

Author • Yuishi Artist • Kagachisaku

volume

9

An Introvert's

HOOKUP HICCUPS:

This **GYARU** Is Head Over Heels for Me!

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Prologue: To Each Their Own Regret

I'm sure most people have heard the saying, "Hindsight is twenty-twenty." But how many people have thought about what that actually means?

I've used the saying plenty of times myself, but I didn't at all know where it originated. I was guessing that it wasn't terribly uncommon for people to do so.

But it seemed that in this case, I had been misinterpreting the meaning of this particular saying.

I had always thought that the saying meant we couldn't undo something we'd done, no matter how much we regretted it. In other words, I thought it was a saying we used *after* we had already done something. But actually, it looks like the saying was meant to teach people to think *before* they act, so that there wouldn't be anything to regret in the first place. I felt like that was actually the opposite of the way I had thought about it. I wished I had known earlier that it was trying to teach us something about the future, instead of the past.

Because...

"Oh, it's Misumai-senpai—the one that was kissing onstage," I heard someone say.

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

"I heard he won the best couple contest because he kissed his girlfriend onstage."

"Seriously? Wow, he's pretty wild. I thought he was a total straightedge," the other person muttered.

You've got me all wrong. Well, okay, I guess you don't. But then, why am I feeling so defensive?

Just like that, though, random girls from the year below would come talk to me, or I would hear them talking about me from far away.

Ah, see, I can hear it again now. They're talking about the couple contest.

Nanami and I had gotten carried away and ended up kissing onstage. I wasn't going to make it seem like she was the one who initiated it, because—had I wanted to—I could've stopped her from kissing me. I knew *this* really was hindsight, but in that moment I had been able to see her movements almost frame by frame. So in all honesty, I could have stopped her if I had really wanted to. I could have used both hands to stop her in place, or dodge her, or just *pretended* like we kissed. There were many ways I could've done it. But I didn't. I guess there was no way I'd ever dodge a kiss from Nanami, in any case.

Still, I had accepted what she had done. And that was why we were both responsible for that incident at the couple contest.

Still, just when I thought we'd taken care of one rumor, there was now a new one to deal with—though I guess this one was more based in fact.

What could I say? We both got carried away.

That was probably what school festivals were all about...or so I thought, until our teacher reprimanded me for what we did. Dammit, I thought they weren't going to yell at us for stuff that happened at the school festival.

A reprimand? Or a warning? Whatever it was, the teacher called me in and told me to tone things down. He also told me that Nanami and I were probably the first ones to ever actually kiss onstage for the couple contest.

Seriously? I wouldn't go so far as to say that I thought *everyone* was doing it, but I was sure that there were students who did it at least every few years or something. Didn't someone say something about things at the festival being carnivalesque, after all?

But whatever the truth was, in the end Nanami and I were granted the dubious honor of accomplishing a certain "first" for the school.

I ruminated on these events as I made my way back to our classroom. Nanami...wasn't there. It seemed she still hadn't returned.

Nanami wasn't with Otofuke-san and the others; she had been called in by a different teacher, separately from me; that teacher was none other than the school nurse.

Maybe she would be easier to recall if I referred to her as the one who had

given me...*that* thing.

Even though I was a little taken aback by the fact that Nanami had been called in by the school nurse, I was pretty sure Nanami herself was even more shocked than I was. She was an excellent student, of course, but I guess not even *she* could get away this time without some kind of reprimand.

Seeing as how she wasn't back yet, she was probably still in the midst of her conversation with the nurse. Still, it seemed rare for me to be the one waiting for Nanami in the classroom.

I sat down at my desk and messed around on my phone. Baron-san and the others were logged into the game chat. I pondered for a moment whether to tell them that Nanami and I had kissed onstage...but then thought better of it.

It felt like it had been a while since I last played on my phone by myself in the classroom. I used to waste time like this constantly; doing it now somehow left me wanting, though. Maybe I'd gotten too used to Nanami peeking in from the side or getting excited with me whenever I played now.

When is she going to come back?

"Do you regret...kissing me?"

Out of nowhere, my inner Nanami spoke, voice full of anxiety. Wait, that sounded like there was something wrong with my brain. She had actually asked me that question before heading over to meet with the school nurse.

There was no way I regretted it.

I didn't regret kissing her. If there *was* any regret, it would have been for not thinking more about *where* we were kissing. It was because we kissed where we did that we were able to dispel all those terrible rumors.

"Dang...I really messed that up. How could I have been so careless?" someone muttered.

When I raised my head at the voice, I saw Kenbuchi-kun—rather, Hitoshi—sitting in front of me. Though his body was turned toward me, he was gazing down at the floor, muttering without actually looking at me.

"Man, this sucks. I really should have done it," he continued mumbling.

Uh, is it just me, or does he sound like he really wants me to ask him what's up? Should I talk to him? But asking him seems like a lot of trouble.

Hitoshi just kept mumbling to himself as I sat there trying to decide what to do. He wasn't looking at me at all, so I couldn't tell if he was doing it on purpose.

He was the first friend I'd made since starting high school, so the idea of not asking him what was up made me feel bad, even ungrateful in a sense. It might also sound opportunistic of me, but a part of me thought that reaching out to him now would be a good step in rehabbing my interpersonal skills too—even though the thought of him not responding to me was terrifying. If that happened, I was pretty sure I would cry.

"Is something—" I started.

"You wanna listen?!" he shouted.

Yikes, he's coming on super strong.

I had spoken up while worried about whether he'd respond to me at all, but he seemed to have been waiting for me to talk to him the whole time. Yeah, that actually scared me a bit.

As I sat there with my eyes wide open in surprise, Hitoshi looked back at me, expectation lighting up his eyes. There seemed to be no way I could say I *wouldn't* listen. Not to mention I wasn't good at saying things like that in the first place.

"Not sure I'll be of any help, but sure," I muttered.

"Thanks. Yeah, you know, it's just that I thought I'd mucked things up with the school festival," he began.

"The school festival?" I repeated.

Mucked things up? How? I was no expert, but in terms of how it went, I would've said that our class did really well with the school festival. We had a lot of people come to our café, and we also had a ton of fun. I mean, maybe having the guys cosplay as girls was kind of a mistake, but I still thought we were all into the whole thing.

“I don’t think you messed anything up,” I offered.

“No, man. I’m not talking about the festival itself. I just realized that we should’ve made a class shirt or something,” Hitoshi explained.

“A class shirt? What’s that?” I asked, tilting my head in wonder at the unfamiliar phrase. Now it was Hitoshi’s turn to be surprised, confusing me even more. *Is this really that important?*

“You know, it’s when we all wear the same T-shirt? For class solidarity? You’ve never heard of it? I wanted to do it, but then I totally forgot,” Hitoshi ended up murmuring.

I had no idea such a thing existed. It wasn’t the kind of term that showed up frequently in the manga and things I read, so it wasn’t really on my radar.

Hitoshi continued to moan and groan, his upper body splayed out over the desk. He practically radiated sadness.

What was I, as a friend, supposed to say to him in times like this? Should I just let him be? I had thought that the school festival had ended in a huge success, but for people who had wanted to do more, maybe there were still lingering desires.

I guess that was his regret. I had to admit that I never even thought of it. *Were other people having regrets about the school festival right now too?*

Does Nanami have regrets too? Just as I was thinking about that, a shadow crossed my field of vision. Thinking it was Nanami, I looked in that direction...only to discover that it wasn’t her.

“Huh? Shirishizu-san?” I found myself saying.

“Oh, Misumai-kun. And Kenbuchi-kun too. It’s rare to see the two of you together,” she muttered.

She looked so dejected that I was about to mention it was rare to see *her* in that state.

Shirishizu-san, very clearly exhausted, seated herself at a desk near us and put her head down too. Oddly enough, she took on the exact same posture as Hitoshi.

Two people sitting before me in basically the same way. Should I say something to Shirishizu-san too? Or was it better to leave her alone?

After going back and forth, I finally chose the former option and asked, “Did something happen?”

It felt weird to check on Hitoshi and not Shirishizu-san—at least, to me it did.

Unlike Hitoshi, Shirishizu-san didn’t jump at the opportunity to divulge things to me. For a while, she wiggled in her seat like a restless caterpillar, and then eventually turned herself toward us and let out, “The teacher really put me through the wringer.”

“Oh, I see,” I said, deducing everything from her straightforward response. Just like Nanami and I had kissed onstage, Shirishizu-san had done something shocking as well.

She had slapped her childhood friend.

It really was something else. And because of that, getting yelled at for doing something like that in front of so many people unfortunately made sense. If anything, maybe we should be glad that the teacher was only angry with her. Still, Shirishizu-san seemed pretty down about it.

“Also,” she began hesitantly.

Huh? There’s more? I can’t think of anything aside from that magnificent slap though.

By the time we realized it, both Hitoshi and I were staring at Shirishizu-san with concern, as she seemed unable to continue. She then blushed slightly and glanced away from us as she murmured, “The underclassmen and the other delinquent types have started calling me ‘boss lady.’”

Hitoshi and I were at a loss for words.

Right now Shirishizu-san was wearing her school uniform like a gyaru, but when she was standing onstage for the best couple contest, she had looked like a total delinquent herself. Slapping another delinquent-looking student—even if he *was* her childhood friend—would certainly get her into her current situation.

It made perfect sense to me, though I didn’t dare say that out loud.

“Boss lady,” Hitoshi murmured softly.

“Stop it,” Shirishizu-san moaned as she turned toward Hitoshi and glared at him, her eyes in their usual narrow look while she still lay slumped over the desk. It seemed, though, that neither of them was going to move from their current position of having their heads down on their desks.

Her posture still intact, Shirishizu-san kept muttering to herself about why she had to go and slap him when and where she did. I guess this, then, was Shirishizu-san’s regret.

“Don’t take it too hard,” I said to her. “Apparently we’re always destined to regret things.”

“What do you mean, dude? Having no regrets at all is way better,” Hitoshi returned.

“That would be ideal, sure. But realistically speaking, it’s just not possible to live life without regretting things,” I explained.

I’d only been living the decade-plus of my life given that I was only a high schooler, but it already seemed to me that regret was an emotion no one could avoid experiencing.

It was like that in manga too: there were so many scenes centered around characters making decisions out of a desire to leave no regrets in their lives. But despite all their talk, they seemed to keep landing themselves in situations where regret was inevitable—where, in the end, they were left to ponder if perhaps the other choice would have left them better off.

So, really, it wasn’t necessarily a bad thing to have regrets.

My dad and I talked about this precise topic just a little while ago. It was after the dare had ended, and I was thinking about whether I’d made the right decision.

“It’s fine to regret your decision. Regret is just another important function of the heart, so I would never say that having regrets is meaningless. The important thing is not to regret things too much, and to move forward with your decisions knowing that you’ll give everything you’ve got to your future.”

I remembered the conversation well because it was the first time I had talked about something like that with my dad—it was one of the first times I had felt so relieved from hearing someone else’s advice.

I suddenly wondered if my dad had ever experienced something that made him think that way. I didn’t ask him about it then, but maybe I could the next time I had the chance.

“I see. That is an interesting way to think about things,” Shirishizu-san said.

“I’m really just quoting my dad, though,” I confessed.

“I don’t think I’ve ever talked about stuff like that with *my* dad. Wait, when was the last time I even talked to him?” Hitoshi wondered out loud.

I shared my thoughts because I wanted to make the two of them feel a bit better. It seemed I had been able to do that, at least a little bit.

I also never thought I’d ever get to sit in a classroom talking to...friends. And even though I never imagined it, it wasn’t too shabby. I was honestly having kind of a fun time.

Just then, I heard the classroom door open, so I looked over in that direction—and found Nanami walking in with her brows slightly furrowed.

Did Nanami get a talking-to as well?

“Welcome back, Nanami,” I said.

“Hey, Yoshin,” Nanami said weakly. She then walked over to me rather than to her own seat, entirely deflated and unsteady on her feet, and proceeded to lean on me face forward.

We thus ended up hugging each other while I remained seated in my chair.

I wasn’t expecting her to do that in the classroom, so I had to brace myself to catch her. My body felt like it was going to start trembling any minute.

“Why aren’t you sitting down?” I asked her, more than slightly confused.

“The other two look exactly the same, so I wanted to do something different,” she mumbled.

Apparently she wanted to stand out from the others. *Gosh, is there a need for*

her to be competing against them like that? Just as I thought that, though, Nanami managed to reposition herself and moved to hug me from behind. She was now pressing into my back and leaning all her weight on me.

“Did she yell at you that much?” I asked.

“Um, no, not *that* much,” she replied.

I assumed Nanami had gotten quite a talking-to because she seemed pretty drained, but that seemed not to be the case. She held me as if to cradle me, then started swaying from side to side.

So I, too, swayed to match her movement.

“Man, you two sure are close,” Hitoshi remarked.

“They’ve been a lot more clingy ever since the school festival,” Shirishizu-san added.

