

A SISTER'S ALL YOU NEED.

YOMI HIRASAKA

Illustration by Kantoku



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Chihiro (cute version)







♪ The Novelist Is a
Little-Sister-Obsessed
F██k III



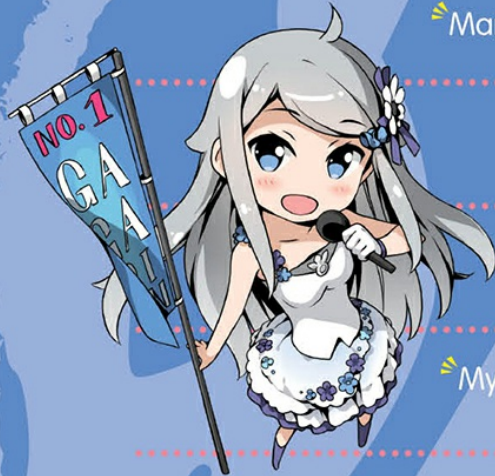
♪ June 6

♪ The Manga Version



♪ Face Time

♪ Manga Artist Versus Illustrator



♪ The Near Miss

♪ Nudity Strikes Back

♪ My Little Sister Can't Be Cute
(At All)



♪ How a Tax Accountant Kicks Back

♪ Chronica Chronicle (Part 3)



♪ The Omen

♪ Bonus Track
The Life of a Light Novelist



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4



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A Sister's All You Need.

Vol. 4

Yomi Hirasaka

Illustration by KANTOKU

Translation by Kevin Gifford Cover art by KANTOKU

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IMOTO SAE IREBA II. Vol. 4

by Yomi HIRASAKA

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Contents

[Cover](#)

[Insert](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[The Novelist Is a Little-Sister-Obsessed F██k III](#)

[June 6](#)

[The Manga Version](#)

[Face Time](#)

[Manga Artist Versus Illustrator](#)

[The Near Miss](#)

[Nudity Strikes Back](#)

[My Little Sister Can't Be Cute \(At All\)](#)

[How a Tax Accountant Kicks Back](#)

[Chronica Chronicle \(Part 3\)](#)

[The Omen](#)

[Bonus Track: The Life of a Light Novelist](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Yen Newsletter](#)

A SISTER'S ALL YOU NEED.

ITSUKI HASHIMA

A novelist seeking to devise the ultimate in little-sister characters.

CHIIRO HASHIMA

Itsuki's younger brother. The perfect human being.

NAYUTA KANI

A novelist prodigy 100 percent driven by her love for Itsuki.

MIYAKO SHIRAKAWA

A college student the same age as Itsuki.

HARUTO FUWA

A dashing novelist who made his debut alongside Itsuki.

KENJIRO TOKI

Itsuki's editor.

SETSUNA ENA

A genius illustrator. Pen name: Puriketsu.

ASHLEY ONO

A tax accountant.

KAIKO MIKUNIYAMA

A manga artist.

The Novelist Is a Little-Sister-Obsessed F—k III

It was morning when I was awoken by the chirping of the little-sister bird out the window. “Tweet, tweet! It’s morning, big brother!”

As I rubbed my eyes, my little-sister mattress invited me back to bed. “...Let’s stay together just a little bit longer, my brother!” But I brushed off her temptation as I climbed out of my little-sister bed and whisked opened my little-sister curtains.

“Ooh, not so rough!” they squeaked as I enjoyed the light of the little-sister sun through the little-sister window.

“Good morning, Bro!”

“Yeah, good morning. Radiant as ever today, huh?”

It was a lovely little sister kind of day. I marveled at my luck as I opened my little-sister door and walked out of the room, taking step after step upon the soft, supple skin of the little-sister stairway.

Down in the living room, my breakfast had already been laid out upon my little-sister table.

“Breakfast is ready, dear brother!”

Fried sunny-side up little-sister eggs, little-sister sausage links, a thick slice of little-sister toast, and a small bowl of little-sister salad. Before I dug in, I stopped by the bathroom, washing my face with the chilled little-sister water that flowed from the little-sister tap.

“Are you awake?” my little-sister mirror asked.

“Yeah.” I nodded.

“In that case,” the little-sister washcloth chimed in, “hurry up and dry your face off with me! Come on, rub your big-brother liquids all over my fabric!”

“Sure,” I said, following her instructions before sitting at my dining-room little-sister chair.

“Enjoy your sisters, Bro!”

“Thank you.”

I stabbed my little-sister fork into a little-sister sausage, brought it to my mouth, and chewed.

“Oooh! I’m getting all torrrn apawt in my big bwother’s mouf!”

The sensation of my little sister’s juices melted its way into my mouth, filling it with joy. My little-sister cooking never fails to satisfy.

When I inserted my knife into the little-sister eggs, the yellow little-sister yolk waiting inside promptly oozed out onto the plate. A few slices of crisp, juicy little-sister bacon were lurking underneath. I brought both together to my lips, the mellow taste of the little-sister eggs and the saltiness of the little-sister bacon melding together in sublime harmony. It almost felt like two little sisters were engaged in a nude dance performance on the tip of my tongue.

“Aww, Bacon-chan and I are melting together inside our brother’s mouth!”

“This feels so e-lec-tri-fy-ing! Now we’re even more delicious than ever for our big brotherrrrr!”

I enjoyed the gastronomic tryst for several moments before smearing my little-sister jam all over my little-sister toast, soaking it into all those little-sister nooks and crannies.

“Agh! Touching skin to skin with someone besides my elder brother... It is a disgrace to my very psyche!”

“Aw, hold out a little, Toast-chan! This is all so we’re tastier than ever for him!”

“Ngh! Stop this at once, Jam! I—I am positively dripping!”

The intensely flavored little-sister jam and the nicely crisped little-sister toast formed the perfect duo. In the blink of an eye, they had both disappeared into my stomach.

My little-sister-laden breakfast complete, I changed into my little-sister uniform, hoisted up my little-sister messenger bag, and left my little-sister house. “Have fun at school!!!” I heard all the little-sister-infused objects in my house thunder in unison as I pounded the little-sister pavement.

So began my day-to-day life, awash in all that little-sisterdom had to offer.

.....

.....And so on with this nonsensical exposition for the next thirty pages.

“.....Ugh...”

After somehow managing to wade through it all, Kenjiro Toki sighed, the fatigue clear on his face, and tossed the manuscript on the low *kotatsu* table. In front of him, sitting on the floor, was novelist Itsuki Hashima—owner of this apartment—eagerly gauging his editor’s reaction.

“Wellllll?” he asked, snickering as he flashed an even more shamelessly impudent smile than he usually wore.

“...I’m not sure what you mean by ‘well,’ but I think my usual response of ‘What the hell?’ is about right for this one.”

“You... You can’t be serious...”

“Why’re you acting so surprised...?”

The look of near-terror on Itsuki’s face even scared Toki a little.

He had just finished reading the introduction to *Life With a Little Sister*, Itsuki’s latest potential project. It was a love story, apparently, set in a world where everything’s sisters, and reading this sample, the actual text didn’t seem to make any more sense than the synopsis Itsuki had provided earlier. It was much easier to slot into the horror genre, really. Itsuki hadn’t written anything beyond this intro yet—the project hadn’t been green-lit—but in cases like this, where the description in the proposal didn’t really bring the point of the series across, publishers would occasionally ask the author to spec-write a few opening pages or some of the more climactic scenes.

“...So...is that a no for this one, too...?”

Toki solemnly nodded at Itsuki’s low semi-mumble.

“...Yeah. It’s a no.”

Over the past several months, Itsuki had been focused on putting out new spec sheets like this one, only to have none of them pass muster.

“Ugh, not again... Next time, though! Next time, I’ll come up with such an incredibly amazing little-sister novel that I’ll *force* you to bend to my will!”

“You’re not gonna bend me to do anything,” Toki pointed out. “You aren’t submitting this to your editor; you’re submitting it to your readers. And, I mean, it’s great that you’re coming up with new ideas, but don’t you think you should be focusing on *All About* right now? You got *Sisterly Combat* on your plate, too.”

Itsuki was currently penning two series in tandem—*Sisterly Combat* and *All About My Little Sister*—and the other day, he had been informed that an anime adaptation of the latter had been approved. There was no staff in place yet; it’d be a while before the public announcement. But Itsuki had a lot to do before the anime-related work started to *really* come in. The quality of his writing couldn’t afford to drop, of course, but he also had to consider future plotlines to keep things exciting, flesh out parts of the world that he had kept vague up to now, and get ahead on his writing (for *Sisterly Combat*, too) so his publishing pace didn’t slacken when it mattered most.

“What’re you talking about?” Itsuki lashed back. “I want to announce something new while we’ve got that momentum from the anime, and of *course* I’m gonna make *Sisterly* more exciting than ever, too. I want the world to know more than just *All About*. I want ’em to know there’s this guy Itsuki Hashima out there, conjuring up all this stuff!”

“Yeah...”

He had a point. Launching a new series right when another series from the same author was enjoying hype from its anime version was an effective business strategy.

“...I guess you actually *do* think, huh?”

Itsuki winced at Toki. “What’s *that* supposed to mean?”

Toki sighed. “Well, if that’s your line of thought, I’m not gonna stop you from brainstorming new ideas...but are you sure you got this? Because I know you’re

aware, but moving three different series along while handling all the work for the adaptations isn't exactly easy."

"Hah! I've *totally* got this!" shouted Itsuki with a self-confident smile. "As long as my love for my little sister keeps burning, there's no such thing as impossible!"

"Except you don't have one." Toki rolled his eyes. "But you're not wrong. As long as you've got your crazy yen for that trope, maybe there really *is* nothing stopping you."

As much as Itsuki's obsession made even his own editor take a step back, he was an established novelist with a following dedicated enough to finally score him an anime adaptation, and Toki had to admit it: He was really something.

Plus, Toki was truly glad for one other thing.

Thank heavens he doesn't really have a little sister.

BOOK PROPOSAL

LIFE WITH A LITTLE SISTER (tent.)

CONCEPT

A vast, sisterrific sci-fi slice-of-life romantic comedy set in a world where anything and everything is your little sister!

CHARACTERS

Narrator

The main character, a seventeen-year-old in high school. In a world where everything is a little sister, he is the only “big brother” in existence.

House

The narrator’s house and domain.

Mom

The narrator’s forty-four-year-old mother.

Childhood friend

The narrator’s little sister, a lifelong friend since childhood. Male.

President

The narrator’s little sister, the bespectacled class president.
The glasses she wears are also his little sister.

Other

The narrator’s desk, chair, bed, bag, water, roads, sun, clouds, food, and everything else are his little sister.

Synopsis

One day, sisterly elements from another dimension suddenly appeared in our own, turning all objects and concepts into little sisters. The narrator, the only thing in this universe unaffected by these elements, attempts to live out his normal life in a realm where everything around him treats him as their big brother—but what happens when things seem to fall apart?

Editor’s Comment

Sorry, but reading this alone, I just don’t get it. I kind of have the impression this could turn into something awesome, though, so could you maybe try writing thirty or so pages for me?

June 6

Today, June 6, marked Itsuki Hashima's twenty-first birthday.

Last month, his little circle of friends held a surprise party for Miyako Shirakawa's birthday. However, given that Itsuki and his pals almost always had their get-togethers at his apartment, there wasn't much chance to set up a surprise anything for him, so they all decided to just do what they always did. The *kotatsu* table was filled with Itsuki's favorites—shrimp and chili sauce, some of Chihiro's patented North-Meets-South Spring Rolls, seafood fried rice—and the entire room was filled with mouthwatering aromas.

But today, they were all celebrating more than just another year checked off Itsuki's life.

"Happy birthday and anime series, Itsuki!"

""""Congrats!!""""

Nayuta was the first to toast his good fortune, followed by Haruto, Miyako, and Chihiro in unison.

"Bah-ha-ha! Thank you, everyone! Cheers to the first steps into a new era of my life!"

He gulped down his beer, spirits high. It was Gouden Carolus Cuvée van de Keizer Red, a special ale for a special occasion, and one he had last sampled when they were all here to watch Episode 1 of Haruto Fuwa's *Chevalier of the Absolute World*. That night, sadly, resulted mostly in regret, but tonight was different. They were just toasting to the news itself; there was nothing to rate and berate yet.

"Pfaahhh... Damn, this Keizer Red's good..."

Haruto smiled and gulped down his own glass, as if trying to dilute his bitter

memories.

In addition to the five people surrounding the table, there were two others: tax accountant Ashley Ono and editor Kenjiro Toki. Having seven people in a fairly budget-conscious apartment made things crowded, forcing Ashley to seat herself quietly on the bed and Toki to lean against the door frame between the living room and kitchen.

Ashley flashed an eerie smile. “Tee-hee-hee! Now you’ll have more income than ever before, Itsuki. Time for your accountant to show you *what she’s really* made of.”

“Yeah, I can’t believe something my own brother made is gonna be on TV... That’s so cool.”

“It sure is,” chimed in Miyako. “I guess even a sister-obsessed deviant like him’s pretty amazing if he can pull *that* off.”

“Hee-hee!” snickered Nayuta to the side, glugging down her root beer and acting a little elated herself. “I can’t wait to get a taste of Itsuki’s new, improved twenty-one-year-old dick!”

Despite not imbibing any alcohol, Nayuta always had a habit of acting a bit unsteady, as if she'd had a few too many. Ever since Itsuki had wrapped up the manuscript for *All About My Little Sister* Volume 4, the trend had grown even stronger.

“Um,” Miyako ventured in an attempt to change the subject, “so how does it feel to get an anime?”

Itsuki's face turned serious. "Hmm. Well, this just, you know, fell into my lap, so I can't get too excited about it." He curled the edges of his lips up for the admiring Miyako. "Heh... I mean... It's all just a bunch of coincidences. Just one of those things... I was *chosen* by this era, if you will..."

“Huh?”

“Heh-heh-heh... A chosen one, designated to shoulder a vast destiny by pure happenstance... I must remain strong, and modest! I can't let myself get carried away! I must fulfill the fate meted out to me, heh-heh-heh... eh-heh... Fah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-haaaaaaa!!”

“Wow, shut up! Sorry I ever gave you a compliment.”

“Itsuki...”

Miyako and Chihiro gave each other exasperated stares as the not-at-all-modest Itsuki lost himself in his nefarious laughter.

“Yeah! That’s the spirit, Itsuki! You’re the torchbearer for a new generation! A savior for the world of entertainment! Literary history’s gonna be divided into ‘pre-Hashima’ and ‘post-Hashima’ eras from now on!”

“Hee-hee-hee. Quite true, Nayuta. He’s the Golden Boy of our generation. We’ve finally found someone who can put Shakespeare where he deserves—in the past!”

“Ha-ha-ha-ha! That’s right! Keep it going! But let’s not stick me with a nickname that’ll make me feel like I’m gonna get arrested, okay? I got a rep to maintain!”

Itsuki’s laughter grew even louder at Nayuta’s and Ashley’s goading.

“.....”

But even as they and the rest of the room smiled and carried on, Toki looked oddly depressed over something. “You know,” he half growled at Itsuki, “this was *supposed* to be a secret between you, me, and the editors until the official announcement. How many goddamn people did you tell anyway?”

Itsuki just breezily smiled back. “Aw, don’t get so worked up! I didn’t say anything on a blog or Twitter or anything!”

“You could at last *pretend* to be sorry...”

Haruto grinned at Toki as furrows appeared between the editor’s eyebrows. “Yeah, I was so excited when *my* anime got confirmed that I kinda told Itsuki, too, so...”

“You too, Fuwa? Ughhh... Well, it’s not like that’s unusual, I guess. I understand it, but...” Towa sighed. “...I suppose most writers tell someone, at least, the moment they hear about the anime. I get why, but...”

It’s not an uncommon sight on Twitter for someone to announce the anime version of their own novel series and for other authors to retweet with

abandon and send congratulatory replies, but—more often than not—those authors were already aware of the news quite a while ago. To put it another way, if they *didn't* know about it until the official announcement, the resulting jealousy and envy would make it impossible to send any sort of well wishes at all. Receiving advance word grants them time to clear their minds, compose themselves, and offer blatantly false congratulations on social media. *(This reflects the personal opinion of the author and does not represent the official position of his publisher. -Ed)*

“Wa-ha-ha! Exactly! You know no novelist is ever gonna hide the secret! So don't worry about it!” Itsuki cried with a smile.

“See? The way you bite back at me without a single trace of regret! *That's* what pisses me off!” Toki wailed before consuming the remainder of his drink in one gulp.

“Heh-heh-heh...” Itsuki took the hint and picked up Toki's glass to refill it. “Well, KenKen, I hope you'll be my editor for volumes and volumes to come!”

“Pfft. You *wish* you could get rid of me.” Toki grabbed Itsuki's glass to top him off in return. “Just remember, you're gonna be busier than ever from here on in. You better be prepared.”

“You know,” Miyako observed as she watched all this, “they bicker constantly, but Itsuki and Mr. Toki have a pretty good relationship, don't they? I wonder if every author-editor collab is like that.”

“Mmm,” Haruto replied first, “I've never really been *that* buddy-buddy with my editor. We're still pretty formal with each other.”

“Yeah, same with mine,” added Nayuta. “I mean, we hardly even meet up much at all.”

“This place being right by the editorial office helps, but I'd say it's pretty rare for an editor like Mr. Toki to show up at one of his authors' birthday parties.”

“Wow, really?” Miyako asked, nodding.

“Were you interested in becoming an editor, Miyako?” Haruto asked.

“Mmm, maybe a little...”

“Oh, I hope you do!” said Nayuta, eyes shining. “If *you* could be my editor, Myaa, that would be so awesome!”

Miyako smiled. “Yeah, but the market for publishing jobs is, like, supercompetitive, isn’t it? I dunno if I’d even have a chance...”

“Ooh, yeah,” Haruto said, stealing a glance at Toki. “A few of my college classmates applied at publishers, but I think all of them got turned down. The way I heard it, they only hire the best of the best from the top universities... supposedly, anyway...”

The “best of the best” in the room was now loudly arguing with Itsuki, very quickly letting the alcohol take him.

“I *told* you! The ideas you’re throwing at me lately are just... I mean, you’ve got the little-sister cutesiness going for you, but your stuff is getting *totally* deviant!”

“Ah, so you mean it’s transcending all boundaries of the genre? Ha-ha-ha! Glad to see we’re in agreement!”

“That’s not a compliment! The sisters you’re depicting in your work lately are no longer ‘sisters’ as defined by conventional wisdom! They’re something...*sinister*! Repulsive!”

“What?! How *dare* you call my sisters repulsive! *You’re* the one who paid for time with that lady at the sex shop who looked like some deep-sea hag straight out of the Palace of the Dragon King!”

“Don’t, don’t, don’t remind me of that, you ass! I paid so much money for that deep-sea hag who looked nothing like the photo, and they told me I couldn’t swap out for another woman, so I just sat there on the mat staring into space and waiting for time to go by—do you have any idea how that feels?!”

“No, I don’t, dumbass! It’s your fault for going to places like that!”

“Don’t dismiss them out of hand just because you’ve never been to one, you hyper-virgin novelist! Here, lemme take you to one for your twenty-first birthday present!”

“Whoa, hell no! Absolutely not!”

“Oh, don’t be a wimp! They’re nice! ...Um, assuming you go to a decent place! Like the one in Shibuya I’m a member of—”

“Shut *up*! I don’t wanna hear about it!”

“Well, if you’re too embarrassed to go right into a soapland-type place, you could visit a *sentai* first.”

“A what?”

“A *sentai*. You know, the two characters for ‘wash’ and ‘body.’ Basically, you go there, and this girl washes you up.”

“That’s still basically a sex shop, isn’t it?!”

“No! You’re not going there to get off; you’re there to get cleaned up and feel good while you—”

“Y-you know, I could probably sue you right now for sexual harassment, right, you deep-sea-diving editorial garbage?”

“I didn’t *choose* to go deep-sea diving! I just didn’t want the money to go to waste, so I tried to use up as much of the time as possible!”

Miyako, Nayuta, and Haruto watched with cold, composed eyes as this high-volume exercise in vulgarity unfolded.

“Gross... We’ve got a minor here, guys...”

“So that’s the ‘best of the best’? A top college grad who fended off all the competition? I hope KenKen’s dick falls off.”

“Hey, you know, being an editor’s a hard job...and Itsuki isn’t the only problem child Mr. Toki has to deal with, so...you know, I think we should allow him to let off a little steam when he’s drunk. Besides, there are lots of total assholes out there who still do a great job in their work. Your academic history doesn’t say anything about your personality, so...”

“You’re being kind of harsh, too, aren’t you, Fuwa?”

Then they fell silent, watching Toki passionately lecture Itsuki on all manner of unsavory things, as if the three of them were on a field trip to the local landfill.



After all the food and drink were thoroughly enjoyed, the attendees each gave Itsuki their birthday presents. Haruto's was a body pillow cover with a little-sister anime character on it, the front depicting her smiling in a maid outfit and the back showing her in the same dress, except with about 80 percent of it ripped off her body. No nipples were drawn in, which may have been why the character looked slightly embarrassed, but vaguely happy if you looked at her the right way.

"...Say, did this maybe come as a preorder bonus for a porn game or something?"

Haruto flashed a slightly distressed smile. "Yeah, so? This isn't a character I like, so I don't need it, but I can't bring myself to throw it out. This way I'm rid of it, and you've got another piece of collectible sister merchandise. It's a win-win, right?"

"...I don't know anything about this," Itsuki said as he dubiously regarded the half-naked character, filing away the game's title in his mind for potential purchase.

Miyako's gift was a coffee mug with the Chinese character for "little sister" written on it. "I found it at the home-goods store," she explained, "so I thought you'd like it. It was kind of embarrassing to bring it to the register, I hope you appreciate it."

"Y-yeah," Itsuki ventured as he looked at it. "I know I can love pretty much any character if they're written up to be someone's little sister...but I dunno if I can feel the same way about the *word* itself... I feel like I'm being tested to see if I can reach even newer, unexplored realms..."

Chihiro, meanwhile, gave him a T-shirt with a hip pop-art illustration of an owl.

"Whoa! This is neat!"

"I'm glad you like it," Chihiro bashfully replied.

"...This is pretty good material. Did it cost a lot, as tees go?"

"Um...well, Dad wanted to buy you a present, so he gave me some money to work with..."

The confession made Itsuki wince for just a moment. "...Oh," he mumbled, his lips turning into an upside-down V. "...By the way, why a T-shirt? Did I mention wanting one?"

Chihiro looked up at him, feeling a bit awkward at how obviously keen Itsuki was to change the subject.

"...Um, don't be mad, okay?"

"...? What do you mean by that?"

Chihiro faltered.

".....I wanted something you could wear in public and wouldn't make me embarrassed to be with you..."

"...So when we went to the aquarium, did you spend the whole time thinking 'God, I can't believe I have to hang with this guy and his gross-ass T-shirt'?"

"J-just a little! But it was fine!" If Chihiro was attempting to alleviate the shock of the news, he failed. "It wasn't like I couldn't deal with it! I mean, once you get used to it, it's no problem at all!"

".....Couldn't deal with? ...Get *used* to?"

"Um... R-really, it's totally fine! I—I wear this track jacket all the time, too, so it's not like I'm one to judge!"

"Yeah...well...unlike you, I'm not enough of a stud that I can even make a tracksuit look fashionable. I guess I'll make sure not to walk next to you from now on..."

"Itsuki..."

Sadness clouded Chihiro's eyes as he took in Itsuki's peeved reaction. But Itsuki just laughed it off.

"...I'm just kidding. How 'bout we go clothes shopping together sometime?"

"Uh... Oh, um... Yeah, sure! Definitely!"

Itsuki smiled as his brother's face lit back up.

"Right! So, as promised, I got you a S—tone...or I was *gonna* give you one, but I found this instead."

Inside the bag Nayuta provided, tied up in a festive ribbon, there was a single SD card. It made Itsuki's eyes open wide.

"Oh, no way, is this...?!"

Nayuta was fresh from writing an entire novel for Miyako's birthday last month. So had she repeated that trick again—for Itsuki...?

"It contains an assortment of X-rated selfies. Not all of them are really in focus, but you'll find some full nudes in there, too. ^///^"

Nayuta's cheeks reddened as she fidgeted in her seat. Itsuki greeted this with a completely blank expression, then a sigh that sounded like it rose up from the depths of his very soul.

"Wh-what's with *that* reaction?!"

"N-nothing...um, thank you very much Kanikou I'll cherish this forever and ever."

"Huh," Nayuta said as Itsuki recited his thanks like a robot. "In that case, I'll take this back and give you a Slen—tone later." Then, in a single motion, she snatched the SD card right out of Itsuki's hand.

"Oh..."

And Nayuta, of course, keenly noticed that ever-so-slight look of regret that crossed his face for an instant.

"What's thiiiis? Second thoughts, Itsuki?"

"N-no."

She grinned ear to ear at the now-blushing Itsuki. "If you want to see porn of me, all you have to do is ask, you know. Here, don't you want this? You should see the shameless stuff I'm doing in some of these pics!"

"I—no, I don't need it! I'd want a Slender—, like, a hundred times more!"

"Are you *suuuure*? It's not healthy to bottle up your desires, you know? Come on, it's full of all the brazen eighteen-year-old smut you crave, y'know. Pretty *useful* stuff, don't you think?" She dangled the memory card in front of his face, taunting him with it.

Then Itsuki suddenly grew stern.

“...Is that so? Well, if you’re going to go that far, then I’ll gladly accept it.”

“Huh?” Nayuta paused, eyes wide open.

“What’s wrong, Kanikou? I said I’ll take the SD card. Hand it over.”

“Uh-hmm... Are you serious?” Now she was wavering, the supreme confidence of a moment ago vanished.

Itsuki nodded. “Of course I’m serious.”

It only made Nayuta’s face redder. “This, this is seriously hard-core stuff, okay? I mean...I’m doing things in them that I, um, I’m not sure I can talk about in front of people...”

“Oh really? Well, after all that effort you must’ve put in, I sure as hell gotta *use* ‘em, don’t I?”

“Use...um, use my porn...?”

Her eyes pleaded upward at him, sweat beading on her forehead, as Itsuki nodded, bright red but completely in earnest.

“So hand it over, Kanikou. Give me your perverted SD card full of pictures of you at your most shamelessly pornographic! Now!”

“Uh, umm, I...”

“What’s the problem? Weren’t you giving that to me?”

“B-but I, um, I’m starting to think that maybe this’ll create a lot of problems for me...”

“Problems?”



“I, I mean, you’ve heard all the stories about revenge porn lately! It...it’d really suck if you did that to me and stuff!”

“...And you really think I’m the kind of person who’d do that?”

“I’m not s-saying *that*, but...oooh...”

Nayuta stared into space for a minute, attempting with every fiber of her body to gingerly present the SD card to Itsuki—

“I—I can’t do this! *Yet!*”

—then, with a half scream, she snapped the card in two with both hands. In another moment, she was sitting back by the *kotatsu* table, using the comforter covering it to hide half her face in shame.

“Jeez... Why are you coming at me so vigorously today...?”

“If you couldn’t take your own medicine, Nayuta, you shouldn’t have tried in the first place...”

Itsuki rolled his eyes, then breathed a slight sigh of relief. For him, actually obtaining a cache of Nayuta porn would have left him at a loss for how to handle it. *...Do I want sexy photos of the girl I like? Of course I do. I do, but if I had them within arm’s reach all day, I’d agonize over it so much that I’m sure it’d affect my work.*

“...This is so ridiculous,” muttered Haruto, eyes scornful as he watched it all unfold.

“It sure is,” Miyako added, a plethora of emotions on her face.

That just left Toki’s and Ashley’s presents, but Toki was already hammered—arms around his knees and snoring, fully clothed, in the empty bathtub—so they all let him be. As for Ashley:

“Sadly, I’ve forgotten to bring a present, but...hmm...”

She thought for a moment. Then, without warning, she took off the socks she had on, pointed her bare feet at Itsuki from his bed, and started twirling a sock with her hand.

“Which do you like more—socks, or bare feet? Hmm, Big Brother?”

Itsuki swallowed. “Wh-which do I like...?”

“I can either give you these freshly removed socks, or I can let you lick my feet.”

“Wha...!”

“Tee-hee-hee... What’ll it be, Big Bro?”

“A little sister’s socks, or her feet... Talk about a diabolical choice...!”

“Keep it together, Itsuki! That’s not your little sister! She’s just some thirty-two-year-old gra—um, never mind.”

Haruto fell silent at Ashley’s cold, resentful eyes. Itsuki opted for the socks.



After the presents, the group ate birthday cake to round out the event. Nayuta, Miyako, Chihiro, and Ashley all went home, leaving Itsuki and Haruto alone in the apartment (save for the sleeping Toki in the bathroom). They quickly settled down to drinking beer and nibbling on the leftovers.

“...Hope the *All About* anime turns out okay,” Haruto blurted out.

“...Yeah.”

Itsuki nodded, softly replying through gritted teeth, a far cry from the pepped-up guffawing of the party. To him, scoring an anime adaptation was something worthy of sincere celebration. It was—but also, it was a cause for anxiety. It always would be.

“...Congratulations, Itsuki. It’s been decided that *All About My Little Sister* will be getting an anime adaptation.”

He couldn’t help but recall when he’d first heard the news from Toki.

“Huh?” he dully replied at first, unable to grasp his editor’s meaning.

“We’re making an anime. An *All About* anime.”

“.....Really?”

“Really.”

An anime. He rolled the word around in his mind.

“Heh-heh...” A smile naturally rose to his lips. “Heh-heh-heh-heh... Bah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! I see... Now I’m finally part of the ‘author behind the anime’ family, ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

“Umm, let me just say...” Toki’s voice was tense, raining on Itsuki’s personal parade. “There’s something else I was wavering about telling you...but judging by your reaction, I guess I might as well...”

“Oh? What is it?”

“This anime project was originally gonna be based on another novel series.”

“.....”

Itsuki’s face turned grim.

“...This romantic comedy that’s also released on our label. But just when they were about to draw up the contract, a new volume in the series came out, and sales just fell off a cliff.”

Toki paused. Itsuki had an idea of what series he was talking about, but that wasn’t important. He silently waited for him to continue.

“...So, you know, even if we did animate it, there’s practically no hope of it being a success. But the thing is, we’re already so far along with arrangements between all the companies involved that if we scrapped the project at this point, it’d be an obstacle for all our other anime projects going forward.”

“...So *All About* was selected as a substitute because it’s still kinda popular, just not as much as *that* one?”

Toki nodded.

