. Pro-per-ly! You can’t just show off your weirdness like that.”

“Uhhh... but,” she muttered, looking up with puppy eyes, “Youko-chan... they say ‘Love is war, so forget cowardice and scruples; use each and every form of attack to win...’”

“Well, they do...” Youko admitted with a frown.

From her perspective, there were many other things Sanae should be doing. However, considering her lack of courage and stamina, her curses—or rather charms—were probably already the only way in which she could ‘attack.’

Sanae’s eyes welled with tears behind her glasses.

Even Youko was in a slightly unusual mood, so she just let out a long sigh and shrugged.

“Whatever, just do what you like. You need to finish up soon or lunch’ll be over. You still not done?”

“Y-Yeah...” she admitted hesitantly.

She glanced at a desk off to the side. There was a white piece of paper with the recipe for “Sanae Murata’s Special Chocolate Brownies” written on it.

It was something she’d found on the internet and added her own touches to.

“I’m actually... just... missing one last... ingredient...” she said, looking at the last item on the list.

● ● ●

Whether it was due to the cold medicine he’d bought on the way home or

simply because he'd laid down, when his eyes snapped open, Kyouhei was feeling much better.

Once Mizuhito had brought him home, Kyouhei hadn't done anything but sleep.

He was on the second floor (as he called the area of the catwalk).

The room, created with the bed, desk, and assorted furniture, was filled with darkness.

"Ugh..."

He grabbed his phone from by his pillow and checked the time. Half past four; he'd slept for quite a while.

Kyouhei held in the pain of his parched throat and sat up.

"...Pamil?"

As he did, he noticed the figure watching him silently from beside his bed.

It was a girl wearing a brown blazer. Indeed, she was Pamil.

It looked like she'd just gotten home from school. That was fine, and it didn't seem like she'd made any stops on her way back, so no problems there.

But...

Kyouhei's eyebrows suddenly furrowed. Something was strange. Pamil was standing differently than normal, though he wouldn't be able to put his finger on how...

"Pamil?"

"Hmm, you're up?" Pamil said. "I'd rather have finished while you were still asleep..."

"Huh? What are you—"

"Kyouhei," she interrupted him, staring at him with her blue eyes.

Her flowing golden hair gathered the small amount of light in the room; it looked like it was shining.

Her features made her look otherworldly, in a good way. She was like a fairy

or an angel in a fairy tale. She was grace personified, lacking the impurities of a mortal body.

“Kyouhei,” she repeated.

There was a crease between her eyebrows, as if she were deep in thought. Despite her expression almost being anguished, Pamil’s attractiveness still somehow made it seductive and strangely alluring.

“Wh-What?”

The unusual, serious demeanor that she currently had overwhelmed him and made his voice shake.

Who knew if Pamil noticed the state he was in.

But...

“Kyouhei...” she murmured heatedly as she reached a hand out to him.

There was a squeak... it was the springs of the mattress shifting as Pamil’s slight weight pressed on them.

“...Wha...”

Still mostly lying down, Kyouhei unconsciously backed away. Well, he tried, but there was nowhere to run on the bed.

“W-What are you...?”

“...I want it...” came her whispering, almost gasping, voice.

Kyouhei couldn’t respond. The fever had dulled his brain, so even if he tried to gather his thoughts, it refused to cooperate.

A string of random sounds and noises left Kyouhei’s mouth.

“Don’t run, Kyouhei.”

While it was phrased as an order, it sounded far more like a plea.

Pamil was kneeling on the bed and slowly moved her fingers to the buttons of her blazer, undoing them.

“It’ll all be over soon... just stay still...”

“Wai... Pamil...?!”

Anyone would have been agitated like this, with a girl crawling towards them and taking her clothes off. Even if he weren't, Pamil had been near his bed many times before—and nearly naked at that—so the fantasies would run wild regardless of his own volition.

“...Wh... What are you... tr...”

He could feel his heart trying to beat its way out of his chest.

Pamil was now crawling over him as he tried to escape, like a beast hunting its prey. Then, she leaned over him and stopped.

Her pale hand reached out to touch his forehead.

“Kyouhei... give me...”

Her fingertips slipped coquettishly into her skirt pocket.

And then...

“Give me your precious thing...”

As she spoke, she pulled something out of her pocket.

Kyouhei made a wordless noise of shock. Gripped in her dainty hand was a huge pair of scissors, the size telling of their intent to chop it off.