Their comments hinted at mild exasperation, but of course we would have never done this had there been others in the classroom. We were only able to do this because it was after school. *Wait, we are able to do this, right...?*

Nanami, though, seemed to be looking at the two of them with mild indignation. I couldn’t quite see her face, but my guess was that her current expression might even be one of pride.

“Then why did you look so concerned earlier?” I asked Nanami.

“Well, uh,” she began hesitantly, tightening her grip around me. She then continued speaking, choosing her words very carefully.

“After she reprimanded me about the whole kissing thing,” Nanami began.

“Uh-huh,” I said, trying to get her to continue.

“She asked me why...”

“Uh-huh.”

“...there was no tongue.”

“Huh?”

It felt like time had stopped in our classroom. *Wait, she talked to the school*

nurse, right? How did they get to talking about that? What is that lady even asking? Oh, see, the other two are completely frozen too. Shirishizu-san's turned bright red. Hitoshi's got his eyes all wide and is repeating "Tongue... Tongue?" like a broken record.

"N-Nanami-chan, who asked you something like that?" Shirishizu-san asked.

"The school nurse," Nanami said simply.

With that, both Shirishizu-san and Hitoshi let out a soft "Ah," as though that explained everything. Their faces were still twitching, but they did seem to understand that the school nurse of all people *would* ask such a question.

So that really is how everyone thinks of the nurse, huh?

"When she asked me that, I kind of regretted that I didn't think of it myself," Nanami muttered.

"Hold it right there," I said.

I knew that regret could take many forms, but this one was completely unexpected.

Having never thought that a kiss could even go in that direction, I suddenly felt nervous about whether Nanami—who was still hugging me from behind—wouldn't try to pull it off right then and there.

Chapter 1: Something Never Heard Before

I was often told that studying was a student's top priority, so I also wondered why we had so many nonacademic events for school. Given that I was a pretty disengaged student, though, I took neither academics nor school events all that seriously.

I wondered, I was... I was talking a lot in the past tense. I couldn't really claim that I was now an engaged student, but there were definitely things about me now that were different from before. My grades were a lot better compared to a year ago, and I also now participated in school events. I felt like I was going through all the excitement that a first-year would have experienced, only a year late. *Does that make me a late bloomer?*

This was all only possible because of Nanami. My horizons had really expanded since I began dating her. Moving forward, too, I knew I was going to do more things that I otherwise wouldn't have had I been by myself. I couldn't thank Nanami enough for that.

I couldn't, but...

"I don't wanna have anything to do with that event. I just don't want to," I mumbled.

"Really? That much?" Nanami asked.

I nodded several times in response to her question, though I remained completely silent.

This was nonnegotiable for me. I genuinely disliked it. It was an event that absolutely made me put my foot down, with just the thought of it making me tremble. I couldn't stop, like a little kid afraid of ghosts in the dark. I knew it sounded childish of me, but still.

Nanami watched me as I made my immature remarks, her expression one of mild surprise. Even when I saw her looking at me like that, I only looked down, as if I could express how strongly I did not wish to participate by literally not

looking her way.

“You really dislike sports festivals that much?” Nanami asked, using her pleasant and beautiful voice to speak such terrible words that must never reach my ears. *Oh, no, Nanami—you shouldn’t let such words cross your lips.*

Those two words topped my mental list of words unsuitable for public broadcast. If at all possible, I wanted to be able to bleep them out any time they were spoken. I was aware I might be overreacting slightly, but still.

The event I found more distasteful than any other...was the sports festival Nanami mentioned.

It was, quite literally, a festival celebrating sports. I guess we could think of it as the sports version of the regular school festival. In fact, on our campus, it happened immediately after the school festival—which meant that it was going to take place not too long from now. I found just that fact alone completely abhorrent.

“How do you like to work out but *not* like the sports festival?” Nanami asked.

“Working out is okay because I do that on my own. I just don’t like sports that involve other human beings,” I explained, scratching my head even though it wasn’t itchy. It was like my body was trying to physically manifest unpleasant memories. Look, I couldn’t stand the twice-darned event, and I couldn’t help how I felt.

The feeling was probably rooted in a childhood experience. I couldn’t remember it terribly clearly; I just knew that a very definite distaste for sports festivals was thickly plastered onto my heart.

Track and field, individual sports...I even hated the regular PE classes we had. I didn’t mind doing athletic things on my own, though, so maybe I just disliked the sports we did at school. I really couldn’t explain it myself.

“So, what did you do about it last year?” Nanami asked.

“Uh, I think I lost at some individual event, and then I just ditched the rest of the festival by sitting out somewhere,” I replied.

“Wow, that sounds even more delinquent than what most delinquents would

do,” Nanami let out.

“Oh, come on. I wasn’t breaking any rules or anything. Probably,” I protested.

“No way! You must’ve broken *some* kind of a school rule or other!” Nanami exclaimed, knocking her fist lightly against my forehead. The contact seemed almost to make a sound, but of course it didn’t hurt. It was an adorable way for her to scold me, almost as if she were talking to a small child.

I’d thought this before, but I really did kind of like getting scolded by Nanami. Though if I overdid things, she might *actually* get mad at me. I didn’t know how to describe it, but her scolding felt as if she was looking out for me. I could imagine a fully activated Nanami scolding me the way someone would tease the person they liked. Man, it would be amazing if there was a specialist out there that studied this exact thing.

To keep myself from thinking more about it, I had to press my palms against my cheeks.

“What were you doing the whole time the event was going on, then?” Nanami pressed.

“Well, I think last year there were some mats kept in the gym storage closet, so I just lay on them and played some games,” I said, trying to jog my memory of that day. I didn’t have the guts to fake an illness and hang out in the nurse’s office, so I had just wandered around places where there was no one else nearby.

And it was because I’d wandered that I found just the right kind of environment already set up for me to sit out the sports festival. I must have thought I had hit the jackpot and just stayed in the closet for the whole day. I thought I saw a few other people skipping out on the sports festival, but it seemed like a don’t ask, don’t tell kind of situation. They weren’t my friends or anything, so I didn’t really remember. Now that I thought about it, maybe the spot I found was well-known to the school truants.

“Jeez, you can’t be doing that! The sports festival is part of our education too,” Nanami insisted.

“I see. I suppose you could see it that way,” I responded.

“You’re being uncharacteristically stubborn about this. You must really hate sports festivals,” Nanami murmured.

I nodded quietly, to which Nanami just let out a wry laugh. I mean, even I couldn’t explain why I disliked it so much. I guess I should just chalk it up to a childhood trauma.

“Hey, wait a minute,” Nanami began as though she had thought of something, bringing her index finger up to her lips. I watched her mouth intently just in case she was going to trace her lips with her finger at some point. With my gaze fixed on her lips like this, I found myself recalling what she had said before.

It was when Nanami, Hitoshi, Shirishizu-san, and I were all talking in the classroom. After each of us had mentioned our unique regrets about the school festival, Nanami had said something outrageous.

Or, rather, she had *had* something outrageous said *to* her.

“Why was there no tongue?”

How could a teacher have said this when they were also scolding us for something bad we’d done? But since it was the school nurse who had said this particular thing, I suppose it wasn’t completely unimaginable; she apparently gave students relationship advice, and had expanded into giving students sex ed lessons too.

But that still didn’t explain why she would ask about tongue...or whatever.

I couldn’t help picturing the school nurse, a grin on her face like a naughty child about to cause trouble. *Yeah, she’s definitely the type to say stuff like that. After all, I still have...that thing she gave me saved in my wallet.*

I’d had no opportunity to make use of it, but I couldn’t quite throw it away either. That was why it was still sitting in my wallet. Though I felt like when the time came to use it, I’d hesitate just because it’d make me think of the school nurse.

In any case, it seemed Nanami had taken to thinking about what to do about her tongue after being told that. She even went to the trouble of declaring that in front of me. I didn’t know what I was supposed to do after such a declaration, but I did think of one thing.

How, with just the addition of this one small element, does a kiss suddenly become so sexual?

I was probably the only high school student to be thinking about such a question so seriously. Regardless, looking at Nanami's lips made me return to such thoughts and questions. *Is there some kind of tongue practice you can do beforehand?*

"Hey, Yoshin? Are you listening?"

"Huh?! Oh, sorry, what were you saying?" I managed to say, quivering as I suddenly realized that Nanami was looking into my eyes.

Until a moment ago, I had been staring at her mouth, but all of a sudden I was meeting Nanami's gaze directly. Of course I would be surprised.

"What were you thinking about?" Nanami asked suspiciously.

"Huh?"

"I mean, you rarely space out and miss what I'm saying," she continued.

"Oh, well, you know," I said, struggling to find a response.

"You were thinking about something pervy, weren't you?"

My body gave another slight jolt. *No, I'm pretty sure it's not pervy. I mean, it's about kissing, so it can't possibly be that pervy.*

Nanami then narrowed her eyes like Shirishizu-san always did and looked even more intently into my face. Her piercing gaze started making me sweat out of nerves. A chill went up my spine, and I couldn't keep my eyes in focus. With her eyes still narrowed, Nanami leaned in to bring her lips closer to my ear.

"Next time we're alone, tell me about it," she whispered, then pulled herself away from me as her eyes returned to normal. Her expression changed so suddenly that I felt a totally different kind of shiver go up my spine.

Wow, I don't think I can win this one, I thought, seeing Nanami flash me a toothy grin. Not that this was about winning or losing.

"Anyway, what I was saying was, were you okay when you played basketball against Shoichi-senpai then?" Nanami asked.

“Oh, true. I was somehow okay then?” I wondered out loud.

That might have been the only time I’d ever played sports in front of Nanami. She was right to point out that when that happened, I was actually okay despite all the attention I was getting. Why was I okay in that situation, even though I absolutely hated playing sports at school?

I glanced over at Nanami as I contemplated the possible reasons for it. *The only thing unique about that situation was...*

“Maybe because I was doing it for you,” I said without thinking.

It was true, though: I was getting pretty worked up back then because senpai and I were fighting over Nanami. I mean, I was guessing this in retrospect, but maybe, in that moment, my anger had won out over my complete and utter distaste for sports.

If that was the case, saying that it had been for Nanami certainly sounded nice, but that also meant that Nanami had been the cause of the incident.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to reference you like a variable in some weird experiment of mine,” I said.

“Oh, no way, why are you apologizing? It makes me so happy to hear you say that you did it for me,” Nanami replied.

I guess that’s good. I feel kind of relieved to hear that.

“If that’s the case, it sounds like your dislike for the sports festival is more of an emotional thing. Would you be more willing to participate if there was some kind of reward in it for you, like when you were studying for exams?” Nanami suggested.

“Oh, maybe. But didn’t you say that it wasn’t always good to use the reward system?” I asked, perking up upon hearing the word “reward.”

“Just this once! If you work hard at the sports festival, I shall reward you appropriately!” Nanami declared, tilting her head slightly as she picked up on the change in my attitude.

A reward...reward, huh? I glanced at Nanami’s lips again, then shook my head violently from side to side. *No, no. That won’t do.*

“I’ll think about it,” I muttered instead.

“Oh, come on! You can ask for anything,” Nanami insisted.

“You shouldn’t say things like that. What are you gonna do if I actually request something totally inappropriate?” I asked.

“Huh? But I really *am* willing to do anything,” Nanami mumbled.

I had to suppress the urge to ask, “Really?” Nanami was starting to scare me because right then she really *did* seem like she was willing to do anything for me.

Still, if she herself was saying “anything,” then maybe she really meant it.

Inside me, a conflict began to brew. The words “reward,” “regret,” and “Nanami’s lips” swirled about in my head. They formed a string of signifiers but were devoid of anything signified.

As I remained unable to say anything, the two of us seemed to be stuck simply staring at each other. *What’s going on here, exactly...?*

“Guys, you know you’re still at school, right?”

Those words snapped us back to reality.

When I turned, I saw that Hitoshi—along with several of our other classmates—were looking at us. *Oh, right—we’re just on break between periods.*

“Well, uh, it’s still passing period, right?” I managed to say.

“We can’t help listening in on your conversation. For crying out loud, practice some self-censorship, man,” Hitoshi remarked.

“By which you *really* mean...?” I asked.

“Your conversations are like poison to me because I’m single! Just give me a break man, you’re killing me!” he shouted.

I’d never heard anyone describe a conversation as poison. I guess I’d never thought of this possibility because no one had said anything like that until now, but...

“Could it be that you’ve been thinking that this whole time?” I asked.

Hitoshi nodded fervently several times. The other guys and girls in the class looked sheepish too. Some of them had wry smiles on their faces.

“I like listening to couples who are really close, so I don’t really mind it,” one person said.

“I’d sit there being kind of jelly...but then I also file away what you say in my mind for future reference,” another added.

“When I hear you guys talking while I’m having a fight with my girlfriend, it makes me go and apologize to her,” someone else piped up.

“Actually, I’d appreciate it if you’d tone down some of the sexy stuff,” someone murmured.

“Well, you guys *are* the celebrities of the class,” a fourth person declared.