“...If anything was gonna get the anime treatment,” Itsuki slowly, ponderingly observed, “I figured it would’ve been *Sisterly Combat* first, so that’s kind of a surprise, but...huh. Neat.”

“So as I said,” Toki continued in his businesslike manner, “this anime project kicked off with another novel as its subject, so we pretty much have all the partners set in stone.”

“The partners?”

“The sponsors, the network, the production company, that kind of thing. The ‘production committee,’ as they call it. Who’s in that committee affects the staff, the cast, the artist singing the opening theme, the budget, what we’re allowed to depict and not depict... A million different things.”

“.....”

“So, um, I just want to be sure you realize that these partners originally came together for another series, not for *All About*. As a result, you may not agree with all of the people involved—I mean, really, it might be safe to say that almost *nothing’s* gonna turn out how you’re thinking. Just wanted to temper your expectations with that.”

“.....”

“And I said that we’ve decided to produce an anime version, but actually...I mean, technically speaking, it isn’t a hundred percent green-lit yet.”

“What...?”

“That’s because we need your consent as the original author. Without that, we can’t officially kick this thing off.”

“.....”

“To put it another way...” Toki looked straight into Itsuki’s eyes. “What I’m trying to say is, *you still have the right to turn this down.*”

The emotion in his eyes was the pinnacle of sincerity. This was absolutely not the sort of advice an editor would normally give their author. If the publisher had already decided to move along with an anime series, it was the job of rank-and-file editor Toki to coax the original creator into being part of the team.

“...You saw what happened with Fuwa and *Chevalier*. You know that an anime isn’t always a good thing for you. In fact, there are a lot of creators who, directly or indirectly, got steamrolled by their anime adaptation. With this project in particular, there’s a high risk compared to your typical anime that things’ll turn out different from what you’re hoping for. But if you’re still—”

“Let’s do it.”

Before Toki could finish, Itsuki had given his reply—the will clear in his voice,

his eyes locked with his editor's.

"...Out of curiosity," he then asked Toki, "if I said no to the anime, what then?"

"...Probably we would've just gone with another rom-com. Like *Kirakoi* or *Kaze-Kimi*," came the blunt reply. Both of these had about as much name-brand value as *All About*.

"So...I guess *I was always replaceable*?" Itsuki half whispered, his voice strained. Then he flashed a defiant, irascible smile. "Well...bring it."

"Huh?"

"Let's get the *All About* anime moving as fast as we can. No matter how it turns out, it's gonna be an experience I'd never have otherwise, I think. I wanna see what Haruto saw. What a certain someone else saw. I gotta see it."

Maybe I'm expendable right now, maybe they could replace me easily enough—but if I'm gonna get ahead, I need this.

"...All right." Toki let out a soft, distressed sigh, then gave Itsuki a lighthearted smile. "So be it. As your editor, I'll follow you all the way down to hell."

"Heh. I'll be counting on you."

With that, Itsuki gave him a brazen laugh of his own.

That marked the official launch of the *All About My Little Sister* anime—and, really, the moment he heard the news, Itsuki was in no way capable of rational thought. But after Toki left his apartment, night turned into day, and even more days passed after that, and then the excitement in his mind became dwarfed by his anxiety.

Over the past few days, he had been deliberately trying to act as fired-up and enthusiastic as he could, in part to hide this. But no matter how much he carried on in front of Chihiro and Miyako and Ashley and Toki and Nayuta, he couldn't mask the tension in his mind. Only with Haruto, whose own anime adaptation was a currently unfolding disaster, could he honestly reveal his concerns.

"...I *want* it to be good. Like, seriously. Every part of me does," Haruto

emphasized again.

“...Do you really?”

“Mm? What d’you mean by that?”

“...Like, even if *All About* turns into this incredible series, your *Chevalier* anime’s all...you know...like that.”

“Oh, so you think I’ll be too frustrated or jealous to really celebrate it if your anime succeeds, because mine was a piece of shit?”

Itsuki lightly nodded. “...Yeah.”

Haruto gave this a light chuckle.

“...Well, of *course* I will.”

There was something almost refreshing to his voice.

“...I guess so, huh?”

“Yeah. Well, I can’t really say until that happens, but I’m pretty sure I’m gonna be so frustrated and jealous, I won’t know what to do with myself. Like, why did mine have to be like *that* but yours got to be like *this*, you know...? But I do want it to be good. Not just *All About*, either. I want all the creators and fans of the novels and manga and games that get put through the media-mix wringer to be happy. I want *Chevalier of the Absolute World* to be the last sad example of an anime version that didn’t work out... Not that it’s gonna happen, obviously. There’s gonna be lots more shitty media-mix projects ahead for us, I’m sure, and they’re gonna break the creators’ hearts and disappoint all their fans...”

But in Haruto’s opinion, he ought to be allowed to at least hope for the alternative. He should be allowed to at least dream of an incredible future ahead, one where every series, every creator and staff member and fan, could find happiness. For Haruto, subjected to all manner of thoughtless slander on a weekly basis after every anime episode, that was what he truly yearned for.

Itsuki listened silently, sternly, to all of this. Then, in a whisper:

“...You’re a good guy.”

“Yeah, ain’t I?” Haruto laughed, hiding his embarrassment as he took the last few swigs of beer from his glass.

Itsuki fell asleep soon after Haruto left.

Kenjiro Toki would report to the office the next morning in a wrinkled, beer-scented business suit, his joints aching from sleeping in his author’s bathtub overnight, but **this sort of thing happens with editors all the time**, so nobody yelled at him about it.



Meanwhile, back at her hotel, Nayuta Kani was busy stripping off all her clothes, collapsing into bed, and writhing around.

“Mmnnnyaaaaahhhhhh! I can’t be-*liiiiieeeeevvvve* this!”

She had tried to give Itsuki an SD card full of homegrown smut for his birthday, but she got so embarrassed over it that she destroyed it in front of his face. When it came to Itsuki, she didn’t much mind what kind of vulgar bits of herself she showed off. She sincerely thought that having him jerk off to her naked body would make her happy. But right when push came to shove, she chickened out. It just came out of nowhere.

Two weeks ago, when Itsuki and Nayuta were both fresh off deadlines, they had joined Haruto in a game of Once Upon a Time at Itsuki’s place. Soon after, she fell asleep in Itsuki’s bed, unable to stay awake any longer—but it wasn’t a very deep sleep, apparently, and Itsuki’s and Haruto’s voices had awoken her. She was still groggy at first, most of the conversation going straight over her head, but:

.....All right, all right, I’ll admit it. I like Kanikou.

Those two simple sentences were enough to banish all fatigue from her mind.

Itsuki, as he had described it, had a huge thing for Nayuta after all. He loved her, but he didn’t want to act on it yet, because he still wasn’t on the same level as her. Someday, when the two of them were on equal footing as authors, he would finally admit the truth to her.

Hearing that made Nayuta feel like her body was going to catch fire. She had

long known that Itsuki wasn't some cartoonishly narcissistic, incest-loving, little-sister-obsessed f██k, that he had something burning deep within him, but she didn't think his feelings about her—as an author, and as a woman—were that strong. She had loved him ever since his first published book and come to love him more now that she knew him personally. The more she learned about him, the more it amplified her romantic feelings.

And now she knew those feelings were mutual. Nothing could have made her happier. The fact they couldn't be an official couple right now irritated her, but the futile sincerity behind his feelings was darling to her.

...I'm not really anything yet, but when I become a protagonist on an even level with Kanikou...then I'm gonna tell her that I love her. And I know it's not fair to her, but I need her to wait until then.

Nayuta didn't have an accurate gauge of Itsuki's feelings.

To her, Itsuki had been an irreplaceable talent, a giant among wannabe authors, from the very beginning. She went professional because of how much she looked up to him; she loved everything he wrote; she never thought of herself as better than him; and she had never even compared her skill as a novelist to his. She could be sure, however, that whatever feelings he had for her, they definitely factored in Nayuta Kani as a novelist.

If Nayuta deliberately phoned it in for a new series, let it fail, and then told Itsuki “All right, we're equal now,” it'd do nothing but disappoint him. He'd probably get genuinely angry with her. In order to be the one Itsuki loved, Nayuta Kani had to advance, and improve, as an author. She could do nothing less than her absolute best.

But simply standing there and waiting for Itsuki to confess his love to her was too painful to endure, so she kept actively searching for ways to melt the ice surrounding his heart. If their feelings were truly mutual, she ought to be safe with taking more extreme measures in her gambits. Thus went the thought behind that sexy SD card—but she wimped out at the last moment.

So the naked Nayuta let out a lonesome sigh as a finger reached down toward her abdomen.

“Aaaahhhh...nnh...hhh... I love you, Itsukiii...looovve youuuu...”

“...I want you, Itsukiii... I want you to ruin meeee... ♥”

So she went on, releasing her passion while consumed by the fantasy of being ravaged by the **throbbing, fifty-foot-long, eight-headed carpet python of a penis** lurking between Itsuki’s legs.



Q&A Corner



QUESTION

Where does Haruto purchase all his import beer?



Sometimes I go to shops that specialize in a good Belgian selection, but generally, I purchase it off the net. You can sign up for some stores' mailing lists, too, and they'll tell you when they've got some rare beer in stock.

QUESTION

What board games do you recommend for beginners?



That depends on who you're playing with, how many people you have, and what you like personally, but right now, Dominion is a pretty good go-to. I first got into board games when a bunch of other novel writers invited me to a Dominion meet, and there's a huge player base, so it wouldn't hurt to learn the rules. That and old favorites like Catan and Carcassonne have been played and loved for decades. They're always surefire winners. For two-player games, I recommend Patchwork and Lost Cities; they're easy to learn, and the strategic aspects on both are really fun!

QUESTION

Are Haruto's glasses just for fashion purposes?



Nah, I have bad eyesight, so they have prescription lenses in them.

The Manga Version

It was another afternoon at Itsuki's place, the host goofing around in his apartment with Haruto and Nayuta a few days after his birthday party, when Kenjiro Toki stepped in for a visit.

"...What brings you here today?" Itsuki furtively asked. Toki responded by taking a sheaf of clipped-together paper out of a bag with the publisher logo on it and placing it on the *kotatsu* table.

"...What's that?"

"Some samples from the artists we're considering to handle the *All About* manga version."

"...! *Manga* version...!"

Haruto and Nayuta murmured their "ooooh"s of curious interest, and their attention turned toward the sample sheets as Itsuki's own eyes widened.

The process of "comicalization," a made-up English-language term, was straightforward: Take a novel and make it into a manga. It was common for popular novels to receive this treatment as part of the adaptation blitz; many recent ones (including *The "Hentai Prince" and the Stony Cat*, *The Sacred Blacksmith*, and *Ranobe-bu* ["Light Novel Club"]) were high-quality productions in their own right, and some adaptations had even sold better than the original novels. You also saw cases like *Haganai* where the comic version not only scored high with Japanese audiences but proved a hit overseas as well, thanks to Itachi's manga illustrations striking a chord with American comics culture. Over there, *Haganai* was better known for its manga than the novels or anime. It showed that the comicalization process held an important role in the international manga scene, much more than just another cash-in to please fans of the original story.

The publisher Itsuki and his friends contributed to had a monthly manga magazine called *Comic Gifted*, the home for serialized comic versions of Haruto Fuwa's *Chevalier* and other popular in-house novel series. Itsuki's own titles were all popular enough to merit manga projects as well, but the timing and other issues hadn't quite all come together for them yet. With the anime project underway, though, a manga version was the perfect way to push the brand even more.

So Toki and the *Gifted* editorial staff wrote up a list of candidates to handle the comic, having each of them design the characters' visual look and draw up a few sample scenes. That's what was in the stack of paper on the table.

"I e-mailed all this to Hoshiimo, and he already replied to me. You, him, and the editorial team need to agree on an artist, and then the manga will kick off."

"Hoshiimo" was the illustrator for the *All About* novels, an artist well known for his masterful depictions of the naked body. He lived far away enough that Itsuki never met him in person, but he was great at keeping a decent work schedule, he always stuck to his deadlines, and his quality was consistent, which made his talents widely sought after in the business.

"Hmm..."

Itsuki nervously picked up the sheets and unclipped them.

"We've narrowed it down to four candidates," Toki explained as Itsuki began peering at the samples. "The first one's put up a lot of Web manga on his personal site, and he's gonna have a book of it published soon. He's popular enough that it'd create a lot of buzz you both can benefit from."

His character designs seemed a little oversimplified to Itsuki compared to the original novel illustrations, but the energy in the sample scenes attracted his attention. For story sections where the protagonist was doing all kinds of silly nonsense for the sake of his sister, it was perfect.

"Can we look, too?" Haruto asked.

"Oh, yeah, you and Kani have been reading *All About*, too, haven't you?"

"Uh-huh!" Nayuta triumphantly bragged. "I've read everything Itsuki has ever written! Trust me, I'm the biggest fan of his original work in the universe!"

“Well,” Toki said, “feel free to provide your feedback as fans, then.”

Haruto and Nayuta peeked at the sheets from behind Itsuki.

“Hmm... Kinda phoning it in with the designs, don’t you think?”

“I like the composition, though. It oughtta work fine for the manga, wouldn’t it? If the women aren’t cute enough, though, I’m not sure that’s gonna work for a romantic comedy.”

It sounded like Nayuta and Haruto shared Itsuki’s impressions.

“It’s not bad, but let’s treat it as a backup,” he said as he put Candidate One’s pages on the tabletop.

“Okay. The next one is a popular contributor to art sites. He follows Hoshiimo online, and out of all the candidates, his style’s closest to the original art.”

“Oh...”

“That *is* pretty good art.”

“Yeah. Totally Hoshiimo. Cute girls, too.”

“As a manga, though, it’s kind of hard to read,” Itsuki said.

Nayuta and Haruto murmured their agreement. Drawing each panel of the manga in the exact style of the original novel illustrations was fine and all, but the panels didn’t flow well, and it didn’t feel like there was any energy behind the character’s actions.

“He really is a good artist, though...”

“Maybe it could work if you had someone else storyboard the panels, then he did the finished art. You know, like with *Kure-nai*?”

“Yeah...”

To the back burner he went.

“Number three’s a new guy who won a manga rookie competition. He’s already had a one-off story published in *Gifted*, and the reader feedback was pretty good.”

“Oh...?”

“Huh?”

“Hmmm?”

They looked at the candidate’s character designs as they listened to Toki, and what they saw made all of them voice their confusion at once. The hair, eyes, and other primary characteristics were all there, but the designs had been remixed to the point that you wouldn’t believe it was *All About* unless you were told so. But let go of your preconceptions, and they were unique, attractive, and had even more appeal than Hoshiimo’s own designs. The sample manga pages gave the same impression—bold in design and structure, but easy to read and well thought out. Simply look at one page, and something in you said “Well, *this* manga looks kinda neat.”

But:

“...It’s just not *All About*, you know?”

They were already different characters at the design stage, and that applied even more in the sample manga. They didn’t even speak the same way. Itsuki and Toki gave each other confused grins over it.

“Well, you know, this guy definitely has talent. As long as you keep him on a short leash as the novelist, he oughtta do fine for you...”

“Hmm...”

Itsuki was at an impasse. As a manga, it was definitely eye-catching. If he went with this guy, the comic could wind up becoming even more popular than the novels. But would it really be a “manga version” at all or something completely different?

“Um,” said Nayuta, “even I can tell that this manga artist has a ton of talent, but *do you think he really wants to adapt this series at all?*”

“...”

The room fell silent for a few seconds before Toki spoke up.

“...I was told he wanted to debut his own series, but the *Gifted* edit team wants to start him with an adaptation project first so that he can get used to a regular production schedule.”

“Ahhh.” Itsuki scowled. “Well, if it results in a good manga, I don’t really care what editorial’s motivations are. But...I dunno, I’m not too sure this artist really likes *All About* that much.”

The biggest issue Itsuki and Nayuta sensed from the samples was that, to put it bluntly, there just wasn’t any love for the original. Instead, they saw an artist who clearly believed his own manga was God’s gift to the industry. And it *was* pretty amazing. If it were an original series, it’d have tremendous allure. But this was a manga adaptation. It was fine for him to polish his skills and pursue his own unique style—Itsuki didn’t even mind if the results didn’t replicate the original very much—but as an author overseeing an adaptation like this, you at least wanted to be sure the artist enjoyed his work.

“...To be honest,” a troubled-looking Toki said with a smile, “I agree. He oughtta have a chance at an original series. I’ll suggest that to his editor.”

Then Itsuki’s attention turned toward candidate number four—and the moment he saw the design for series protagonist Kazuma Akatsuki and his sister, Ichika, on the first page, his eyebrows arched up.

“Whoa...!”

Page two featured the Onizaki siblings, the two main supporting characters, alongside Shirogane the owl, the series’ comic-relief mascot. On the next page stood the main cast’s long-suffering teacher, their classmates, and the principal/vice-principal duo who served as antagonists.

Itsuki spent a lengthy amount of time sizing up each of their designs. Was it an exact duplicate of Hoshiimo’s illustrations? No. Candidate Two’s art was far, far closer. But while these designs reflected the artist’s own personal style, they perfectly encapsulated what stood out with each character, brilliantly reworking each one to make them truly the creator’s own.

He could feel his emotions rise as he turned the page to peek at the manga sample. There, before his eyes, he found the cast of *All About* come alive. *This* character totally runs like this when he’s in a hurry. *This* character tenses her body up like this when she’s shouting. *This* character contorts his face like this when something surprises him. When *this* character’s laughing, the rest of her body is doing this. Not only did this art faithfully recreate how Itsuki described

the action in his books, even all the little details that he didn't put into text seemed totally natural to him. They were all living, breathing people, each with their own unique look and personality quirks.

The little-sister characters in particular, Ichika Akatsuki and Yukiko Onizaki, practically jumped off the page. The backgrounds and minor characters were all done up in excellent quality, but even more effort had clearly been expended on the sisters, making it clear who were the most important people in the story. It shared more than a few things in common with Itsuki's style, which devoted special care to how the girls were described in the novels.

"Wow...who *is* this...?"

Itsuki found himself blinking rapidly, feeling something warm welling up from behind his eyeballs. The emotion he felt ran deep. It was amazing to think that anyone besides Hoshiimo the illustrator could so flawlessly express the world of his story.

"Hohhh..."

"Wow, neat..."

As Nayuta and Haruto gawked at the sheets, Toki explained. "The fourth one is a college student who cold-called the manga edit team three or so months ago. She's totally new—no work in the fandom, nothing published in other magazines. Apparently she's into the little-sister theme, too, and she's read all of Itsuki's work, so the team brought up the idea of giving her the *All About* adaptation—but really, we had no idea she had *this* in her."

"...I see. So is this editorial's pick?"

"Yeah, this one. And Hoshiimo agreed with them, too."

Itsuki cracked a soft smile. "Great. Well, I guess we're all in agreement."

"...I'm not so sure about having a college girl working on it, but no, I wouldn't hesitate to leave *All About* in her hands."

Haruto laughed at Nayuta's sudden bout of haughtiness. "Good thing you found the right artist, though, huh? Seriously."

And that was that.

She wrote under the pen name Kaiko Mikuniyama, a twenty-year- old college student and newbie manga artist who loved little-sister stories and clearly had vast wells of talent to tap. Having such an outstanding artist handle this manga filled Itsuki with delight—because at this point, he had no idea of the storm he was in for.

Q&A Corner



QUESTION

Tell us more about the publisher and label that you work for.



I work for a label called GF Bunko. It's a medium-sized player in the light-novel business, and Kanikou's *Landscape* series is about the only one in the lineup that sells industry-leading figures. There used to be another big GF Bunko title that went toe-to-toe with hers...but we'll talk about that in the main story later. Still, we have a lot of popular series, mine and Haruto's included, so it's not doing too bad. It's got eight editors working for it, led by Editor-in-Chief Satoshi Godo.

GF Bunko is a label run by its parent company, Gift Publishing. They publish a lot of regular literature, comics, magazines, and other stuff, too. I think they have a full-time staff of eighty or so.



Huh. I didn't know that.

You kind of *should*!



Face Time

It was early in the afternoon, three days after the group picked Kaiko Mikuniyama to draw the manga version of *All About My Little Sister*, and Itsuki Hashima and Kenjiro Toki had just reached a café where they were slated to meet with their new artist. They didn't have to wait long before a couple, a man and woman, were seated across the table from them.

Itsuki was familiar with one of them, a pudgy man in his mid-thirties. His name was Kohei Tokuyama, and he did manga editing for *Comic Gifted* magazine. The other one had to be Kaiko. She looked close in age to Itsuki, a gentle sort of stereotypically Japanese beauty with striking long black hair. Her face was tensed up a bit—she must have been nervous—making her look a bit like a timid forest creature. Her clothing was loose, comfortable, and mostly white in color, and while that made it hard to tell, she had a fairly ample chest. On her head was an Alice-style hairband with a large ribbon on it, lending a bit of a childish look to this girl of nearly twenty, but it worked well with the “rich girl” look she otherwise exuded.

“Nice seeing you again, Mr. Hashima,” Tokuyama began. “Thank you for taking time out of your schedule to see us... Ms. Mikuniyama, let me introduce you guys. This is Itsuki Hashima, the original creator.”

Original creator. That struck home with Itsuki. No longer would he just be a novelist; now he was a “creator,” the mastermind behind what would soon become a world depicted in multiple forms of media.

“Um, nice to meet you,” Kaiko said, her voice ringing like a pristine bell as she presented a business card to him. It was white with lots of ribbons drawn all over it, “KAIKO MIKUNIYAMA – Manga artist” written in rather small print alongside her e-mail address.



BOOKS: ALL ABOUT MY LITTLE SISTER

“Th-the pleasure’s all mine,” Itsuki said, a bit nervous as he provided his own card. His was done up with a yellow font over a plain black background, with “ITSUKI HASHIMA – Novelist” right in the middle and his e-mail, phone number, and address below that. The other side had a list of his previously published work.

“So,” Tokuyama continued once they exchanged cards, “as you know, we’ve decided to launch a manga version of *All About My Little Sister*, so you’ll probably be seeing quite a bit of us going forward, Mr. Hashima.”

“Oh yeah. I’m looking forward to it.”

Itsuki nodded at him and Kaiko as they both gave him a polite bow of the head.

“So today, I just wanted the original creator to get acquainted with Ms. Mikuniyama and, you know, throw around any questions and advice you might have for each other.”

Itsuki and Kaiko turned to look at each other. When their eyes met, Kaiko averted hers, blushing a little. There was something sweet about it—nothing at all like Nayuta or Miyako or Ashley or the other women in his life—and it shook his composure a little. He began to doubt himself. Was this mature, sensible-looking, beautiful woman really capable of adapting the world of *All About* into manga, his world full of ridiculous situations and a never-ending stream of adult-oriented humor? The samples she gave him were flawless, but...

“Umm, Mr. Hashima?” she said first, peering up at him. “What did you think about my manga? I’d appreciate it if you could give me your honest feedback.”

“Well, um...honestly, I thought it was perfect. Nothing wrong with it at all.”

“R-really?” Kaiko asked, her lack of self-confidence readily apparent.

Itsuki gave her a reassuring nod. “Really.”

“...This is from a guy who’s never afraid to voice his opinion, no matter how rude it is. So I think you can trust in that,” interjected Toki.

“I’m not *rude*,” Itsuki shot back with a glare. “...But, yeah, the character designs were perfect, and I couldn’t ask for better quality as a manga. I loved

how cute Ichika and Yukiko were in particular.”

The encouragement made Kaiko’s face blossom with a smile like a spring flower. “It’s an honor to hear that. I put a lot of work into those two, so I could be sure they’d express as much of the deep love you have for them as possible...”

Itsuki’s eyebrows shot up. “Hoh... So you noticed the extra effort I put into depicting them, huh?”

“Oh, of course. I really admire the love you have for them...or, really, for all the little sisters in your work. The way you described Ichika’s toes as she was going up the stairs barefoot in Volume 4... I was just in awe.”

“I didn’t think you’d bring up *that* scene...!”

He *had* put a ton of effort into writing the scene Kaiko referenced, even though Toki derided it as “pointlessly long” and the online feedback was along the lines of “Yeah, Kazuma may have a sister complex, but seeing him stare at his sister’s feet for that long is *creepy*.” Even from the sample pages, he could tell: Everything he thought was important in his stories, she picked up on. He couldn’t wait to see what she’d do with that scene in manga form.

“Speaking of which, I heard you were a fan of the little-sister character as it’s portrayed in novels like these? As an artist?”

“Oh please, I’m hardly an artist yet! I haven’t even made my professional debut. Just Kaiko is fine.”

The modest act flustered Itsuki a bit. “Oh, um, yeah, Itsuki works for me, um... Kaiko.”

“A—all right...Mr. Hashima.”

“This isn’t an arranged marriage, guys,” an exasperated Toki butted in.

“So, Kaiko, what’s your image of little sisters?”

“Oh, right. Well... I’m an only child, but for a while now, I’ve always admired the idea of a girl who really adores her older brother like that. And as I started reading manga and novels with those characters, I guess I sort of fell in love with the concept, too.”

“I see.”

“And with your work in particular, Mr. Hashima, it’s so clear how much love you’ve poured into that idea. It just resonates with me, truly.”

“Yeah. You see a lot of authors who just kind of shoehorn a little sister as a bit player so they can pull in that audience, even if they don’t care about them at all.”

Kaiko briskly nodded. “Exactly! But even when it’s so obvious, I can’t help but love those characters anyway...just because it’s a little sister we’re talking about, you see?”

“Oh, I totally get you! Even if it’s like, ‘Man, I’ve seen this character like thirty times before,’ it’s not like it’s *her* fault. If anything, I start loving her out of pity or whatever!”

“That sounds so much like you, Mr. Hashima...!”

“Do you have any recent favorites along those lines, Kaiko? Outside of my work?”

“Hmm... I know this is kind of a popular answer, but maybe Sagiri from *Eromanga Sensei*.”

“Yessss, she’s a goddess on Earth! If you want someone who creates really cute sisters that don’t go down the same well-trodden path, nothing can beat Tsukasa Fushimi’s books.”

“Yeah. And Kirino from *Oreimo*, his previous work, was pretty amazing, too.”

“Definitely! She’s got this incredible balance, you know? Like, the way she’s set up, you’d think the general reading public would be turned off, but she just wins you over eventually, you know? I’d love to meet Fushimi sometime and get some advice from him.”

“Also, I really love Shizuku from *Chivalry of a Failed Knight*.”

“Me too! That heroic young woman, giving her entire heart over to her brother...and then her brother [remainder redacted for spoilers]!”

.....

.....

Itsuki and Kaiko's little-sister lovefest continued unabated, leaving the two editors firmly in the dust.

"Umm," Tokuyama said with a wry smile, "we should probably wrap it up pretty soon..."

"Oh no!" Kaiko snapped out of it, her cheeks still reddened from all the excitement of the conversation. "I kind of lost hold of myself... I apologize."

"Not at all." Itsuki laughed. "This is the first time I've talked to someone who can keep up with me on sisters like this." He looked her in the eye. "Now I know for sure: Kaiko Mikuniyama, I feel totally safe in letting you take up *All About My Little Sister*. I hope you'll treat all my beloved little sisters with as much care as I did."

Kaiko paused a moment, letting the words sink in. "Of course. I promise I won't let you down," she said with a fetching smile and a stern voice.



"So, yeah, Kaiko was just this incredible person. With her on my side, I'm sure *All About* is gonna be the best goddamn comic adaptation ever. Mwa-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

".....Oh? Well, good for you."

Later that night, Itsuki was recounting his meeting with Kaiko Mikuniyama to Nayuta, who had come over to his place for dinner. He went over every detail—her prim, proper, refined atmosphere (unlike the other women in his life), the way she understood what made Itsuki's novels tick, and how much they had enjoyed discussing other novels in the genre.

"...I'm glad you had fun," a clearly miffed Nayuta replied.

"What's wrong?" Itsuki asked, suspicious. "You aren't jealous of Kaiko, are you?"

"....."

Nayuta nodded, her chin jutting out peevishly.

“R-really?” Itsuki asked, already looking a little guilty.

“...I’m sure I love you a whole lot more than that, Itsuki.”

“H-hey!” Itsuki immediately reddened. “Don’t get the wrong idea! Kaiko loves my work, not me!”

“...But, I mean, honestly, I really can’t keep up with all your little-sister talk.”

“Just because we’ve got that in common doesn’t mean we’re immediately gonna have feelings for each other.”

“...All right, so you don’t think anything at all about that Mikuniyama girl?”

“N-no.”

Nayuta’s reaction threw Itsuki for a loop. Why was she confronting him like a wife who had just discovered her husband was cheating on her? Maybe he and Nayuta *did* have feelings for each other, but they weren’t dating or anything.

“Really? You truly, honestly never felt a single pang of emotion for Mikuniyama?”

“.....Well, if you’re gonna phrase it like that...” Itsuki began to sweat, his eyes averted. “I mean...she seemed kinda nice to me, yeah...but just that.”

Nayuta instantly wrinkled her nose.

“I *knew* it!”

“What do you want? She’s really pretty! Any man would notice!”

“*Rawrrr!*”

“Besides, even if I was head over heels for Kaiko at first sight, what’s that matter to you? Nothing!”

“It matters a lot! I’m gonna be your future wife, Itsuki!”

“That future’s never gonna happen!” he boldly declared.

“Mmmph... You don’t have to be *that* forceful about denying it...” Nayuta crossed her arms, pouting, and Itsuki could tell this actually *was* bumming her out a bit.

“...Okay, maybe not *never*...but I’m talking a ninety-nine point nine percent

chance of no.”

“So there’s a zero point one percent chance of us getting married? Wow! I mean, that’s basically the same thing as one hundred percent!”

Itsuki rolled his eyes. “How does *that* work...?”

“If something has a zero point one percent chance of working in a manga or anime, that’s a guaranteed sign it’s gonna work.”

“...That’s a good point,” Itsuki replied, convinced. “But that’s still in the realm of fiction. If you want a future with a zero point one percent chance of taking place and make that happen one hundred percent of the time...you’d kinda *have* to be the hero of the story.”

“...!”

To Nayuta, who had heard Itsuki complain loud and clear earlier about wanting to “be the protagonist,” this was Itsuki essentially saying “Will you marry me?” to her.

“Nya-haaah~”

“...?”

Itsuki awkwardly stared at Nayuta as her face melted and cheeks turned pink as the ecstatic reverie washed over her.

Q&A Corner



QUESTION

Who are your favorite game designers?



Tetsuya Nomura and Kenichiro Takaki.