● ● ●

A little earlier.

“Kyouhei went home at lunch,” Pamil said as she listened to the bell sound to announce the end of the day.

The chiming was a sound that signified an end, whether it was the end of a lesson or of a break.

It was a strangely melancholic sound as it echoed, inviting grief.

“B-But...”

The dull noise of the electronic bell fit perfectly with the tragic, wavering expression on Sanae's face.

The depth of the shock she'd just taken had Sanae falling limply to the floor.

Pamil looked at her in question.

“Hm? What’s wrong? Anemia?”

Sanae’s pale face certainly was reminiscent of someone with anemia, but she shook her head in denial.

“What do I do...?” she whimpered. “I need it... by tomorrow...!”

Her expression was filled with... deep despair.

Naturally, Pamil had no idea what Sanae meant by ‘it,’ but even she could tell it was awfully important to her.

Therefore...

“Hmm,” she resolved, crouching down in front of Sanae. “What do you need?”

“Pamil-chan...?”

Pamil nodded decisively at Sanae as she blinked her teary eyes.

“Aiding suffering commoners is one of the duties of a royal. And you are our school friend, Sanae,” declared Pamil, clenching her fist. “You may be a school friend, but the important part is ‘friend’; you are our *friend*. What kind of princess cannot solve a single friend’s troubles? Sanae, do not hold yourself back, simply say what you need. Should it be within our power, it shall be granted.”

“...Pamil... chan...” she muttered, overcome with emotion.

With how withdrawn she was, and with her hobbies, Sanae had barely ever been explicitly told she was a friend. Youko wasn’t the type to say that kind of thing, so Pamil’s declaration was devastating, in a good sense.

“I-I can... really ask you...?”

Her face had softened together with her emotions, and Sanae shook as she spoke.

“Indeed. Ask, and it shall be given to you.”

Pamil stretched out a hand after gently giving her line, a line someone would yell about being plagiarized.

She was elegant, and from Sanae’s perspective, almost incorruptibly holy.

“A-Actually,” she stuttered astonishingly meekly. She was like a devotee confessing to her priest as she spoke of what ‘it’ was. “Before tomorrow... I need... Nanbu-senpai’s...”

● ● ●

And that’s how it had gone.

“I need it to answer my friend’s plea, Kyouhei.”

The scissors opened with a *swish* .

“I don’t get what you’re on about!”

“Hm?”

For Pamil, the whole thing was rather logical, but Kyouhei didn’t know the details, so he was obviously in the midst of fear and confusion.

A beautiful girl had been stripping as she crawled over to him, but then in the next instant pulled out a huge pair of scissors and demanded his “precious thing.”

What on Earth was she planning to cut with those scissors, too terrifying to be called stationery...? Just thinking about it made him feel faint.

“Just stay still and it’ll all be over. Bear with it, Kyouhei!”

“Waaaahhhh?! ”



Kyouhei sprang backwards, falling from the bed. The landing hurt, but this wasn't the time to wait for the pain to abate; he turned his back on Pamil and rushed away.

Pamil jumped from the bed and pursued.

"Mgh, why are you running, Kyouhei?!" she yelled, brandishing the scissors.

"Why do you think?!"

"Don't you feel sorry for Sanae?"

"What are you on about?!"

While he was feeling much better, he still had a cold, so he was unsteady on his feet. The length of their strides was different, so Pamil would have usually struggled to catch up, but today he was at a disadvantage. Moreover, Pamil was strangely motivated as well.

"You act like I'm asking for your life!"

"You may as well be!"

"It's okay! It won't hurt!"

"It will, it definitely will!" he yelled back, his unease growing.

...

The scissors opened with a *shinkt* .

The two silver blades shone as they hunted. A vital body part to men, exceedingly important in several ways, would be stuck between them.

The blades would close with no hesitation...

...

"This isn't ancient China...! Like hell I'd let you castrate me!" Kyouhei cried, forcing his ill body to run.

Bloodlust behind him!

Following his instincts, he threw himself to the side. Pamil's scissors passed through the space that his head had been occupying a moment prior.

A shiver ran down his spine—that would have taken his head off.

“What are you trying...?!”

The room might have been large, but they were still inside; there was a limit to where he could run. The piled up and abandoned goods also left him with very few places to step.

“Mmmm...”

Pamil’s scissors left afterimages as they were thrust forward, again and again. They were fast, scarily fast.

Kyouhei had experience in warzones of many countries though—his father had dragged him around the globe—thus, he was able to barely evade her advances.