People continued sharing their various opinions of me and Nanami’s conversations. It was pretty embarrassing to hear what everyone really thought of us.

Wait, what do you mean, “celebrities of the class”? That makes it sound like the conversations Nanami and I have are like some kind of restaurant special.

These were all assessments of us we’d never heard before, but being told them now really was pretty embarrassing.

“In that case, I’ll do my best to hold back a bit in the future,” I said.

“Wait, you’re gonna hold back?”

“Huh?”

“Oh...”

There was an unexpected voice of protest from our midst. It came, of course, from Nanami. As soon as I reacted to it, though, she covered her mouth—as though she’d let her thoughts spill out unintentionally.

When I remained silent because I didn’t know how I was supposed to respond, Nanami took her hand away from her mouth and pinched the hem of my uniform.

Seeing her like that made up my mind.

“I guess I won’t hold back after all,” I said.

Someone murmured, “Yeah, I thought so.” The voice sounded slightly exasperated, but I couldn’t help it.

But still, I reminded myself to later consider which conversation topics might be best discussed when Nanami and I were alone.



I didn’t have the first clue about where my aversion to sports festivals came from, but fortunately for me, the possibility of a reward from Nanami actually had me thinking more positively about it.

The problem now was figuring out what event to compete in. I actually didn’t even know what events the sports festival held. *A marathon, maybe? Wow, that sounds terrible.*

“Speaking of, what did you compete in last year, Nanami?” I asked.

“Me? I think I did basketball and the chicken fight, and then maybe the cheer competition too?” she replied.

“You did that many? Wow, that’s impressive.”

“Heh heh, then praise me! Give me a pat on the back for a job well done!” Nanami said.

She was sitting very close to me, probably because she and I were alone in her room. She rubbed her head against my body like a cat marking its territory.

I tried out patting Nanami gently on her head. Touching Nanami’s hair always made my heart pound. She half closed her eyes too, seemingly out of pleasure, but I thought I was the one getting all the benefits from the situation.

After I petted her for some time, Nanami seemed to remember something. She took out her phone and started waving it around.

“You wanna watch a video we got of last year’s sports festival?” she asked.

“Huh? You have one?” I asked.

“Yup. Hatsumi and Ayumi got it and sent it to me. Oh, but you can keep petting me.”

I thought maybe I was supposed to stop petting her head since she was going to show me the video, but apparently I was wrong. Nanami began tapping away at her phone as I continued stroking her hair. I wondered if I was supposed to keep doing this while I watched the video, but once Nanami finished fiddling around with her phone, she moved away from my hand and sat down next to me. With her shoulder touching mine, she turned her phone to landscape orientation.

“See? This is from last year,” she remarked.

“I see. You seem kind of different here,” I commented.

What appeared on-screen was a video of Nanami from the previous year, when she was a first-year. It must have been the middle of a basketball game, because the video showed her dribbling a ball.

Wow, Nanami seems really good. She’s dribbling, taking shots, and actually making them. I had no clue she was this good at sports.

She had her hair in a ponytail and was wearing a jersey over her PE clothes. Her ample chest warped the number on her jersey, making it hard to read.



“We lost really early on in basketball though. I was in a few other events too,” she said, swiping out of the video and displaying a number of other matches that she had also participated in. In addition to the ones she’d mentioned earlier, it seemed she had taken part in several other events as well.

She had participated in the beanbag toss too, with one video capturing her as she grabbed at beanbags on the ground and hopped up and down to throw them into a basket affixed to the top of a tall pole. *I didn’t even know our sports festival had such an event.*

“You look like you’re having so much fun, Nanami. It’s so cute when you jump around like that,” I told her.

“Tee hee hee. But didn’t you do the beanbag toss too? I’m pretty sure that was mandatory for everyone,” she said.

“Huh? There was a mandatory event?” I wondered out loud.

Nanami was surprised that I didn’t remember at all. I, on the other hand, was shocked that Nanami remembered things like this in the first place.

A mandatory event? Was there such a thing? Well, I guess so...

I didn’t remember it because I either had zero interest, or my entire class had zero interest. *If I asked Hitoshi, would he know?*

Nanami was watching the video and smiling, as though recalling all her pleasant memories. If I got to see Nanami make such pretty expressions on her face, then maybe it wasn’t such a bad thing to revisit the past like this.

Just as the thought crossed my mind, though, Nanami suddenly narrowed her eyes.

Bewildered by her sudden change in expression, I kept looking back and forth between the phone screen and Nanami’s face. *What’s wrong?*

I couldn’t tell if Nanami had picked up on my perplexity, but she began tapping at her phone screen with her fingertip. She paused the video she was watching, rewound it a bit, played it again, then paused it once more.

What’s going on? Did she see something strange in the video?

“Isn’t this...?”

Nanami pointed at her phone screen after pausing it at a particular frame. The scene displayed was an ordinary one, where Nanami was seen slightly in the distance surrounded by several other people.

It didn’t seem like anything that should draw Nanami’s attention. What she said next, though, wasn’t something I expected.

“Isn’t this you?” she asked me.

“Huh?” I blurted out.

Nanami was pointing at a male student who appeared on-screen.

He was standing there with sleepy eyes and a disposition that seemed to suggest zero investment and zero motivation for anything that was occurring in his vicinity. It was the kind of student who seemed to be the textbook example of one who had no desire to engage whatsoever.

Yup, that’s definitely me. So I guess I was in the beanbag toss. I don’t remember this at all, but this seems to be proof.

When we played the video, I saw the student who seemed to be me pick up a beanbag...and throw it in no particular direction. All. By. Himself.

I couldn’t tell what he was thinking from the look on his face, but he was probably wishing that the whole thing would be over soon.

I knew this was me, but...

“Put your back into it, dude...”

When those words fell out of my mouth, Nanami burst out laughing.

For the record, the video ceased to capture me after that point, so I could no longer tell where I was anymore. Despite the brevity of my appearance, though, my absolute lack of investment in the event came through quite clearly.

H-How embarrassing. I had no idea it was so mortifying to have an old video of myself get dug up like this.

“Hey, wait—why are you laughing?” I asked, realizing that Nanami was doubled over even as she suppressed a laugh. Well, no, she wasn’t quite

managing to suppress it, but at least she wasn't totally laughing out loud.

Wheezing and out of breath, yet somehow seemingly enjoying herself, Nanami placed her hand on my chest and said, "B-Because...you just told your past self to *put your back into it...*"

My remark seemed to have tickled her just right, because she leaned her weight into me and finally started laughing out loud. Having the ridiculousness of my comment pointed out made my cheeks turn hot from embarrassment.

Still, even objectively speaking, my past self seemed to care so little about the sports festival that it was shocking. I mean, even *I* was shocked.

I guess this was another kind of regret—though, maybe since I didn't know it at the time, there was really nothing I could do about it.

Who could've imagined that I would one day start going out with Nanami, and that she and I would end up watching such a video together? There was no way for me to know such a thing would be in my future, and no reason for me to take things more seriously back then. Therefore, it was a waste of time to think that I should've put more effort into things at that time.

So it was pretty pointless to regret how I acted at last year's sports festival. Regardless, it was becoming clear that trying to lead a life with no regrets was, apparently, pretty much impossible for me at this point.

Still, I never expected there to be a video of me saved on Nanami's phone. Were our classes last year close to each other?

Nanami was replaying the video, as if to confirm the footage of me again. It was embarrassing to have her watch it so many times, but I guess there was nothing I could do to stop her. I just had to resign myself to the situation. Even if I stopped her now, she was probably just going to watch it later at some point anyway.

"You seem different here than how you do now," Nanami finally remarked.

"You think so? I don't feel like I've changed that much," I replied.

"Well, maybe because you're a first-year, you seem kind of young and cute."

Cute? Is that supposed to be a compliment? Nanami was probably saying that

to be nice, but I had to admit the word gave me mixed feelings. Though I guess the Nanami I saw in the video also seemed different and cute, perhaps because the footage was from a year ago. It was probably because so many things had changed in the last year too.

There was a saying from way back when: “Even three days after parting, a scholar expects his companion to appear to him in a whole new light.” High school girls were probably the same way too. They could transform at the drop of a hat—for better or for worse.

“But seriously, just the fact that I have a video of you on my phone,” Nanami muttered.

“Yeah, what a coincidence, huh?” I said.

“A coincidence? I prefer fate,” Nanami quipped.

How romantic. Hearing her say that sure got me thinking, though. *Could* something like that be described as fate?

Realistically speaking, this was just a case of me having been caught on video completely by chance. Nanami didn’t seem to be calling it fate in earnest either. She was just enjoying the coincidence. That seemed more accurate than saying it was meant to be, or something like that. Still, even if that was what she was thinking, it seemed uncouth of me to point that out.

In the end, regardless of what the reality was, what mattered most was how Nanami and I felt. Maybe it was better just to enjoy things to the best of our ability. We could naysay all we wanted, but there were times when it was actually more difficult to accept things as they were than to deny them. If that was the case, then I should just embrace what Nanami said and wanted. That seemed like a lot more fun.

“It’d be cool if it really was fate, huh?” I said in the end.

Nanami just smiled at me happily and sidled up even closer to me.

Maybe because I had been doing it until just a little while ago, but I naturally resumed stroking her hair. Maybe we were getting a little—or a lot—too intimate, though.

Just as I was telling myself that it couldn't be helped, I recalled the image I saw on Nanami's phone—an image of me at the sports festival, looking like I'd rather be anywhere else.

I had no idea I looked so utterly uninterested. There was a saying that essentially said we must learn from others' mistakes, but I never thought I'd learn from seeing my own mistakes. Though considering that there was yet another saying that argued one's past self might as well be a stranger, I supposed I *could* pretend like I was learning from someone else's errors rather than my own.

Even so, seeing that video really did stir a little fire in me to actually make an effort at this year's sports festival—if only because I couldn't bear to let Nanami see me like that ever again.

"All right, then I'll actually take the sports festival seriously this year," I announced.

"Wow, why the sudden change in attitude? Though it makes me happy to hear it," Nanami said, this time being the one to pat me on the head. I said earlier that it felt nice to stroke Nanami's hair, but being petted like this felt good too.

The feel of Nanami's hand, along with the comfort of being gently touched by her—and add in the fact that her body was pressed up against mine—the warmth I felt had my heart overflowing with happiness.

"If you're gonna work hard, maybe I should be in the cheer competition this year too," Nanami suddenly said.

"The cheer competition?" I repeated. She had mentioned that earlier too.

Upon noticing that I hadn't quite followed her thought, Nanami started fiddling around with her phone with one hand while she let her other hand remain resting on my head.

"This is the cheer competition," Nanami said, showing me a video with other female students in cheerleading uniforms, plus Nanami in her PE clothes, holding pom-poms in their hands and cheering on their classmates.

At first I thought, *Wow, I didn't even know people did stuff like this*—and then

I wondered, *Why is Nanami in her PE clothes?*

“It was kind of embarrassing for me to wear the cheer uniform back then, so I wore my PE clothes instead. Ayumi and Hatsumi are wearing cheer uniforms, though,” Nanami pointed out.

She was right. Otofuke-san and Kamoenai-san were wearing cheerleading outfits right along with the other girls. The skirt of the cheer uniforms was quite short, so every time the girls kicked their legs up, cries of excitement went up among the guys.

Given that it was a competition, the students from the opposing class were dressed similarly—though the girls in that class were wearing the traditional school uniform for guys, with the fronts open and revealing their chests bound with white fabric.

I didn’t remember seeing... No, wait, maybe I did sort of recall something like that happening. I was on my phone the whole time, though, so I couldn’t say for sure.

Still, Nanami looked so cute cheering with the pom-poms in her hands. Even in PE clothes she was adorable. Or, did she look cute *because* she was in her PE clothes?

If she was gonna cheer me on looking like that, then I would definitely take the sports festival seriously. *Yeah, I really should do my best this year.*

“If you’re gonna work hard, then maybe I’ll wear a cheer uniform too this year,” Nanami muttered.

“Huh?”

“Hee hee, it’s still kind of embarrassing. But if I did, it’d get you fired up, right?” she teased.

Nanami, in a cheer uniform?

I looked down at the cheer uniform that the girls in the video were wearing.

The top was cropped above the waistline and also showed off the shoulders. The bottom was a miniskirt. The uniform was quite revealing, and every time the girls moved, their belly buttons became visible for all to see. *Nanami would*

wear this?

The moment I thought that, a shiver went up my spine.

“Do you like cheer uniforms that much, Yoshin? You’re practically glued to the screen...looking at girls other than me,” Nanami said.

Her voice didn’t sound too different from usual, and yet the moment I heard it, I immediately sat bolt upright. The light in her eyes seemed to have dimmed instantly. Her eyes—a clear blue, and yet with no glimmer in them at all—seemed to both charm me and plunge me into their depths.

I mean, obviously, the light in her eyes wouldn’t *actually* disappear, but...just for now, it *seemed* like it was gone. That was more the product of Nanami’s attitude, or her way of speaking, or her behavior...or so I wanted to believe.