Everyone's old favorite, Reiner Knizia.
Him and the master, Uwe Rosenberg.



Well, Shigeru Miyamoto, Akitoshi Kawazu, Yasumi Matsuno, Sid Meier, Todd Howard, Mark Cerny... A lot, actually.

I'm sorry...
I don't know very much about games...



Me either... I've played *Mario* and *Dragon Quest* and stuff, though. That and the gal-games Itsuki lent me...

I'm not too sure, actually. I have lots of favorite artists, though.



I have a few favorite ones to hate...

God.



Manga Artist Versus Illustrator

About a week after Kaiko Mikuniyama met Itsuki, Toki arrived at his apartment with the rough draft of chapter 1 of the *All About My Little Sister* manga. Colloquially referred to as the “name” in Japanese, this draft provided the framework for the comic, similar to a plot outline for a novel; in adaptation projects like these, the original novelist usually did their checking with this draft, looking over the story flow and dialogue.

“...Here’s the draft for chapter one.”

“Whoa! Finally! I’ve been waiting for this!”

Itsuki practically burst into paroxysms of joy as he accepted the printed-out stack of paper and began to read...failing to notice the rather taut expression on Toki’s face.

Every manga artist has a different approach to how detailed their “name” drafts are (schedule lengths are another factor). Some of them are little more than the bare minimum of word balloons and panel layouts, while others are detailed enough to almost be submittable as is. Kaiko’s draft was firmly in the latter camp, easily publishable in its current format. It was already even higher quality than what new artists usually submitted to competitions, showing just how enthusiastic she was for this project.

“Whoa... Man oh man! She sure didn’t let me down...”

Volume 1 of Itsuki’s novel took approximately twenty pages to establish the main protagonists’ traits and the story setting. Here, with a few changes in the dialogue and structure, Kaiko had done the same thing in several pages of vivid, fluid comic art.

“Right...”

With a nervous swallow, Itsuki turned to the next page. Now the manga was

tackling the first major event of the story, where Ichika is struck by an attack of carnal desire while in the shower, and her elder brother Kazuma must give her his own blood to stop it. This wasn't just fan service—it represented how *All About* would grow and thrive as the immoral, silly rom-com that it was. It was illustrated with a color spread at the front of the Volume 1 novel, and Hoshiimo's wonderfully obscene depiction of the moment was vividly burned into the minds of its viewers, Itsuki included. It wouldn't be going too far to say that the manga's approach to this scene would be the make-or-break for it, the first demonstration of what this thing was truly made of.

But I'm sure Kaiko did a great job, Itsuki thought, the expectation swelling in his mind (along with the tiniest sliver of trepidation) as he turned the page.

“.....Huh?”

And when Itsuki laid eyes upon Ichika, drawn proudly across the entire page, his pupils shrank to two little pixels of shock.

It made no sense. The face—its expression—was exquisitely done. He could practically hear her pained groaning, her seductive panting, in his ears. Her pale bare shoulders, arms, and thighs were nothing less than works of art. Every strand of dampened hair, every splash from the shower, every droplet coursing down her body, was drawn right in. The quality was amazing, easily good enough to use as a novel-insert illustration.

But.

However.

For some reason...

This Ichika was wearing underwear.

“Huhhhhhhhhhhhhh?!”

Itsuki brought the draft page right up to his face, boring holes in it with his eyes, but it was no mirage. Once he realized it, he couldn't help but physically yelp in consternation.

The lingerie Ichika had on—every wrinkle, every shadow, even the intricate embroidery on it—was drawn elegantly and without compromise. Even in black

and white, they shone in their realer-than-real presence, boasting overwhelming amounts of texture, realness, and allure. They were the best damn bra-and-panties set in the history of manga. One look at it, and you could tell the artist's passion for comic art wasn't just lip service.

But, of course, Ichika was nude in the novel version. She'd kind of have to be; she was taking a shower at the time. In fact, whenever she was struck with an irresistible jolt of horniness in the novels—on top of the roof at school, in the gymnasium, in a cave, atop a snowy mountain—she was always completely naked.

That was why they called it fan service. Nudity was part of the definition. That was the absolute, ironclad rule for *All About My Little Sister*, for all of Itsuki Hashima's work.

"And, she, you, this, you, this...you... This is *bullshit*!!"

Toki had to hurriedly step in to keep the enraged Itsuki from ripping the page apart.

"Whoa, chill out, Itsuki!"

"Fugginsshit!"

"Get ahold of yourself! Okay? Don't worry... Everything's gonna be okay..."

"Hahh...hahh...hahh..."

"...There you go... It's okay, just keep it together... Keep it together..."

"Hahh.....pew..."

Itsuki, recomposed but now drained of strength, tossed the entire draft chapter on the table. His suspicious eyes turned to Toki.

".....So what's this about...?"

"...I was just as shocked as you when I saw it," came the awkward answer. "I asked Mr. Tokuyama at *Gifted* about it, and...I guess, um, Mikuniyama... She's got a huge underwear fetish."

"An—an underwear fetish...?"

The term "underwear fetish" seemed impossible to mesh with the

heartwarming, squeaky-clean image Kaiko put forth in person. Itsuki didn't know how to react.

"Yeah. She's obsessed with drawing stuff like this, so she wound up drawing 'em in even with the nude scenes."

"What do you mean, she 'wound up' drawing them?! Then have her fix it!"

"...Look," Toki began with a scowl, "apparently, she loves panties and stuff so much, the whole reason she became a manga artist was so she could draw more of it. If we ban her from drawing panties, it's definitely gonna affect her motivation in a bad way. So the *Gifted* editorial team made us a proposal, like... if the original creator's okay with it, we could continue having her go with panties and stuff for the fan service scenes."

"Is this a joke?! Hell no I'm not okay with that! If she wants to draw panties that bad, have her do it in her own manga! The fan service in my series is all about stripping down, man! That's the rule!" Itsuki told him point-blank.

"...Well, worst-case scenario, that could mean Ms. Mikuniyama has to depart the project, but are you okay with that?"

"Mngh..." Itsuki couldn't reply.

"She loves your work from the bottom of her heart. That's a fact."

"...Yeah. I can tell that from the manga."

"I frankly doubt we'd find anyone better able to depict the world of *All About* in manga form than her."

"...Yeah. I don't know anybody else who understands my work that much... who loves little sisters that much..."

But.

Itsuki's face was racked with pain.

"But...I want to see her nude... I want to see Ichika in the manga without a stitch of clothing on her..."

They went back and forth a while longer on this before Itsuki made his decision:

“...Let’s start by talking with Kaiko one more time.”



They hastily arranged a meeting between novelist and manga artist for the next day at Itsuki’s place.

Itsuki and Toki sat at one end of the table, Kaiko and Tokuyama at the other, all four of them stone-faced. The rough draft of chapter one was haphazardly laid out on the tabletop.

“Um...Kaiko?”

“Y-yes?” Kaiko immediately replied, gauging Itsuki’s slightly tensed voice as her own trembled with anxiety.

Itsuki picked up the draft and opened it up to the problem area—Ichika taking a shower in her undergarments.

“...Could you explain to me why Ichika isn’t naked in this scene?”

“It’s just as I said to my editor. I love panties. So I drew them.”

“Well, *don’t!*” Itsuki’s voice quickly grew ragged at the total lack of regret in Kaiko’s answer. “Didn’t you like my novels? If you like them, why are you butchering the parts that make them good?”

Kaiko twitched an eyebrow. “...I do love your work, Mr. Hashima. But, if I may say so, there *is* one aspect of it that I find disappointing.”

“Disappointing? ...Wait...”

“Yes,” Kaiko said, eyes fixated upon Itsuki. “Why, Mr. Hashima, do you always take these wonderful, darling little sisters and immediately rip all their clothes off? That’s rubbed me the wrong way ever since the beginning. I always want to see more of them wearing lingerie or panties or whatnot, but it’s always full nudity with you, every time... These poor sweet girls! They deserve better. They deserve panties and bras just as cute as they are.”

“Ha! You fool!” Now Itsuki was on the counterattack. “It’s in the heart of any big brother’s mind! He wants to see every crevice, every nook and cranny of his cute little sister! Panties? Nothing more than dumb pieces of cloth! Having such

crude, dirty rags in the way of the sheer, divine charm that is the sister's naked form is the height of stupidity! It's barbaric, like spitting on heaven itself! A little sister is at her most beautiful only in her most natural of forms! Denying this form—swaddling it in **garbage** like bras and panties—proves to me that you know nothing of true beauty!”

“G-garbage...? Are you calling this garbage...?”

Kaiko's body visibly shook as she took in a deep breath.

“Her ‘most natural of forms’?! How is that any different from some wild animal?! A human being becomes a sentient creature only when they gain the modesty to cover themselves in undergarments! Coveting nudity above everything else puts you squarely in the primate family, Mr. Hashima! The most beautiful of women deserve the most beautiful of wardrobes! *That* is where the pursuit of true beauty lies—for your little sisters, and for all else who walk upon the earth!”

“Quit being stupid! The truly beautiful are beautiful by their own merit! You don't need to decorate them with superfluous adornments! The nude form is the pinnacle of fashion! You think it's like being an animal? Well, what's wrong with that?! The little sister is the most beautiful untamed creature in the world, master of humanity and all other living creatures!”

“The pinnacle of fashion?! I was born in Gunma Prefecture to a family that's been farming silk since Japan was ruled by the shoguns! Since infancy, I was raised surrounded by beautiful silky-smooth undergarments! And a man-ape like *you* dares to debate fashion with me?!”

“Well, what a coincidence! I wasn't about to brag about *my* family, but my grandfather came from a rich family in Gifu Prefecture that raised fancy koi fish for ponds! I learned *all about* what beauty is from a tender age, trust me on that! And just as a koi is at its most beautiful when set free to swim around in its natural form, a little sister is at *her* most beautiful when she's naked! What you're doing is like putting clothes on a fish! Nothing more, nothing less!”

“Hah! Gifu? No wonder you have a chimpanzee's sense of style!”

“Pfft! Gunma? Well, given that Gunma's full of barbarians who just found civilization half a year ago, no wonder they're treating underwear like it's some

divine miracle!”

The kindred spirits of just a few days ago were firmly in the past. Now they were using the rudest of terms to berate each other’s beliefs and even dunk on each other’s birthplaces.

Toki stepped in. “...Does it really matter? Whether she’s nude or not...?”

“Yes, it matters!!” the other two shouted at once.

“B-but,” Itsuki’s editor warily protested, “I mean, Ms. Mikuniyama, if this is the type of quality you can consistently produce, then I think our readers will be totally happy either way, nude or not...?”

“You dumbass! I’ve never stripped down my little sisters for the sake of my readers’ happiness! Not even once! My nude scenes aren’t reader fan service! They aren’t even really necessary! I just put them in because I want to see little sisters naked!”

“And that’s something to brag about?!”

“I’m the same as Mr. Hashima,” Kaiko added. “I am not drawing in panties because I think that’s what the readers want. I just can’t help it—I want to see these darling sisters in underwear that’s just as darling. If it weren’t for that, I’d never do anything so reckless as adjusting the novels’ premise.”

“Oh, so you know full well that it’s reckless?!”

Toki sighed. These two creators were of the same mind—and that was exactly why they could never get along.

“Ugh... What should we do about this...?”

That was when the doorbell rang.

“.....”

Itsuki silently got up, looking just as peeved as ever, giving a final glare before opening the front door.

“Hey there, sir.”

It was novel illustrator Setsuna Ena, a small kid with an eye-catching hairdo.

“Sorry, we’re busy right now.”

“Aww, really? Well, okay. I’ll see ya later.” He turned to leave, dejected.

“Ah! Wait a second, Puriketsu!!”

It was Toki who hurriedly stopped him. Turning around, Setsuna found the editor standing up from the *kotatsu* to approach him.

“...I apologize about *SILLIES*. I just couldn’t do enough for it,” Toki said, bowing.

“Oh, no. It’s fine,” the illustrator replied with a slightly distressed smile. “These things happen, y’know.”

Itsuki immediately read between the lines.

“...So they’re going through with the cancellation of *SILLIES*?”

“Yup,” Setsuna replied a bit sadly.

SILLIES was a novel series illustrated by Setsuna. The first four volumes in publication were fairly popular, but after Volume 5 was released back in March, sales plummeted. The reason was easy to grasp—the main heroine revealed herself to be a boy in the second half of Volume 4, but the other protagonist didn’t let the gender barrier stop him from hooking up with the hero[ine]. Quite explicitly, it should be noted. The fact that most of Puriketsu’s artwork for the second half prominently featured the hero[ine]’s bare ass probably didn’t help matters.

“Yeah, this is the first series I worked on that got canceled, but boy, it’s kind of a shock, huh...?”

“You shouldn’t feel at fault for it,” Toki said. “None of this would’ve happened if we’d managed to keep Yohei Kitagata under control.”

But Setsuna shook his head. “Nah, y’know, I wasn’t too sure about the whole gender-bender twist, either. But I had some confidence in it, y’know? Like, if I can draw some supersweet asses for the second half, the readers would still dig it, whether it’s a dude’s ass or not...”

“That was exactly how Kitagata defended it to me. Like, ‘If the readers truly love this character, then gender’s nothing more than a tiny detail.’ Which sounded good at the time, but...I dunno. If that series had a decent female

audience, that's one thing, but if you're writing a sex comedy with a ninety-nine percent male readership, I guess forcing male asses on 'em is a little extreme."

"Yeah..."

Itsuki had mixed feelings about this, as he observed how much of a letdown it was for Setsuna. He hadn't heard it directly from Toki's mouth, but from his observations, he was pretty well convinced that *SILLIES* was the novel series that was going to be turned into an anime before *All About My Little Sister* was slotted into its spot. It sucked to hear that Setsuna—his friend, and someone he owed a lot to for his artwork—had a series canceled, but if *SILLIES* hadn't fallen like a rock like that, *All About* wouldn't be an anime at all. In a way, it was a stroke of luck for Itsuki.

"Well, I'm outta here. I'm gonna go search for that girl again." With that, Setsuna headed for the door again.

"W-wait a moment!"

It was Kaiko who stopped him, standing up and using a concerned-sounding voice.

"Um, are you *the* Puriketsu? The illustrator for *Genesis Sisters of the New World*...?"

"Oh! Yeah?"

"Oh no!" Kaiko's cheeks turned red, her eyes watery. "I had no idea I'd be meeting *the* Puriketsu today...!"

Setsuna's artwork had been heavily praised by professional manga artists and illustrators alike. He had a lot of respect around the scene, and he figured she must be another fan.

"Oh, um, I'm sorry, my name's Kaiko Mikuniyama and I'm handling the comic version of Mr. Hashima's *All About My Little Sister*!"

"Oh, Kaiko, huh? Hey. *All About*'s getting a manga? Congrats, sir!"

"Thanks," Itsuki said with a nod before lowering his voice. "...I dunno if this girl's gonna be the artist yet, though."

Kaiko let out a low groan.

“Mm? You guys got creative differences?”

Itsuki picked up the problem scene from the draft on the table and handed it to Setsuna.

“Whoa, this is really good... Huh? Wait, isn’t this the...?”

“...This girl put panties on Ichika for her nude scene.”

Setsuna had thought something was off. Now he knew.

“Huhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh?!”

His reaction was exactly the same as Itsuki’s when he first laid eyes upon the page. This time, though, Kaiko was there to be taken to task about it.

“Huhh? Huhhhhh? Like, *huhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh*?! Like, what were you even thinking here?! Why would you do something as terrible as putting panties on a naked lady?! This is, like... Wow, now I know what they mean by raping the original!”

“Exactly.” Itsuki gravely nodded, even as Toki and Tokuyama were both giving him “what are these people talking about” looks. “I knew you’d understand, Setsuna. This monster’s having her way with my novels, and you need to show her the truth!”

Kaiko’s voice trembled. “P-Puriketsu, are you saying you’re a believer in the **evil cult** of extreme nakedness...? All I wanted to do was give these beautiful girls the beautiful clothing they deserve...”

“You’re crazy, man! I really like this scene in *All About*! Hoshiimo’s illustration was bursting with sheer ass-power! Why’d you go and put panties on her? I mean, the bra’s one thing, but you gotta have her take the panties off!”

Now Itsuki was startled.

“What’re you *talking* about?! I don’t need the bra *or* the panties! I want her fully, completely naked! I won’t accept anything else!”

“A bra only...? What a disgraceful thing to say! I had no idea you were one of *those*, Puriketsu!”

It was hard to figure out what Kaiko was mad about, exactly. Setsuna ignored it.

“And plus, like, I don’t care if you do that with scenes where Ichika’s facing the reader! But when she’s got her ass front and center, I hope you take those panties off, dude!”

“How—how could I do something so unnatural?! The bra completes the panties, and vice versa! That’s the one true, correct way to make Ichika shine as brightly as possible!”

“What do *you* know about Ichika[’s ass]?! C’mon, sir! There’s no way you can give the *All About* manga to someone like this!”

Itsuki seemed ready to instinctively agree with Setsuna, but instead, he just looked at him, conflicted.

“I know. I really want to sever ties...but apart from the nude scenes, I’ve got absolutely no complaints about the *All About* she draws. It’s wonderful. Nobody’s more qualified for this job than her... Ugh! Why does someone with as much talent as you have to have this ridiculous lingerie fetish...?!”

“And why does someone like *you*, Mr. Hashima, love the little-sister characters as much I do but still insist on stripping them naked all the time? You’ve let evil conquer your brain...”

But before Itsuki and Kaiko could bicker any further:

“So let *me* draw it!!”

Setsuna’s declaration came out of nowhere.

“Wh-what are you, crazy? You’ve got other work to—ah.” Toki cut himself off.

“Mm-hmm. Now that *SILLIES* is done, I got some time in my schedule.”

“Hmm... Setsuna drawing my novel...”

Itsuki gave the proposal the serious consideration it deserved. He had wanted to wait a bit—to grow as an author so he could team up with him again for his “ultimate” novel. But if Setsuna could be the guy adapting his work into manga instead, he’d be a great partner for that, no doubt. The team from *Genesis Sisters of the New World* (Itsuki’s debut series) coming back together would attract tons of reader buzz, too—it might even convince readers who were just fans of their work to come back for the manga.

“But Setsuna...um, can you draw manga?” Another thought had occurred to Itsuki.

“I’ve never drawn any before,” Setsuna replied, breezily as ever, “but I bet I probably can! I’ve drawn novel illustrations that were all divided up into panels before, so...”

“Mmmm.” Itsuki thought about it for a moment—just a moment. “All right. If you think you can, then let’s go with this.” He turned to Toki and Tokuyama, eyes deadly serious. “I wanna stage a competition between Setsuna...I mean, between Puriketsu and Kaiko. If Kaiko can beat him, then I promise I’ll let her draw panties on naked girls.”

“Um, no, I mean, this is rather sudden...”

“I don’t mind,” Kaiko said, cutting off the flustered Tokuyama as her sharp, willful eyes turned toward Setsuna. “In fact, I insist. Being able to compete with Puriketsu would be an honor for any artist.”

“...You sure? ’Cause I don’t wanna put you out of a job.”

Setsuna sounded serious, for a change. It made Kaiko flinch back a bit—but not enough to relent.

“...I won’t lose this. I promise you.”



Thus, it was decided that Setsuna and Kaiko would hold a manga battle right there in Itsuki’s apartment.

Kaiko had her art materials with her, and while Setsuna generally worked with digital tools, he was just as handy with a mechanical pencil. Each artist was assigned the same controversial scene—the sexy one with a naked Ichika letting her libido run wild. Setsuna would depict her naked, just like the original, while Kaiko would stick with her lingerie look. The judges were Itsuki, Toki, and Tokuyama, with Itsuki allowed to cast two votes as the original creator.

The main thrust here wasn’t who can make the better manga; it was who’d make a better person to adapt the novels. They would be judged not just on their current manga art skills, but on their overall future potential, name-brand

value, and so on.

Like Itsuki, the two editors knew full well that (1) if the original had naked chicks, having said chicks be naked in the manga would be the safest bet, and (2) having a known figure like Puriketsu handle the manga instead of a nameless rookie would have merits of its own. In terms of gut feelings, Setsuna enjoyed a substantial advantage—but Setsuna had never drawn *All About My Little Sister* and was a total amateur at manga. Kaiko, on the other hand, got full marks for her art style and had drawn this scene once already. She was the better manga artist, but was she good enough to make the judges pick her over Setsuna, despite her willful intent to ignore the original? That was the question.

So Setsuna and Kaiko were seated on opposite sides of the table, two blank sheets of paper in front of them. As the two stared each other down, the three judges stood over them to observe.

“Pencils at the ready,” Itsuki said. Setsuna picked up his mechanical pencil, twirling it around his fingertips. Kaiko, meanwhile, took out all her manga stuff—pencil, eraser, G-nib pen, ink, Wite-Out, screen tone, utility knife, and so on.

“I kinda wanted to compete at the sketch level,” Itsuki said. “Are you gonna ink it, too?”

“Yes.” Kaiko nodded, full of drive. “I’m going to cram everything I’ve got into these pages.”

“Yeah, uh, we’ll see about that.” Setsuna laughed, still twirling his pencil around.

“...All right, whatever. Are you two ready?”

“One moment,” Kaiko said—and then, for some reason, she removed the headband from her hair, then plucked the ribbon off it. As Itsuki looked on dubiously, she undid the bow...and gave the rest of the room a shock.

“Wha...?!”

They couldn’t be blamed. The accessory everyone had assumed to be a ribbon was actually a single pair of women’s panties.

“P-panties...?”

“Panties, huh...?”

“Yep. That’s definitely a pair of panties.”

Before the wide-eyed Itsuki and Setsuna, Kaiko gave the underwear a loving caress for good luck, bewitching smile spread across her face.

“You... You’ve been wearing a pair of panties on your head this whole time?!”

“That’s correct.”

“Oh, gross, gross, gross!” Itsuki was reeling.

“How rude of you. What’s so bad about using panties as a ribbon?”

“How could it ever—? Well, hold on, maybe... Hmm? ...Maybe it’s not...?”

Kaiko was so matter-of-fact about it that Itsuki wasn’t so sure his common sense was telling him the truth any longer.

“...So,” he sputtered, “so why did you just take it off your head...? Are you using that as a model, or—”

“No. Even without a model, the styles and textures of every type of lingerie known to mankind are alive in my mind.”

Ewww! thought Itsuki. He somehow managed to keep from voicing it.

“...Um, so what are those for?” he finally asked, fearing it’d be something even worse than he could imagine.



*

“...From this moment forward, I, Kaiko Mikuniyama, will reach out and attain manga divinity.”

And with those resolute words, Kaiko put the panties on. Like a wrestling mask.

“““““Whaaaaaaaaaaaaa?!“““““

Faced with this act straight out of *Hentai Kamen* or maybe Blue Snow from *Shimoneta*, Itsuki, Setsuna, Toki, and Tokuyama all screamed in surprise.

Kaiko pointed the tip of her mechanical pencil at Setsuna, like a knight challenging their opponent to a duel. “...Let us begin,” she said, her voice clear as the morning sun.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa! What’s that for?!” Itsuki frantically interjected.

“This is the uniform I wear when drawing my manga. What is the issue?”

“Your—your uniform...?”

Itsuki could feel Kaiko’s sharpened eyes drill into him as he searched for the words. He knew a lot of people who changed into work clothes or tracksuits or whatnot before sitting down at the writing desk, to help them mentally switch gears. He even heard stories about manga artists who went with gothic Lolita fashion, or bondage gear, or even cosplay of their own characters. And considering Nayuta Kani was so off-kilter that she couldn’t write a word without going completely naked, the concept of a prim young woman wearing panties over her head all day then unrolling them down her face when at work wasn’t so weird. Probably. Maybe? Perhaps. Itsuki made a very deliberate choice to think so.

“Um, well, all right... Are you ready now?”

“No issues here.”

“Yep. No way I’ll let this perv beat me,” the now-calm Setsuna said.

“All right. Ready... Go.”

At Itsuki’s signal, Kaiko’s and Setsuna’s pencils immediately began to dance on

the paper. This was a do-over of sorts for Kaiko, but there wasn't a moment of hesitation or indecision in Setsuna's strokes. Itsuki was happy to see that—Setsuna wasn't just being kind to him; he really *did* like his work. Getting to partner with him again would be awesome.

Seeing this boyish-looking guy with the fancy dyed hair compete head-to-head with a girl whose face was covered in panties was downright surreal at first glance, but both artists' eyes were both brimming with competitive spirit as they focused on their sheets. It put him at the edge of his seat.

They were both undoubtedly geniuses in their own ways, and nobody else wanted to bother them for now. Itsuki left the *kotatsu* to write at his desk while the two editors flipped up their notebook PCs and attended to their e-mails.

Two hours passed.

"Yes! I got the rough done!"

Setsuna was the first to shout out, three pages' worth of manga in front of him. It was sketchy, of course, being done with nothing but pencils, but it still exhibited the full force of Setsuna's skills in expression. Just one glance at it was enough to take your breath away.

"Whoa..."

Picking the sheets up, Itsuki felt excitement shoot up and down his body. There was Ichika in all her unbound glory, cute but still utterly depraved. He wished he could just plunge into that page and cling to her, right then and there.

"Whew... Man, your nudes are just incredible..."

Setsuna wiped the sweat from his brow as high praise slipped from Itsuki's mouth.

"Heh-heh... But what about you, Kaiko?"

He tossed a doubtful glance across the table.

She had drawn a total of five pages. The pencils were all done, and once again, they were easily magazine-publishable quality. She had even finished inking page one, and her G-nib pen was busily wrapping up the next one. Her

attention was focused solely on the page in front of her; she hadn't even noticed Setsuna was done. Her breathing was ragged through the mask, causing her to make little rhythmic "fwssh, fwssh" sounds through the fabric. It must've been hot under those panties, because her face looked almost worryingly flushed.

"...Man, talk about concentration," an impressed Setsuna muttered as he picked up page one of her work, Itsuki leaning in for a glance.

"“Huh...?!”"

They both yelped out loud at once. It depicted Kazuma realizing the sex-crazed Ichika was in danger and leaping into the shower room. She was naked in the original and tastefully clothed in lingerie in Kaiko's first take. This time, though, Ichika had a school uniform on, her bra poking out from underneath her damp white shirt. A pair of white panties was just barely visible from the bottom of her upturned skirt.

"She... She's exposing even *less*...?"

Transforming a nude scene into a lingerie tease had almost cost her the job, and now Kaiko had gone and thrown a second layer on her. It made no sense at all.

Confused, Itsuki turned toward the page Kaiko was inking presently. It depicted Kazuma scrambling to help the pained Ichika, dutifully undoing each button on her shirt, the bra underneath gradually becoming visible down to the most minute, intricate detail. She took up an entire page with that alone.

He picked up the other three penciled pages from the floor. Ichika, overcome with lust, was now advancing upon Kazuma, her half-unbuttoned shirt revealing yet more of her, her skirt pulled down just a bit so you could see the upper rim of her panties—every possible detail drawn into the lace and so on, as usual.

On page four, she still had the shirt sleeves on, but the bra was almost entirely visible. The skirt was still further down her legs now, exposing the panties halfway to the world. Finally, page five had Ichika's shirt completely off, skirt on the shower-room floor; she was now back to the state Kaiko had drawn her in the first round. She was lewd, lustful, violent, beautiful as she lapped up the blood running down the back of Kazuma's neck, peace and tranquility

slowly but surely returning to her countenance...

After reading it, Itsuki took an astonished step back. *Right now*, he realized, *I was just completely enthralled by this manga. I spent all that time and effort writing that nude scene, and she went and gave her an entire outfit for it—but look how it turned out!* As much as he hated to admit it, the sight of Ichika gradually disrobing, gradually revealing what lay underneath, made even a nude-or-nothing guy like him excited.

He wanted to see more. He wanted more of that bra and panties. Like a starving beast, he wolfed down the comic pages, all but begging for more. This wasn't a single illustration, like what light novels generally had. This was *manga*, a series of artwork connected by a common thread, and it had just told the tale of a hapless set of undergarments. And it *enthralled* him!

"...What do you think?"

Itsuki, staring at the pages on all fours like some barnyard animal, was brought back to reality by Kaiko's voice from above. He stood up, embarrassed, and turned toward her.

"Lemme see that one sec," Setsuna said as he took the pages away, a grim look on his face. "...Huh. Yeah, that's another way to draw it..." The joy and frustration were written all over his whispered praise. "Um, sir? I don't think we have to wait for Kaiko to finish inking, do we?"

Kaiko raised an eyebrow. "You mean...?"

"Like...just say it, sir." Setsuna sounded like someone had just deflated the air from his tires. "What do you think of this manga?"

"...Ahh... Well...how to put it.....?"

Then, all at once, in the most uncomfortable way possible:

".....It made me think, y'know, maybe lingerie's better than I thought."

Kaiko's manga had just physically *excited* a sworn acolyte to the naked female form. The world is full of superb, exquisite, engaging works of art, but how many of those works have the power to change the very way its readers view the world? Even if that epiphany was along the lines of "I used to like nude

chicks, but I'll totally start faving panty shots, too!" Itsuki had just been granted a brand-new outlook on life.

Setsuna's manga was great, too. Moving, even. But it was overwrought in areas, from the panels' pacing to the way he used dialogue, and it wasn't actually all that complete a manga package. It was basically Puriketsu the illustrator trying to cram his immense artistic talent into the manga format. He was such a great artist, and the art remained great in this manga. Maybe they could hire someone else to do layouts for the manga run until he got more used to the genre. But as Itsuki judged it, Setsuna's talents were best utilized when he could focus wholly on illustration.

And Setsuna himself seemed to agree. He flashed them a smile, already resigned to his fate.

"Whew... Well, you ready for the judgment?"

"I'm as ready as ever." Kaiko nodded.

In the end, the vote between Itsuki, Toki, and Tokuyama was unanimous. Kaiko swept it.

"Thank you so much!" she half shouted, beaming as she practically ripped the panties off her head, sending beads of sweat flying into the air.

"I can't wait to begin working with you, Mr. Hashima!"

Holding the sweat-soaked panties like a valuable treasure, she gave a polite bow to Itsuki.