From an outside perspective, it looked like an action movie, or close enough.

The scissors sliced repeatedly through the air. Every so often, however, one snip caught Kyouhei’s pajamas and cut through them.

While he was miraculously unhurt, his pajamas would soon be in tatters.

Then, the next thing to cut would be...

“...Where can I hide...?”

He frantically scanned the warehouse.

Finally, his eyes came to rest on a place. A room with a lock he could shut himself into.

The toilet.

“...There...!”

Still dodging Pamil’s repeated attacks, Kyouhei mustered his remaining strength and headed for the toilet.

If he made it, then he’d have the time, whether to work out how to escape or calm her down.

Unfortunately...

“Mmm!”

Pamil seemed to have realized what was going on.

She was too late though.

Before she could follow, Kyouhei got his hand on the toilet door and—

“Royal Beeeeeeaaaaammm!” came the roar, or rather, scream.

With a *pew* , the light passed him instantly and hit the door, blasting its top half, which landed on the floor in front of Kyouhei with a clatter.

“Geh?!” He couldn’t help but yell.

He’d forgotten; a door would be no obstacle to her, the walking embodiment of craziness and a self-proclaimed body double android. A bank vault or a nuclear bunker would have probably fared no better than soggy tissue against her.

To his right, a mound of goods.

To his left, a tall, tall wall.

To his front, the dead-end of the toilet.

To his rear...

“...Ugh.”

He didn’t want to look back... but he had nothing else he could do.

Pamil was standing calmly behind him, now with two pairs of scissors, both of them snipping away.

“Now...”

...I’m... I’m done for...

“It’s been a short life...” Kyouhei muttered in shock as Pamil advanced on him.

The silver blades descended mercilessly...

But right that instant...

A blast rent the air, echoing around the warehouse.

It was the doorbell. A bell in name only that Shuuhei had set to have the sound of a baryonic rifle from *Orbital Gear Grendam* .

He didn't know who it was, but they had perfect timing.

"Mmm? A guest?"

Pamil was distracted for a moment, her attention going to the door. Kyouhei didn't miss his opportunity.

"Kuh!"

With a quick dodge, Kyouhei rushed past her and ran to the door.

"Mgh! You won't escape, Kyouhei!!" she yelled, chasing after him.

Kyouhei was faster to open the shutter than she was to follow him though. It might have been a lot of hassle to open it from the outside, but it just took a single button press from the inside.

And then...

"Good eeeevening."

Behind the shutter was a calm woman.

Her long hair was tied up in a white ribbon, giving her a neat and tidy appearance. She was gorgeous, and had a soothing air to her that could put anyone at ease.

This was Kaoruko Houwa, the young proprietress of the Corvette, a familiar café for the Nanbu household.

"Oh?"

Kaoruko blinked slowly, like a panda almost. Though she didn't look like it, she was rather surprised.

Kyouhei was standing in front of her. He was almost half-naked, his pajamas sliced up from running away from Pamil.

He was exhausted from the fever and was gasping for breath. Said fever was also making his eyes water and nose run, so it looked like he was sniffing with tears.

And behind him... was Pamil.

She was also flushed from the chase, breathing heavily. On top of that, she

still had the huge scissors in her hands.

It was a rather ambiguous scene to walk in on.

However...

“Kaoruko-san, hel—”

“I heard you came down with a cold and collapsed,” she began with a hand on her cheek as she tilted her head, “so I came to check on you and nurse you some.”

As she spoke cheerily, she lifted a carrier bag. There was a spring onion poking out of it, so she was probably planning on making him a bowl of rice porridge.

But then...

“Pamil-chaaan, you can’t do that,” she scolded her, awfully nonchalantly for what was clearly her hunting him down. “You need to get consent first.”

“...What are you talking about?” Kyouhei groaned.

“Eh?”

Kaoruko blinked in question. She looked at Kyouhei’s clothes, askew and cut up, and then at Pamil’s scissors.

“That’s not what’s happening?” she asked.

“Well... what do you mean by ‘that’?”

“I was sure...” she started, “Pamil had taken advantage of her Onii-chan’s illness and tried to rape you.”

Kyouhei didn’t have the energy to make his protestations.

“That’s not it,” Pamil corrected in his place. Snipping the scissors repeatedly, the delusional blonde continued, “I need Kyouhei’s hair.”

“...Huh?”