“N-No, *no*! I wasn’t looking at the girls, I was looking at the uniform! I was thinking whether it was okay for you to wear such revealing clothes in front of other people,” I blurted.

“Whether *I’d* be okay?” Nanami asked.

And immediately, her eyes returned to normal. It was a little scary, but maybe it was better for me to think that all of it was because I was just loved. Besides, Nanami wasn’t all that controlling.

And in terms of being controlling, I was probably worse than Nanami anyway.

“Well, you, of course, but me too. As in, I was thinking whether it’d be okay to have other guys see you in that,” I murmured.

I felt like if she did go through with wearing the uniform, my jealous side would rear its ugly head despite me being aware of what a bad idea that was. Though I had to admit I *did* want Nanami to cheer me on in that outfit.

I did want her to wear it. But only to cheer for *me*, and not the whole class.

“I guess I can’t help thinking that,” I added.

“You’re just gonna tell me all that?!” Nanami exclaimed, looking slightly embarrassed. I’d said things like that out loud without thinking before; this time, I said it intentionally.

Because, you know, these things never seemed to turn out well if I kept my mouth shut and didn't say anything. That was why I made the conscious effort this time to say what was on my mind.

"This is just me being selfish, though. So if you want to wear the cheer outfit, then of course I wouldn't stop you," I continued.

"Well, in that case," Nanami said, suddenly getting up and moving to the spot right in front of where I was sitting. Then, straddling both my legs, she proceeded to sit down.

It was almost as if I was holding her, but since I was sitting down, we were in a position I didn't quite know how to describe. Nanami then brought her face close to mine. I thought she was going to kiss me, but she came just close enough for her lips to almost touch my ear.

"Maybe I should just wear the outfit...and then cheer you on in your ear like this," she whispered, her voice sending chills up my back.

"Go, Yoshin, go. You can do it," she went on.

Being so gently cheered on by Nanami in her sweet voice, I placed my hands on her waist and squeezed without another thought. Nanami was thin, and she seemed like she would break if I hugged her with all my might. But holding her like this, I was distinctly aware of how soft her body felt through her clothes. I was overcome by the urge to hold her even more tightly.

As I sat there fighting back that desire, though, Nanami brought her hands behind my back and held me tight, as if trying to return the favor.

We were holding each other, but her lips were still hovering by my ear. Then, in a breathy voice, Nanami continued whispering sweet words of encouragement.

Everything she was saying was perfectly wholesome. In any other circumstance, they were just cheers that would no doubt encourage me to try harder. Just the fact that they were being whispered in my ear, though, was absolutely killing me.



All Nanami was doing was whispering, and yet it somehow felt so *good*. My brain felt like it was going numb.

Actually, I think my brain really *did* go into a stupor.

I was hearing her say so many different things, but it seemed like none of them were making it through to me. Yet the words seeped into my brain all the same, in a contradictory, swampy mix of sensations.

Nanami continued to encourage me, enjoying the various reactions I had to her words.

No matter how we looked at it, all she was doing was cheering me on. There was nothing questionable happening here. Just truly normal, commonplace words that anyone had heard before.

But every single one of those words made my body jump.

Nanami's breath fell on my ear, followed by her voice...and finally the words themselves. It seemed physically impossible, but that was the only way I could describe it.

Maybe it was because Nanami was making a point to blow in my ear first before speaking. *Oh man, I can't think anymore—my brain is shutting down.*

I didn't know if Nanami was just enjoying the whole thing, or if she was getting kind of excited herself, but her voice was gradually starting to take on a kind of heat.

Is she excited, or am I excited?

My body trembled, and then...I felt the slightest of sensations on my ear, accompanied by a wet sound.

"Wha—?!"

It was something I'd never felt before: a soft, wet sensation against my ear. A shock that felt almost like a tingle, or even a kind of pain.

When that sensation hit my ear, a strange sound escaped my lips, and all strength left my body.

N-Nanami...?

Even after my weird outburst, the sensation kept coming—and each time, more strange sounds came out of my mouth. *Does Nanami not hear me at all?*

Her cheers of encouragement and that strange soft, wet sensation took turns entering my ear. I would get the stimulation, and then I would get encouraged. At this point, the words “Go Yoshin” sounded inordinately titillating.

What...is happening to me right now?

Nanami had nibbled on my ear before, but this time felt both similar and different from those instances. Each time that this new stimulus hit me, my body felt warmer and warmer. I shifted my body and tapped Nanami’s back in a bid for survival against the onslaught of sensations hitting me like a rampaging wave. Even then, the sensations kept coming.

“N-Nanami? Nanami...?!”

It was all I could do to call out her name.

I didn’t know how many times I called her before she finally—and suddenly—stopped moving.

Her movements stopped, but my ear still felt like it was pressed against something warm. I debated what I should do next, but I didn’t realize that by now my body had also reached its limits.

I’d heard once that the human body perceived the most weight when it was standing still, but maybe that was precisely what was happening to me at that moment. What was more, I had zero strength in my body, as though I had used up any and all energy I had had.

In other words, having lost the power to even hold up Nanami, both of us fell completely backward. I tried to tighten my abs to slow down the fall so that Nanami at least wouldn’t get hurt, but...I nearly cramped up. *Is Nanami okay?*

“Yeeks,” Nanami let out belatedly, after we were both on the floor. And that was when I was finally hit with a loss; whatever was touching my ear had moved away.

At the same moment, though, strength began returning to my body. *Wait, is the ear some kind of weak spot on the body? Like, pressing it makes the body*

instantly powerless? I've never even heard of that before. At the very least, I'm glad that Nanami doesn't seem to be hurt anywhere. Though I don't have the slightest clue what I'm supposed to do next.

As I lay on the floor, Nanami removed her hands from behind my back and sat upright on top of me. By the time I realized what had happened, Nanami had essentially shifted into a martial arts mount position over me, with her on top. Though I was pretty certain that she wasn't going to start pummeling me.

When I looked up at her, I saw how flushed she was and that she was slightly out of breath. She must have been sweating, because her hair was tangled and somewhat plastered to her face. She then ran her hand through her hair and tucked it behind her ear.

I said that Nanami was sweating, but it seemed I was sweating too. Maybe I was a bit excited as well.

"Nanami, what were you doing just now?" I asked.

"Um, I guess," she said slowly, "I wasn't really thinking."

"You weren't thinking, and...?"

"I...licked your ear," she confessed.

Using her own index finger to represent my ear, she let her tongue peek out from between her lips and brought it closer to her gently crooked finger. She didn't lick her finger; she just brought her tongue close to it.

Still, that gesture—as if she meant to run her tongue along her finger—seemed incredibly provocative to me. The fact that she was somewhat teary-eyed made the entire image she was making even more so.

The tip of Nanami's beautiful tongue was touching my ear?

It was insanely embarrassing to clearly see what had been done to me. I tentatively reached up and touched my own ear. The fact that it felt somewhat damp must have been because...I was sweating. *Yeah, that must be it.*

"Why would you do something like that?" I asked.

"Well, I just thought...oh, this nice thing is in just the right place," she muttered.

Apparently my ear was in just the right place.

I felt like something similar had happened before. It was when we were cutting it *most* closely. I was pretty certain that back then, too, Nanami had my ear in her lips. Yeah, it really was a lot like this. The only difference was that this time, we were able to stop even without Tomoko-san knocking on the door. Plus this time, I was able to remain somewhat calm because the impact on my ear was, funnily enough, just too much to make me lose it entirely. If the sensation had been a hair weaker, I might have lost all reason.

A tingle along my spine, a dull itchiness, even shivers all over my body. Wanting more, and at the same time wanting it to stop. It was different from the last time she'd held my ear between her lips. That was why, when it *did* stop, I somehow felt both disappointed and grateful at the same time.

Nanami leaned over and lay down again on my chest, as if she could hide how embarrassed she was from me. I felt the comfortable weight of her torso on mine.

Regardless...

"I don't know how to put this, but...you're really interested in sexual stuff, aren't you?" I said.

"Huh?! I-I don't think so?!" Nanami stammered.

"Well, I mean, you were the one that started it last time too...when you messed with my ear with your mouth," I explained.

I was pretty sure of this, though my memory wasn't crystal clear. But wait, was that because I had somehow touched Nanami first? By that logic, was I the one who was super interested in sexual stuff?

I lay there, thinking my comment was maybe about to bite me on the ass, when Nanami muttered, "Jeez, I really can't argue with that."

Nanami, her face so red it seemed like steam was about to pour out of her body at any moment, buried her face in my chest...then took a second to calm herself before raising her head again. Though her face was still redder than normal.

“Do you not like me being too forward about sexual stuff?” she asked hesitantly.

“If it’s with you, then I don’t dislike it, and if anything, I like it a lot,” I replied immediately, though I barely made any sense.

Her question nearly destroyed me. Was there any guy out there who could say he disliked a girl who asked such a question? I certainly couldn’t. The cherry on top was the fact that she seemed so *shy* about it all. If she’d asked like it was no big deal, I probably wouldn’t have been so affected.

Modesty—important, it is. I definitely sounded like I was quoting some weird commercial, but I truly believed that.

Whether she knew my inner turmoil or not, Nanami was running her fingertips along my body. It tickled so much that I blurted out something I absolutely shouldn’t have.

“Nanami, were you getting kind of turned on?”

What...the hell am I saying?

All the blood drained from my face as I realized that I’d just made a comment that was probably an egregious breach of etiquette, so much so that it was practically sexual harassment. Even though the part of my body where Nanami was sitting was warm, everywhere else suddenly felt incredibly cold, like a bucket of ice water had been splashed on me. Everything felt chilly, and I started sweating all over my body out of nervousness. I could’ve sworn there was so much sweat that a gushing sound must’ve accompanied it. It seemed, though, that Nanami felt the same way...

Because she snapped upright and looked down at me.

With her eyes opened wide and her lips trembling, Nanami spoke—well, sort of.

“D-D-Do you think so? W-Was I getting turned on? Is this...what it means to be turned on?!” she exclaimed.

It seemed that she hadn’t realized it herself until I pointed it out. The trembling in her lips seemed to spread to her shoulders, then her torso, and

then the rest of her body.

The trembling of her body then spread to mine, making me quiver as well.
Jeez, why did I have to go and say that?

For some time after that, Nanami continued to squirm while she remained on top of me.

I mean, not in any weird way. She really was just agonizing over her new realization. I swear we weren't doing anything weird, even though it certainly sounded like we were.

"Sorry, Nanami. I shouldn't have said anything," I told her.

"No, I mean...I went overboard there too. I should've been more careful," Nanami said, finally flopping over me as she tried to catch her breath. The blush in her cheeks made her look somewhat seductive, but her expression revealed her genuine exhaustion.

I patted Nanami on the back, trying to console her. Her breathing gradually returned to normal, as did the color in her face.

"Um, so, what were we talking about again?" Nanami suddenly asked.

"Uh, right. The sports festival. Yeah, the sports festival," I returned.

It seemed Nanami had been so turned on—no, wait, I shouldn't say that, lest Nanami start agonizing again—so *carried away*, that she had lost a part of her memory. Though I admit that I had lost track of what we were talking about too.

"Right, right! The sports festival! Yes, we were talking about how I was going to give you a reward for working hard at the sports festival, even though you totally hate it," Nanami concluded.

"Wait, was *that* what we were saying?" I asked.

"It's fine, we'll just go with it," she replied.

I thought maybe that wasn't quite what we were discussing, but if Nanami was going to say that we were, then there was no reason for me to correct her.

"If you participate and do your best, I'll give you the reward you deserve,"

Nanami said, raising her head and grinning mischievously. Despite the fact that she was straddling me, her smile made her look like a young child.

It was hard to believe that just a moment ago she had been licking my ear and getting all excited about it. *Ouch! Jeez, is it that obvious what I'm thinking?* Needless to say, Nanami had knocked me upside the head for my internal comparison.

Still, a reward...reward, huh? What would that even look like?

According to Nanami, unlike the school festival, the sports festival ranked the class performance in each event. I was pretty sure that they were team competitions between different classes and grades.

Maybe the reason why I made it into a video saved on Nanami's phone was because we had somehow been on the same team last year.

Ordinarily, if I placed high enough in an event, I should be rewarded. But Nanami seemed intent on giving me a reward just for participating.

What a generous reward that would be. Wow, I really am so easily swayed.

"If that's the case, though, what should I even participate in? We're supposed to decide that during our next homeroom period, right?" I asked.

"I think so. Yoshin, you wanna try out basketball? I bet senpai would be super happy," Nanami suggested.

"Nah, I wouldn't stand a chance in a serious game," I murmured.

Also, basketball seemed like it would be a really popular event. I would feel bad participating just for the fun of it, when others might want to do it with the genuine desire to play and win. I guess I was also just really bad at team sports too.

If that was the case, then I had to stick to individual events—like a marathon or other track-related events. I should practice too. I had zero confidence in my endurance.

As I sat there trying to decide what seemed best, I realized that Nanami seemed to want to say something.