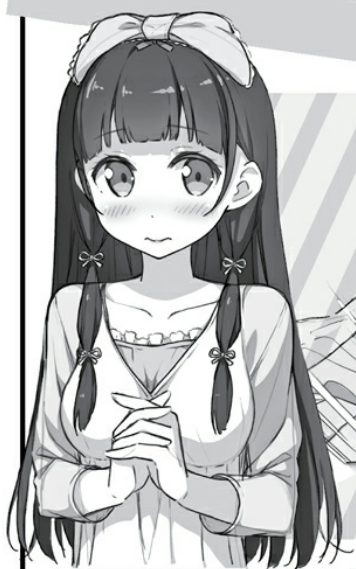
KAIKO MIKUNIYAMA

AGE: 20

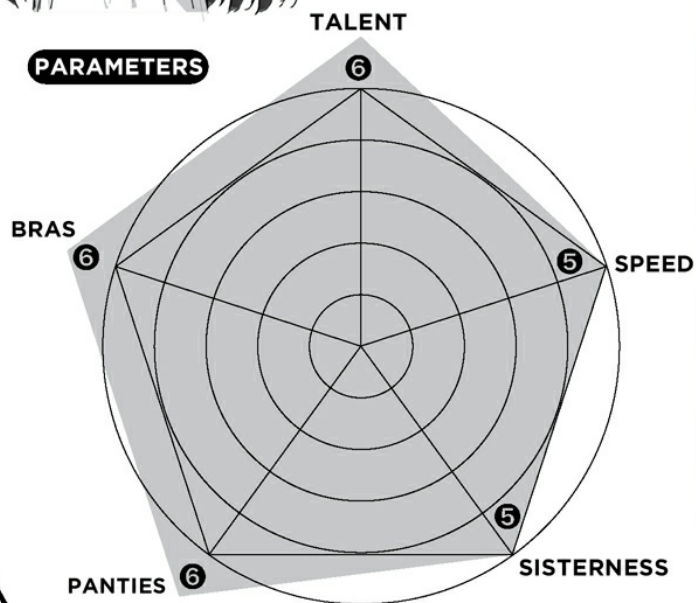
BORN: March 28

Bust: 34 Waist: 23 Hips: 33

A freshly minted manga artist with an undying love for little sisters and panties. Gifted with unbridled talent and passion.



PARAMETERS



**AN UNPARALLELED LINGERIE
ARTIST, WEAVING SILKEN LACE
INTO THE 2-D REALM**

The Near Miss

“Well, see you later, sir.”

Setsuna excused himself not long after Kaiko humbled him in competition.

“Hang on. My brother oughtta be here soon to cook dinner. You want some?”

Setsuna thought over Itsuki’s invite for a moment before shaking his head.

“Nah, I’m fine today. I really oughtta meet him someday, though.”

Given his habit of showing up uninvited, hanging out for a while, then leaving without warning, Setsuna hadn’t managed to be around Itsuki’s place when his brother was home yet.

“...Sure thing. Have a good one.”

“Mm-hmm,” he replied, a little anxiously, as he left.

Then:

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah, she *killed* meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee...”

He slumped over, sighing deeply.

It didn’t take a genius to see that a manga beginner tackling an upcoming professional was foolhardy at best, but losing still stung. As inexperienced as he was with the manga format, he still put everything he had into drawing pretty-girl asses, his greatest talent. It still wasn’t enough.

He wanted to be able to draw better asses. *Godly* asses. Asses so overwhelmingly wonderful that they could transcend illustration, transcend manga, transcend fine art, and turn all those formats on their heads. And to do that, he had to see *that* girl’s ass again—and use it to boost himself to the next level.

It had been several months since he had last seen her and her ass of the

millennium around this neighborhood. He had paid frequent visits to the area ever since, searching around, hoping against hope for another chance to see it, but none of his efforts had borne fruit yet. He had checked out a few nearby schools and gyms at Itsuki's suggestion, but it seemed that the general public didn't have a concept of what "ass power" (as he attempted to describe it to others) meant, and apart from the amazing ass power this girl had, he didn't know her name or face or anything. If he at least knew what she looked like, he could sketch out a likeness easily enough, but apart from her ass and the supple, voluptuous legs supporting it, everything about her had vanished from Setsuna's mind.

"Ugh... I should probably give up..."

SILLIES was canceled, he had just lost a manga battle, and this girl refused to be found again. All Setsuna Ena could do was trudge dejectedly around the city.



Meanwhile:

".....!"

Chihiro Hashima, walking from the nearest bus stop to Itsuki's place, was startled by the sight of a young man in front of her. There was no way she could forget that tricolor hair. He was small, about the same size as Itsuki. No doubt about it.

—*Why is that molester here?!*

Darting into a nearby alley, Chihiro waited for her heart to calm down.

Several months ago, when Itsuki and his friends had gone out to picnic under the cherry blossoms, Chihiro was accosted by this man on the way home. He asked her to show her ass, or something—none of it made much sense to Chihiro—and when she turned the stranger down, he reached out and pulled down her pants.

She was lucky enough to knock the pervert out with a well-placed kick, and because he hadn't shown up since, Chihiro assumed she was in the clear. But he was still prowling around this neighborhood?



...Maybe he lives around here. Or maybe he's looking for me. For revenge.

Either way, Chihiro never wanted to run into him again, and as she briskly headed for her brother's apartment, she swore to keep a sharp eye out the next time she walked down this street.

Q&A Corner



QUESTION

Where did your pen names come from?



Itsuki Hashima is my real name.



I just rearranged my real name a little.



“Kani” is the last name because I had crab, or *kani*, for dinner the night I was thinking it up. Too bad it wasn’t shrimp, or else I’m sure Itsuki would be all over me by now... So close, too. “Nayuta” I picked because it sounded kind of cute.



“Puriketsu” literally means “jiggly ass,” and that’s what I’m all about, man!



“Kaiko” is Japanese for “silkworm,” and just like that beautiful insect, I want to be the raw material for all the world’s most bewitching undergarments. “Mikuniyama” is my mother’s maiden name.

Nudity Strikes Back

The day after the manga competition, Nayuta was lazing around Itsuki's *kotatsu* table as he sat facing his computer.

"Hmm...hmm... Whoa....."

He was peering intently at the screen, apparently searching the net for something. Nayuta leaned back for a better look.

"Mmm...? Nyaaaah?!"

"Whoa! Don't scare me, Kanikou!"

"Don't scare *me*!" she countered, face strained.

"Huh? About what?"

"Why are you looking at lingerie sites, Itsuki?!"

On the screen was an online store for women's undergarments, filled with stock photos of bras and panties, along with shots of well-proportioned Western women modeling them.

"I, I'm just doing research! There's no ulterior motive!"

The shouting, reddened Itsuki did little to dissuade Nayuta as she squinted at Itsuki, then the screen.

"Research...? On panties?"

"Yeah. I wanna talk about them in my novels."

Nayuta gave him the most incredulous look her eyes could muster. "What about your novels makes you need to look into lingerie?! Just do what you always do and describe them all generic, like 'white panties' or 'bra' or whatever!"

This was a habit that Itsuki still hadn't addressed since his first published

work. His descriptions of what his ladies wore under their clothing were skimpy at best. It was a miracle if he even bothered to mention the colors.

“...That’s what I’m trying to improve on,” Itsuki earnestly replied. “I think I haven’t been giving this stuff the attention it deserves. There are all these types of bras and panties, each with their own colors and decor and shapes and materials. Everything’s so unique. It’s like I finally realized that what a character wears is important for expressing a lot of her personality.”

“Wh-what happened to you, Itsuki...?” Nayuta pouted sadly at him. “It doesn’t matter what kind of panties they’re wearing. You know that in the very next line, they’ll take them off, or the wind will blow them off, or they’ll be torn to shreds by a magic spell. So who cares?”

“...You’re right. That’s how it’s been, up to now. But from now on, I’m thinking about adding some lingerie fan service, too.”

“Oh, no way! Where’d *that* come from?!”

Nayuta nearly fainted out of sheer dismay as Itsuki continued, his face as serene as a statue of Buddha.

“You know Kaiko Mikuniyama, the manga artist for *All About*? She’s really opened my eyes, you know? She showed me how deep the world of underwear truly goes.”

Suddenly, all expression vanished from Nayuta’s face.

“...Oh... Kaiko Mikuniyama... *That’s* the name of the snake who turned you all topsy-turvy...?”

The coldness of her whisper almost penetrated through the walls, chilling the entire neighborhood.



The next day, fresh-faced manga artist Kaiko Mikuniyama walked into a mid-rate hotel about a ten-minute walk from the nearest rail station by her publisher. As Tokuyama put it, one of GF Bunko’s best-selling authors had voiced a sudden desire to see Kaiko—and this author, Nayuta Kani, had been staying at this hotel for a while now.

Kaiko had never read her work, but she knew how dedicated her fan base was. What would such a popular writer want with her? They had never met, and Kaiko hadn't even made her professional debut yet. She didn't have a clue how Nayuta would even be aware of her.

It was thus with more than a twinge of nervousness that Kaiko walked down the hallway. Nayuta had made a very enigmatic point of asking her to come alone, so her editor Tokuyama wasn't there. Reaching Nayuta's door, she gingerly gave it a knock.

"...Yes?" a woman's voice said from the other side.

"Um, this is Kaiko Mikuniyama. Is this the room of Nayuta Kani?"

The door slowly opened, a silver-topped head popping out from within. She was quite attractive, but her face was oddly scrunched up, as if she was angry over something.

"...Come in."

"S-sure."

Kaiko stepped in. Another woman was sitting on the bed there, about the same age as Kaiko but more refined in looks. She gave Kaiko a hesitant nod.

"Um...? Who's this, Nayu?"

The silver-haired girl sniffed at the air. "This is Kaiko Mikuniyama, a manga artist. She's handling the comic adaptation of Itsuki's *All About* for him."

"Wow, a manga artist?" The woman eyed Kaiko closely, fascinated by her. It made Kaiko blush and turn away a bit.

"Oh, my name's Miyako Shirakawa," the refined woman said as she stood up. "I'm Nayu's friend, and I was Itsuki's classmate in college, too."

"Ah, I see! My name is Kaiko Mikuniyama. Good to meet you."

Then Kaiko turned to the silver-haired girl.

"Um, and you are...?"

"I apologize. My name's Nayuta Kani. I'm Itsuki's wife."

"W-wife?!"

Kaiko peered intently at Nayuta. The fact that this wispy, otherworldly girl with the silver hair was famous novelist Nayuta Kani was surprising enough, but she was married to Itsuki Hashima? No way. Itsuki Hashima, this guy with a love for two-dimensional sisters as strong as her own, had this cute real-life girl for a life partner the whole time? Kaiko honestly felt a tad betrayed.

“Nayuuu,” Miyako said with an eye-rolling sway of the head, “you really shouldn’t tell a bald-faced lie like that to someone you just met.”

“Oh, what’s the big deal, Myaa? I’m marrying him sooner or later.”

“I...um, how do you *know* that...?”

Miyako seemed to struggle for words a little as Kaiko figured out what to say next.

“Um...what kind of lie do you mean?”

“Oh, this girl just really loves Itsuki, that’s all,” Miyako replied with a chagrined smile.

“I...see,” Kaiko said, unsure what else to say.

“So, Nayu, what did you need me for today? You said this was urgent...”

Ah, Kaiko thought. She wasn’t the only one called here for nebulous reasons.

“Well, I mean,” Nayuta reluctantly replied, “it’s kind of scary, isn’t it, being alone with someone you’ve never met before?” Then she stared at Kaiko. “Listen to me, Myaa. This woman here has seduced Itsuki!”

“S-seduced?!”

“M-me?!”

Both of them began blushing profusely.

“Wh-what on earth are you saying? I am just drawing the *All About My Little Sister* comic, and I have not a single intention of any other relationship with Mr. Hashima!”

Nayuta pointed a finger straight at the pleading Kaiko. “And yet, you’re leading Itsuki down this terrible path!”

“T-terrible path?”

“You went and changed his original story on him, didn’t you?”

“Oh, that...? Well, yes, that’s right.”

“Changed?” a quizzical Miyako asked, a question greeted by a derisive *huff* from Nayuta’s nostrils.

“This woman! Had the *audacity*! To take a scene where the main heroine’s naked and put a bra and panties on her!”

“Ah...”

“No, *not* ‘ah...’!” Nayuta puffed her cheeks out in anger. “How can you be so indifferent, Myaa?!”

“Um...” Miyako gave her a confused look. “I don’t know what to tell you. Is it that much of a problem?”

“It’s a *huge* problem! Putting panties on a girl during a nude scene is like taking all of Itsuki’s work and ripping it to shreds!”

“...Mr. Hashima said pretty much the same thing,” Kaiko calmly replied. “But eventually, he saw the light when it came to the charms of underthings, and he agreed to let me change the scene to include panties.”

“Itsuki said yes? So what’s the big deal?”

“Everything!” Nayuta shouted, lunging at Miyako’s question. “Itsuki’s been bewitched! He’s all messed up in the head now! He’s talking nonsense about wanting to put lingerie scenes in his own novels!”

“Oh yeah, he’s always super lazy about describing intimate apparel in his books. Isn’t it a good thing for him to tackle it seriously now?”

“Aw, no way! You think it’s perfectly fine for Itsuki to change his religion from all-nude to dainty lace thingies?!”

“If those are the only two choices, I’m not sure if either of them are fine, or neither of them...” Miyako was utterly lost.

Nayuta gave her a look of astonishment. “You, you’re kidding me... What happened to the Myaa I know? The manhandling slut who rips her clothes off at a moment’s notice?”

“I don’t remember becoming a slut, Nayuta!”

“We played around naked on the beach in Okinawa!”

“Y...yeah, we did, but...”

“We both stripped down in this very room once!”

“That, that’s because you begged and pleaded for me to do it!”

“We started making out in the nude together on the street and got arrested for public indecency!”

“That was in that game we played!”

“...What are you two doing...?”

Miyako turned a dark shade of red at Kaiko’s withering stare.

“D-don’t listen to her! I’m not some kind of deviant nudist, all right?”

“Oh, Myaa, how could you...? I thought we were nudist buddies...”

Nayuta gave Miyako a look that resembled a kitten in the rain. It made Miyako wince with an apologetic little whimper.

Then Kaiko’s voice dropped to a lower pitch. “Hee-hee-hee... It would seem that the only person infected by the evils of nudist fundamentalism is you, and you alone.”

“Nnngh...”

Now Nayuta was gnashing her teeth in anguish.

“So enough of this uncivilized compulsion to do away with your clothes,” Kaiko triumphantly continued. “Filly underwear is the greatest beauty the human race has ever created! Nudity has no place in great art! In the shower, in the bathtub, between the sheets, in a deep sleep, when you’re eating, when you’re at school—every beautiful young woman needs to go around in her underwear, in every aspect of daily life!”

“No, *you’re* acting pretty weird, too!”

“What...?”

Miyako was doing all she could to tread water here, and it caught Kaiko by

surprise.

“*Regardless*,” barked Nayuta, “I refuse to allow you to adapt Itsuki’s work!”

“Whether you like it or not, Mr. Hashima has already accepted me. Besides, I am absolutely positive that nobody in the world is better prepared than me to depict the world of *All About My Little Sister* in manga form!”

The boldness of the statement made Nayuta flinch for a moment, but she quickly recovered. “That—that’s not possible! I can depict it far better than you ever could!”

“...! W-well, if you are willing to go that far, I refuse to take it sitting down. I challenge you to a match! If I win, you’ll have to accept that I’m handling the manga!”

“Perfect! Fine by me!”

“Nayu,” Miyako whispered, “can you even draw?”

“No problem!”

“Wow... Impressive.”

There was something resembling envy in Miyako’s tone as she marveled at the indefatigable Nayuta.

“...”

Kaiko, meanwhile, was putting on a bold face but internally fretting at this silver-haired girl’s seemingly unflappable attitude. There was no mistaking the fact that she thought herself the most qualified to adapt *All About*, but now she was tasked with convincing the publisher’s most talented novelist of that fact. A publisher that offered a home to all manner of technically gifted talents, like Puriketsu from yesterday. Maybe *she* was a crack manga artist, too.

But I can’t back down now.

Ever since she was a child, she had been drawing manga filled with ladies’ undergarments, hiding it all from her parents. She finally told them a year ago, when she had brought her manga to a publisher and they immediately assigned her an editor. They were firmly against it—*The work’s too unstable*, they protested. This time, though, she wasn’t trying to convince an editor. She had

to convince the world. She had to provide real results, to prove that she could go it as a professional manga artist, to make her parents see the light. Otherwise, it'd just be boring old college, to boring old recruitment meetings, to a boring old job.

And it had to be done with her vast knowledge of intimates. She knew full well how rash it was to change the original story around without permission. But this was the path she had chosen, and she was ready to expend everything for it. That effort brought her victory over genius-level talent Puriketsu and forced the nude-obsessed original creator to see things her way. She was almost there. Even if she was facing the top-selling author in the entire company, she could let nothing trip her up now!

“.....”

The fires of war blazing in her eyes, Nayuta picked up a ballpoint pen and memo pad she had on hand. Ready and willing to fight this genius novelist, Kaiko took out her manga equipment and installed her panties over her face.

“...Let us begin, then.”

“Prepare to accept defeat. My future with Itsuki is riding on this,” Nayuta growled back.

There, as Miyako looked on—too dazed to jab at them any longer— the battle began.



Five minutes later, Kaiko emerged the victor.

Miyako, realizing this was never going to be close, forced them to stop around then.

“.....Nayu, your art's not good at all,” she said with a vague sense of relief.

In short, Nayuta's manga was about as good as a grade-schooler's doodles. A completely jet-black figure, just barely sort of recognizable as a human figure, was striking some bizarre pose. It was eerie, the kind of thing you wouldn't want to look at too long for fear of unlocking an ancient curse.

“Aww... Why can't I draw better than this?” Nayuta shrugged as she gave her

artwork a shocked look. “I may not look it, but I had so much talent in kindergarten. Even my teacher said ‘Ooh, you paint really well’ and stuff...”

“Well,” Kaiko intoned as she snapped off her panties, “I win. So, as promised, you will recognize me as the one and only manga artist for Itsuki’s work.”

“W-wait a second! That was just a practice round! The *real* match is best two out of three!”

“Don’t know when to give up, do you?” Kaiko sighed. “I’ll duke it out with you as many times as you like...but it’ll just turn out the same, won’t it?”

“N-no it won’t!”

“...You should just give this one up, Nayu,” Miyako instructed the sneering, almost-crying girl.

“Not you too, Myaa...”

“I’m not an expert, but even I can tell she’s really good. If she’s turning Itsuki’s story into a manga, you should really offer her more support.”

Nayuta shook her head back and forth in disagreement. “I know full well she’s really good at drawing! But no matter how good she is, taking a naked girl and putting panties on her? It’s just not right!”

“You sure are stubborn on that point... Why are you so obsessed over whether someone’s naked or not?”

“It’s about more than the manga!” came the impassioned reply.

“How so?”

“This is a problem that affects the entire blueprint for my life!”

“That seems a little dramatic,” Miyako pointed out.

“...Um, what does my manga have to do with your life?” a mystified-looking Kaiko asked.

Nayuta wiped a tear away. “...I mean,” she said as if it was completely self-evident, “I’m gonna marry Itsuki someday.”

“Oh,” Kaiko indifferently replied. Miyako just stood there, smiling to block the pain, as Nayuta sniffled.

“And in *my* house, I’m generally always naked! I’m always gonna be naked in front of Itsuki, and he’s gonna get so turned-on and impatient that he’s gonna screw me until he’s satisfied! We’ll have sex, we’ll sleep, we’ll wake up, we’ll have sex, we’ll eat, we’ll have sex, we’ll watch TV, we’ll have sex, we’ll play games, we’ll have sex, we’ll read books, we’ll have sex, we’ll take a bath, we’ll have sex, and...and whenever he feels like it, we’ll have sex! We’ll have sex until I can’t even see straight, and I’ll be in pure ecstasy day and night, and my heart and my body will just melt right there on the bed! That’s the love-laden married life I’m dreaming of!”

“Give it up!”

Miyako’s and Kaiko’s cheeks were both a deep red now.

In obvious pain, Nayuta pleaded. “So please, I can’t have you awaken any sexual interests in my future husband apart from nudity! How do you plan to make it up to me if my naked body doesn’t ignite his passions any longer?!”

“Just put on some lingerie!” Kaiko angrily shouted. “Either way, I’m not going to change my manga approach just for your sake! Good-bye!”

“W-wait a moment!”

Nayuta circled in front of the departing Kaiko. “O-okay, if it’s come to this...”

A moment of hesitation—and then Nayuta flung the clothing off her body, skirt and panties and bra sailing through the air, until she was fully nude in the blink of an eye.

“Wha, wha, wha, what’re you doing?! That’s *shameless*!”

Nayuta was blushing just as hard as the frantic Kaiko. “If it’s come to this,” she cried, “I’ll do whatever it takes to make you recognize the wonders of being nude!” Then she hugged Kaiko from behind.

“Wh-what are you...?!”

“I want to teach you how the female chest feels!”

“I, I, I’m perfectly happy with my own, thank you!”

“Reeeeeeally?”

“Hyah?!” Kaiko cried out adorably as Nayuta whispered into her ear.

“...I knew it, Mikuniyama. You don’t know how another girl’s chest feels, do you? In the flesh?”

“...! So, so what?!”

Kaiko protested a little too much, the truth revealed. Nayuta smiled the smile of a gamer who had just discovered the trick to taking down a superstrong monster.

“Eh-heh-heh... And you think that someone handling the manga for a rom-com with just a little sex humor in it can get away with not knowing what a woman’s boobs feel like?”

“I, I told you, I’ve got a perfectly fine pair to figure out everything I need myself...”

Nayuta breathed into Kaiko’s ear, earning another “Hyah!” from her.

“You know, I learned not too long ago that feeling up your own breasts is totally different from feeling up someone else’s...”

“Huh...?! ”

“Oh? You didn’t know that? And you think you’re going to draw that scene in the hot springs where Ichika and Yukiko are washing each other off, and they start groping each other? When they’re saying ‘Ooh, did your boobs get bigger again’ and stuff?”

“I, I, women don’t *do* that in real life! It’s just a fantasy, so I can use my imagination to draw that!”

“Just a fantasy? Isn’t running into your sister in the shower room wearing nothing but a bra and panties a fantasy, too? Is *that* the kind of halfhearted approach you took when you drew that?”

“N-no! I’ve got a perfect image of how real-life panties feel, and smell, and taste in my mind! That’s what allows me to draw them in so much detail!”

“...Taste?” Miyako mumbled, her eyes half-lidded with exasperation. The other two failed to notice.

“Mikuniyama,” Nayuta said as she suddenly plunged a hand into Kaiko’s clothing.

“Hyah?! Wh-what are you...?!”

“I agree. I think the undergarments you draw are amazing. I can understand how you’ve managed to bewitch Itsuki with them.”

“Affh... Take, take your hand off, please...”

“If you took that skill and aimed it more toward the naked figure, that’d leave both Itsuki *and* his readers one hundred percent satisfied...but you refuse. Why can’t you draw anything besides lingerie?”

Her hand had made its way down beneath Kaiko’s bra.

“Ee... W-wait a...”

“...I’m not saying you should never draw a single bra ever again, you know. Those kinds of shots would work great in locker rooms, or bedrooms, or whatever. And you can draw all the bra and panty flashes you want, too, I’m sure. But for the bathroom, at least...? Can we get fully naked there, hmm...?”

Then, a squeeze.

“Hyaahn!” came Kaiko’s almost-flirtatious voice.

“You can draw lots and lots of underwear, for all I care. But promise me you’ll at least draw some nudes, too...come on...”

One of Nayuta’s hands was now kneading Kaiko’s chest, as the other dragged her skirt downward.

“Or is it more that you...*can’t* draw them?”

“...!”

Kaiko’s face tensed up.

“Because you’ve never touched a real pair of breasts, or a woman’s real butt... And that’s why you can’t draw them, hmm?”

“Nh... Agh...!”

The sweet insinuations were eating their way into Kaiko’s heart. Nayuta was

wrong. Kaiko *had* drawn boobs and butts before—including for the *All About My Little Sister* sample character designs, using Hoshiimo’s illustrations as a guide. But compared to the undeniably first-rate shots of panties and the like, the T&A just couldn’t quite compare. She had even posed in front of a mirror, playing around with her breasts with one hand and sketching with the other. But no matter how “nice” her boobs were, she just couldn’t get her illustrations to “must grab right this minute” level, the way she could with clothed figures.

In Kaiko’s mind, this was just a matter of not having the love. She adored lingerie from the bottom of her heart, but she had no similar emotional attachment to the female form. That was a problem, she thought.

But maybe Nayuta was right. Maybe it was just that she never had the opportunity to play with someone else before. It wouldn’t be a matter of “love,” just a lack of experience, or knowledge, or study. Or effort?

“Maybe, you know...it’s not that you’ve chosen underwear; it’s that you’re fleeing from nudity, hmm?”

“Ngh...!”

The poison behind Nayuta’s words stripped Kaiko of both her clothing and her identity. It made her question the validity of all she held dear, as Nayuta flashed an evil grin and finally made a move to unfasten her bra.

“...No you don’t...!”

She grabbed Nayuta’s wrist, protecting both her identity and her chest support. She had to prove it—that she wasn’t drawing on panties because she was incapable of drawing enticing nude art. She wasn’t fleeing from nudity—she just opted for the path of a pinup fetish artist. She was already well acquainted with the realm of tits and ass, and with that knowledge firmly in hand, she had to hold her own chest high and proclaim to the world that skimpy cover-ups were even better.

I have to show that my love is real! And to do that...!

A glint of determination flashed in Kaiko’s eyes. Free from Nayuta’s arms, she turned back toward her and promptly grabbed both of the other girl’s breasts, like her hands were the talons of a majestic eagle.

“Ha-hyah?!”

Now it was Nayuta’s turn to yelp out loud, as Kaiko slowly, hungrily, sometimes gently, sometimes roughly fondled her. She moaned out loud, cheeks flushed and eyes cloudy.

“Nyaaah...aiyahh... N-no... Shtaaahp...”

Apparently, she could dish it out, but she couldn’t take it.

“Ahn... Uhn... Ahh... Unf...”

Every time Kaiko applied pressure with her fingers, Nayuta acutely reacted to it, letting out cute little moans and exclamations.

“I see... This *is* different from touching myself, isn’t it...?”

Kaiko gave a satisfied nod, more than a touch of excitement running across her body. It wasn’t just a matter of Nayuta’s chest being different in shape or size from hers. When she felt herself, the resulting feedback was a mixture of tactile feel and internal reaction. Here, though, she could focus entirely on what her hands were telling her—and these were the hands of a manga artist, someone capable of beautiful, delicate artwork. They were far more sensitive than an average person’s hands, and the information they could gain from groping Nayuta’s naked breasts was vast. The way that Nayuta’s body jerked and shuddered and made all kinds of other unexpected movements along with her moans was just as fresh an experience, something Kaiko could never have found by herself.

“Nh... Hahh, hahh...”

She almost sounded ready to weep between her short, alluring breaths.

“Wh-why, why are...you so *good* at playing with, with my breasts...?!”

“Because I’m a manga artist,” Kaiko replied, as if nothing could be more obvious.

“Nnah... A, a manga artist...wowww... Please, enough...”

“I’m not going to end it with just *that*, no.”

Her hands continued their kneading work as Kaiko’s eyes ran up and down the

length of Nayuta's body, her honed manga artist's perception inspecting every curve and vertex of her pale, naked form.

"D-don't look, please," Nayuta half cried out, her bashful eyes sealed shut.

"Sorry, but I must. This is a golden opportunity for me, so I will happily study your body down to the last detail. Let me show you what happens when you make a manga artist get serious."

Her eyes were pulsing with excitement, but Kaiko's mind was totally clear and free of distractions. As she normally did with women's undergarments, she brought her face close to Nayuta's body as her hands continued, smelling it, examining the taste with her tongue.

So this is a woman's body...

The sensation, and the taste, made Kaiko overjoyed. She had to admit it—this was excellent. And it meant that she had to face up to it with everything she had, too. Not just with her hands and tongue. For real.

Her resolve steeled, Kaiko removed her hands, then her own bra. Her two breasts fell out with a near-audible *boing*—just as bountiful as Nayuta's and just as well formed.

"Nyah, what're you...?"

Before the slack-jawed Nayuta could voice her confusion any further, Kaiko wordlessly pressed her breasts against her partner's.

"Fyahh?!"

A shout rang out. Kaiko, for her part, was trying her best to keep her breathing steady, letting out little squeaks and grunts as she did. Even with her status as an A-level lingerie fan, her breasts were just as exceptionally sensitive as her hands—perhaps even more so, to the point where she scored a perfect 100 percent whenever she played Guess the Bra (a game popular in Gunma Prefecture where players are blindfolded, have a bra put on them, and have to guess the brand and materials).

Now Kaiko poured all her focus into her breasts, using them to analyze Nayuta's. They felt completely different on her skin from the high-quality

brassieres she preferred, but they were still just as smooth and comfortable to her. The sensation that seemed to draw in and gently embrace her breasts was easily equal to the comfort of a worn-in bra that had adjusted to her body after several months.

Wow... This is just... Wow...!

She was consumed by the feeling, her breathing accelerated by the astonishment and excitement—and then Kaiko decided to find out how her butt felt. Nayuta wouldn't let her bring her face close to it, but when Kaiko used her honed pro-manga-artist techniques to pinpoint the particularly sensitive spots she had discovered earlier, the author was putty in her hands.

The feel of Nayuta's butt was just as wondrous as her breasts. Seeking to explore it in greater depth, Kaiko slipped her panties down, which left her completely nude. In addition to Guess the Bra, she was also one of the best players of Guess the Panties (you can figure out how that's played) the world had ever known. Her superhuman sense of touch, normally reserved only for fully enjoying the sensation of the panties she wore, soon discovered all the secrets of Nayuta's ass.



“Nyahh...hh... Oh, oh, please... P-please, forgive me...”

“No.”

Nayuta’s impassioned, pleasure-drunk pleas fell upon deaf ears.

...A few dozen seconds passed.

After getting her fill of Nayuta’s rear end, Kaiko rubbed her own breasts and butt against various parts of Nayuta’s body, coiling herself around her as she carried out her expedition. Now Nayuta was spent, twitching slightly as she lay curled up on the floor, Kaiko watching from above.

“...I suppose you were right. The nude body is a subject worthy of challenging after all.”

“I—I told you, didn’t I...?”

Nayuta’s eyes were teary as she breathed out the words in a trancelike state.

“...Having just awoken to this new revelation, I don’t know how capable I am of expressing it, but I will try drawing Ichika in the nude.”

Nayuta breathed a sigh of relief at the declaration. “Y-yayyy... I did it... I finally did it, Itsukiii...♥”

“...But one issue remains.”