Kyouhei let out a dull sigh at the unexpected claim.

● ● ●

Since long ago, it has been said that hair is a woman’s life.

In Japan, one form of taking responsibility was shaving one's head.

Well, because of that... Pamil had concluded that hair was precious to the Japanese.

Therefore...

"I told you to give me your precious thing...?" she said, showing no sign of remorse.

Kyouhei could only fall silent.

The three of them—him, Pamil, and Kaoruko—were around a dining table in a corner of the warehouse.

In the middle of the table were the scissors that Kyouhei had taken from her.

The state of his pajamas would have made his cold worse, so Kyouhei had gotten changed and put on a jacket. He also had an icepack on his head that Kaoruko had brought.

"Right, Kyouhei-kun, you need to drink loots of liquids with a cold."

Ignoring the strangely uneasy mood around the table, Kaoruko was her usual easygoing self as she placed a cup of warm tea in front of him.

Kyouhei's throat was parched, so he took it gratefully.

"Fank you ve'y muh..."

Kaoruko smiled gently.

"No problem."

Her smile eased Kyouhei's exhausted (in many ways) mind and body.

He was rather happy that she'd come out of her way to check on him despite having her café to run.

Well, let's leave that for now.

"What did you think I meant?" asked Pamil.

"Ah... well... you know."

"I didn't think you'd be so against it. Is hair really that important to Japanese people?"

“Ah... you know... um...”

Kyouhei couldn't explain the exact specifics, and so only stammered.

“But why do you need Kyouhei-kun's hair?” Kaoruko asked, saving him.

“It's not me that needs it, it's Sanae.”

“...Murata-san?” Kyouhei asked, his brows furrowing at the unexpected name.

“She wanted your hair, but couldn't get it because you'd gone home. She was really upset.”

“So you were getting it for her?” Kaoruko clarified.

“Indeed.” She nodded deeply.

“But... why does she want my hair...?” Kyouhei pondered. “I don't remember doing anything she'd hold a grudge over...”

Most people that had a basic knowledge of Sanae's hobbies and tastes would probably realize she wanted it to put some curse or something on Valentine's chocolates. As established earlier, though, Kyouhei didn't have the slightest bit of interest in the festivities, and was rather unsociable.

He still hadn't even noticed Sanae's feelings towards him, so while the connection from hair to curse was fairly easily made... he couldn't then connect it to Valentine's or chocolate.

“Have you really never done it?” Kaoruko asked. “You've never taken a girl for everything she has and then thrown her away?”

“I haven't,” Kyouhei denied flatly, “I'm not my dad.”

“Oh, but Shuuhei-san wouldn't do that either.”

She was strangely confident saying that in front of his son, but that wasn't really relevant here.

“Anyway... you should say that kind of thing first. Anyone would run away if you came at them with scissors.”

“Hmm, so that was why.”

“Yes, that was why. Man...”

Kyouhei let out a sigh.

From Pamil’s perspective, she was just trying to help Sanae, but that was what had caused the whole incident.

Taking that into account, he couldn’t stay angry.

Trying to help someone without weighing the benefits... was an important thing. She might have been brought up poorly, or might actually be an android. Either way, her common sense was completely missing, and she was slightly off when it came to expressing emotions too.

Precisely because she was like that, Kyouhei wanted her to keep those normal, everyday feelings of wanting to help someone, treasuring them and being grateful.

And so...

“How much do you need then? Is a single strand enough?”

Pamil’s face shone at the question.

● ● ●

The postbox in the fourth block was the rendezvous spot.

The sun had already set and the street was dark, but an electric light on a telephone pole was casting light at the ground. There was a girl standing glumly, like she was trying to get in close to the postbox.

“Sorry to keep you waiting,” Pamil called to her, making her turn to face her. The girl, wearing the navy blue coat the school specified and a white scarf was, of course, Sanae.

“Pamil-chan...!”

Pamil walked up to her and handed over a folded white handkerchief to the beaming girl.

Ever so slowly, Sanae took and unfolded it. Encased within was a single, exceedingly thin, dark line.

“Your request.”

“Th-Thank you...!”

Overcome with emotion, she carefully refolded the handkerchief and put it in her breast pocket.

Pamil looked at her in slight confusion.

“Why did you need it though?” she asked.

“Ah... it’s... um... Tomorrow’s Valentine’s Day... and... I wanted to give... Senpai... some chocolate... with a charm... not a curse...” she muttered, her face bright red.