Was there maybe an event that she wanted to enter together? Like a doubles

event? Maybe she was thinking of ping-pong or tennis or something. I didn't know much about ball games, but I imagined that those were about the only ones that you could enter in pairs.

"Nanami, is there an event you want to try entering together?" I asked.

"Huh? Um, no, uh...not really," she muttered.

It was rare for Nanami to sound so hesitant about something. I tried asking her because she seemed like she definitely had something she wanted to try, but I guess she didn't want to share anything after all.

But Nanami still seemed fidgety when I took a glance at her—as though she had something on her mind.

Maybe this was one of those instances where she actually *did* want to say something but couldn't because she felt bad about it.

I felt that was pretty rare between the two of us. We always tried to say what we wanted to say and did our best not to hide things from each other. When things did come up, we always put our all into resolving any issues we had.

Well, things like this can happen too, I thought...but then I stopped myself.

Shouldn't I try even harder to hear her out in situations like this? If I didn't listen to her when she had something to say, it would cause more trouble later on. Small misunderstandings and disagreements could lead to bigger problems. Sure, bumps in the road made for good fiction, but our relationship wasn't fiction. Potential problems needed to be eliminated as I sensed them, as soon as possible.

And so I brought my hands behind Nanami's back.

Nanami quivered in shock at my sudden movement and looked at me, but I purposely avoided meeting her gaze. Instead, I simply proceeded to gently hold her, with my hands now at her sides.

"Y-Yoshin?" Nanami murmured uncertainly.

"Nanami," I said softly, now using my legs to hold her in place.

"Huh?" she let out.

I then declared, “If you’re not going to tell me what’s on your mind, I’m going to tickle you.”

“Wait, what?!” she yelped, panicking and trying to escape the hold I had on her. Of course, since I was now gripping rather tightly, I wasn’t going to budge...okay, yeah, I did budge a little.

Nanami was actually pretty strong too, so it wasn’t like I could totally stay still—but she wasn’t going to get away from me so easily.

“You’ve got ten seconds to confess,” I said. “The countdown starts...now! Ten...nine...eight...”

“Yoshin, are you serious right now?! Wait, stop, the countdown is scaring me! Wait!” Nanami screamed.

Nanami’s flailing almost made me let go of her, but I did my best to hold on and keep the countdown going. And as I did, I noticed something.

Couldn’t Nanami free herself if she really wanted to? It seems more like both Nanami and I are enjoying this situation. Well, obviously I’m enjoying it, but...

“Okay, okay! I give up! I’ll fess up, so don’t tickle me!” Nanami finally shouted just as I’d counted down to two. I hadn’t even started tickling her yet, but she was already laughing.

Taking her plea seriously, I loosened my grip on her waist and removed my legs from around her. To be honest, if it had gone on for much longer, I probably would have reached my limit—in a lot of different ways.

“So, what event do you wanna do?” I asked.

“Um, so,” Nanami hesitated, looking up at me and covering her mouth, as if already embarrassed. She then finally broke and said, “There’s actually an event you can enter in pairs. Coed pairs.”

“Oh, I didn’t know that. Is it a ball game or something?” I asked.

“No. I guess it’s more of a track and field thing? You work together to run toward the goal,” she explained.

So not a ball game. That might actually be helpful. Ball games and I don’t really get along—I just don’t feel like I’m any good at them. But an event where

you work together to run, huh? Like a three-legged race or something. We can definitely do that with two people, and the practice might be fun even if it's kind of challenging. The best part of it is that I'd be able to do it together with Nanami.

"That sounds good, let's do it. Why did you hesitate to tell me about it though?" I asked.

"Um, because...the event is called..." Nanami began, then paused once again.

"Hmmm? If it's just two people running together, isn't it just a three-legged race?"

"It's not, actually. It's called...the piggyback race," Nanami said.

What in the world is that?

I had assumed it was a three-legged race, so the unfamiliar name gave me pause. *The piggyback race? At the very least, it should involve a piggyback ride, right?*

"So I run while giving you a piggyback ride?" I surmised.

"Basically, yes, but of course *I* can run while giving *you* a piggyback ride too," Nanami countered.

Yeah, no. I mean, just think about it. Nanami giving me a piggyback ride? Forget being a loser, I'd never show my face anywhere again.

Nanami must've pictured it too, because she chuckled and said, "Yeah, I guess that won't work." She did, however, seem like she was interested in trying it out at least once.

I'm not sure that's even possible, muscularly speaking...

"I didn't realize there was such a competition," I said instead.

"There are actually a bunch of couples who participate. It's even a thing for two people to do when they want to get to know each other better," Nanami explained.

I see, I see. So it's that kind of an event. Still, that's pretty impressive. It's kind of amazing how romance can be found in practically everything. Although

maybe that's the kind of event it's meant to be. If that's the case, though, I could enter it with Nanami and make a genuine effort at the sports festival at the same time.

Hearing Nanami's explanation, though, I still didn't understand why she hesitated to mention it to me. Was it a race where you were tasked to do something strange? If anything, it sounded like the kind of thing I should hesitate to bring up.

"But why were you reluctant to explain it to me earlier?" I pressed.

"Because, um..." Nanami mumbled, looking uncertain. Averting my gaze, she again seemed unable to say more. *Is there some kind of crazy rule or something?*

Nanami must have finally made up her mind, because she slowly began to explain the reason for her hesitation.

"It's called a piggyback race, but as long as one person's carrying the other, you can really do whatever you want," she began.

"Oh, I see. So I could just carry you like I would carry a baby too?" I suggested.

That actually seemed *more* challenging than a piggyback ride. Doing it that way would be hell on both my arms and my back.

But what if she rode on my shoulders instead? It wouldn't be like carrying a baby, but I'd just turn Nanami sideways and have her over my shoulders... No, wait, I can't be treating her like a sack of potatoes.

"Anything goes as long as one person's doing the carrying, so some people even reach the finish line doing the princess carry. Or they complete the race where they're holding each other, kind of like the way we were earlier," Nanami interjected.

Running while carrying someone face-to-face? *Isn't that actually pretty hard? I feel like you'd tire out your muscles a lot faster than when you're carrying someone normally. Though I guess you could get a really good workout out of it. Maybe Nanami hesitated to tell me because that kind of face-to-face position just looks really bad, no matter how you spin it. There's all sorts of things wrong with even the idea of it.*

As I sat there telling myself that that must be the case, though, Nanami added something completely unexpected.

“I got so excited hugging you earlier, so I couldn’t bring it up because I didn’t want to get so worked up in front of the whole school,” Nanami confessed.

She buried her face in my chest after she finished speaking. She was acting totally embarrassed, pressing her head into my body and hiding her face from me.

Was this because of my thoughtless remark earlier? Asking if she was turned on had been totally insensitive of me. If that was the case, then of *course* she would feel reluctant to bring up the subject.

“I’m sorry I said something so uncalled-for,” I said.

“Not the genuine apology! It’ll only make me feel more embarrassed!” she shouted, groaning as she squirmed on top of me.

“Well, we can just think of this as our practice for the event...even though it seemed pretty intense for that,” I offered.

“Jeez, stop trying to be so logical. You’re being so mean,” Nanami said, nearly in tears, as she brought her hands behind my back to hold me once again. She wasn’t squeezing me, so the embrace felt soft and gentle. It was so comfortable that I found myself stroking Nanami’s hair again.

Now that I know what competition I’m doing for the sports festival, I can move on to thinking about how I’m going to put everything I’ve got into it. I don’t like the sports festival. I don’t like it at all, but if I’m trying to make memories with Nanami, I’m sure there will be times when I’ll have to make an effort even when I don’t want to.

I could just think of this as a dry run for the future. And if that was the case, then it made sense to say that school events really *were* a part of our education. I now found myself convinced of that.

With the warmth of Nanami’s embrace traveling through my whole body, I vowed to do all I could, to the very best of my abilities.

Interlude: It's Good to Double-Check

When Yoshin told me that we shouldn't make a habit of being so physically attached to each other, I somewhat unwillingly detached myself from him.

He was right; if we got too used to it, we would want to be stuck to each other all the time—which, of course, would bring us all sorts of trouble.

I knew that we had recently spent more time close to each other at school, but it hadn't quite become a habit. It hadn't...well, I was pretty sure it hadn't. And anyone who thought otherwise could keep their thoughts to themselves, thank you very much.

It was important to maintain an appropriate distance for each and every circumstance. We had to be able to read the room too. Even I recognized that too much PDA would make us less adorable and much more dorky and awkward.

What's that? Oh, come on—even I had a pretty good idea of what people thought of us when we were together.

Yoshin and I were most likely what people termed an “adorkable” couple.

And what of it? It was fine as long as we weren't causing trouble for the people around us. There was no way that me and Yoshin being flirty with each other was against school rules.

Well, maybe it *would* be, if we overdid it. After all, even though I knew better I'd still ended up kissing him onstage.

What was more, the school nurse asked me if the kiss had any tongue in it. I hadn't even thought of doing such a thing. I really did learn an important lesson there.

Still, if you asked me whether I would've been able to do it onstage if I actually *did* have such ideas, my answer probably would've been “No.”

It probably wouldn't have been possible for me to go that far. I mean, I

thought it was impossible; it was, wasn't it? I practically melted over even just a little peck; my brain would go numb and I would feel my body start to burn up.

People sometimes said that a kiss tasted like lemon candy, but it really wasn't such a sweet or sour taste at all—it wasn't such a squeaky-clean thing. Honestly, taste-wise, it seemed more accurate to describe it as...sensual.

What would happen if we added an even more intense method of contact—like with tongues?

I'd probably die. Probably. At the very least I'd pass out.

Thinking about it that way, I realized that what I did earlier really *was* going a bit too far, even for me. That was so rare...okay, fine, maybe it wasn't all that rare for me, but still.

No matter how worked up I had been, never did I think I would play with Yoshin's ear using my lips...or, rather, my tongue. I shocked myself there.

Maybe I had done it because I had been thinking about what to do with my tongue. Well, no: there was actually a different reason for it.

I stole a glance at Yoshin's ear.

I thought this earlier when I saw it up close, but Yoshin's ear was round and cute. I didn't know if it was right to say that it was kind of masculine, exactly, but it did have a nice thickness to it.

I didn't have many opportunities to stare at his ears, but on that occasion I realized that they were shaped totally differently from mine. Come to think of it, Yoshin didn't even have his ears pierced. They were completely smooth.

And he had nice skin too. He said he didn't do anything special to take care of it, but I almost wanted to teach him about skin care. Like, for the future. I wanted Yoshin to always have skin that felt good to touch.

That sounded kind of perverted, didn't it?

In any case, back to Yoshin's ear. At that time it just so happened to be in front of my face...so I couldn't help, you know, doing *that* with my tongue.

Is this what it feels like to have the munchies?

Still, even though I was toying with his ear with the tip of my tongue, it wasn't like I was actually tasting it, so it's not like I thought they were tasty or anything. Though, maybe that was more because I was too excited to really remember anything. All I could remember was how much I enjoyed doing what I did.

But if I told Yoshin that it tasted good, how would he react? A part of me was dying to know what he would think. *Is that sexual harassment? Is it totally inappropriate for me to say?*

When Yoshin said earlier that I was really interested in sexual stuff, I couldn't argue with him. Now that I was a bit more calm, though, I could at least say this: *It's not that I'm interested in sexual stuff; I'm interested in Yoshin. How will he react, depending on what I do? How will he touch me? What will he say, and how will he sound?*

Sexual things were the means, not the end. At least, that was what I was going to claim. Though I had a suspicion that the means were going to *become* the end.

"Nanami, what's wrong? You're so deep in thought."

"Huh?!" I let out, my body giving a jolt as Yoshin's gaze suddenly met mine. In a panic I bolted to my feet, but I lost my balance and pitched backward.

"Watch out!" Yoshin shouted as he grabbed a hold of my waist, preventing my fall. Though behind me was only the bed, so even if I had fallen, it wouldn't have been terribly dangerous. Though it *would* have been dangerous in a different sense.

Plus, it was the opposite of the way we were earlier: I had been on top with Yoshin on the bottom, but if I had actually fallen, I would've been on the bottom, with Yoshin on top of me.

I was more than willing for that kind of outcome, but I had to resist acting on that sweet temptation.

Still, even if Yoshin really did push me down onto the bed, he probably wouldn't do anything. We were in my room right now, and we weren't alone: Mom and Saya were downstairs. And besides, Yoshin said himself that he wouldn't...have sex with me while we were still in high school. I wasn't a huge

fan of the idea, but thinking about that specific conversation warmed my heart.

I for one had no intention of toning down my gusto for seducing Yoshin, though. So in some ways, I saw this as a battle between the two of us.

If he could continue to resist, he would win. If he couldn't, I would win.

Of course, I knew this wasn't about winning or losing, but it was still fun to think of it that way. He and I were practicing lots of different things, but the entire time, I was looking for moments to pounce on him. I still *was* scared of the whole thing, though, so I couldn't really go all the way.

"Hey Yoshin, I have a question for you."