“Issue...?”

“The only breasts I know are mine and yours. However... Yours are not sized that differently from mine.”

She was right. They were both pretty buxom. But Ichika, heroine of *All About My Little Sister*, was relatively slender—not flat-chested, but certainly not double-Ds. An average size. Even after the painstaking exam she had just completed, Kaiko couldn’t express the nude form of Ichika with the experience of Nayuta’s body alone.

“Hee-hee... No problem there...!” Nayuta stood up, still trying to catch her breath. “We have someone who could be the perfect reference for Ichika’s body...*right over there.*”

Her eyes were glued to Miyako Shirakawa, who had watched this exercise in

debauchery with sheer exasperation but also enough excitement to keep her from stepping in to stop them.

A lurid smile crept onto Kaiko's face. "Ahh, yes, you're quite right."

Miyako's face tensed up, sensing the danger. "Wh-what...?"

"Eee-hee-hee! Myaaa...♥"

The still-nude Nayuta ran up and embraced Miyako, holding her to ensure there was no escape.

"Whoa, hey, wha, Nayu?!"

"Please remove your clothes, Myaa. Like you always do!"

"Don't—don't phrase it like I'm always stripping for you! I'm not some perv who likes being nude all the time! I refuse to succumb to peer pressure!"

But as she resisted, the nude Kaiko approached. "I beg you, Ms. Shirakawa. For the sake of my manga...I need you to be naked."

"Absolutely not! I'm never gonna take my clothes off again for you guys!"

"Oh, it's all right, Myaa. You'll feel so wonderful once we begin!"

"I don't want to!"

She did her best to reject their advances, but after two minutes' of sincere, devoted pleading, she relented, muttering, "Ugh, there is just no *dealing* with you people" as she disrobed and presented herself to the manga artist's fearsome sense of touch.



One week later, the second draft for chapter 1 of the *All About* manga landed on Itsuki's desk.

The general setup was identical to last time, except with an extra new helping of bra and panty shots. The slow, gradual, exhaustively detailed strip tease that accentuated the shower scene was also the same, but on the page after Ichika was stripped down to her undies, she was finally depicted in her full nude form.

Now the story had some extra fan service that wasn't mentioned in the

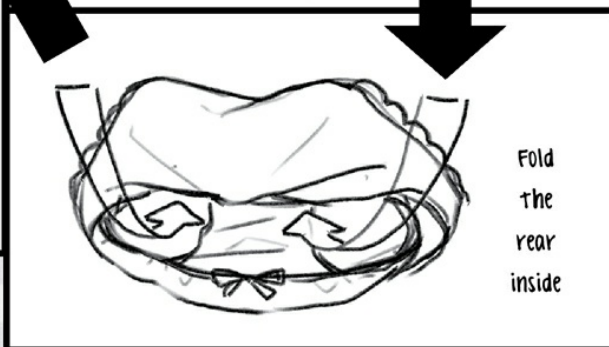
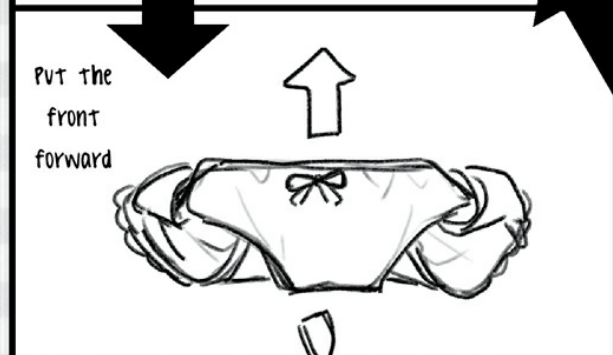
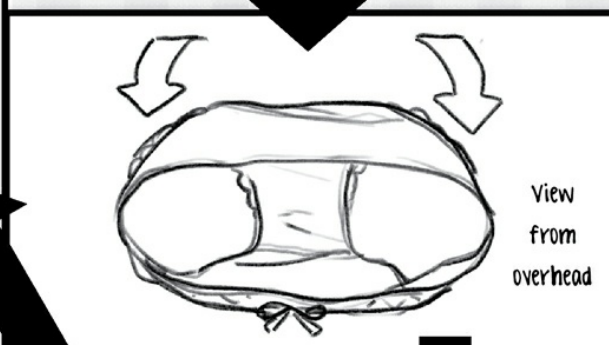
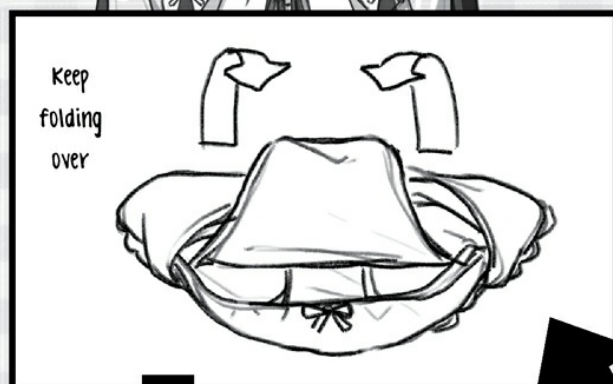
novels, along with descriptions of undergarments that changed the very nature of the story itself. What it also came with was a nude scene sure to satisfy any die-hard fan of the original, ensuring that new readers, faithful followers, panty fetishists, and nudity snobs could all enjoy it. The perfect adaptation.

“Heh-heh...geh-heh...gyeh-heh-heh... I thought the panties were nice, but nothing can beat nude, huh? It’s, like, the *ultimate*, guh-huh-huh-huh-huh... weh-heh-heh-heh-heh-heh...”

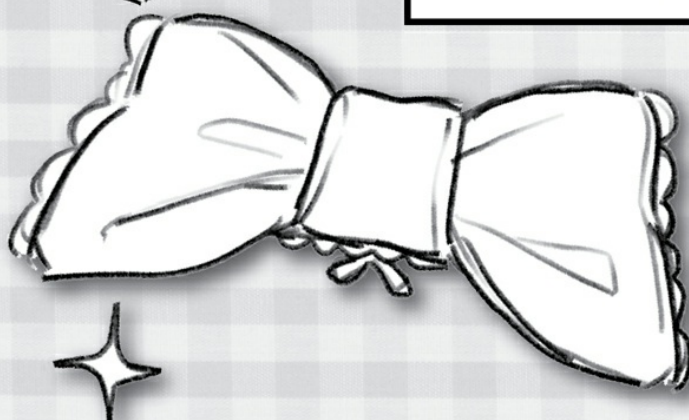
And as Itsuki stared at this nude scene, face contorted as he practically ran his tongue all over it, Nayuta stood next to him with a serene smile.

Supervised by Kaiko Mikuniyama!

How to Make a Panty Ribbon



Turn inside out and adjust the shape



COMPLETE!

My Little Sister Can't Be Cute (At All)

Early in the wee hours one night in late June, the anime series *Chevalier of the Absolute World* aired its final episode on TV.

Based on the light novel of the same name, the show had boasted terrible art direction from the very first episode and mediocrity in almost every other aspect, from scripting to character and mech designs to the voice cast's performance. It was panned, berated, and laughed at online as the "Shittiest Anime of the Season," even by people who never watched a frame of it.

Haruto Fuwa, the original story writer, watched this final episode alone in his room. He had considered inviting everyone over to Itsuki's apartment and making it into a party, like with the premiere a few months back, but it was easy to picture how painful the experience would be, so he opted against it. It'd just be raining on Itsuki's parade right when he was all excited about his own anime, no doubt—and besides, he didn't want to look pathetic in front of Miyako, a girl he had a growing crush on.

The concluding episode was just as awe-inspiringly awful as the others. The main cast did get around to defeating a mid-boss-level foe, but the series as a whole ended with a vast number of mysteries and plot elements left wholly unresolved. They went with that ending in anticipation of a sequel, but at this rate, there was no way the DVDs or Blu-rays would sell at all, and a season two was out of the question. (Even if it weren't, Haruto would've turned it down anyway.)

For the time being, he tweeted "Thanks for watching the final ep of the anime! Let's give the staff and cast a big hand for all their hard work! Watch for the DVD/BD release, too!" and turned off his PC. He was too scared to see what kind of replies his followers would give him.

"Ughh... Well, at least it's over now..."

He sighed—a deep sigh that almost took his soul with it—and leaned against the back of his chair. It had been about a year and a half since his editor told him about the anime project. All that time, the anime had occupied a large part of Haruto’s mind and work activity. He attended meet and greets with the director, the scriptwriter, the producer, and the rest of the main staff. He joined in their production meetings, nights out drinking, cast auditions, script conferences. He did the supervision work he was asked for. He attended the recording sessions, held interviews, wrote an entire new novel as a bonus for the DVDs...and then it premiered. And wound up being the worst anime ever.

Still, Haruto harbored no feelings of resentment or disgust toward the people behind it. *After all*, he thought, *it was hard work, but...you know...it was kinda fun, too.*

The utter embarrassment when the voice actors shouted out the lines he wrote in loud, bold voices during the auditions. The excitement when he saw the final character and mech design sheets. The pounding of his heart when he heard the opening and background tracks. The sense of accomplishment after butting heads with people during the script sessions. The joy at seeing life breathed into his characters at the recording studio. The happiness at being a core member of the team behind an anime, a genre of media he’d enjoyed since childhood. When he was wading in the midst of it all, Haruto had a total blast.

The past three months of airings had been an ordeal. Week after week, he could feel his heart being torn out. He didn’t want to pretend the fun he had never existed—but it’d be hard on him, admittedly, if he couldn’t divide the fun memories from the bitter experiences in his mind.

“...Too bad we couldn’t have just made the anime and never broadcast it on TV.”

That way, he figured, at least they could bask in the fun of creativity without a deadline breathing down their necks. They wouldn’t be subject to a barrage of vitriol from irresponsible, insensible haters who weren’t even consumers of the content. It was a silly thought, but it made Haruto’s lips curl into a smile.

“...It takes, what, about ten or twenty million yen to make a thirty-minute

anime episode? A twelve-episode season would be around two hundred million. If I had that much... Well, no, if I want to keep the quality high, I'll want at least three hundred million... Boy. Ha-ha... Oof."

He could've pooled all the royalties from the *Chevalier of the Absolute World* novels, plus the cut he received from the anime and merchandise, and it'd still be a drop in the bucket.

"...All right," he muttered. "I'll just have to sell ten times as many books and get that three hundred mil saved up. Then I can make an anime all for myself!"

It was a joke, but still about one-fifth the truth. He grinned at himself and stood up off the chair. His head was too messed up to sleep well yet, but he wasn't in any mood to tackle work. This was the perfect time for a drink.

So he headed downstairs and plucked a bottle of Bierblomme from the kitchen cabinet. Despite having "bier" in the name, this was actually a distilled liquor, a type of brandy. The name, meaning "beer flower" in Dutch, comes from the flowers of the hop plant used in both its and beer's production.

He placed a glass on the living-room table and filled it up from the bottle. The smooth, clear liquid, 40 percent alcohol by volume, smelled pleasantly of herbs and made a satisfying glug-glug on its way out of the container. He filled his glass halfway and tossed a few ice cubes inside. Before they started to melt, he brought it to his lips, gave it a furtive lap with his tongue, and allowed the warmth from the alcohol—a pleasant contrast to the mild, mellow mouthfeel—spread across his mouth.

For someone who mostly drank beer that was 5–10 percent alcohol, this was pretty potent stuff. He had Itsuki try it once, warning him to be careful with it, but he had gone and drained it like a lager anyway and immediately coughed most of it up on the floor. Haruto wasn't much of a liquor aficionado himself, so he used his tongue to play with the taste a little, mixing up the gentle sweetness with the strong alcohol, taking care not to swallow too much at once.

He enjoyed the sensation of the warmth running down his throat and throughout every vein of his body, the exhilarating scent of the spirit on his breath. Then he picked up the glass again, sipping just a little more—

“What’re you doing?”

“Bopph!”

Haruto was so shocked at the voice behind him that he wound up swallowing the whole mouthful. It was either that or spew it all over the table, but it set his esophagus on fire.

“Ngg...?! Kaff! Agh! Kahha!”

“Are you all right, Bro?!” Haruto’s younger sister asked in a panic.

“Keff keff... Haccck! Koff.....hahh, hahh... Whewwwww.”

Once he recovered, Haruto looked reproachfully at his sister as he wiped his mouth with a towel.

“I swear... Don’t scare me like that, dumbass...”

His sister glared right back at him, face reddened. “What?! It’s not *my* fault that scared you! Don’t blame me!”

“Oh, shut up. Why are you even awake right now?”

“Wh-what’s it matter to you?! I just had insomnia, so I thought I’d go have some tea, that’s all!”

“Oh? Well, don’t drink too much and wet the bed again.”

“What?! I never wet the bed! How stupid are you?!”

“Kind of hard to believe coming from someone who wet the bed in the eighth grade.”

The malicious swipe from Haruto only made his sister’s face redder.

“I— That— I just drank too much juice that day! That was the only time since I started middle school!”

“It still means you’re a middle-school bed wetter,” Haruto calmly pointed out.

“You... Nnnng, nnggghhhhhhh!!”

Finding nothing left to counter with, she fumed as tears began to form in her eyes. Haruto thought about teasing her some more but decided not to.

“Geez... Just get your tea and go to bed.”

“I know! You don’t have to tell me, dumbass!”

She stormed toward the refrigerator, opened the door, took out a liter bottle of tea, poured it into a cup—and then plopped into a chair right next to Haruto.

“...Why’re you sitting down?” a quizzical Haruto asked.

“Wh-why do *you* care? I just feel like sitting down and having some tea!”

“...Really?” he asked as he began sipping his Bierblomme again. The ice had begun melting, making it feel softer in his mouth, but it was still a stiff drink. His sister next to him did the same thing, lightly sipping at her tea even though it was ice-cold from the fridge. She was a total brat, but he had to admit—there was something maybe a little cute about the act, like a mouse nibbling at a seed.

“...By the way,” she said, still staring at her cup.

“By the way?”

“They played the last episode of the anime from your novels just now, didn’t they, Bro?”

Haruto’s face stiffened. “...Did you watch it?”

His sister turned toward him, cheeks tinged with red. “It—it was just running when I turned on the TV! So I just kind of watched it!”

“Really?” Haruto sighed. “...Pretty shitty, wasn’t it?” he self-mockingly added.

“Yeah, it was garbage.” The anger was clear in her immediate reply. “...I don’t like any of your books at all, Bro, so it’s not like I care whether the anime’s garbage or not, but...”

“Hey...”

“...But what *was* that? It was pure crap. The animation was all janky, the people barely even moved at all, the voice work was amateur at best, the characters and mechs and monsters looked nothing like the originals, the dialogue barely made sense, the conversations didn’t even connect with one another, the plot got all slashed apart, and it’s like, how stupid do you think the viewers even are?! Everyone who made it ought to die!”

“You don’t have to get *that* angry about it,” Haruto replied, perplexed.

“What?! I’m not angry at all! I don’t give a crap about my brother’s stupid anime! I don’t even think of it as your anime, so it doesn’t matter!”

His sister drained her tea.

“Ugh, just thinking about it pisses me off even more! And why did it go so far away from the original novel from the very first episode? That doesn’t make any sense! All that awkward dialogue gives you no clue what Asao’s thinking, and you have zero idea why Lancelot even picked Asao, so she totally comes off like this loose slut or something!”

For someone who wasn’t interested and didn’t care, seeing his sister accurately point out even minor details like that made Haruto smile.

...She really does like Chevalier, doesn’t she?

“What’re you smiling at me for, Bro?! You see, that’s exactly why people keep on messing around with you! Because you’re always smiling like that!”

Haruto shut his mouth. It was never easy having your little sister call you out on something you suspected might be the case.

She was merciless, paining his ears and stabbing at his heart with her words, but weirdly, he never found it maddening or frustrating. In fact, he could feel his heart lighten a little. It felt kind of like it had three months ago, at the anime premiere, when Miyako Shirakawa cried right alongside him. Perhaps Haruto’s sister realized that he was too deeply involved as the story creator to openly lash out against the anime he worked on, so she was playing that role for him, never pulling punches and always putting her emotions out in the open.

Maybe, Haruto realized for the first time, having someone angrier than you about your work can save you as much as having them cry with you about it.

Without thinking about it, Haruto brought his hand to his sister’s head, roughly tousling her hair a little.

“Wh-what’re you doing, you dumbass?!”

“Er, um, nothing...”

He hurriedly brought his hand back. His resolve was firmer now. He had to say

it.

“...But just you wait. It’s gonna go better next time. I won’t let things turn out that awful ever again.”

“.....”

She gave him a blank look for a few seconds, only to have her face redden yet again.

“Aaahh! Well, no *duh!* If you make *that* kind of garbage anime again, I’ll never let you hear the end of it...so...so try harder next time, all right?!”

Then she stood up, blew Haruto a raspberry, and left the living room. Watching her go, Haruto couldn’t help but feel a tad lost.

I thought there was absolutely nothing good about having a little sister...but...

How a Tax Accountant Kicks Back

The last Sunday of June.

Ashley Ono, seated at the notebook PC on her low table, stretched her arms behind her head as Chihiro Hashima wrapped up cleaning duties on her kitchen/dining room combo.

“Whew... Finally done...”

Ashley’s office was also her place of residence. There was a rather ornate office adjacent to the dining room, but the thick, luxuriant easy chair wasn’t too comfortable for her, so whenever she had extended sit-down work, she did it in here. When she didn’t have clients stopping by, she generally went with a T-shirt and sweats, putting on a pair of black-rimmed glasses and tying her hair up into an onion-shaped bun. Seeing her in this state was a shock to Chihiro at first, but she got used to it quick—her brother acted much the same way before deadlines.

“Good job.”

She refilled Ashley’s cup with piping-hot green tea, taking care not to spill any as she slowly placed it on the table.

“Tee-hee-hee... Thank you,” Ashley said as she closed her computer, removed her glasses, took the band off, let her hair down, and sighed with a light smile. “I’m exhausted... Yes, truly exhausted.”

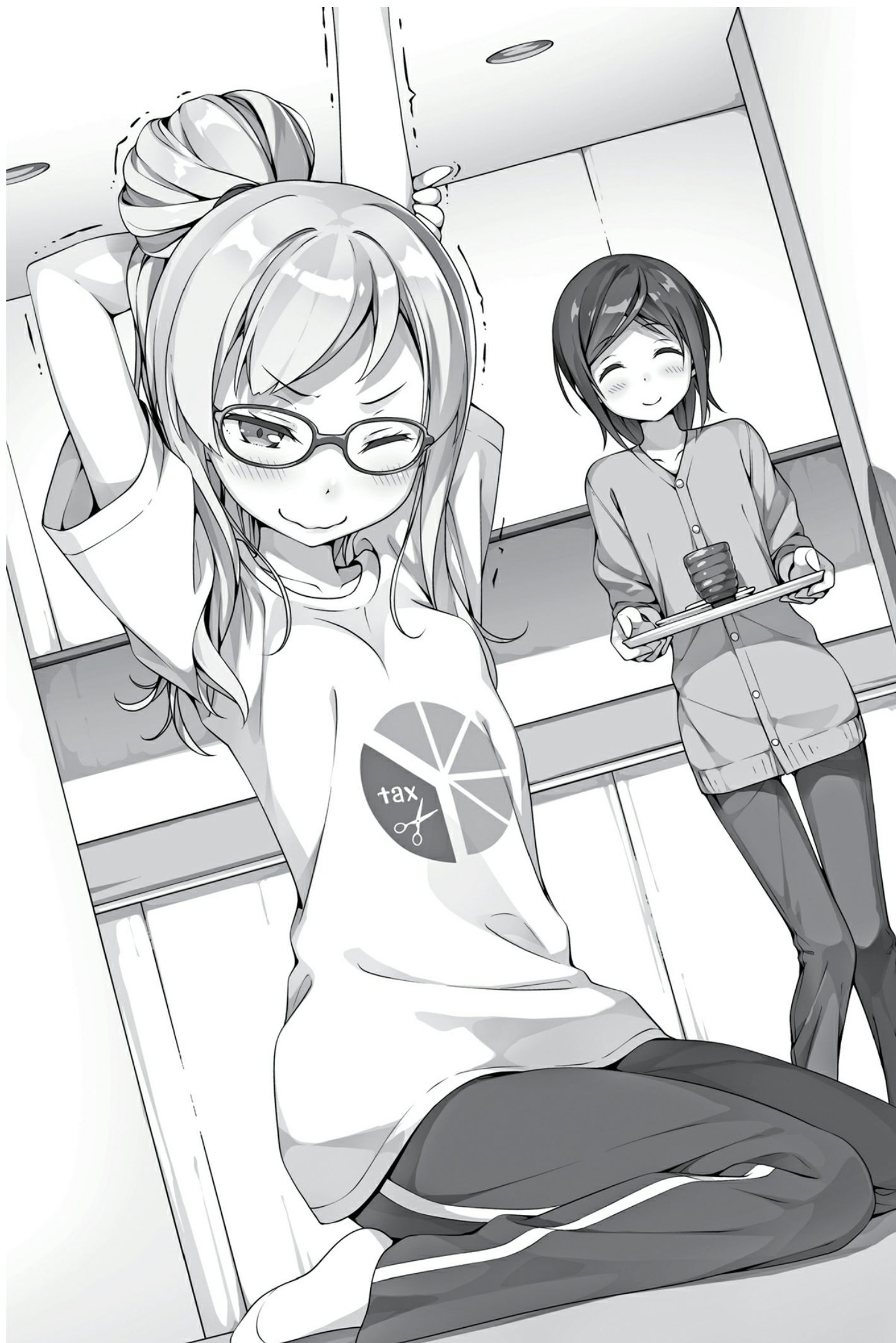
“Was it a big job?” Chihiro asked.

“Well...it’s taken almost ten months to get it fully wrapped up.”

“Wh-what kind of job was it?”

“...An inheritance case,” Ashley resentfully replied. “This wealthy businessman died, leaving two sons who absolutely hate each other. They started fighting

just before I could submit the forms, and it's been this huge morass ever since... I mean, they'd ask me things like 'Whose side are *you* on, Ms. Ono?' Like I had a personal stake in it or something. Ugh! The only ally I have in this game is money, you know. It's my job to keep the government's hands off as much of it as possible, but *oh*, how they carried on..."



“Wow, that sounds rough.”

“It was. The deceased was an old client of mine, so I took the job, as much as I didn’t want to. But inheritances are the one category of jobs that I absolutely hate accepting, because in my experience, two out of three times it’ll get messy.”

“That often, huh?”

“Easily. Of course, not too many of them get *this* ugly...”

Chihiro’s face clouded. “It’s kind of sad, isn’t it? Families fighting with one another for the sake of money.”

“Ee-hee! Aw, you’re so kind, Chihiro. But...yes, it’s true. Families really need to get along, don’t they?”

“Yeah,” she murmured, face resolute. “I really think so.”



About an hour later, Ashley and Chihiro were in front of a department store about a fifteen-minute taxi ride from her accounting office. After finishing a big job, Ashley had the habit of going on a shopping spree to let off steam. Unlike her earlier outfit, she chose a fetching red dress for her outdoor jaunt, her hair suitably teased and pulled to finish up the look.

“Ee-hee-hee! Where should we begin today?”

She laughed as Chihiro’s vision wandered to and fro, earning her an odd look.

“...What’s up, Chihiro?”

“Oh, um... I haven’t really been to fancy department stores like this one very much. I’m kind of nervous.”

“Are you?” Ashley peered at Chihiro’s reddened cheeks. “Well...in that case, why don’t I have you pick out some clothes for yourself?”

“Huh?!”

Before the confused Chihiro could protest, Ashley was pulling her up to the young men and women’s floor.

As Ashley looked at one fashion label collection or the other, she asked, “By the way, what kind of clothing do you usually wear? It can’t be sweats all the time, can it?”

Chihiro currently had on a drab track jacket.

“Um, well, I wear a jacket when I’m at work or visiting my brother’s place, but otherwise it’s pretty normal.”

“Meaning female?”

“Female...um, a lot of unisex stuff, mostly. Usually with jeans.”

“No skirts?”

“I don’t own any.”

“Not even one?”

“No. I had a few before, but I got rid of ’em when my mom remarried...”

“...What about your school uniform?”

“My school doesn’t have a dress code.”

“Oh,” Ashley said, looking a tad befuddled. “Hey, pardon me,” she said to a passing female clerk. “We’re searching for a super-girly-looking outfit that this girl here would look nice in, but could you help us with that? Like, as cute as you can find.”

“Huhh?!”

Chihiro’s head drew back as the clerk sized her up, head to toe, then smiled and gave a confident nod. “Right this way. This ought to be fun...!”

“Hee-hee-hee! Don’t you think?” Ashley agreed with an impish grin.



After an impromptu dress-up fashion show that lasted nearly an hour, Chihiro and Ashley left the show floor.

“I feel like I’m letting out three years’ worth of cuteness...”

Ashley smiled at the exhausted-looking Chihiro, currently slumped against a department-store bench.

“But you had fun, didn’t you?”

“I, um...yeah.” She nodded, her cheeks a tad flushed.

She had acted totally at sea the first little while, all these frilly and unfamiliar dresses and skirts, but over time, her excitement began to rise. Toward the end, she was picking outfits to try on herself.

“They all looked really good on you. I wish I could’ve had you try on more.”

Chihiro gave Ashley a crestfallen look. “I dunno... I didn’t want to cause the clerk too much trouble...”

“Well, if you were worried about *that*, you should’ve just let me treat you.”

She had to stop Ashley from purchasing all the outfits she exhibited even the slightest interest in.

“Oh, I really couldn’t have. You’re already paying me by the hour...”

“Those are two different things. I just wanted you to have some cute outfits, Chihiro. As a present.”

“...I know,” she protested, “but I can’t let someone spoil me with stuff like that. Not unless it’s a special occasion.”

“Wow. You keep a closer eye on money than actual tax accountants.” Ashley smiled. “Well, why don’t you have your big brother buy you some nice outfits sometime?”

“.....”

Chihiro fell silent for a while before finally nodding slightly.

“Yeah.”

Chronica Chronicle (Part 3)

The first Sunday in July marked the first RPG session between Itsuki, Haruto, Miyako, Nayuta, and Chihiro in a while.

“Right, here are all your upgraded stats after you leveled up in the last session,” Haruto the gamemaster began.

The four players eyed the shiny new level-2 character sheets he handed out. In addition to the usual parameter boosts, Itsuki’s Tsukiko Midfield had learned new weapons she could copy with her Phantom Smith unique skill; Chihiro’s Sen Midfield gained the ability to cook new types of monster meats and plants; Miyako’s Miyako Midfield adopted a new magic that boosted her movement speed; and Nayuta’s Deathmask Midfield acquired a new defensive spell.

“Heh-heh-heh... Allow me to show you my *new, upgraded* powers!”

“Hope this stuff’s useful for cooking...”

“The new magic’s fine and all, but I really hope I can fire my railgun this session. I got the mithril I need now.”

“I want to have sex with Tsukiko for sure this time!”

Newfound powers in hand, the adventurers examined their data, eagerly awaiting the next adventure as Haruto smiled.

“Okay you guys, are you ready to create a new story?”

GM (Haruto): First, a recap. In the town of Aegis, on the far end of the land of Gagagia, you were sent on a mission by Sylvia, daughter of the local lord. Along the way, you defeated a group of orcs wrecking the land and discovered that Sylvia’s brother Lloyd was the villain sending them out. He was experimenting with the orcs in order to boost his kingdom’s forces and protect them from potential invasion by the Empire of Horn River. Thanks to your efforts, Lloyd

was imprisoned, and Sylvia was named next in line for the lordship, and they all lived happily ever after.

Current Party

Tsukiko Midfield

LV: 2 HP: 33/33
MP: 15/15 Movement: 4
Status: Normal
Inventory: Potion x2



Sen Midfield

LV: 2 HP: 21/21
MP: 18/18 Movement: 4
Status: Magic Break
Inventory: Rabbit Meat x2, Deer Meat x1,
Roasted Orcish Meat x2,
Herbs x1, Wild Strawberries x1



Miyako Midfield

LV: 2 HP: 17/17
MP: 35/35 Movement: 2
Status: Normal
Inventory: Potion x1, Mithril x1



Deathmask Midfield

LV: 2 HP: 23/23
MP: 24/24 Movement: 3
Status: Normal
Inventory: Magic Potion x1, Stimulant x1,
Sedative x1



Tsukiko (Itsuki): No they didn't! A little sister's just had her brother thrown in prison! I can't let such a tragedy be!

Deathmask (Nayuta): Yeah! If it weren't for those Horn River marauders, none of this would've ever happened. They're the ones behind all this. Let's take 'em down.

Sen (Chihiro): "Take 'em down"? They're an entire country.

Miyako (Miyako): Yeah... I don't think there's much that we as a group can do about them.

Deathmask: By the way, how powerful are we by the standards of this world?

GM: Well, you're all young noblewomen from the principality of Midfield, trained in the fields of martial arts and magic. Even at level one, you're definitely more dangerous than the average guy on the street, but you're still new at the adventuring game. By that measure, maybe just fair.

Tsukiko: Fair...? And how powerful is the Horn River Empire's army?

GM: It varies a lot among the troops, but basically, if they're squad-captain-level or higher, they're gonna be too much for newbie adventurers to handle.

Deathmask: Doesn't sound like a foe we can really take on. Oh well... Let's just give up and have sex, Tsukiko.

Tsukiko: You're giving up a little too easily, don't you think?!

Deathmask: Oh, what's the big deal? We can at least act on our sexual fantasies all day in the game world!

Sen: I guess we'll just have to work on strengthening ourselves if we ever want to take on the empire. Like, learn new magic or get stronger weapons or whatever.

Miyako: Yeah. Glad to see Sen's got a good head on her shoulders, at least.

Tsukiko: Quite so! I'd expect nothing less from my younger sister.

Sen: I, I'm not your—um, I mean, yes, I *am* your younger sister, aren't I? Uh, thanks, Sis...

GM: We'll pick up the action while you're still in the town of Aegis. The

reward money Sylvia provided you means you won't have to worry about sleeping on the street anytime soon.

Deathmask: There are lots of ruins and caves and stuff nearby, right? Maybe we could use this town as a base and raid those for a while.

The rest of the group agreed with Deathmask's proposal, and soon they decided to gather intelligence on the ruins in the area. Thus, they headed for a tavern frequented by adventurers, where they began talking with the rabble-rousers drinking up a storm in broad daylight inside.