She was as shy and pure as usual, but in a slightly off-fashion way—again, as ever.

“Mm, Valentine’s? Oh yeah, Kyouhei—I mean, Onii-chan mentioned it this morning. Something about it being a holiday to commemorate a Christian saint that was martyred in Rome. So, is school closed tomorrow?”

“Eh...?” Sanae blinked at the deluge from Pamil. “Do you not know about Valentine’s Day... Pamil-chan?”

“Mm? Is it not a festival?”

“Ah... well, that’s... not exactly wrong...”

It wasn’t surprising that Pamil was unaware of what Valentine’s Day was about in Japan.

Giving chocolate had started in the U.K., but it was Japan that had limited it to girls doing the gifting to show their feelings. Flowers and cards were more common in Europe, and there wasn’t the restriction of it just being from women to men.

Anyway.

“U-Uhm... uhm...”

Sanae was in a tizzy from the embarrassment. Pamil asked again, but she couldn’t explain.

After all, she was Kyouhei’s sister, and having made all this fuss, Sanae couldn’t claim she was doing it out of obligation. Furthermore...

Pamil-chan's... so cute and beautiful.

For a maiden in love like Sanae Murata, Pamil was like a slumbering dragon. She didn't want to accidentally prod her and gain another rival for love.

"U-Uhm... uhm... y-yeah! In Japan, Valentine's Day—" Sanae explained desperately.

"Mm, I see." Pamil nodded, folding her arms. "Japan really has some moving customs..."

"R-Right. It's a wonderful tradition of Japan, and... um..."

Sanae smiled vaguely, mentally apologizing to Pamil as she did.

But then...

"In that case, I'll have to join in!" Pamil declared, laboring under some misconception.

● ● ●

Beep beep beep.

An electronic noise roused Kyouhei from his sleep as he grumbled sleepily.

Assuming that the alarm on his phone was going, he picked it up. The screen showed 7:10 and was silent.

He finally realized where the noise was coming from.

Now that he considered it, when he woke up earlier, he'd put a thermometer under his arm, then fallen back asleep while it was taking its measurement.

Looking at its display, he read the temperature. 36.8°C. A little high, but in the range of normal temperature.

"It eased quicker than I thought. I guess the medicine worked... or maybe it was 'cause Kaoruko came and helped."

Kaoruko had made rice porridge for him after all the commotion yesterday.

Kyouhei mostly cooked for himself or ate out, so the (not quite) homemade taste was a rarity for him. Despite the difference, he'd really appreciated it.

There were, of course, other reasons, like his youth letting him bounce back

quickly, the medicine, his activity the night before promoting recovery, and other such explanations. Regardless, it was nicer for his male instincts to consider it the effect of Kaoruko nursing him.

He still had a bit of a blocked nose and cough... and felt a little tired, but he was much better than yesterday.

“Kyouhei, are you up?”

Pamil had climbed the stairs on light feet. She was already dressed in the school’s tawny blazer.

“...Ah, yeah.”

She was ready and eager to go to school, it seemed.

Kyouhei got out of bed, deciding to change into his uniform.

He’d rather have taken it easy for another two or three days, but the chaos yesterday had made him not want to let Pamil out of his sight. Health starts with the mind after all, and being in school, where he could intervene, would be far better in that respect than just worrying at home.

“Kyouhei,” called Pamil somehow formally, interrupting those thoughts, “do you know what day it is today?”

“What day it is...?” He looked at his phone again, checking the date: February 14th. “It’s Valentine’s Day...”

He did indeed know that, but putting it into words did make it feel more special.

“Indeed, it is Valentine’s Day across the nation. So, take this.”

Pamil thrust forward a brown thing as she spoke strangely haughtily.

A quip about her giving him a shelled shellfish passed through his mind, but he was more surprised at getting chocolate from Pamil.

He looked at her again, the crazy girl with a proud expression on her face.

“Sanae told me that it’s a day where you give presents to people who have helped you.”

“Ah... yeah, I guess.”

She'd slightly missed the point, but it wasn't really wrong per se. Nowadays, about 90% of the chocolate was given solely out of obligation between friends of different sexes.

"As a royal, and as an android, I cannot allow my bed and board to go unacknowledged, so I decided to follow this wonderful Japanese tradition."

"Hahhh."

"And you're always helping me, so go ahead!"

Apparently, she wanted him to eat it right now.

Honestly, he was lost for a moment, but...