"Hmmm? What's up?"

A bit of mischief was rearing its head with Yoshin still holding me. I was pretty sure that Yoshin wasn't expecting my next question. I didn't know how he would react, but I still wanted to pose it.

"How did you feel when I licked your ear?" I asked.

"Huh?"

Oh, he's losing his grip, and now we're falling over...

When we lose our balance, we get pulled toward the heavier side. Since it was his arms supporting us, and the strength in his arms had practically fled from his body, our fall was inevitable. I mean, I *was* the one who'd made the strength leave his body. It definitely wasn't because I was heavy, or I'd gotten fat, or I'd plumped up, or anything like that. Absolutely not.

Anyway, what I wanted to say was that Yoshin lost his balance and fell toward me. As in, he and I both slowly fell onto my bed.

I felt the heaviness of his body on me a tiny bit, but Yoshin was holding himself up with his hands so that his entire body weight wasn't pressing on me.

How many times had he unintentionally pinned me down like this?

With our positions now reversed, I looked up at Yoshin. There was now a feeling of slight distance between us, where we weren't completely attached to each other—where our bodies were nearly touching, but not quite. Where this

small space between us felt so vast.

The position we were in now wasn't too shabby either—though you might wonder what I was saying, given that I had been practically stuck to him just moments ago.

"That was dangerous," Yoshin muttered, sounding somewhat upset.

Truthfully, he was right, so I gave myself a mental slap on the wrist and said, "Sorry, sorry. I couldn't help it."

"Jeez. We might get hurt, so don't do stuff like that when we're in a weird position," he continued as he moved to get up and move away from me out of consideration. In that moment, though, I sat up too and grabbed his hand—or, rather, his shirt.

"Nanami?" Yoshin muttered, taken aback.

"Just a little bit longer. Please?"

I said it like I was trying to seduce him, but that really wasn't my intention. I really, genuinely wanted to enjoy being in that position with him for a bit longer.

Yoshin looked up at the ceiling as though unsure, but then he gave a wry smile and came back toward me.

With that, I slowly laid myself back down on the bed. The covers gave slightly as they changed shape and brushed up against my skin. It felt good.

I watched Yoshin's every move, my heart pounding in my chest. My gaze traveled to the opening at the collar of his shirt, and I took a peek at the sliver of toned chest revealed there.

I looked up, my eyes settling on Yoshin's Adam's apple. A close look revealed that it was shaped completely differently from mine. That difference, too, made my heart skip a beat.

Yoshin positioned himself over me, holding himself up with his arms in order not to squish me.

"If it gets too hard on your arms, you can just get on top of me, okay?" I told him.

“It’s not exactly easy, but I can just think of it as a workout,” he said.

“Is this the kind of workout where you’re not supposed to bump into me at all?” I suggested.

“That...sorry, I might bump into you a few times on purpose.”

When he said that, I chuckled and reached up toward him. *Wow, if my mom catches us like this, there’s no way I can talk us out of it.* Even as I thought that, though, I touched my palm to his body.

“Nanami?” he murmured.

My hands were on Yoshin’s neck. It looked like I was about to strangle him. But I wasn’t gripping tightly; just a light hold. Even then, I was shocked by just how different his neck was from mine. *I never knew that a boy’s neck was so rugged and thick.*

I ran my fingertips along the line of his neck, touching his protruding Adam’s apple. It felt solid. It was a lot more firm than I was thinking. I was expecting it to be much softer. *Is an Adam’s apple actually a bone of some kind?*

“Um, Nanami?” Yoshin spoke up.

“Oh, sorry!”

Yoshin was getting bewildered because I was practically stroking his throat. Of course—anyone would be surprised if their partner suddenly touched their neck.

“I’d never really looked at an Adam’s apple before. I couldn’t help touching it,” I confessed.

“Oh, really? But...I’m pretty sure women have Adam’s apples too,” Yoshin said.

“What? Really?”

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure. It doesn’t really stand out, but it’s supposed to be...around here somewhere?” he said as he slowly touched his hand to my neck.

The moment his hand made contact with my skin, the heat from his palm

transferred over to my neck, and a strange feeling shot through my entire body. It felt like a tickle, and yet not. It felt hot, but my body shivered as if I was cold. An indescribable sensation coursed through me at the speed of lightning.

That was when a very quiet moan escaped from my lips.

It felt weird, and yet I wanted him to touch me more. Every time his hand moved along my neck, that ticklish sensation grew stronger.

Without thinking, I grabbed his hand and squeezed. I couldn't tell if I wanted to shove his hand away or accept it entirely.

So, not knowing, I simply held his hand in place.

"Sorry, did you not like that?" Yoshin asked.

"N-No, it's not that I didn't like it. I didn't *not* like it, but maybe...I want you to stop," I eked out.

There was a voice inside my head clamoring for things to not go any further. Whose voice was it? Mine, of course. Any more, and we would really be in actual danger.

In fact, the most dangerous moment was when Yoshin's hand moved away from my neck. It was by accident, but at the very end, he stroked my neck, as though flicking it.

I really should be praised for not yelping right then and there.

"Then I'll make sure not to touch your neck from now on," Yoshin said apologetically, to which I could only nod back in silence.

I didn't even have the ability to joke that he could touch it again soon, or even to tease him into doing it again.

I wanted him to touch me there again, but if he did, it would probably mean serious trouble.

Because either I had been frozen by that realization or I was doing my best to stifle any outbursts, but I could no longer say anything. Even when I tried to speak, my throat felt like it was shut tight, and nothing came out.

For some time afterward it was quiet between me and Yoshin. I felt kind of

embarrassed so I kept looking away, but he and I both ended up stealing glances at each other.

After doing that a few times, our eyes ended up meeting—and then we both burst out laughing.

The fact that Yoshin laughed when I did made me inexplicably happy. Even though it looked like I was being pinned down on the bed, I still felt incredibly relaxed, though my heart was still somersaulting a little bit.

Once our gazes met, we ended up continuing to stare into each other's eyes. The light shining from behind him made Yoshin's expression appear different from usual.

"Hey, Nanami?" Yoshin began, looking at me now with a somewhat serious look on his face.

"Hmmm? What is it?" I asked, smiling. Whatever was on his mind, I would meet him head-on.

"Why did you, um, lick my ear? Was it really just on impulse?" he muttered. He was bringing up that moment with total seriousness, but his hesitation suggested that maybe he was a little embarrassed about it too.

Gosh, he's so cute.

"Oh, well..." I began slowly.

There actually *was* a reason I wasn't all there at that moment—though despite the reason, I probably wouldn't have done anything had his ear not been right there in front of me.

"So, actually..." I restarted.

"Actually?"

"I heard that guys like having their ears licked," I finished.

"Wait, heard it from *who*?" Yoshin asked.

"Peach-chan and Nao-chan."

It had been a while since the last time I'd seen Yoshin look so agonized. How long had it been? He looked like an insect had flown into his mouth and he just

so happened to bite down on it. The fact that it wasn't just Peach-chan but also Nao-chan might have contributed to his distress. She was his workplace senpai, after all.

It was pure coincidence that they both told me that; they just so happened to mention it around the same time.

Peach-chan had been learning about ASMR lately and had apparently learned about ear-licking that way. Nao-chan, on the other hand, seemed to be into the type of ASMR where pretty girls whispered sweet nothings into the listeners' ears. She said she was too embarrassed to listen to the ones with guys.

From those two—who had rather different preferences—I received very similar advice.

“Wouldn't it be super effective to whisper into a guy's ear and lick it?”

I protested that that would be too mortifying to do, but maybe because the piece of information was sitting in the back of my brain, I ended up acting on the suggestion. I was discovering just how little self-control I had.

“I can understand Peach-chan, but Nao-senpai too?” Yoshin groaned.

Huh? Is that how he thinks of Peach-chan?

According to Yoshin, Peach-chan had recently begun practicing her ASMR skills on her game companions over voice chat. She apparently kept things PG, did it to everyone equally, and never practiced when she was alone with a single person. *Are her gaming friends okay, though? Aren't they gonna get arrested?*

In any case, because of that, I had ended up...getting a taste of Yoshin's ear.

“Nanami, are they being a bad influence on you? Are you okay?” Yoshin asked.

Wow, Yoshin looks exhausted. Maybe hearing such stories about people he knew had really drained him of his life force.

For now, I decided just to smile and not respond to his question about negative influences. I *was* getting influenced, but I didn't know whether it was good or bad. Actually, given what a good time I had, I felt like it was a good

influence, if anything.

Seeing me laugh off his question, Yoshin seemed to give up, and he smiled instead.

I loved that smile of his.

I knew I was being calculating, but even if I did something weird, his smile made me feel like he forgave me and accepted me anyway.

I couldn't help but think of the possibility that one day, he might not smile and forgive me, and a chill shot up my spine. It made me want to cry. That was why I didn't want to trouble him or deceive him on purpose. This particular smile was rare, I had to tell myself, and if I got too cocky, maybe I would lose the privilege of seeing it.

That also meant I had to tell myself that the question I was about to ask him wasn't going to bother him. It was, if anything, a question from earlier that I still hadn't heard the answer to. If I didn't ask, I would never know.

"Is it okay if I ask you another question?" I said.

"Hm? Of course. What's up?" Yoshin asked.

Even though he encouraged me to ask, I couldn't form my words so easily—it was almost like something was blocking my throat. I waited a beat and took a deep breath.

I waited, patiently, until my curiosity beat out my anxiety. Then, I asked Yoshin—who by this point seemed perplexed by the wait—my question.

"Did it feel good?"

Earlier I ended up asking in a roundabout way instead of just asking directly, but I had surely gotten my point across this time. As proof, Yoshin opened his eyes wide and began to turn red.

I knew what he wanted to say based on that change in expression alone, but I pressed for him to tell me verbally. I wanted him to say it himself. His face now scarlet, Yoshin turned slightly away from me and mumbled something under his

breath.

“Probably, yes.”

His response made me so giddy that I reached out toward him and pulled him in for an embrace, not even bothering to suppress the laughter that bubbled up from inside me.

Yoshin lost his balance again and fell so that we both ended up hugging each other on top of my bed. His face was right next to my ear.

We were in the opposite position from earlier, but Yoshin didn't lick my ear.

Aw, shucks.

Chapter 2: My Own Personal Cheerleader

This was kind of embarrassing, but I didn't know that there was a difference between a sports festival and a sports day. The difference, apparently, was whether the event had been organized by the students or not.

Was that why the word "festival" was in the name? The sports festival was an athletic celebration that came as a pair along with the school festival.

"Mwa ha ha! Let's kick butt at the sports festival!"

Hitoshi was shouting with his hands on his hips, wearing a T-shirt with "2-2" written on the front of it to show which class he belonged to. On the back was his roster number, along with the phrase "Girlfriend wanted!" He must have been excited because he had finally gotten the class T-shirt he so badly wanted. Everyone else, too, was now chatting enthusiastically while holding the shirts that had been handed out.

Today's homeroom period was dedicated to doing a final check-in for the sports festival, as well as the distribution of the class shirts. We had thought of collecting money just from the folks who were interested in getting the shirt, but it turned out everyone wanted one. I hadn't expected everyone to want one, though when it came to the guys, I had a feeling that they had all been swayed by a comment that Hitoshi had made.

"I mean, doesn't it technically mean we'd be matching with all the girls in the class?"

It was an offhand remark, though one that was very effective. The fact that our teacher offered to subsidize the shirts a bit probably also helped.

Come to think of it, I had never worn matching outfits with Nanami before. I guess she had never suggested it either.

Did Nanami not like stuff like that? As for me, if it made Nanami happy, then I was willing to consider it. Except I thought it was kind of difficult for a guy and a girl to wear the same thing. We had to find something that suited both of us,

and also one where the design made sense.

Because of that, maybe this class shirt would be good practice for wearing matching outfits. If this didn't make us feel awkward, then maybe we could try going for a matching outfit in the near future.

The fact that I was feeling excited over my very first class T-shirt probably had something to do with why I was even considering stuff like this in the first place.

"Aren't you gonna wear yours?" Nanami asked, surprising me by appearing next to me with her own shirt in hand. It seemed that most girls weren't planning on changing into their new shirts here in the classroom.

"I can't actually change into it unless I take my shirt off. And I don't really wanna do that here," I explained.

"Ah, yeah. True," Nanami nodded in agreement.

A few of the guys had very willingly taken off their shirts and changed into their new T-shirts, despite the presence of girls in the classroom. The girls were looking at them in disbelief, along with mild amounts of envy—though they didn't seem like they were going to change themselves.

The one exception was Kamoenai-san, who said, "Maybe I'll try wearing mine too"—only to have everyone around her try to stop her with all their might. She really required close supervision at all times. You never knew what she was going to do next. Needless to say she was now getting a talking-to from Otofuke-san.

"What, man? Are you not taking off your shirt because you've got a hickey or something?" Hitoshi asked.