GM: All right, I'll need one of you to roll for Charisma for the group.

Miyako: Who'll go?

Tsukiko: You get one more die for every six points a stat goes up, right? My Charisma's 10, Sen's is 8, and Miyako's is 11, so that's just two dice. Deathmask has 12, so that's three?




Deathmask: Yeah, I'm the most charismatic conversationalist out of all of us.

Tsukiko: ...I'd have a word or two to say about that, but if that's how the game's set up, so be it.

Deathmask: Hee-hee-hee! It's not my fault people love me so much. Let me handle this.

Deathmask rolled her dice and spoke to the adventurers. The result:

"Hahh? You wanna know about a good ruin to explore? Buzz off!"

She had rolled    for a total of four, making the intel mission a complete failure. Many RPGs count multiple natural ones in a dice roll as a critical miss or fumble, but that concept didn't exist in this game, so it was just treated as an extra crappy roll.

Miyako: Hey! What happened to your genius communication skills?

Deathmask: You can't hit it off with strangers all the time.

GM: Seeing you sisters bicker with one another, the adventurers begin to laugh loudly. "Still wet behind the ears. Go back to drinkin' your mama's milk!"

Deathmask: ...Well, they asked for it. I follow their directions, head back

home, and swallow my sister Tsukiko's man milk.

Tsukiko: Stop giving up all the time! Also, I don't have any milk for you!

GM: The adventurers turn their leering eyes upon you, Tsukiko. "Ooh, well lookie what we have here! Wanna hang with us this evenin'? If you do, we'll tell you some *real* useful info!"

Tsukiko: In your dreams, asshole! What kind of moron would let a bunch of vulgar trash like you anywhere near her body? You filthy pigs would be better off as orc fodder!

Sen: Y-you're going too far, Br—I mean, Sis!

GM: One of them screams, "You little bitch!" Another one pipes up. "Let's teach this bratty tomboy how the real world works!"

Thus, battle began in the tavern against six drunken adventurers.

"Lemme show you the power we used to take down that orc fortress!" Tsukiko screamed—only to have her sword brutally deflected by an adventurer's shield.

"Wh-wha?!"

"Whoa, these guys are strong, aren't they...?!" Sen exclaimed.

Neither her bow, nor Deathmask's body strikes, nor Miyako's magic had much effect. The four sisters soon found themselves cornered by their foes.

GM: "Geh-heh-heh! Maybe you didn't notice, but we've slayed a dragon in our time, you know. You think we'll let a bunch of little girls defeat us?"

Deathmask: Why is this obvious redshirt enemy horde so strong? I'd like to file a complaint!

Tsukiko: Ngh! Kill them...!

GM: "Geh-heh! You better be ready! We're gonna make you girls scream for mercy all night!"

Deathmask: Oh no! We gotta do something, or these men are going to sexually assault my big sister Tsukiko! Their dirty, unwashed cocks are going to violate every hole in her body... Deh-heh-heh...

Tsukiko: Why're you so happy about it?!

Miyako: If those're the stakes, I gotta nail at least one of 'em with my railgun...!

GM: ...You prepare to unleash your Thor's Bullet skill. But just as you do: "...Would you customers mind knocking it off, please?"

Sen: Huh?

GM: The surly voice that rises above the raucous crowd belongs to a tavern waitress. She looks to be in her mid-twenties, blond-haired, blue-eyed. A very cool, indifferent sort of beauty. She's wearing a katana around her waist. The tavern's uniform exposes a lot of cleavage, so it's easy for you to notice that she's got a star-shaped mark of some sort on her chest. Her skirt's pretty short as well, revealing her healthy-looking thighs.

Tsukiko: An armed waitress with big tits... Sounds like exactly the kind of character you'd enjoy, Haruto.

Miyako: Oh? Are those the kind of sexy girls you're into, Fuwa?

GM: Um, no comment! Haruto Fuwa isn't here right now; I'm the Gamemaster! ...But anyway, this mystery waitress is butting in to try to end the fight. The adventurers aren't having this, of course. "Shut up! Step out of the way!"

Sen: Um, ma'am, you should probably keep your distance from these guys. We'll be out of here pretty soon, so...

The woman sized Sen up. "...You won't need to," she coolly replied. "They'll be the ones out the door soon"—and a moment after she finished speaking, the waitress whipped out her katana faster than anyone's eyes could follow. In an instant, it sliced through the weapons and armor of the rowdy adventurers.

"Wh-who is this girl...? Her skill's off the charts..."

"What'll it be next? An arm? A leg? Or your heads?"

By the time she had sheathed her katana with a metallic click, the adventurers were already running full-speed out the door. Any good adventurer knows when it's time to run and save your own hide, after all.

“Um, thanks very much for helping us out,” Sen said.

The waitress replied frostily. “Picking a fight with a group when you don’t even know their skill is a fool’s errand. You better quit this trade and go back home while you’re all still alive.”

“...We don’t have a home to go back to,” Tsukiko said, gritting her teeth. “We were raised in Midfield, which gave itself to the Empire of Horn River without a fight. The imperial forces rule over our land on a whim, our nobility and knights squabbling with one another over whatever scraps of power the empire dangles above their heads. It is no longer the MF—the Midfield—we knew and loved.”

The waitress gave this sad tale a thoughtful look. “...I see. So what are you going to do now? With that much power, you’ll be nothing but bait for the monsters if you venture into the ruins.”

“N-no we won’t! We defeated an entire horde of orcs!”

“Mostly because we set their fort on fire,” Sen softly added.

GM: “I’d be more impressed if you faced a frontal orc assault and survived, but if *that’s* how you did it, it hardly proves your strength. Just give it up. Find yourselves another way to live.”

Deathmask: All right. I’ll just go back to having sex with my big sister for money. Profits ahead!

GM: “...You intend to prostitute yourself? At your age?”

Deathmask: No, I’m just gonna focus on screwing my big sister Tsukiko.

GM: “That’s hardly what I would call a decent living.”

Deathmask: You don’t think...?

Miyako: You’re seriously disappointed by that, Deathmask? ...Wait, but who *are* you, ma’am? Not just an ordinary waitress, I’m assuming.

GM: Her gaze turns to the distance as she replies, “Ah, I’m just a woman who threw herself into the realm of battle, long ago...”

Sen: Sounds like she’s been through a lot. Something she won’t talk about...?

Miyako: Yeah. It’d be kind of rude to ask for her entire life story.

Deathmask: In that case, I'm gonna dig deeper with her.

Miyako: Huh?!


Deathmask: Can I try another Charisma check to see what I can get out of her?

Tsukiko: Damn, you're merciless!

Deathmask: Well, she's clearly an important character, isn't she? Her past has to play into the story later on.

GM: Ha-ha! Well, feel free to roll...but I'll tell you outside of the game that yes, this *is* a major story-bending secret, so it's not gonna be an easy check. Um... Let's call it successful if you roll sixteen or higher.

Miyako: Sixteen with three dice...? That *is* major.

Deathmask: Time to show you guys what I can do when I'm *serious*. Hah! ...
 Seventeen.

GM: What the hell?!

Sen: Whoa...

Deathmask: Heh-heh-heh! I *told* you I can play people like a piano! And two natural sixes mean it's a critical, doesn't it? Is she gonna talk for us?

GM: Well, shit. You never know what the dice are gonna give you... So thanks to Deathmask's astonishing coercion skills, the mysterious waitress eventually wound up giving away her true identity.

Tsukiko: Kind of a wimpy mysterious woman... Guess she's a lot less mysterious than we thought.

GM: The mystery waitress's name is Nina, age twenty-six, about five-and-a-half feet tall, ninety-five pounds, measurements thirty-five/twenty-one/thirty-four.

Miyako: ...How can she fill out *that* kinda body with her weight?

GM: It—it doesn't matter! It's a fantasy world!

Deathmask: All right. So instead of her, like, missing organs or having some nonhuman body structure, she's just another delusion from the insane mind of

the virgin Prince Manwhore?

GM: Yes, all right? Yes!

Tsukiko: I don't care about her measurements. Just give me the important stuff.

GM: Yeah, yeah. Um, it turns out that several years ago, Nina was an up-and-coming knight in the services of Horn River.

Deathmask: Wait! I've heard of her... A ruthless Empire general. "Bloody Nina," they call her. Mastermind of countless castle sieges, mercilessly killing even women and children in her way...!

Tsukiko: You're just making that up.

Deathmask: Uh-huh.

GM: ...Well, really, she's not far off the mark. And after a while of that, she finally got sick of herself, fled the Empire, and now she's working as a waitress at this tavern.

Tsukiko: Why a waitress, of all things...?

GM: Since her early teens, Nina's been tasked with wearing heavy armor and waging near-constant war on the battlefield. Thus, she's always had a thing for cuter, more complimentary clothing. So she decided to work here—because of the pretty uniforms.

Tsukiko: That seems a lot deeper than it sounds, weirdly enough.

Deathmask: The former knight, age twenty-six, liked the pretty uniforms.

GM: You got a problem with that? It's supposed to make you say "aww" and stuff!

Miyako: Er, Fuwa...?

GM: Ah, never mind... Regardless, Nina flashes you a lonesome smile. "Heh... Look at me; I've been rambling on far too much..."

Tsukiko: Yeah, you sure have. I'm pretty sure there were a few useless stats thrown in that we didn't need to know...

GM: "W-well, anyway, do you still insist on being adventurers?"

Miyako: Of course!

GM: “Oh brother. Well, it’s your funeral. But perhaps it was fate that brought us together. Let me teach you a bit about the basics of battle.”

And so the four sisters were enlisted for training at the hands of ex-Empire knight Nina.

“...Ahh, so this character’s meant to be kind of a teacher type?”

Itsuki nodded at Nayuta. “Looks that way. And once we’re able to fend for ourselves, she’ll probably get killed off in some in-game event.”

“Yeah, by the Empire, I bet.”

“Mm-hmm. That’ll give the party more motivation to fight the Empire later.”

Haruto rubbed his temple, twitching, as the two of them postulated.

“I *told* you in the last session! You guys are professional writers! Stop using your skills to guess at future developments!!”

“Oh, uh, sorry... (´• ω •`)”

“Excuse us... (´• ω •`)”

Given how genuinely angry Haruto looked, Itsuki and Nayuta felt it wise to avoid agitating him any further.

So began the four sisters’ training regimen, one that would go on for days to come. Nina, as it turns out, was handy with more than just a katana—she was well versed in most any weapon and even had a working knowledge of magic. This allowed her to give each party member a wealth of new skills and spells.

Through a gauntlet of monster-slaying runs and low-level dungeon hacks, the four sisters gradually learned the talents they needed to survive as adventurers. Or, to put it in game terms, they all hit level 3.

But one night, when the party was eating a fresh Sen-cooked dinner at Nina’s house, she smiled lightly and dropped a bombshell on them.

GM: “...You know, looking at you guys reminds me of when I was young. I had a family, too, but while we were traveling to another town, bandits killed my parents and took my younger sister. She was still a baby at the time, seven

years younger than me. I was saved by a passing troop of knights, and soon they had me working as their chore girl. It wasn't long before they recognized my talents for battle and made me a full-fledged knight. I found myself traveling the lands, searching for my lost sister, but I never did find her, in the end... Her name is Tina. If you ever somehow run into her in your own travels, please, tell her I am here now."

Miyako: But she was an infant when they kidnapped her. Even if she's alive, would she remember Nina...?

Sen: Do we have any clues where she might be?

GM: "She bears a star-shaped birthmark on her chest, just like mine."

Tsukiko: Right. A nineteen-year-old girl named Tina with a star birthmark on her chest. Got it. I swear to you that we'll find her and reunite you both!

GM: "Heh. Thanks, Tsukiko." You notice Nina's countenance suddenly turning grim.

Tsukiko: Nina?

GM: "...Looks like we're surrounded."

As if to prove Nina right, a window shattered, followed by several people storming into the room. They were clad in black from head to toe, so the party couldn't tell their faces, ages, or genders.

"Wh-who are you?!" Tsukiko shouted.

One of the assailants threw a knife at her. It was easily deflected by Nina's sword.

Katana in hand and eyes sharp, Nina told them frankly, "...Chances are these are assassins from the Empire of Horn River. I never dreamed they would track me down to the edge of this land..."

"The Empire never forgives those who betray it," one of her foes said in a muffled voice.

"Tsukiko! Sen! Miyako! Deathmask! All of you, get out of here! They're after me!"

The four sisters each shook their heads.

“W-we’re gonna fight!” Sen shouted.

Miyako nodded. “We can’t let them get you, master!”

“...Very well,” the apparent leader of the black assassins droned. “Kill them all...for the sake of a new tale.”

“““““For the sake of a new tale!”“““““ the rest of them shouted, before descending upon the party. Nina and the four sisters raised their weapons, and the battle began.




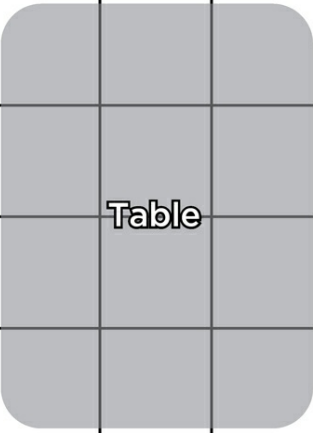


The assassins numbered a total of six people, all skilled.

“Flowing Slash!” “Yah!” “Ice Needle!” “Holy Light!”

Tsukiko used her sword, Sen her bow, and Miyako and Deathmask their offensive magic to lay out a concentrated assault. Each attack found its mark.

“Heh,” Nina chuckled proudly as she engaged the leader. “You’ve grown stronger, have you?”

The other foes attempted to attack the four sisters, but Tsukiko, enhanced by Deathmask’s defensive magic, took the hit for her allies while Sen and Miyako counterattacked.

| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J |
|----|-----------------|---|---|---------|---|--|---|--|---|---|
| 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | |  | | | | |
| 3 | | |  | | | | | | | |
| 4 | Assassin 3 | | | | | Death-mask | |  | | |
| 5 | Assassin 2 | | | Tsukiko |  | | | |  | |
| 6 | | | | | | | | Miyako | | |
| 7 | Assassin 1 | | | Nina | | | | Sen | | |
| 8 | | | | | | | |  | | |
| 9 | Assassin Leader | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | | | Assassin 4 | | | Assassin 5 | | | | |

Before long, the enemy's numbers began to dwindle—and soon, only the leader was left. But: “Pfft... Useless garbage.”

Refusing to even acknowledge his own allies, the leader cruelly ignored them as he kept fighting Nina. The ex-knight was still far stronger than the now-seasoned sisters—but even she was put on the defensive by the leader's brutal assault. The assassin mostly dodged her slashes and magic as his merciless blade weaved its way through her defenses and sliced at her body.

Bloodied from head to toe, she continued to swing her katana.

GM: “Heh. I'm not done yet...”

Tsukiko: Back up our master!

Miyako: Okay!

GM: “Stay away! The four of you combined couldn't defeat him! Run away while I can still buy you time!”

Tsukiko: Are you crazy?! You know we can't do that!

Sen: She's right! What'll you do about your sister?!

GM: Nina looks at you and flashes a serene smile. “Heh. You know, I kind of started thinking of *you* all as my little sisters...”

Tsukiko: Will you stop setting yourself up for a noble sacrifice?!

GM: “Just get going! I don't want to lose another sister before my own eyes!”

But just as she got the words out, the assassin attacked her once more, drawing her back into combat.

“...Let's go, sister. Our master has made up her mind. We can't let her choice be in vain,” Deathmask quietly said.

“Nngh...”

“...”

It wasn't the suggestion Miyako or Sen wanted to hear. Both of them winced, gritting their teeth at the idea, even as they prepared to run. All of them knew they were no match for this masked assassin.

But one of them still had yet to give up on helping Nina.

“...Prepare to become the cornerstone for a new tale.”

“Not if I can help it!!”

The relentless blade descending toward the tottering Nina found itself landing upon an unexpected target—Tsukiko, who had just invoked her Protect skill. It easily cut through her armor, relieving her of more than half her HP in one strike.

“Tsukiko!”

“Sister!”

“Sis!”

“Why must you get in my way...?”

It only served to provoke the assassin, but the bloodstained Tsukiko still laughed boldly at him.

“Now, time for the counterattack...”

“What...?!”

Focusing her concentration, Tsukiko began to emit magical light from her left hand. It was Phantom Smith at work, allowing her to copy any weapon she had seen before and take advantage of its unique actions.

“Wh-what’re you gonna do...?!”

Tsukiko screamed at the wavering assassin:

“Phantom Smith—come to me, Roper Tentacle!!”

A forest of thick tentacles, squirming and glistening with slime, sprouted from her hand. It was the tentacles from the Roper that had attacked the party in the lake during their previous adventure, encircling their target and holding it in place. Were tentacles “weapons,” truly? They were—or, at least, close enough that Phantom Smith worked.

“Hwuh?! Ngh! Let me go!”

The seemingly endless swarm of tentacles stretched out from Tsukiko’s hand,

the slimy tendrils promptly wrapping themselves around the assassin's body.

"Now, Miyako!"

"R-right!"

At Tsukiko's signal, Miyako fired a Thor's Bullet at the assassin—her unique skill, firing pure mithril at speeds that even left the passage of time behind. It was a cut above all the sisters' other offensive skills, and the full brunt of the attack impacted the assassin, scoring major damage.

"Nwaaahhh!"

It was enough to make even the assassin scream out in anguish. Nina immediately took the opportunity to strike the final blow.

"Imperial Drawn-Sword Arts—Horned Dragon Beam!!"

Skraahhhh!!

The high-speed slash Nina unleashed ripped diagonally across the assassin's frame. It was followed by a violent spray of blood.

Tsukiko: Did we win?!

GM: Yes, Nina's attack just now definitely reduced the assassin's HP to zero.

Sen: Wow, we really did it!

GM: ...But.

Deathmask: Oh, that doesn't sound good!

GM: Despite the lethality of the blow, the assassin still doesn't fall. He says, "I must carry out my mission...for the sake of a new tale...!" And just before he breathes his last, he unleashes a final, desperate strike at Nina.

Miyako: Huh? That's not fair!

Deathmask: Wow, one of those "death's door" counters. The final struggle! I couldn't count the number of times that kind of thing got me in a console RPG. You're trying to kill Nina off here no matter what, aren't you, GM?

GM: Hey, don't blame me. Rolling for damage...

Tsukiko: I use Protect!!

GM: Wha...?! Are you serious?! You're never gonna survive this with the HP you have left!

Tsukiko: But I'm still using Protect! If Nina dies, it's going to devastate her little sister. I don't care if I never even met her; I absolutely refuse to have a little sister suffer under my watch! I, Tsukiko Midfield, live by this creed!

GM: Um, Tsukiko—I mean, Itsuki—talking outside of the game again, but this assassin's death counter deals 3d+10 of non-blockable damage.

Miyako: 3d+10...? And what's Tsukiko's HP right now?

Tsukiko: 15. So as long as you roll a 4 or less, I can survive this!

GM: I mean, well, okay, that's not *impossible*, but...!

Tsukiko: No problem, man! My passion for little sisters will conjure up a miracle!

GM: Where does this completely baseless confidence of yours come from?! ... Ugh! All right! But seriously, don't blame me for what comes next!

Steeling his resolve, Haruto rolled three dice.



...No miracle occurred.

The assassin's final blow, released with every ounce of force left in his body, sliced the protecting Tsukiko to ribbons, dealing lethal damage.

"C-curse yooooou..."

The assassin let out a loathsome groan as he breathed his last, unable to complete his mission.

"Tsukikooooo!"

Nina propped up the girl's profusely bleeding body.

GM: "Tsukiko, why...why did you protect someone like me...?!"

Tsukiko: Mmm... Well, so much for that... I have no regrets...

Sen: Big Sis!

Miyako: Tsukiko!

Deathmask: Oh, my poor sister!

GM: The other sisters run up to them as Nina gently lays Tsukiko's body on the ground... Any last words, Tsukiko?

Tsukiko: ...Well, sorry, guys. I guess this is it for me.

Sen: No... Sis, no!

Tsukiko: But don't worry about me... Just help Nina reunite with her sister... And you, Miyako... Keep Sen and Deathmask...safe for me... And then I softly close my eyes...and go limp.

Miyako: Um...so, wait, is Tsukiko really dead?

GM: Yep.

Miyako: That can happen?!

GM: Well, that's a role-playing game for you. Even player characters can die sometimes.



Miyako: Is there a magic or item or something we can use to resurrect her?

GM: Nope.

Sen: Oh no...

Deathmask: You're kidding... You have to be kidding, Tsukiko!

Deathmask broke into tears, clinging to the lifeless form of her beloved sister—but Tsukiko did not open her mouth again.

It was a long while before Deathmask, still crying, weakly staggered out of the house. Miyako and Sen merely stood there, unable to summon the energy to chase after her. And as Deathmask wandered the mountain path, deep into the night, her eyes burned with the dark flames of revenge.

“...They'll pay... I swear I'll make Horn River pay for killing Tsukiko...”

Once Nina patched up herself, Miyako, and Sen in her house, the three of them decided to leave town at once. Staying here could expose them to another assassin strike before long. Thus, even as the pain of losing their sister tore at them inside, Miyako and Sen hurriedly prepared to hit the road.

As they packed up, Nina revealed a beacon of hope to them. “...Come to think of it,” she said, “when I was still in the army, I once heard a rumor. A rumor about a villager from the Narow tribe that populates the Elcadia Mountains, one who wields the power to revive the dead...”

“Ah! Maybe we can revive our sister...!”

“...Indeed, maybe you can.”

The light of hope began shining in Miyako's and Sen's eyes once more. The decision was unanimous. Sen and Nina would take Tsukiko's body and set off straight for the Elcadia Mountains. Deathmask still did not return the next morning, so Miyako volunteered to search for her and regroup with the others later.

Miyako: Where did that girl wander off to...?

Sen: Hang in there, Big Sis. I promise we'll go adventuring together again.

GM: Upon Tsukiko's sudden death, Sen and Nina decide to set off on a quest

to resurrect her. Meanwhile, Miyako embarks to search for Deathmask, who has disappeared into the night. What will befall the Midfield sisters in their ensuing adventures? ...**Seriously, *what am I gonna do with you guys now?!***

With a very non-contrived scream of agony, the session came to a close, following a little level-up stat management. The final sheets looked like this:

Tsukiko Midfield

PLAYER Itsuki Hashima AGE 17 GENDER ♀

External characteristics

A fetching, gallant young woman with long, black hair

Background

Second oldest in a group of four adventuring sisters

Hobbies

Googling herself

Likes

Shrimp, crabs, etc.

Dislikes

Cut for length.

Parameters

LV: 3 / Max HP: 39 / Max MP: 20 / Movement: 3 / Strength: 14 (3d)

Spirit: 10 (2d) / Magic: 12 (3d) / Agility: 13 (3d) / Dexterity: 12 (3d)

Luck: 12 (3d) / Wisdom: 9 (2d) / Charisma: 11 (2d) / Intuition: 13 (3d)

[Resistances (lower numbers are better)]

Cutting: 70 / Bludgeoning: 80 / Piercing: 80 / Heat: 100 / Cold: 100

Electrocution: 100 / Holy: 100 / Dark: 100

[Status ailment resistances (lower numbers are better)]

Poison: 100 / Sleep: 100 / Confusion: 100 / Paralysis: 100 / Petrification: 100

Magic Bind: 100 / Arm Bind: 100 / Leg Bind: 100

Actions

Flowing Slash: Range 1. Consumes 0 MP. Accuracy defined as Agility +8.
2d+9 cutting damage on a single target.

Horizontal Stab: Range 1. Consumes 0 MP. Accuracy defined as Agility +7.
2d+9 piercing damage on a single target.

Shield Bash: Range 1. Consumes 0 MP. Accuracy defined as Agility +6.
1d+8 bludgeoning damage on a single target. Pushes target
back 1 square.

Protect: Consumes 0 MP. Takes all damage dealt to a neighboring character.

Taunt: Consumes 0 MP. Turns one enemy's attention to herself. Accuracy
defined as Charisma +10.

Unique skill

Phantom Smith: Can copy any weapon she has seen at least once in the
game and perform that weapon's intrinsic actions. The copied weapon
disappears after the action is complete. Consumes MP depending on the
weapon copied.

Currently copiable weapons: Longsword, Knife, Short Bow, Wood Mace,
Club, Orcish Ax, Roper Tentacle, **Dragon Lance, Claymore, Flame
Staff, Morning Star, Steel Sword, Throwing Knife**

Inventory

Potion × 1





Sen Midfield

PLAYER Chihiro Hashima AGE 16 GENDER ♀

External characteristics

Kind of girlish? She has a ribbon on.

Background

Second youngest of the four adventuring sisters

Hobbies

Cooking, sports

Likes

Cute things

Dislikes

Liars

Parameters

LV: 4 / Max HP: 29 / Max MP: 24 / Movement: 4 / Strength: 10 (2d)
Spirit: 10 (2d) / Magic: 6 (2d) / Agility: 21 (4d) / Dexterity: 19 (4d)
Luck: 18 (4d) / Wisdom: 12 (3d) / Charisma: 8 (2d) / Intuition: 22 (4d)

[Resistances (lower numbers are better)]

Cutting: 100 / Bludgeoning: 100 / Piercing: 100 / Heat: 100 / Cold: 100
Electrocution: 100 / Holy: 100 / Dark: 100

[Status ailment resistances (lower numbers are better)]

Poison: 100 / Sleep: 100 / Confusion: 100 / Paralysis: 100 / Petrification: 100
Magic Bind: 100 / Arm Bind: 80 / Leg Bind: 80

Actions

Arrow: Range 5. Consumes 0 MP. Accuracy defined as Dexterity +5. 1d+11 piercing damage on a single target. **May consume a corresponding potion to add status ailments to the strike.**

Knife: Range 1. Consumes 0 MP. Accuracy defined as Dexterity +10. 1d+13 cutting/piercing damage on a single target. **May consume a corresponding potion to add status ailments to the strike.**

Unlock: Consumes 0 MP. Success defined as Dexterity +5. Opens the locks on doors and treasure chests.

Detect Trap: Consumes 0 MP. Success defined as Intuition +5. Discovers traps before they are set off.

Taunt: Consumes 0 MP. Turns one enemy's attention to herself. Accuracy defined as Charisma +10.

Cooking: Consumes 0 MP. Success defined as Dexterity +5.
Cooks any food items in inventory.

Compounding: Consumes 0 MP. Success defined as Dexterity +5. Combines ingredient items to create potions.

Unique skill:

Jaldabaoth: Range 1. Consumes 0 MP. Accuracy defined as Agility +3. Cancels all magic touched by her hand, whether attack or healing types. Automatically destroys any magical items touched.

Inventory

Fruitcake x1, Monster Steak x3, Herb Salad x3, Beef Jerky x2,
Wolf Bone x2, Poison Potion x5, Sleep Potion x3

Miyako Midfield

PLAYER

Miyako
Shirakawa

AGE

20

GENDER

♀

External characteristics

Kind of like Mikoto Misaka

Background

Eldest of the four adventuring sisters

Hobbies

Shopping

Likes

People who try really hard

Dislikes

People who make fun of them for it

Parameters

LV: 4 / Max HP: 23 / Max MP: 45 / Movement: 2 / Strength: 5 (1d)

Spirit: 13 (3d) / Magic: 24 (5d) / Agility: 9 (2d) / Dexterity: 7 (2d)

Luck: 12 (3d) / Wisdom: 19 (4d) / Charisma: 13 (3d) / Intuition: 12 (3d)

[Resistances (lower numbers are better)]

Cutting: 100 / Bludgeoning: 100 / Piercing: 100 / Heat: 80 / Cold: 80

Electrocution: 50 / Holy: 100 / Dark: 100

[Status ailment resistances (lower numbers are better)]

Poison: 100 / Sleep: 100 / Confusion: 100 / Paralysis: 100 / Petrification: 100

Magic Bind: 80 / Arm Bind: 100 / Leg Bind: 100

Actions

Staff Strike: Range 1. Consumes 0 MP. 1d+4 bludgeoning damage on a single target.

Fireball: Range 4. Consumes 3 MP. 2d+11 heat damage to enemies within range.

Ice Needle: Range 4. Consumes 3 MP. 2d+16 cold/piercing damage to enemies within range.

Energy Bolt: Range 3. Consumes 4 MP. 3d+11 electrocution damage to enemies within range.

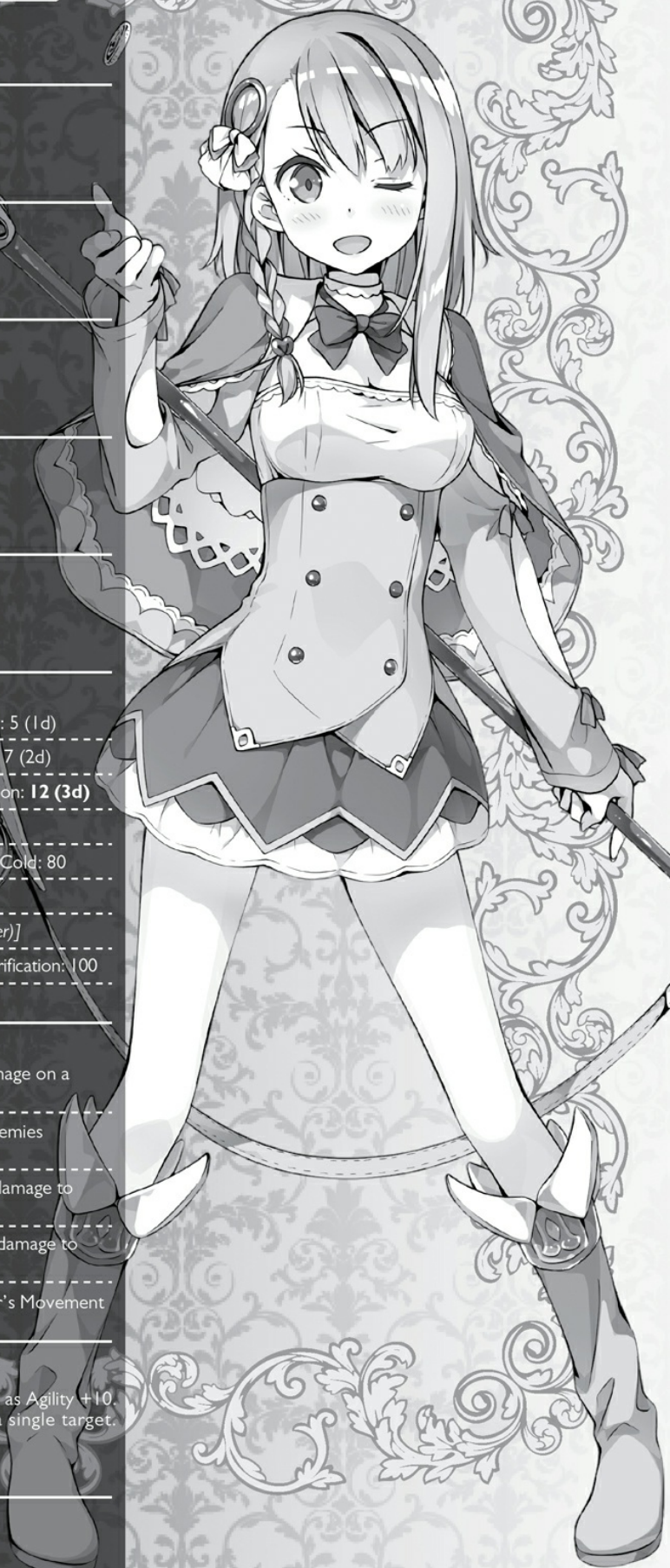
Light Wing: Range 1. Consumes 3 MP. Boosts single character's Movement by +2 for 3 turns. Not stackable.