"Thanks, Pamil... I appreciate it." He smiled, accepting the brown plate from her and taking a bite.

Then he froze.

Was it sticky?

Slimy?

His teeth buried themselves in something soft, far from the sensation he expected from chocolate, and something filled his mouth.

It hadn't just melted.

"...Um, Pamil-san?" he began.

The taste was wrong. The flavor filling his mouth was spicy and oily.

It was like he'd just put a curry base straight into his mouth.

"What?"

"This is like... Actually, is it really just a curry base?!"

"Indeed," answered Pamil, smiling widely and completely missing the point. "You like curry, right?"

"Well, I do, but..."

An uneasy sweat ran down his back.

He'd been careless.

Due to his blocked nose, he'd not been able to tell by the scent... and he'd just assumed it was chocolate from its appearance. Pamil had not once actually called it chocolate.

His experience so far let Kyouhei infer what had happened.

She'd probably missed some of the information and not checked what the brown thing girls used as a gift for Valentine's Day was. Therefore, she'd decided on a curry base.

She hadn't yet realized the mistake. As proof, her proud declaration:

"Is it good? I got the most expensive one from the shops."

She is actually grateful... probably, Kyouhei thought as the sweat soaked his back. She didn't have the kind of personality to bully people like that; she was simply showing her appreciation.

The chocolate wasn't the important bit. The strange, bizarre, mysterious, queer, loopy girl could indeed thank someone. She had normal, everyday feelings... *that* was the important bit.

It might have seemed pointless to most people, but Kyouhei had to treasure it.

So...

"...Yeah, thanks," Kyouhei said the only thing he could as he chewed and swallowed the hardened curry base.

Afterword Greetings, I'm the light novelist Sakaki.

This is the first volume of *Fake Fake*, serialized in *Novel Japan*. I've happened to publish novels with HJ Bunko that involve princesses one after another now, and I didn't mean to. Well, it wasn't exactly a coincidence either.

Fake Fake wasn't actually something I came up with completely alone. There was actually something—an idea, or inspiration if you will—that gave me a push to write it.

Another author I know saw the title of my best-known work, *Scrapped Princess*, and said this:

"Man, she's a princess and she's scrapped, so I was sure some revolution had taken out the royal family, so they'd thrown away some body double android they didn't need, and the main character found it."

...Isn't that funny? Haha.

So I asked him to let me use that idea, and once he said yes, put the characters and background into a book: this book.

Actually... I wrote this novel as an experiment using assistants.

It's awfully difficult to specify which bits used assistants, so I'll leave that out, but I used the system anime scripts use for reference.

At least with a short story, whether I use assistants or not doesn't make much difference in how much effort it takes. I can finish a short story in two days on average, or three days on the longer side. Shortening that by about half a day is not really worth noting.

Nevertheless, I wondered if intentionally mixing other people's thoughts (and feelings) into parts of the process would let me get charms into the book that I couldn't alone. I came up with that idea on a previous occasion, when I used the artist's illustrations to change my characters. Basically, I mixed in elements that others thought of into my characters. I think it turned out rather fun.

At the same time, I hope that my assistants (former students) can learn my methods in storytelling, directing, and other things by seeing the process.

Incidentally... because of how many books I publish, you see people saying stuff like “Are there three Sakakis?” or “His students become Sakaki No. 2 and 3,” but in the end, the manuscripts are all written by me, just so you know, haha.

Well, I want to explore all the possibilities of light novels, not just with this work.

At any rate, experiment or not, and whatever the author thinks, light novels are all about the fun for the reader; popularity is everything. Particularly for those serialized in magazines, which will be canceled if they aren’t popular. Hopefully, this series will get more volumes too.

Finally, I give my thanks to Mr. Matsuoka, who provided the opportunity to serialize this work.

I also thank Ms. Fujita, who gave this series far more refined illustrations than it deserved. I *also, also* thank the editors, proofreaders, printers, and everyone else involved with making this book a reality.

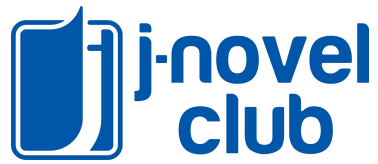
And last but not least, I give my thanks to the readers who subscribed to read this novel.

Until the next volume.

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Ichiro Sakaki, 9/3/2007.



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Wild Times with a Fake Fake Princess: Volume 1

by Ichiro Sakaki

Translated by MPT

Edited by Eric Bravo Górriz

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