"Have you ever thought that maybe you don't have a girlfriend because you say stuff like that?" I quipped, as if by reflex. But it seemed my quick remark was more like a critical hit to Hitoshi; he deflated instantly. *Shoot, I wasn't thinking. But, I mean, Nanami would be embarrassed if we talked about hickies here in front of everyone.*

"Dammit. You don't call me by my name anymore, *and* I can't even get a girlfriend. I know—I'm gonna blow everyone's socks off at the sports festival, and the girls will be all over me then," Hitoshi said, his shoulders drooping as he

made his way dejectedly toward the girls in the class. Seeing as how he was still going to talk to them, though, he must not have been too devastated.

A sidenote: just like Hitoshi said, I really hadn't been calling him by his first name lately, even though I had no issue doing it when I was talking to him inside my head.

It just seemed too challenging to refer to a friend by his first name. The first time I did I thought that I could definitely keep doing so, but in the end, it was just too embarrassing for me. That was why I couldn't do it unless I really psyched myself up first.

"Seriously. Are you flirting with him?" Nanami asked, her cheeks puffed out.

"How so?" I muttered helplessly. No, really—how did she see all that and think I was flirting with him?

Nanami now had her upper body splayed out over the desk, blowing air out of her pouting lips. "It's a woman's instinct. I bet you're embarrassed about calling him by his first name, aren't you?" she said.

"How did you know?" I murmured.

"Because I'm your girlfriend. You know you're only supposed to do that to me, right?"

"But I already *do* call you by your first name," I protested.

"I know that. I know. But it still messes with me," Nanami wailed, pouting again and holding her head in her hands, seemingly confused.

Still, I felt like I knew what she was trying to say.

I started calling Nanami by her first name at the very beginning—that day in the nurse's office, when I started calling her "Nanami-san," with the honorific. A part of it was because she had asked me to, but it was also because I had been trying really hard to get her to like me.

That didn't mean that I was now treating Hitoshi like the heroine of the story, though.

"I never thought there would come a day when a guy made me feel jealous," Nanami muttered.

“Weren’t you saying that at the end of the school festival too?” I asked.

“But I was *kidding*. I didn’t think it would actually come true,” Nanami said, sighing and looking depressed. I showed her the T-shirt I was holding in a bid to cheer her up.

“There’s absolutely nothing to worry about! Look, I have your name carved into my back,” I said, unfolding my shirt to display the words “I’m with Nanami” printed on the back of it. To be honest, I was mortified to have such a thing printed on an article of clothing—it was just that Nanami had asked me to do it when we were ordering them: to print matching phrases on our two shirts, since we were going to get them made anyway.

I had hesitated for a moment, but given that it was a class memory, I also thought that it wouldn’t be such a bad thing to go along with her idea, so we chose phrases that wouldn’t be too embarrassing to have on our backs.

“Tee hee, that makes me so happy,” Nanami said, opening up her own T-shirt to reveal the phrase “I’m with Yoshin.” Nanami had said that she wanted to include a heart at the end, but I begged her to spare me.



In fact, Nanami's earlier ideas had been rather blatant; many potential phrases just straight up had the word "love" in them. I had chosen the phrase we ended up going with precisely because it was more toned down than the other options.

Watching Nanami be so overjoyed with the letters printed on her shirt, though, I couldn't help wondering about something.

"Hey, Nanami, can it be," I began.

"Hmm? What is it?" she asked.

"That you suggested all those super embarrassing ideas in the beginning, just so I would say okay to this one?"

Although Nanami had been swaying her body from side to side as she studied the T-shirt in her hands, she suddenly froze when she heard my question. She was completely immobile, as though time had stopped around her and her alone. I noticed that her smile now seemed forced, and that sweat was starting to form on her forehead.

She got me, didn't she.

"Nanami?" I said, bringing my face closer to hers. Nanami, now mildly flustered, turned away from me. *Yup, she's totally guilty.*

"Yes, you are correct," Nanami finally declared, showing me the phrase on the shirt again as if in surrender. *I see—I've heard of this method in negotiations, but I never thought someone would use it on me.*

"Are you mad, Yoshin?" Nanami asked, worry creeping into her voice.

"Oh, no. I'm not mad. Honest."

I wasn't angry at all. I was feeling more tickled, like I had been caught on camera without realizing it. It was that kind of mysteriously comforting feeling. Maybe it was because I'd been caught in one of *Nanami's* schemes—though she herself simply seemed relieved that I wasn't upset.

"I'd be embarrassed too if it was too sappy. I thought this might be okay, but since I was worried that you might not be into the idea, I had to tone it down just to be safe," she explained.

I see. Honestly, if she had suggested this phrase first I might have been reluctant to say yes. Though I can't deny that this is probably "toned down" by other people's standards.

"But, I see. You've finally gotten to a point where you'll take me for a ride like that," I sighed.

Personally, I was pretty happy about this development. It simply meant that Nanami had fewer reservations about our relationship.

No matter how much I tried to express things in words, Nanami still seemed reluctant to ask things of me, or make demands of any kind. I knew it was important to respect each other's boundaries, but still. That was why the fact that she strategized to get her way seemed like a good thing to me. We had to be careful too, of course, since overdoing it could lead to misunderstandings.

"S-Sorry," Nanami muttered.

"Oh—no, no. I'm just glad that you're starting to be more forthcoming with me about what you want," I explained.

"Really? Then I want you to make more demands of me too," she replied.

My demands, huh? Demands...what are my demands? I can't really think of any. To express my selfish desires and opinions to Nanami...

I couldn't come up with any on the spot, so I just ended up sitting there for a bit, chewing things over—but in the end, I wasn't able to find anything suitable to share.

"I'll be sure to make my demands too, when the time comes," I simply said.

Nanami smiled happily at my response. It was strange to make someone else happy by saying I was going to be selfish, but the idea was one that I looked forward to in its own way.

The problem, though, was Nanami's reply.

"Got it. When you're ready, feel free to really take me for a ride."

With that simple statement from Nanami, the people around us became abuzz—and I nearly fell off my chair from shock.

She probably just said that as a play on my comment earlier about her taking me for a ride. That was probably what it was. She had no ulterior motive. Absolutely not. As proof, Nanami was looking at me, concerned and confused about the fact that I'd almost fallen off of my chair. The surrounding murmurs changed tone as well.

This was simply the combination of Nanami not knowing such turns of phrase, and me being entirely impure of heart.

Saying that the people around me, too, were just as impure as I was might be a bit of a stretch, though.

Oh, Nanami's still looking confused, but now Otofuke-san is whispering something into her ear.

The next instance, Nanami's face turned as red as a boiled lobster.

A bomb going off would've been the perfect punctuation for this moment. Otofuke-san was looking at Nanami with a wry smile on her face.

Nanami then looked around with tears nearly coming out of her eyes. She stumbled toward me, as if seeking my help. She then moved to grab the hem of my clothes. *It's okay, you just didn't know.* I, along with everyone in the class, looked at the mortified Nanami with a consoling look...

"I-I'm okay with...that meaning of the phrase too," Nanami said.

"Nanami! There are people around!" I yelled, all sense completely ejected from my brain.

Nanami continued to appear panicked, gazing up at me and quivering. Tears really did seem to be pooling in her eyes.

Yikes, Nanami can't handle it anymore. She's about to self-destruct.

My exclamation wasn't helpful either. That made it sound like it was okay for her to say that if we *were* alone. There was still a commotion around us, though, so no one seemed to have noticed what I'd said.

As the room continued to fill with murmurs, I moved to pat Nanami on the head in order to calm her down. I felt like I was soothing a puppy.

"It's okay, Nanami. Just breathe in deep. Everything is fine," I said softly.

“Oh...thank you,” Nanami managed to say. Every time she exhaled, the flush in her face subsided bit by bit. Her breathing, which had been unsteady from her panic, gradually returned to normal as well.

Our classmates also seemed surprised that I was capable of yelling so loudly. They were right: it was probably the first time I’d ever raised my voice like that in class.

“Jeez, guys. At least watch what you say in class, yo,” Hitoshi said, making me and Nanami shrink back guiltily. *I mean, really. We’re so terribly sorry. Should we just apologize to the whole class right now? We’re usually a tiny bit better about all this. It’s true. I know we’re not terribly convincing, but still.*

“Anyway, keep it up for the piggyback race too, guys. I’m sure everyone will get a kick out of you two wearing those shirts,” Hitoshi continued.

“Huh?” I blurted out, bewildered.

“Huh?” Hitoshi repeated, tilting his head.

W-Wait, I wasn’t going to wear this shirt when I was actually competing in stuff, though.

“Dude, if you don’t wear it while you’re competing, then what the hell is the point?” Hitoshi asked, as though he’d read my mind.

His question made me turn to Nanami. She, too, was looking at me, perplexed. She appeared almost to be asking, “Huh? You weren’t gonna wear it?” Everyone else seemed to assume that I was going to wear it during the competition as well. *Oh, I see. So that’s how it is. I genuinely had no idea.*

“Um, Yoshin, can I make a selfish request?” Nanami whispered. “I’d really love it if you wore that shirt and competed in the race with me.”

Given what I had said earlier, denying her request was out of the question.

Yet when I wondered out loud whether wearing matching T-shirts and competing together wouldn’t make us look even more like an adorkable couple, everyone simply told us that it was already too late.



The day of the sports festival had finally arrived.

There wasn't an executive committee or anything like that this time, so all we had to prep was to choose which events everyone was going to compete in. Once we had our class T-shirts, we really felt like a united front.

Our sports festival took place over two days, with ball games taking place on the first day and track and field events happening on the second. The piggyback race that Nanami and I were participating in was on the second day, but both of us were competing separately in other events too, including some of the games on the first day.

I was pretty sure that Nanami was going to be in the volleyball game. She was also a part of the cheer competition the following day—though she wasn't going to be wearing the cheerleading outfit.

There were many voices of despair...or, rather, straight up complaints from the class regarding this issue, but I felt it was my prerogative as her boyfriend to put my foot down. People hollered that I was being too possessive, or that I should share some of the wealth with others, but such cries were but a breeze tickling my ear; they did nothing to sway my resolve.

I mean, that cheer uniform had a *super* short skirt.

Apparently they were wearing underwear that was intended to be seen or whatever, but I just couldn't say yes to that. I didn't want to. Even if it was meant to be seen, it seemed preposterous to then go around showing it off.

The top was cropped pretty high too, so even the navel was constantly peeking out. I couldn't believe that the teacher had okayed it, but I guess it was pretty standard. I was probably the one overreacting here.

Still, I never thought I'd ever argue with my classmates about something like this, so even that experience was kind of fun. I still said no though.

As a sidenote, apparently Otofuke-san, Kamoenai-san, and Shirishizu-san were all going to be wearing the cheerleading uniform. Several other girls in the class had agreed to wear it as well.

"Man, I wanted to see Nanami in the cheer outfit too, though," I muttered to myself. Yeah, to be honest, if I was by myself, then I would've wanted to see Nanami wearing the cheerleading uniform. I just didn't want anyone *else* to see

it.

Come to think of it, was it okay for Otofuke-san and Kamoenai-san to be wearing it? When I asked them about it, they said that they were wearing it because they wanted to make their boyfriends jealous, and they wanted to show them photos of themselves wearing it too.

I felt bad for Soichiro-san and Shuya-san. If it were me, I'd be positively beside myself. Well, maybe this was only possible because both couples had been dating for a long time.

Speaking of dating for a long time, what about Shirishizu-san? How would Teshikaga-kun react to seeing her in a cheer outfit?

When I brought it up with her nonchalantly, she said, "Taku-chan just told me I should wear it if I thought I'd look good in it. I asked him if he minded other people seeing me in it, but he said it was fine if that was what I chose...heh heh heh."

Scary. She was totally scary. Her smile was scary, and her eyes were scary too. I started worrying whether Teshikaga-kun was okay—in all sorts of ways.

"I know I'm being a real pain, but it's just...like, couldn't he have stopped me, even a little bit? He confessed to me, didn't he? Even if we broke up right after?"

As Shirishizu-san continued murmuring something that sounded somewhat like a curse, Nanami and I...and even Otofuke-san and Kamoenai-san didn't know what to say to her. Since all of us were in relationships, anything we said might just fan her flames.

As another sidenote, Teshikaga-kun had actually consulted me about the whole thing. "Master, was I supposed to say something to Kotoha? Is this what makes me a loser?" he had asked.

Teshikaga-kun, too, was probably trying to figure out the distance he was supposed to keep between him and Shirishizu-san. I very much wanted him to stop calling me "Master," but it made me really happy to be his sounding board.

For now, even though I felt like I had no business giving advice about stuff like this, I told him that if he didn't want other guys to see her, he should just tell

her so.

In any case, the particularly high-stakes cheer competition was taking place tomorrow. For today, though, I simply had to do my best and anticipate just how Nanami was going to cheer me on. That was what I told myself, but...

“She’s late,” I muttered to myself.

I was sitting alone in an empty storage closet in the gym. Soon I would be participating in a basketball game, but since there was still time before it started, I figured I was okay to wait a bit.