Unique skill

Thor's Bullet: Range 10. Consumes 15 MP. Accuracy defined as Agility +10. 5d+34 piercing/bludgeoning/electrocution damage on a single target. Consumes 1 mithril piece.

Inventory

Magic Potion x3
* 5 bonus points left



Deathmask Midfield

PLAYER Nayuta Kani AGE 10 GENDER ♀

External characteristics

Silver-haired Lolita type

Background

Youngest of the four adventuring sisters

Hobbies

Having sex with big sis Tsukiko

Likes

Sex

Dislikes

Those other guys

Parameters

LV: **4** / Max HP: **31** / Max MP: **32** / Movement: 3 / Strength: **16** (3d)
Spirit: **19** (**4d**) / Magic: **12** (**3d**) / Agility: 9 (2d) / Dexterity: **11** (2d)
Luck: **13** (**3d**) / Wisdom: **15** (3d) / Charisma: **24** (**5d**) / Intuition: **15** (3d)
[Resistances (lower numbers are better)]
Cutting: 100 / Bludgeoning: 100 / Piercing: 100 / Heat: 100 / Cold: 100
Electrocution: 100 / Holy: 80 / Dark: 80
[Status ailment resistances (lower numbers are better)]
Poison: 80 / Sleep: 80 / Confusion: 80 / Paralysis: 80 / Petrification: 80
Magic Bind: 100 / Arm Bind: 100 / Leg Bind: 100

Actions

Mace: Range 1. Consumes 0 MP. Accuracy defined as Agility +3.
2d+9 bludgeoning damage on a single target.
Heal: Range 3. Consumes 2 MP. Automatically succeeds.
Heals 1d+14 HP on a single target.
Cure Poison: Range 2. Consumes 2 MP. Success defined as Spirit +5.
Eliminates poison effects on a single target.
Holy Light: Range 3. Consumes 3 MP. 2d+11 holy damage on a single target.
Barrier: Range 2. Consumes 4 MP. Covers a single character in a barrier that absorbs up to 16 damage. The barrier's resistances are 100 for all stats.

Unique skill:

Lilim's Kiss: Range 1. Consumes all MP and makes character skip the next turn. Automatically succeeds if target allows it; if not, accuracy defined as Dexterity +0. Strengthens the target via membrane-based contact. For the next 3 turns, all parameters on the target except HP, MP, and Movement are boosted 1.3x and all resistances are doubled. Target can use 1 extra die while in effect.

Inventory

Magic Potion x2

Once everyone except Tsukiko finished the level-up procedure, Haruto collected their character sheets for checking.

“Let’s see... Sen’s keeping her upgrades pretty balanced, Miyako’s learned a new magic, and Deathmask’s...put all her bonus points into Charisma. Ha-ha-ha... I got a really bad feeling about that...”

“What’re you gonna do with that, Nayu?” Miyako asked.

“Not telling,” Nayuta primly replied.

Thus ended their first RPG session in a while—one that foretold boundlessly exciting events in the future. Where would the story take the four (um, three) Midfield sisters going forward? Not even Haruto the gamemaster could say.

To be continued...

The Omen

“...I gotta say,” Haruto groused as he enjoyed his beer, “I wasn’t expecting a player to sacrifice herself for the sake of an NPC.”

“Ha-ha-ha! I told you! I don’t care if I’ve never even met her; I absolutely refuse to have a little sister suffer under my watch! That’s the creed I live by!”

The TRPG session was immediately followed by a dinner/drinking party in Itsuki’s apartment. Chihiro catered, of course, providing yakisoba noodles packed with seafood and veggies, Korean-style seafood pancakes, anchovy salad, and fresh spring rolls.

The beer was Hoegaarden Original White, a witbier with a refreshing citrus aroma to it. There was practically no bitterness—instead, it was fruity, refreshing, and breathlessly easy to drink. Among Belgian beer, it was the number-one seller in Japan, a regular in the liquor sections of supermarkets and convenience stores nationwide. Thanks to being so easy to drink and readily available, it often served as an introduction to overseas beer for the average Japanese adult raised on a steady diet of cheap lager at the *izakaya* bars.

“...Well, I’m glad Nina’s sister didn’t have to deal with any grief, but that kinda put a lot of grief on your *actual* sisters, you know,” Chihiro somewhat testily observed as he refilled Itsuki’s glass.

“Yeah, um... Sorry,” the suddenly self-conscious Itsuki replied.

“So try to treat your *real* sisters a bit nicer next time, okay, Bro? Um, in the game, I mean.”

“I will. I’m sort of dead right now, but...”

“Oh, don’t worry. We’ll bring you back to life.”

The soft smile that accompanied Chihiro’s promise was so heartfelt that Itsuki

was charmed into blushing a little.

Ever since they had begun this campaign four months ago, Chihiro had become just as much a gaming partner to Itsuki as Nayuta, Haruto, and Miyako were. The awkward politeness between the two brothers was gone—Chihiro was laughing now, talking more, indulging him and griping at him in turns.

They had fully broken the ice...or they should have by now, at least. But Itsuki couldn't shake the bizarre impression that there was still a thin but ever-present barrier between them. This wasn't something he felt back when they were still all stiff with each other. But the friendlier they got, in a way—the more the distance shrank—the stronger that impression became.

Maybe it's because we aren't really brothers...?

The thought depressed him a little as the doorbell rang and Kenjiro Toki stepped into Itsuki's place.

"You're still drinking?" the exasperated-looking editor moaned.

"Y-yeah, so what? I'm working, too."

Toki chuckled. "Yeah, you sure are. I can't believe you're actually progressing with both *All About* and *Sisterly Combat* simultaneously for a change. Your new proposals are still as insane as ever, though..."

As he spoke, he took out some printed manga pages from his bag.

"...Whoa! Is that...?!"

"Mm-hmm. The complete chapter one of the *All About My Little Sister* manga. Unless you find any problems, this is what'll get published in the magazine next month."

"Ooooooh..."

He accepted the printout from Toki, examining it closely. The sketch version from before was already fairly complete, but this final draft was an upgrade in every way—every character pose, every background, every feminine undergarment. It only served to further show Kaiko Mikuniyama's depth as a manga artist.

"Ha-ha... It was kind of a roller coaster getting there, but it's finally done...!"

A natural, gleeful smile erupted on his face—not the bold, incredibly fake one he usually exhibited, but the tender smile of a young child.

“Hey, show it to us!”

Itsuki obliged Nayuta, spreading the sheets out on the *kotatsu* table.

“Wow,” marveled Haruto, “this looks really good!”

“That’s pretty awesome, Bro. Your own story getting made into a comic...”

“Hmm... Kaiko does draw pretty well... I see my judgment didn’t fail me.”

Despite Nayuta’s rather haughty appraisal, the group read through the story until they reached that fateful shower scene once more. They looked on with bated breath as Ichika went from a wet school uniform to a little less, a little less, a little less, all the way to a breathtakingly nude climax. The entire metamorphosis easily reached the realm of fine art.

“Holy crap, this is so sexy, man!” Haruto gave his honest, enthusiastic opinion, while Chihiro averted his eyes in embarrassment.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! It sure is! *This* is the Ichika nude scene I pictured in my mind the whole time! Ha-ha-ha! This is it! *This* is what I wanted to see! Man, this is *hot!*”

There were tears in Itsuki’s eyes, even as Miyako’s face went redder by the moment.

Ughh, this is soooo embarrassing...

Her own nude body had been a primary reference for Ichika’s in the manga. The boobs, in particular, were basically Miyako’s ported to the 2-D page. Wasn’t this basically the same thing as Itsuki seeing her topless...?

“C-come on, isn’t this enough? Can we go on to the next page?” she urged in a panic.

“Huh? Are you okay, Miyako? Your face is all red.”

“Ooh, it is,” Itsuki observed. “What’s up? It’s gotta take more than a picture of a nude woman to embarrass you by now.”

“Ah yes,” noted Toki. “Mikuniyama did mention that Kani and Shirakawa were

a huge help to her. What did you guys do for her?”



“I, I, I can’t talk about something like *that* to you!”

The wide-eyed reaction made Toki take a step back. “Oh, really? What were you even—? Well, after all that carrying-on about panties and bras, having her agree to nude scenes was a pretty big surprise to me, but it’s resulted in one seriously impressive manga version.”

He gave her a bow.

“So thanks, for whatever you did.”

“Hmm? Well, I guess I better say ‘thank you’ then, too. I appreciate it.”

Itsuki’s tone was just as arrogant as ever, but there was no doubting the sincerity behind it.

Now Miyako’s face was warm with an emotion besides shame. She took another good look at the comic page. Even a non-enthusiast like her could see well enough how amazing this manga was. Despite being stripped down and observed from all manner of angles (and in all manner of ways), now she felt a sense of pride in being involved.

She didn’t have the kind of novel-writing talent Itsuki and Nayuta had, and she was terrible at drawing. But even she could be involved with these incredible creators, helping them give birth to these incredible new works. And that might be kind of...well, not just kind of...*really* neat.

Now it was Nayuta’s turn to grab the page.

“Eh-heh-heh, there’s no substituting for nakedness in your stuff, Itsuki. Unf!”

Out of nowhere, she gave one of Miyako’s breasts a squeeze as she stared at the art.

“Hyah?! Hey! What’re you doing?!”

“Nya-hah! You’ve been a huge help to me too, Myaa. Too bad *you* couldn’t be my editor.”

“Yeah, yeah. If I ever get the chance.” Miyako smiled, despite the ongoing groping.

And Toki, watching her, had a sudden thought.

“...Well, would you like to work in editorial with us, Shirakawa?”

“Huh? ...Really?!”

“We’re actually hiring for part-time help right now,” Toki reported with total sincerity. “So if you’re interested... I mean, it’d be more miscellaneous office chores than anything. You wouldn’t be assigned authors to edit right off the bat.”

“S-sure! I’d love to!”

...She gave the reply before she could even think about it.

“Yaay,” cheered Nayuta.

“Miyako in editorial...?!” Haruto marveled with a smile.

“Weird hiring policy you got there,” Itsuki said, squinting at them.



After everyone else went home, Itsuki lay in bed, smirking as he read over the *All About* manga pages.

“Eh-heh-heh...hee-hee-hee...”

It must have been the three-dozen-th time he read the chapter, but it never got old to him. Every single time, it was still wonderful. Having another creator’s hand rebuild his work, giving it new charm that wasn’t there before—*that* was what the media-mix strategy was all about.

For the first time, he realized just how awesome a system this was. He could only hope the anime version would remain just as outstanding. He really wanted it to be, even as he knew just how difficult that was. The travesty of the recently wrapped *Chevalier of the Absolute World* anime flashed through his mind again. Simply imagining *All About* meeting the same fate made his heart ache.

How did Haruto feel, watching that thing? He seemed pretty cheerful on the surface during the RPG session, but had he really achieved closure from all the damage he took? There was no point imagining the worst right now—but, Itsuki reasoned, he still needed to be mentally prepared for it. *Could I really overcome*

that if it happened to me?

“...It’s all right. I can do it.”

He forced himself to sound confident as he went eye to eye with the naked Ichika yet again.

The anime is just another checkpoint. My mission is to create the ultimate little-sister novel, like nothing before it. As long as I have that little-sister thirst, I’ll never stop going forward—and this is one thirst that will never be quenched. Why? Because I don’t have a real little sister. I don’t, and that’s why I can pursue my fantasy of the ultimate sister as far as I want.

Unless a little sister pops into my world out of nowhere one day, I’m absolutely golden.

It was with that unbreakable conviction that Itsuki nodded off to sleep.

(The End)

Bonus Track: The Life of a Light Novelist

This bonus track is a rewriting of the drama CD included with the deluxe edition of *A Sister's All You Need*, Vol. 4 in Japan. Some of the dialogue has been edited and differs slightly from the original CD. Also note that this work remains a work of fiction and has no relation to any actual person or organization. Thank you.

1

“Grahhhhh, this is going nooowherrree!!”

It was mid-evening as Itsuki, staring at the PC on his desk, suddenly shouted into the night.

“Um, are you okay, Bro?” Chihiro worriedly called out from the kitchen as he prepared dinner.

“Nnh, yeah,” came the flat reply. “Don’t worry, Chihiro. Having writer’s block like this happens to people all the time.”

“Oh? That doesn’t sound too okay to me...”

“No, he’s fine,” chimed in Nayuta from under the *kotatsu* table. “No matter how much pain it takes to get there, as long as you make the deadline, it’s all good.”

“Ha-ha-ha! Exactly, Kanikou! No need to panic yet...so I’m wrapping up work for today!”

“Great, Itsuki! Would you like to have our customary quickie in bed before dinner?”

“When have we *ever* done that?!” Itsuki shouted, cheeks reddening a bit.

Nayuta just gave him a sly grin. “Hee-hee! You know, it’s funny to think that there are people who figure you and I really *do* have that kind of relationship already.”

“You’re making no sense!” interjected Miyako, facing Nayuta on the other side of the table. “Why do you think it’s okay to say those things, Nayu? C’mon,

it's your turn."

The two of them had been playing a wealth of board games since the afternoon. Agricola, Ghosts, Let's Catch the Lion, Patchwork, Lost Cities, Battle Line, Blue Moon Legends... They ran the gamut from easy-breezy to intense experiences, and all of them were best suited for two players.

"Aw, I'm getting bored of playing against you, Myaa... I'm at seven wins in a row, right?" Nayuta rolled her eyes.

"Wh-what's that matter?" Miyako countered, ashamed. "Let's at least play until I win a game!"

"Nyaaah..."

Itsuki cut in. "You're losing big again today? You really suck at games."

"Oh, thanks a lot, Itsuki! I'm just not very good at these strategic games...like, where you have to guess at your opponent's moves and stuff! I'd do a lot better in other kinds of games!"

"Heh. You think...?"

"I don't think you're much better at competitive games like that," Chihiro pointed out.

"Nnh... That, that's not true..." Itsuki grumbled.

Then the doorbell rang.

"Oh, you want me to get it?"

"No, lemme see who it is," Itsuki told his brother. "'Cause if it's my editor, you'll have to pretend I'm not here."

"Bro, are you *sure* your work is all right...?"

Itsuki peered through the front-door peephole.

"Umm..." But the person outside was not an editor. It was his author friend Haruto Fuwa. "Phew, it's just Haruto." He breathed a sigh of relief as he opened the door.

"What's up, Itsuki?"

“Heya.”

“Don’t mind me,” Haruto replied as he entered the apartment. “...Oh, the gang’s all here tonight, huh? Well, perfect.”

“Perfect how?” Miyako asked.

“I just bought a new board game today, and it’s supposed to be best for five players. Wanna try it now?”

“Ooh, nice,” Itsuki instantly replied. “Let’s do it.”

“Um, what about work...?” Chihiro ventured.

“Work? What work? Oh no, I must have amnesia, I can’t remember a thing...”

“Come on, Bro...,” Chihiro said with dismay.

Nayuta countered with a smile. “It’s no big deal. He’s just taking a break.”

“Right, exactly! Mental breaks like this are important,” Itsuki enthusiastically agreed.

“...Besides,” Nayuta added, “procrastinating on work to play board games makes it all the more fun.”

“There’s no saving you guys,” Miyako moaned.

2

“Right, so here’s what we’re playing.”

Haruto removed the game from his paper bag. It landed on the table with an audible thump, a large rectangular cardboard box with artwork of manuscript sheets and the title “THE LIFE OF A LIGHT NOVELIST” in big letters.

“The Life of a Light Novelist...? What a weirdly specific title. The packaging looks really cheap, too.” Itsuki wrinkled his nose.

Haruto nodded. “Yeah, it’s probably one of those games that was made by one guy in his bedroom. It was covered in dust on the game-store shelf when I ran into it. I figured it must’ve been crap, but with a title like that, I couldn’t help but invest in it...”

“I definitely understand,” Nayuta replied. “Even if a game looks outrageously

bad, I can't resist giving it a shot. Usually I stick with digital games, though."

"Yeah. And then you play it once, and it's like, 'Why the hell did I spend money on this?' It's the circle of life."

"...You don't have to lower my expectations *that* much before we play," Itsuki interjected, slightly miffed.

"So what kind of game is it?"

At Chihiro's bidding, Haruto took out the instruction booklet.

"Hmm... Ah. Um, 'This game allows players to experience the life of a light novel writer.'"

"What does experiencing that in a game do for you?" Itsuki asked.

"I'm enjoying it enough in real life," Nayuta added.

Chihiro seemed a little excited. "Oh, I might be kinda interested... Like, what it's like to be a writer?"

"Um... 'Players make multiple branching decisions along the way as they write novels, earn money, and eke out a living as a professional author. Players win by collecting Happiness Points and becoming happy by the end of the game.' ... All right, so it's kind of like The Game of Life and stuff. Roll the dice, move your peg, and navigate the forks in the path. There's a few other special rules, but we can figure 'em out as we play."

"Wow... If it's a game like that, maybe even I have a chance to win!" Miyako's eyes lit up.

"...Well, ready to play?" Haruto opened up the rest of the box, taking out the game board, player pegs, money cards, and so forth. "Each player starts with half a million yen and zero Happiness Points," he said as he dealt out the money cards.

"The object is to collect Happiness Points, not money?" Itsuki asked.

"How realistic," Nayuta muttered sagely. "Money really *can't* buy happiness."

The prep work complete, Haruto placed all the pegs on the starting square. "I guess we're supposed to play in the order of our ages."

“So...Chihiro, Kanikou, me, Miyako, and Haruto?”

“Off you go, Chihiro,” Nayuta said.

Chihiro picked up a die. “All right... Oh, wait, there’s already a branch at the start point. ‘You must place an entry in a new-author competition to become a professional writer. Select which competition you want to enter before rolling the die.’”

“Oooh, so we don’t start out as pros?”

“...Um, so Choice A is the event run by industry big-shot Lightning Books. The prize is one million yen. Choice B is mid-tier GM Bunko’s competition. The prize is two million yen. Choice C is new label Gagarin Books. The prize is three million yen.”

“The smaller labels give out more prize money?” Miyako asked, surprised.

“Well,” Haruto reasoned, “the new guys have a greater need to collect talent.”

“And Choice D is not to enter any competition at all and upload your work to the net instead. Prize money: zero.”

“Wow, there’s even *that* option?” Itsuki sniffed.

Chihiro weighed the options for a few moments. “Hmmm... In that case, I’ll go for the mid-tier competition. Umm, ‘Roll a die. If you roll three or higher, you win a prize and make your debut. Proceed down Route B.’”

“So you can’t join the business unless you roll well enough?” said Miyako, scowling a bit.

“Three or more, three or more... Hnh!”

Chihiro rolled a die. The result... .

“Nice! I’m in the industry with a five.”

“Ooh, congratulations, Chihiro.”

“Great job!”

“Yeah, good one.”

“Heh-heh... Thank you. So I’ll move my peg down Route B.” Chihiro moved his person-shaped wooden peg five squares down, then read what was on the board.

“Um, so I win the two-million-yen prize and end my turn, I guess.”

He took out 2 million yen’s worth of money cards, and then it was Nayuta’s turn.

“I go next. Mmm... I want the money, so I’ll join Gagag... Gagarin Books’ competition. Roll two or better to make your debut... Here we go!”

She rolled a .

“Well, that was easy. Now I get to make my debut.”

“Here comes the great new hope of the industry,” Haruto remarked.

Once she advanced her pawn and picked up her money, Itsuki picked up the die.

“Well, if we’re all splitting up, I’ll go with Denge—um, Lightning Books. Hmm... Five or higher to debut? I guess it’s a lot harder to break in with the big guys, huh? But with one anime adaptation under my belt, this’ll be no sweat...!”

He tossed the die with all his might...

“Aaaand that’s a two.”

“You’re fighting an uphill battle. And losing,” said Nayuta.

“Nrahh... Someone like *me*, not making the cut...? Damn you, Lightning Books...!”

“Oh, by the way,” Haruto said, thumbing through the booklet, “I guess you have to pay one hundred thousand yen per turn to cover living expenses. If you go into the red, you’re out of the game.”

“What?!”

“Wow, you gotta debut fast or you’re in trouble.”

“Good thing I made it on the first try,” a visibly relieved Chihiro sighed.

“Also, if two players get married, they can pool their money together.”

“Married?!”

It was only to be expected that Nayuta would latch on to this.

“Um, yeah. We’re all free to marry whomever we want. There’s no gender restriction or anything.”

“Let’s get married, Itsuki! Right now!”

“No!”

“Marry me, and until you can make your debut...no, even after, I promise I’ll cater to your every need!”

“Quit propositioning me in the most graphic way possible! I’ll show you! I’m gonna join the Lightning Books family next turn!”

As Itsuki steeled his resolve, Miyako picked up the die. “I’m up next. Hmm... I have some freedom with my money at this point. Maybe I oughtta try for Lightning, too.”

The dice tumbled across the table.

“Ooh, a five. It’s my debut!”

“Whyyyyy?!” Itsuki screamed.

“Wow, a full-fledged Lightning Books author!”

“Not bad, Myaa! Your first book winning the Lightning Grand Prize!”

Miyako awkwardly smiled. “Hee-hee! Oh, it’s nothing that impressive. I’ll see you down this path later, Itsuki.”

“Gnnhh...”

With that, Miyako’s turn ended, and Haruto picked up the die. “Okay, which way should I go...? Well, since nobody’s picked it yet, how about I take path D, the Internet strategy? It says that I don’t have to roll any dice if I pick this. Right. Here I go! *Overlord* or bust!”

The turn order went back to Chihiro.

“So it’s just rolling the dice and advancing down the path now, right?”

This time he rolled a .

“Three squares... ‘Your debut book received another printing. Collect five hundred thousand yen.’ All right!”

“I’m up next... Four. One, two, three, four... Oh, hey, I got another printing, too! But I only get one hundred thousand yen out of it? Why’s it so different...?” Nayuta looked less than convinced about this.

“All right... Time to make my big debut...”

Itsuki threw everything he had into his dice roll, and...

“Nrahhhhhh, not again! Your standards are way too high, Lightning Books!”

Miyako was next. “I got another printing, too. That’s one million yen for me.”

“One million?!” exclaimed Chihiro.

“What a difference. Lightning’s a force to be reckoned with!” Nayuta marveled.

“Hmm... I guess the money you earn differs completely depending on the path.” Chihiro gave the board and its different routes a quick scan.

“Yeah,” Haruto replied, “and some paths even have more money squares than others. The Lightning route has tons of reprint squares, but the mid-level GM Bunko and smaller label paths are a bit more sparse. The Web-novel route has a lot of squares with nothing on them at all.”

He rolled the die.

“Hmm... No event on that square. Guess I’m just going nose-to-the-grindstone with uploading text.”

The turn order went back to Chihiro.

“...Nothing for me this time, either.”

“Hmm,” Nayuta said, “a reprint, but it’s just one hundred thousand yen... which is totally eaten up by my monthly expenses.”

“All right. Lightning Books for *sure* this time...”

Itsuki rolled the die, telekinetically forcing it to bend to his will.

“Gahhh! A one! That’s like getting rejected in the first round!”

He held his head in his hands as Miyako proceeded down the Lightning route.

“Whoa, another million-yen reprint.”

“That’s crazy,” Haruto observed as he rolled. “Um, guess I’m just uploading more chapters... I’m basically just as unemployed as Itsuki, aren’t I?”

“D-don’t call it ‘unemployed,’” Itsuki spat, slightly put out.

3

“Ngahhhh, four! That’s the fifth straight debut fail! I’m out of money! Why...? Why won’t those pricks at Lightning Books just publish me already...?!”

Five turn cycles in, and Itsuki had yet to leave the starting square.

“Itsuki, shouldn’t you give up on Lightning? If you don’t make the cut next turn, you’re out of the game, right?” Nayuta pleaded.

Itsuki gritted his teeth. “I’m not out yet... I’m not giving up! Besides, Kanikou, I thought you were a pro, but you have barely any money on you.”

“Well, every time I get paid, my expenses eat it all up! The three million yen in prize money is keeping me propped up all right...but this is like death by a thousand cuts...,” Nayuta wailed.

“I’m still making money,” Chihiro said, “but compared to Miyako, it’s nothing.”

“Yeah, how much money do you have, Myaa?”

Miyako counted the money cards in her pile. “Mmm, a little over ten million.”

“Ten million?!” Itsuki’s eyes burst open. “Well, don’t worry, I’ll join Lightning and catch right up with you...”


“Hee-hee! Hopefully you can debut sooner or later, Itsuki.”

“Gnh...!”

“Can’t wait to see how many million yen I make at the *next* printing!”

Miyako looked supremely confident as she rolled the dice, much to Itsuki’s chagrin.

“Four. Umm... Huh? Not a reprint for a change. Uh, ‘You are in danger of missing a deadline. Roll the die. If you roll four or higher, you barely make it in time.’ Huh. Well, here goes.”

She didn’t make it. The die read .

“Oh no, I missed the deadline! But doing that once isn’t any big deal, is it?”

Nayuta and Haruto glared at the indifferent Miyako.

“M-Myaa, you’re turning into one of those problem authors...”

“Yeah, well, maybe it’s because I’m friends with a pair of habitual deadline-breaking offenders in Itsuki and Nayu.”

Not sweating her transgression at all, Miyako continued reading the square’s instructions.

“Um, if you fail to make the deadline, you lose five turns and give up three Happiness Points... Whoa! That’s really harsh! Five turns?!”

“Oh, I’ve heard about this,” reported Nayuta. “The big labels publish a ton of stuff every year, so there’s this intense competition for schedule slots. If you miss a date, you may not get another slot for another six or twelve months, even.”

“A whole year?!”

Itsuki shuddered. “I couldn’t even *imagine* our label doing that to us.”

“Yeah, our publisher never delays anything. They just force us to publish it, no matter what,” Nayuta chimed in.

“I guess the competition is pretty intense in the upper echelons... Oh, it’s my turn. I’m running short on money, too...”

Haruto smiled wanly as he rolled the die. “Um, four... Whoa! ‘Your Web novel has been picked up by a large publisher! Collect five million yen in first-printing royalties!’”

Itsuki was taken aback. “Damn, Web novels are crazy!”

“Wow, all that day-in, day-out effort really paid off...” Haruto laughed.

“Looking ahead, Prince Manwhore, the route after that square looks pretty

crazy.”

“Wow, you’re right! A million yen for a new printing, three million for a new volume...and whoa, look at all the ‘new volume’ squares!”

Nayuta and Miyako couldn’t hide their surprise.

“Well, with all the stuff I’ve written and uploaded, I’ve probably got dozens of paperbacks’ worth of text to publish.”

“Man, you sure can rake it in with Web novels. Maybe I should take that route and try to stage a comeback...”

“Not so fast, Itsuki!” exclaimed Haruto. “Taking the Internet route with zero money is way too dangerous!”

“Mmph...but if I blow it with Lightning Books one more time...” Itsuki groaned. “Wait!”

He suddenly lit up, a new idea crossing his mind.

“Haruto! Will you marry me?!”

“Fwah?!”

“Huh?!”

“Wh-where did *that* come from, Bro?!”

Nayuta, Miyako, and then Chihiro all reacted with varying degrees of shock.

Haruto was the only player in the room to take this offer calmly. “Hmm... Since we’ll share a common bank account, that’ll let you stay in the game more easily; is that what you figure?”

“Yeah...! Haruto, you gotta support me until Lightning Books picks me up!”

“You just wanna be his sugar baby?!” Miyako shouted. Then, more quietly, she grumbled, “...I have more money than him, still. Shouldn’t you be asking me before him?”

“Oh! Right! You’ll work too, Miyako. Will you marry meeeeeeee?!”

“Wha—? No, you weirdo!” Miyako’s face turned red at the sudden proposal.

“Itsuki!” Nayuta interjected. “If you’re gonna marry someone, marry me! You

can use my money any way you want to!”

“No.”

“You’re so mean...” She pouted.

“Um, hey, Bro, if you don’t mind marrying me, that’s fine... Like, I’m not making a lot, but it’s steady, and I have some money saved up, too... If we try hard enough, I think we can make it work.”

Chihiro blushed a bit as he pleaded his case. It made Itsuki do the same.

“Y-yeah... Well, maybe we should, then...like, get married...”

“S-sure...”



“No!” interrupted Nayuta. “That’s incest! It’s not healthy for two brothers to get married!”


“Calm down, Kanikou. This is just a game.”

“If it’s ‘just a game,’ then why won’t you just marry me, already?!”

“I said no... We can worry about that in real life, but the answer is still no!”


Itsuki’s face grew redder as he refused.

“All right, so Itsuki and Chihiro are married now,” Haruto said. “Whose turn was it again?”

“Oh, mine.” Chihiro promptly rolled a . “Here’s a branch point. ‘Your editor has been replaced. Roll an odd number to go down Route A, or an even number for Route B.’”

“Did you see the editor illustrations? Hmm...”

Miyako scanned the editor artwork for each of Chihiro’s potential routes. It made her laugh out loud. Route A featured a serious-looking man in glasses and a business suit, memo pad and tablet in hand. Route B had a chill surfer-boy type holding a red pencil and a horse racing form.

“Hope I roll odd,” Chihiro prayed as he tossed the die. It came up . “Ooh, it’s even...”

“Ha-ha... Well, you can’t judge a book by its cover. Maybe Route B has the more talented editor—”

“The first square in Route B says ‘Your new editor lost your manuscript. Lose three turns.’”

“Maybe not!” exclaimed Haruto, his attempt at placating Chihiro failed.

“This is kind of unbelievable, though. Would an editor ever lose someone’s manuscript in real life—oh, is something wrong?”

Chihiro found Itsuki, Nayuta, and Haruto all turning away from him.

“Um, I can’t help but notice that all the squares ahead for Chihiro are pretty awful...,” Miyako finally said, and the others joined her in examining the board.

“Oh?” Itsuki remarked. “Lemme see. ‘A miscommunication with your illustrator delayed your release date. Lose three turns.’ ‘You were forced to do a media tour, earning you ridicule on the Internet and breaking your heart. Lose three Happiness Points.’ ‘Your editor replaced your text entirely without asking. Lose two Happiness Points.’ ‘The content your editor forced you to rewrite was so unpopular that your series was canceled. Lose four turns and five Happiness Points’...”

“Damn, dude,” Haruto said.

“Um, this isn’t based on reality, is it? Nothing this terrible actually happens in real—?” Chihiro gingerly asked.

“Ha-ha...” “Ha-ha...” “Ah-ha...”

The short, dry bursts of laughter from the three professional novelists in the room told him everything he needed to know.

“There are actually editors like that...?”

“Um, is the light novel industry really okay...?” Miyako asked.

“Aw, don’t worry, Miyako. Someone *this* terrible’s extremely rare in this business. If that’s who you get assigned to, then I can’t offer more than my condolences, but...”

“Oh man... I hope I survive...”

“Well, all the routes have their pitfalls,” Nayuta said, grabbing the die. “I guess light novels are a thorny path, no matter which one you take. Anyway... Oh, I earned three hundred thousand yen for my new release. You know, the difference from the Web author’s earnings is kind of breaking my heart...”

“At least *you* managed to make your debut! This time... This time, I swear I’ll make my debut with Lightni—*gahhhh*, a four! When am I finally gonna crawl outta this square?!” Itsuki screamed.

4

Many turn cycles passed.

“Hahh...hahh...hahh...”

Itsuki, face drawn and head hanging low off his frame, rolled the die.

“Oh?” “Ah?” “Ooh!” “Huh?”

...It showed a 🎲.

“Nnnnnnhhh!! S... S... *Siiiiiiixxxx!!*”

Tears welled up in his eyes.

“Congratulations, Bro!”

“Ahh... At long, long last... Finally! I’m a Lightning novelist!!”

The other players clapped as he let out a guttural roar of victory.

“Ha-ha-ha! Thank you! And congratulations, me! Just wait and see how new author Itsuki Hashima’s gonna rock Lightning Books to its core! And special thanks to the wife who’s supported me all this time!”

“Oh... No, I didn’t really... I mean, it’s all thanks to how hard you worked, Big Bro.” Chihiro turned red.

“You’re brothers,” Nayuta pouted. “Stop flirting like that.”

“...Still, though,” Miyako coldly pointed out, “you sure had it tough until your debut...”

“Y-yeah. And given how you haven’t been able to launch a new book in ten or so turns, you definitely know how it goes.”

“Hey, that’s mean! It’s the publisher’s fault for not letting me sell anything just because I blew a single deadline!”

“Miyako’s getting more and more problematic...,” a shocked Haruto said.

“Ugh... I have to keep releasing books to make money, but now my expenses are piling up... Does this mean, like, if you’re an author who can’t put out a book, you’re basically unemployed?”

“Ha-ha...” Haruto laughed weakly.

“You finally noticed?” Itsuki commented.

“Your intellect is truly beyond compare, Myaa,” added Nayuta.

“Novelists sure have it tough, huh?” Chihiro said sympathetically, then more drily added, “I mean, I’m starting to wonder how many times my editor is going to lose my submissions. Why do I run into all this trouble with my illustrator and designer every time? Are they sabotaging me on purpose, or what? If he made a mistake serious enough to cancel my anime project, how’s he allowed to stay with the company...?”

“Oh no! Chihiro’s editor screwed up so many times, he’s gone over to the dark side!” Nayuta shuddered.

“Come back to us, Chihiro! Come back!”

“Huh? What’d I do...?”

Itsuki’s shouting was enough to restore Chihiro’s sanity, fortunately.

“Hang in there just a bit longer, okay, Chihiro? Your editor’s getting fired in just two more squares, it looks like.”

“Wh-whoa, Haruto, you’re right...! Finally... Finally, I’ll be free of this guy...!”

“Oh, Chihiro,” wailed Itsuki. “It’s even making you cry! You’re so gentle... I swear, a bad editor has the power to completely ruin authors’ lives...”

“Yeah, it ain’t easy being a pro novelist. And meanwhile, here I am, just uploading text on the Internet and raking it in...” Without a care in the world, Haruto tossed the die. “Right, there’s a six. Um... ‘The massive royalties you’re making allow you to live comfortably enough that you’ve decided not to bother uploading weekly novel updates. ‘Thanks for your support! I’ll see you sometime in the future!’ Go back to start!’ ...Oh, come *on*!! Are you kidding me? I’m going on permanent hiatus without finishing the story?!”

Nayuta glared at Haruto. “You’re awful, Prince Manwhore.”

“Permanent hiatus?” Chihiro asked.

Haruto explained. “Oh, it’s just slang for abandoning a project without reaching the ending. You see it a lot in Web novels and indie games. Ughh, seriously, though? I got this far and I’m back to sending stories to competitions...?”

“Well, you *did* abandon your bestselling story just because you got sick of it.

I'm sure all your fans are furious with you, so you'll just have to adopt a new pen name and start over," Nayuta callously pointed out.

"I know I've got all this money, but this is breaking my heart..."

"Um, I'm up." Chihiro rolled the die. It was enough to break him out of the crappy-editor path.

"Whewww! I'm finally through that gauntlet!"

The sincerity of his joy led Nayuta and Miyako to offer their congratulations.

"Good job, there."

"Yeah, nice one. Just watching you go through that was hard enough... And you had to support your unemployed husband, too."

"Don't call me an unemployed husband! Now that I'm a big Lightning Books writer, I'm gonna be the one supporting him!"

"Sure thing, Big Bro. We'll do it together!"

Watching the Hashima couple, Nayuta pouted. "Yeah, yeah, I know we've all got it tough. And meanwhile, I'm still in the bush leagues with Gagarin Books, writing this string of novels that never go anywhere... Oh."

Her peg reached a branch point.

"Hmm? Take Route A if you roll a one or Route B for anything else... Here goes."

Following the instructions, Nayuta rolled...a .

"...There's a one. Down Route A I go. Let's see what this one has... Wait, what?! Wow, this is amazing!"

The idle peek at the path ahead made her yelp in astonishment. Itsuki and Miyako followed her gaze.

"What...? Whoa! What *is* this route?!"

"Um, 'You scored the biggest hit in the label's history! Collect two million yen for the reprints!' 'A manga version is underway! Collect two million yen!' 'You signed on for the anime version! Collect five million yen!' The manga's a hit, my new series is a hit, all the books get reprinted a billion times, the anime's a hit, I

win the Best Light Novel award three times in a row, I win the SUGEE JAPAN grand prize, they write and sell a character song about me!!”

Thrilled, Nayuta kept going.

“So I guess Gagag—um, Gagarin Books used to be this little niche label, but now it’s finally got its very own *My Youth Romantic Comedy Is Wrong!* Now Gagarin’s up there with the brightest stars in the industry!”

“Uh-oh... I better get a book out fast, or she’s gonna overtake me...”

“Dah! In that case, I guess as Lightning Books’ latest sign-on, I’ll have to pull a *Sword Art something-from-another-publisher* out of my ass right now! Hyah!”

Itsuki Hashima, the latest sign-on, rolled the die.

“O-one... Um, ‘Your debut novel was a sales disappointment. Lose two turns.’ ...Well, so much for becoming a certain someone...”

5

Thus, all five players made their light novel debuts, rushing down the paths to their respective destinies.

“‘Your anime is successful. Collect two million yen,’” Chihiro gleefully reported. “Hee-hee! My label’s really been hitting it out of the park lately.”

“‘Your new series is a megahit. Collect two million yen.’”

Nayuta was doing just as well.

“...‘Your editor was caught trying to stealth-market your novels on a forum, triggering an uproar. Lose three turns.’”

Miyako tilted her head in disbelief.

“‘Your anime debuted, but from episode one, the terrible animation and excessively compressed storyline cause you to lose ten Happiness Points.’ Way to remind me of real life.” Haruto let out a despondent groan.

The gaps between each of the five players’ experiences in the world of light novels were increasingly staggering.

“Geez! If you’re gonna try stealth marketing, do a better job than that, editor! Is there a square somewhere that’ll boost my sales to ten billion or something? I gotta find a way to turn the tables...”

“...We’re almost at the end of the game. I can’t wait to reach the end...”

Miyako was starting to get bored, just as Itsuki was starting to lose his marbles.

“The winner’s decided by Happiness Points, right?”

“Right,” Miyako said to Nayuta. “Who’s in the lead now?”

Everyone reported their totals. Haruto was at minus 16, Itsuki at minus 20, Chihiro at minus 26, Nayuta at minus 7: “And I’m minus fourteen... Wow, we’re all in the negative?!”

“No matter which route you take,” observed Chihiro, “there’s tons of events that cost you Happiness Points, but not too many where you gain them back.”

“So what’re we supposed to do?” Miyako asked, confused.

“I suppose this is the game’s way of telling us that happiness doesn’t come easy in this business. But we’ve got no choice but to keep going...,” replied Itsuki.

“What *is* happiness anyway?” Chihiro reflected as he tossed the die. “Oh, another branch... ‘The label you’ve worked for up to now was bought out by the largest publisher in the industry for eight billion yen. Lose five Happiness Points. You have a choice: Either join your dissatisfied editor at a newly launched label (Route A), or stick with your old label and become the giant’s lapdog (Route B).’ Which should I go for...? My label’s gone, guys...”

“Wow,” Haruto said as Chihiro reeled at the news. “You’ve worked so hard not to lose out to the big guy all this time, too. Rough.”

“Yeah,” Itsuki added. “If this happened in real life, it’d break the heart of so many authors and editors. Then, even though the big company bought the smaller one because it was doing well, its earnings would take a nosedive. It’d be a huge tragedy with no winners in the end. Good thing this is just a game!”

“Oh boy, you said it,” Nayuta droned.

“Hmm... I don’t know. My current editor saved me from my really bad one before, so I’d like to keep working with him, but jumping labels sounds dicey... What do you think I should do, Bro?”

“Just follow your heart. Whatever you pick, I promise I’ll support you.”

“Oh, Itsuki, so manly,” Miyako sarcastically observed.

“I wish I was being told that,” a miffed Nayuta blurted out.

“Aw, thank you, Itsuki... All right, I’ve made up my mind! I’m going to follow my editor! I won’t become some Horn River dog!”

“Well said! That’s the little brother...um, I mean, wife I know!”

Nayuta flashed a diabolical smile. “Hee-hee-hee... And while that mid-tier upstart is thrown into confusion by that buyout talk, the time has come for me and Gagarin Books to seize the initiative! Yah!”

The die was thrown; the peg advanced.

“Mmm...? Wha—I’m being sued for copyright infringement? ‘The case drags on so long in court that you lose three million yen and five Happiness Points. Before there’s a verdict, you get doxxed by your haters online and branded a criminal. Lose five Happiness Points and five turns from the mental stress.’ Arrrgh!”

“Yikes,” Haruto said, breaking into a cold sweat.

“Wait,” Itsuki noted, “that didn’t happen to Gagarin Books, that happened to —oh, whoops! This game is a work of fiction and has no relation to any actual person or organization, right, right.”

“Errrgh, who’s the idiot who’s trying to make me into a criminal?” Nayuta whined, her voice shaking. “Who do you think I am...? I am Wataru Watari, author of *My Youth Romantic Comedy*! Bring it on, — and — and —! I’ll whip all of you at once!”

“You’re *not* Wataru Watari, all right?!”

“And if Watari started picking fights with folks like that, it’d screw up the entire industry!” Haruto quickly added.

“Why is this happening to me...?”

“Because your editor didn’t get permission from the original rights-holder, maybe?” said Itsuki.

“Yeah, but why is it happening right when I’m at the top of my game? I smell a conspiracy... It’s got to be the Empire of Horn River at work again!”

“Yeah, it certainly wouldn’t be beneath those guys...”

“It’s all up to you now, Itsuki... Please, secure revenge against Horn River for me... Arrrrgh!”

“Yeah, but I’m already writing for Lightning Books, so...”

“Oh, right! You and Myaa are both Horn River lapdogs...”

“Stop calling us dogs! ...Here, lemme roll.”

Waiting at the square Itsuki reached:

“Um... Oh? ‘Lightning Books is spinning off from its parent company and launching as a new publisher! You are free to join this new publisher or to stick with the original parent company. You can also use your industry connections to join any publisher route other players are members of.’”

“Wait, Big Bro, is this...?!”

“Hmm... Join another player’s company...”

“Hey, Itsuki, join me over at Gagarin Books!” Nayuta cried.

“Um,” Chihiro butted in, “maybe it’d be best to work for the same publisher as me...?”

“Nah,” Haruto interjected, “come with me! If my label hits it big with an anime, you’ll be raking it in! Not that I did...”

“Mmm... Yeah, I’m not sure I’d fit in with a really big place. I think I’ll shack up with Chihiro’s label!”

“Oh, nice! We’re a brother—um, I mean, a married team!”

“Yep! Let’s destroy Horn River together!”

Thus, the super-couple of Itsuki and Chihiro were united under the same

label.

“Okay, my turn...”

Thanks to delay after delay, Itsuki had finally caught up with Miyako on the board. Now she was stopped on the same square Itsuki had just hit.

“Ah, I’m facing the same decision. I dunno... They just never seem to get around to publishing my books. I think I’ll join Itsuki and Chihiro’s label, too!”

Haruto followed this up by landing on the square Chihiro had just experienced.

“Great, so I get to pick between joining my editor or becoming a lapdog, huh? Well...I’m no dog!”

Thus, a total of four players wound up joining the same publisher label. Only Nayuta was left behind. “Well, whatever,” she said. “Once I’m done with my own crap, I’m hopping right over to that route with you guys!”

“Great! Now we’re all writing under the same label!” Itsuki stood up and raised a fist. “Let’s band together and survive this living hell we call the light-novel industry!”

““““Raaahhh!”””” the other four shouted.

6

Just because all five players were walking along the same novelist route didn’t mean they had it easy.

““Your new series was canceled after two volumes. Lose two Happiness Points and two turns’...”

“Oh, finally, a new printing! ...Only fifty thousand yen? That doesn’t even cover expenses...”

“...‘One of your haters left a negative Amazon review. Lose one Happiness Point.’ ...Not that it’s *that* destructive, but it’s still irritating, huh?”

““You were stalked by a reader who resents not being able to marry your heroine. Lose three Happiness Points and three turns.’ I’m being stalked? Like,

does that really happen?”

“My manga adaptation fell apart. I’m out three hundred thousand yen... I’m already scraping the bottom of the barrel here. That’s rough...”

Chihiro, Nayuta, Itsuki, Miyako, Haruto—all five of them were feeling the pain.

“Oof, another cancellation. I have no idea what the readers even want any longer...”

“I had another new series rejected, too. I should’ve appreciated my books back when I was actually releasing some...”

“Wow,” Itsuki marveled, “I’d never expect that from *you* normally, Kanikou!”

“We’re almost at the end,” Chihiro weakly stated, “but we’re all pretty battered and bruised, huh?”

“Yeah... I just hope we can make it...”

The anguish was written clearly upon Itsuki’s face as he rolled.

“...Um, ‘Your friend just got married. Lose fifty thousand yen for a wedding present. If single, lose an additional three Happiness Points out of jealousy.’ ... What’s *that* got to do with being a novelist?!”

“Good thing we’re together, huh, Big Bro?”

Next was Miyako. “...‘Your annual physical returned alarming results. Lose one hundred thousand yen and three turns.’ Yeah, novelists live pretty unhealthy lifestyles. Drinking in the middle of the day, for example.”

“I’m starting to worry about my liver... Um, ‘The chance of a lifetime! Roll a two for a winning horse-racing bet that multiplies your bank account by ten!’ Ten, huh...? I guess this is the only chance I have to get out of poverty...!”

“W-wait, Haruto! Don’t plunge in!”

“Yah!”

Ignoring Itsuki’s plea, Haruto staked his life on a gambling match.

“...Aaaahhhhh, I lost all my money at the racetrack!”

“That’s another thing I’d have a hard time believing you’d ever say in real life...”

“Bad news in the industry today, as Haruto Fuwa, novelist and anime storyteller, lost all his money betting on horses...,” Nayuta began.

“...I thought I could make it work...”

“I’d like to know why.”

“So is this it? I got one more turn to try to avoid a Game Over?”

“You know,” Itsuki commented, “you could marry someone and live off their fortune instead.”

“Ohh, right, I forgot! Umm...” He turned his eyes toward Nayuta.

“No thanks. Whether it’s a game or not, I’m not marrying anyone except for Itsuki.”

“Yeah, I’ll bet. In that case...”

Haruto’s eyes met Miyako’s, and she responded with an exasperated look. “Marrying for money? Seriously, Fuwa...”

“Oh, I hate it when you look at me like that, Miyako... Okay, so be it!”

“So be what?” Itsuki asked.

“I guess this is the end of the road for me. If I’m gonna lower myself to marrying a girl for her bank account, I might as well just bow out now!”

“Wow, Prince Manwhore, that’s the manliest thing you’ve ever done. Maybe I had the wrong idea about you, a little.”

“So—”

“Ugh, wait a minute! I’ll do it for you, okay?”

Miyako spoke up just as Haruto was about to announce his retirement.

“Huh?”

“...I’ll do it for you. I’ll marry you,” she said bashfully.

“Huhh?!”

“...The five of us made it this far together. Wouldn't it suck if one of us fell out now? So let's get married.”

“Aw, you're so kind, Myaa.”

“Miyako...! Thank you...!”

Miyako laughed at the heartfelt appreciation. “You don't have to get *that* excited about it, you know.”

“Yeah, I guess not.”

Itsuki leaned over to whisper at Haruto. “Heh-heh-heh... Nice one, Haruto.”

“...Yeah. In the game, at least...”

“...?”

Miyako gave Haruto a funny look as he did a miniature fist-pump in the air.

“Right!” Chihiro shouted as he took up the die. “Let's get all five of us to the finish line! ...Ugh. ‘You collapsed and wound up in the hospital. Lose five hundred thousand yen and three turns.’”

“Oh no! My wife! Are you all right?!”

“Uh, ‘If married, your partner also loses three turns.’ Sorry to put this on you, Bro...”

“Don't be silly! ‘Through sickness and in health’!”

“Aww, Itsuki...”

“Ugh! Will you quit with that lovey-dovey dialogue?! Give that to me, not your own brother!”

Jealousy drove Nayuta to hurl the die with extra force.

“Ah! I got sick, too, Itsuki! Minus three hundred thousand yen, lose two turns...plus my marriage partner, if I have one; otherwise lose three Happiness Points. Ugh... It's tough, being alone in this world...”

She looked ready to cry for real. Miyako felt sympathy for her.

“Mmm... I'm starting to feel bad for you.”

“Yeah, but everyone else is already married, so... Huh? Wait a second...?”

An idea hit upon Haruto. He thumbed through the instruction booklet.

“What is it?”

“I was just wondering if the game would let you marry multiple people. I don’t see anything about it in the manual.”

Miyako raised an eyebrow at this. “Ummm, I’m not sure the rules were really meant to cover that...but if that’s how it is, Nayu...”

“Yes?”

“...You wanna get married? That’ll save you a few Happiness Points, at least...”

“Myaa... Oh, Myaa, I do, I do!”

Nayuta reached out to hug Miyako, face beaming with pure emotion.

“Hyah?! Ugh, let me go!”

“Hee-hee-hee! I love you, Myaa! Please make me happy!”

“Yeah, yeah, sure.”

Itsuki couldn’t help but envy them as they flirted, but not enough to keep him from rolling and moving his peg.

“...Ooh? ‘If married, you have just had a child. You and your partner gain ten Happiness Points and three million yen in gift money!’”

“M-me and my brother had a child?!”

Chihiro’s face burned in shame, as Nayuta pouted. “Aww, I wanted to have Itsuki’s baby, too... Come on, Myaa, let’s make one of our own! I can’t lose out to these two!”

“It’s just one blockbuster quote after another from you, isn’t it, Nayu...?”

“Wait a second,” interrupted Itsuki, his voice low. “There’s no limit to marriage partners, right? So if you marry all of us, we’ll all get to share in the money and Happiness Points. That’s a bargain!”

“Itsuki...”

“Bro...”

“I think that’s stretching the premise a little *too* much,” replied Nayuta, with

Miyako and Chihiro giving him similar looks of disbelief.

“Hey, don’t look at me like I’m some kind of nutcase! All I’m doing is trying to think up ways for us to all limp to the goal together.”

“Yeah,” chimed in Haruto, “but if we do that, we’ll all finish with high scores and it won’t be a fair contest.”

“T-true...” Itsuki fell silent for a moment. “Hang on! Haruto, lemme see the instructions!”

“Sure.”

Picking the booklet up, Itsuki pored over it, eyes as large as saucers.

“...Hohh...hohh...heh-heh-heh... I see... I knew it the whole time...!”

“...What, Itsuki?”

“Here it is in black and white: ‘Players win by collecting Happiness Points and becoming happy by the end of the game.’ It doesn’t say anything about the guy with the most points winning or anything!”

“Um, so what?” Miyako asked.

“So basically, the points don’t matter. As long as your Happiness Point count is positive, any player who reaches the finish wins. This wasn’t a competitive game at all. It’s a co-op! We’re all trying to reach the end together!”

All the other players blinked in wonder.

“Ohhhhhh...! No wonder this game seemed so hard to me.”

“That explains why it’s balanced to make you fail midway if you tackle a route solo and never get married...”

“Ugh, this whole game’s so misleading! If it was a co-op thing, they should’ve said so in the instructions!”

“If I had to guess, Miyako, part of the strategy lies in whether you notice that or not,” Itsuki said, looking disgusted. “You can really tell how much of an ass the author of this game is.”

“Maybe the marriage rules were left ambiguous just for that reason. It’s just asking you to poke through the loopholes,” Haruto reflected.

“Well, in that case, we all know what to do! Let’s all get married! I’ll make all of you my lawfully wedded wives!”

“You sound like the hero of a harem love comedy, Itsuki.”

“That includes two guys, remember,” said Haruto.

“Ah-ha-ha...”

Chihiro had to laugh at that, if only to divert everyone else’s attention.

“Hmm... I’m still not totally convinced this is right, but I’d hate it even more if we couldn’t finish this, so I guess I’m marrying you and bringing Fuwa and Nayu with me!” Miyako declared.

And with that, Itsuki was suddenly polygamous.

7

For the next several rounds, Itsuki and his four wives were unstoppable.

“Say hello to our fifteenth child! That earns us three million yen times five and ten Happiness Points for everybody!”

The absurd statement from Nayuta made Miyako roll her eyes. “I can’t believe how much richer we are than before,” she said. “We’re all in the black Happiness Points-wise, too. It’s starting not to be the ‘Life of a Light Novelist,’ though.”

It wasn’t all smooth sailing, of course. Just mostly.

“Oh crap, my manuscript’s in trouble! But if another player’s on the same label, they can join in and help me make the deadline!”

Next came Miyako’s turn.

“Oof, ‘Lose six turns after fighting with your editor.’ Oh, but ‘if three or more players side with you, you can all start a new publishing label’...”

“Finally, we can all go indie! I’ll follow you the rest of my life, Myaa!”

“Yep! We’re all friends! *And* family!”

“Thanks. Well...let’s do it! Time to blow a huge hole in this entire rotten

industry!”

Thus, the quintet set off to build their own label!

Through sickness and injury, lack of employees, bookstores giving them the cold shoulder, interference from other publishers, and much more, they all worked together and struggled on—and now they were at the last square before the finish line.

The game didn’t allow players to step off this square until all of them were on there, fresh from completing their routes. Haruto, last to reach it, read the text.

“...‘You’re joining in a large, label-wide project! If all players in the label have sold a combined ten million books, it succeeds.’ ...We’re all good there!”

Itsuki’s chest swelled with pride. “Heh! No wonder! We’ve got ex–Lightning Books writers, a mega-hot Web novelist, and even Wataru Watari himself!”

“And now that we’ve hit it big with that project...all that’s left is the end!”

Chihiro smiled and made a ceremonial toss of the die, moving his peg toward the square marked “GOAL.”

“Um... ‘Players with twenty-five or more Happiness Points, go to the happy ending. If you have between zero and twenty-four points, go to the normal ending. If your point total is negative, go to the bad ending.’”

“I’ve got fifty-four points,” Itsuki reported.

“Forty-nine,” said Haruto.

“One hundred and thirty-four,” said Nayuta.

“I’m at fifty-seven,” said Miyako.

“And I’m at seventy-two...so we all get the happy ending, huh?”

“Woo-hoo!” Miyako shouted.

“What does the happy ending give us?” Nayuta asked.

Chihiro turned his attention to an illustration by the goal square showing a large book.

“Um, is it this?”

The book was set up so you could physically turn over the cover flap, revealing a message below. Haruto did the honors.

“Hmm... ‘After extensive difficulty, you have all managed to survive a truly tumultuous time in light novel history. The constant barrage of unfair calamities may have driven you to anger on more than one occasion. However, none of the events in the game are cheap exaggerations. If you ever became a novelist in real life, these events and more may befall you as well.’ ...You sure got that right.”

“‘However,’” Miyako continued, “‘if you have made it here, then you likely already know everything you need to survive in this irrational world.’”

“...‘And if you do enter that world and face all its unfair realities, as long as you have friends and lovers fighting in the same world as you, we are sure you’ll be able to overcome any obstacle in your way.’” Nayuta picked up the thread.

“...‘This marks the end of the game,’” Chihiro read to round it out, “‘but your battle will continue on after this. We hope you and your trustworthy friends will support one another and make it through this grueling world. The end.’”

.....

.....The five of them sat there for a while, ruminating on the ending message. It was Nayuta who finally broke the silence.

“...Like...it’s funny how everything got wrapped neatly in the end.”

“Yeah... This game...”

Itsuki nodded.

“It’s *suuuuuuuuuuch* a piece of shit!” “What a piece of shit!” “It sure was a piece of shit!” “Wow, that game was a piece of shit!”

Itsuki, Nayuta, Haruto, and Miyako were all remarkably of the same mind—spoken all at once, no less.

Even Chihiro agreed. “Y-yeah, I guess you’re right! I almost let that text fool me for a second!”

“I’m sorry I ever brought this along,” Haruto said with deep regret.

Miyako laughed at him. “Well, at the same time, maybe it’s a good thing you bought it, Fuwa.”

“Huh?”

“I mean, if some teenager bought this game because he looked up to light novel writers, it’d ruin all of his dreams. Me and Chihiro already know how you guys work, kinda, so...”

“Indeed, it’s one less victim, I suppose,” Nayuta said. “There’s the silver lining.”

“Of course,” Itsuki countered, “that doesn’t save you from the crime of making us play this piece of shit.”

“I know,” said Haruto, chuckling. “Actually, I brought another new game along with me, too. It’s a good one, too, I promise. It won a prize in Germany and everything.”

“Ooh! I think we could all use a palate cleanser right now!”

“...Um, what about your novel, Big Bro? Because that board game made it seem like breaking a deadline’s pretty awful.” Chihiro seemed worried.

“Don’t worry! It’s just a game! Real life isn’t *that* terrible!” Itsuki smiled and puffed his chest out.

“You think?” an unconvinced Chihiro asked.

Then the doorbell sounded with its trademark ding-dong.

“Hmm? Someone there?”

Itsuki stood up and looked through the peephole again.

“...Ngh.”

He gasped, turned around, and screamed:

“Oh shit! It’s the editor! Run!!”

(The End)

Afterword

How did you enjoy Volume 4 of *A Sister's All You Need*? I have the feeling that, out of everything I've written before now (including other book series and game scenarios), this is probably the dumbest story yet. It'd make me so happy if you laughed even a little, and I still hope that my editor Iwaasa's dick falls off.

I also had the chance to work on a deluxe version of this volume in Japan, complete with a drama CD. The content on that CD is, shall we say, a little aggressive, so honestly I'm worried that it'll anger the wrong person. I had the chance to select the voice cast based on my personal image of each character, by the way, and in my mind, they're all a perfect match. If you've listened to it, what do you think? There's a section in the survey card for the drama CD, so we'd love to hear your feedback.

By the way, I'm writing this afterword at a hotel in Taiwan. I was fortunate enough to be invited to the Taipei International Comics & Animation Festival, where I held an autograph session and got to meet tons of fans. It was really energizing. Many thanks to everybody I met in Taiwan—I got to fit in some sightseeing as well, so I'm hoping I can toss a Taiwan vacation episode into my work someday.

Regardless, see you all later in Volume 5.

Yomi Hirasaka

Ravishing Silver-Haired Nude Female Novelist

Mid-February 2016

*Now I'll answer a few questions I've received.

【Q】 Will Ayane Mitahora appear again?

【A】 Yes.

【Q】 Which do you prefer: panty flashes, or full panty reveals?

【A】 I like nudes.

【Q】 What are your favorite board games?

【A】 I have a lot, but I'm a particular fan of Village. Don't worry, it's nothing at all like The Life of a Light Novelist.

【Q】 Mr. Hirasaka, how do you feel about your editor?

【A】 I hope his dick falls—um, I mean, I really appreciate him.

*Finally, some advertising. Kadokawa is collaborating with a mobile game called *Chain Chronicle*, and I'm handing the main scenario and several character episodes. Unlike most tie-ins, this is not a limited-time thing, so you're totally fine starting the game right now.

Afterword

Thanks for reading up to the end. This is Kantoku, the series illustrator.

The new character Kaiko certainly brought a lot of impact with her, didn't she? When you try making a ribbon out of a pair of panties in real life, it still doesn't look like anything other than a pair of panties. You'll need to find a pair made of pretty stiff fabric and tie it to a hairband for it to stay in place. Let's just pretend that whatever Kaiko's using as her "base" pair lends itself really well to the ribbon form.

Give it a try, too, readers! Because I sure won't again.

By the way, this volume also came out in deluxe format with a drama CD in Japan! The jokes are really well-timed and well-performed; I laughed out loud a lot. If you have it, I hope you get a real kick out of it.

あまがき。



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