For several different reasons, I had ended up deciding to play basketball for the sports festival.

It seemed that the story about me going up against Shoichi-senpai had gotten around, because when we were trying to decide who would compete in what, Hitoshi asked me if I wanted to sign up for basketball with him.

I honestly wasn’t good at ball games at all, but combined with the fact that it was an invitation from my first friend ever and that we were all required to participate in at least one ball game, I ended up agreeing.

Though a major factor in my improvement might also have been because Shoichi-senpai helped me practice too, saying, “Why wouldn’t you ask me to practice with you?!”

It was with a near perfect sense of irony, therefore, that the first round was against senpai’s class.

The moment we found out, we all lamented that we’d never win against a class that included the captain of the basketball team—but even then, we were united in our desire to fight back as much as possible. Even if we weren’t going to win, we would give it our all without giving up. That would make for some great memories too. Which meant I was going to do my damndest as well.

I wondered why, then, Nanami decided to call me up before such a match.

I still had time before the game, but Nanami wasn’t here yet. She’d messaged me asking me to wait a bit, though, so I at least knew she hadn’t forgotten. If Nanami ever asked to see me and then forgot, I would probably cry, no matter

how pathetic that made me seem.

In any case, I couldn't help thinking that this was actually the first time I had been left waiting because Nanami had asked to meet with me. When she confessed to me, we'd walked to the back of the school together after she had asked to talk to me. Even when she showed me her bunny costume, we had walked to the classroom together as well.

I guess we *had* traveled separately to meet up for a date. Still, we were almost always together, and it was pretty rare for me to wait for her somewhere like this.

I found myself getting excited for whatever was about to happen.

It really seemed, though, as if my aversion toward sports festivals had decided to go off and take a hike. How convenient—though in all seriousness, the change was all thanks to Nanami and my other classmates. Being in my current class this year made me more willing to take part in things.

We were going to have more school events in the future too. I was pretty sure that the next big thing was our class trip. I couldn't quite remember where we were going for that. After all, I had had zero interest in it, and I'd even had a small argument with my parents last year over whether I'd even go on the trip at all. They ended up convincing me back then to go—and for that, I now felt nothing but gratitude. *Maybe I should thank them next time I have a chance.*

"Hey, Misumai! You in here? Sorry to keep you waiting."

Just as I was really getting lost in my thoughts, I heard my name being called and jolted from the mild shock of it. It wasn't Nanami who called me—it was Otofuke-san, along with other girls from our class.

Hmmm? Where's Nanami?

I opened my eyes wide at the girls in bewildered surprise, but they weren't even looking at me; instead, they seemed more preoccupied with something behind them.

It was only then, as I sat there tilting my head and wondering what was up, that I realized Otofuke-san and the others were wearing their cheerleading outfits.

Are they practicing for tomorrow? Or are they cheering on the class in their uniforms today, independently from the cheer competition? Just as I was asking myself that, I saw Nanami bring up the rear of the group.

Nanami, in a cheerleading outfit.

Huh?

“Tee hee. Thanks for waiting, Yoshin,” Nanami said as she waved to me in my shell-shocked state. She was holding the distinct pom-poms of a cheerleader in her hands, which swished with every movement of her body.

As soon as they made sure that Nanami had safely entered the storage closet, Otofuke-san and the others walked out while hollering a mysterious “Have a good time!” They then closed the door to the closet, leaving me and Nanami alone, just the two of us. I could hear them practicing their cheers when I approached the door, so I turned to Nanami, curious about what exactly was going on.

“Um, we thought, since we already have our cheer uniforms and stuff, we should cheer people on at the basketball game,” Nanami explained.

“Oh, I see. I bet that’ll make the guys very happy,” I agreed.

“And when I said that I wanted to cheer you on too, everyone helped make it happen,” she added, smiling shyly.

I didn’t like it if Nanami wore her cheer uniform in front of other people, but she still wanted to cheer me on in a cute outfit. It seemed like the girls got together and decided that all Nanami had to do, then, was to cheer me on personally and individually before the actual game started.

Those who wanted to wear the cheer outfit would wear it, and they would all hide Nanami in the middle of the group as they moved from one place to another. As one couldn’t see the forest for the trees, maybe the saying worked the opposite way too—that one wouldn’t see a cheerleader for the cheer team. Maybe.

I was really moved by the fact that we were able to do this because of

everyone's help, though. Something like this wouldn't have been possible if I was still only talking to Otofuke-san and Kamoenai-san, and hadn't tried integrating with the rest of the class. Well, maybe since Nanami had always been friends with everyone, it still would have been possible. But if I had still been a loner, maybe they wouldn't have been so willing to come up with such a plan.

One of these days, I've got to thank everyone for this.

Since I had been wanting to see Nanami in her cheer uniform, this was like a godsend for me. And since we were alone in a storage closet, there was no way anyone other than me would see her like this. In essence, Nanami had granted me my request.

"Wh-What do you think?" Nanami asked, opening her arms wide as if to hide her embarrassment.

Nanami in her cheerleading uniform...looked *good*. She looked so good that I was at a loss for words.

She was wearing a pleated skirt and a sleeveless top—maybe a tank top—that had fairly wide straps to it. She had her hair tied back in a ponytail, but with the addition of a very large bow she wouldn't normally wear adorning her head. The cheer uniform looked clean and crisp, being white all over with blue accent lines. One might even describe it as wholesome. Even so, her shoulders were bare, and I could also see her navel. Her skirt was very short, almost dangerously so. She looked amazing, but her outfit seemed like one that would take a lot of courage to wear in front of other people.

Yet Nanami really made that uniform pop. She looked like she absolutely belonged in it. I thought Nanami was already pretty to begin with though, so I might have been totally biased.

"Yeah, you look good. That uniform looks perfect on you," I told her.

It would be a bad call to muddle my words in situations like this. If I thought she looked good, then I should tell her that honestly.

Nanami laughed and spun around in place. Her skirt fluttered and then fell back into place when she stopped too.

“We have nothing to worry about here, do we?” Nanami remarked, shaking her pom-poms as though she was already starting to cheer for me. She was right; while we were here no one else could see us—could see *her*.

“Yeah, thank you, Nanami. Am I being too controlling, though? Am I holding you back from wearing the clothes you want to wear because of me? Does it feel suffocating to you?” I asked.

Being too uptight and controlling in a relationship would be a burden on the other person. I wanted to be open with Nanami about things that bothered me, but it would defeat the whole purpose of doing so if that became a hardship for her. I wanted Nanami to wear whatever clothes she wanted to wear. And given those circumstances, I should let her know whenever something concerned me. It was important to talk.

Nanami paused for a moment to consider my question, then sat down on one of the mats in the closet, hugging her knees. She bent her legs, not even bothered by the fact that she was wearing a skirt. When she sat down like that, it was impossible for her skirt to hide her underwear—which meant that I was able to see it completely.

“N-Nanami, I can see,” I pointed out in a murmur, thinking it was somehow rude to look away. Nanami, though, didn’t seem to mind what was happening.

While I wondered why, Nanami moved her legs and shifted herself into a more alluring position, intentionally showing me more of her underwear. She even deliberately lifted her skirt, a slight, seductive smile on her face.



Then, she said, “These are cheer briefs, so it’s totally fine.”

“I don’t think that’s the issue here,” I muttered in response.

Nanami pinched the hem of her skirt with her fingertips and fluttered it like they were butterfly wings. She didn’t seem at all concerned by the fact that her cheer briefs were visible to me.

Tennis players wore those under their skirts, so it was okay if they were visible, right?

Still, I firmly believed that there was a difference between “it’s okay to be seen” and “it’s okay to show”—between accidentally flashing someone, and showing them off purposefully, like right now. When she was showing them to me like that, they were no different from regular undergarments.

Nanami let go of the skirt but kept the same seductive pose, smiling at the perplexed expression my face seemed to be stuck in.

“It’s weird, isn’t it? Bathing suits are pretty much the same shape, but the moment we’re in regular underwear, it becomes totally embarrassing. These cheer briefs too—it’s okay for people to see them, but then I don’t want anyone but you to see them either,” Nanami said, donning an oddly solemn expression as she flipped her own skirt once again.

Her actions and her facial expression didn’t match at all—but I did agree with what she said. It wasn’t the first time I’d heard about the baffling difference between wearing a swimsuit and wearing just underwear, even though the amount of coverage—or lack of—between both was basically the same.

“I have a hunch that it’s all about how I feel. It’d be embarrassing to show you something I usually hide with my clothes, like my underwear, but if it’s something that I’m *allowed* to show you, then I don’t mind at all,” she concluded.

What mattered was how the person felt, huh? I see, that probably *was* true. It was basic human psychology: if its purpose was to be seen, then it ceased to be embarrassing. Even if underwear and bathing suits covered the same area, they were nonetheless distinct things. They were similar, but in the end they were, actually, different garments—so of course they made us feel different too.

“That’s why it’s fine to show you these briefs, but it’d be mortifying to take them off and show you my actual underwear. Oh, wait, do you wanna see them though? Do you?” Nanami suddenly asked.

“I do, but since we’re at school, I’ll refrain,” I replied.

“Oh, really? Well, what a shame,” she quipped.

I knew Nanami wasn’t *actually* trying to show me her underwear—she was only teasing, so I replied in kind. It was our standard banter. As expected, Nanami didn’t seem annoyed even though I had declined the offer; instead, she simply giggled and let her skirt fall back into place.

She isn’t serious, is she? I was worried for a minute there, but given that she was blushing slightly, I guessed that she didn’t actually mean what she said. *Aw, she’s embarrassed.*

It probably wasn’t because I’d declined, but Nanami stood up slowly where she had been sitting, her skirt fluttering as she moved. Though the idea was pretty random, it reminded me of a fairy, fluttering around on its wings like in some fantasy story. A fairy in a high school gym storage closet was about as incoherent as an image could get.

Nanami pinched and lifted the edge of her skirt, showing me her cheer briefs once again. That was only for a moment, though, as doing so while she was standing seemed slightly more embarrassing for her to do.

Her gesture was very bad for my heart as well, even if it was an undergarment that was okay to show off. Nanami must have sensed my panic too, because she laughed innocently and said, “Maybe your worries are kind of like these briefs.”

“Wait, how? I’m not quite following you there—could you explain that one to me?” I pleaded. Or maybe, the conversation was moving too fast, and I just needed her to slow things down for me. The topic of conversation seemed to have taken a turn that was a bit too sharp for me.

“Everything’s up to how I feel. Really, how *we* feel. What you think of as being controlling isn’t anything I find to be suffocating at all. So it’s fine,” she explained. Nanami then twirled in place and muttered to herself, “Actually, what worries me more is if you think *I’m* being too possessive, and that’s

suffocating you.”

It was true that Nanami sometimes said things that came off as sounding kind of yandere-ish, but I’d never felt that to be heavy or suffocating.

Maybe it wasn’t that I never thought of those things as heavy or burdensome, but that that weight was just part of the weight of our love.

Even when we worked out, we needed a certain amount of load...a certain amount of weight. The weight of our love, therefore, was something that could help us exercise our emotions. If the weight was appropriate, it would feel good. If the burden was too much, we’d feel pain or mess up our bodies somehow. The weight I was lifting, therefore, was probably at just the right level for me.

“I don’t think of the weight of your feelings as being a burden at all. If anything, it feels comfortable,” I shared.

“Uh, aren’t you supposed to say that everything’s fine and that my feelings don’t weigh on you at all?” she teased.

“I just thought it was the right level of burden for my love workout.”

“Love workout?!” Nanami exclaimed in response to my odd choice of phrasing—though it was one that made the most sense to me. Even though it made love sound like some kind of muscle. Nanami then asked, slightly confused by my explanation but nonetheless clenching her hands into fists with excitement, “What in the world? That sounds so funny. But does that maybe mean that I’m working out with your love too?”

For me, it all sounded fine as long as Nanami wasn’t going to be squished by my weight.

Finally, Nanami muttered, “In that case, just tell me if it ever gets too heavy to bear, okay? Because I’m sure I’m gonna like you more and more as time passes.”

“Same here. You’re, um, only gonna get prettier and prettier. I’m sure I’ll never run out of things to worry about, and my feelings are only gonna grow stronger too,” I replied.

“Okay. If I ever feel like your feelings are getting to be too much, then I’ll be sure to tell you. So *you* have to...”

“I’ll be sure to tell you too. Like, if your love is getting to be too much, or if it’s too restricting for me.”

We thus exchanged strange declarations—and then both burst out laughing. *How many couples out there say stuff like this to each other?* The situation seemed pretty odd, but I guess this was just how Nanami and I were.

“Come to think of it, I haven’t even done a cheer for you yet,” Nanami suddenly remarked.

“Oh!” I exclaimed as I realized that fact myself.

“I even dressed up, and yet all I’ve done is...show you my cheer briefs?”

“Stop, that’s totally misleading,” I said in protest, raising my hands.

Nanami giddily pinched her skirt again in response. She didn’t flip it up this time to show me her briefs, but it just reminded me of what she had done earlier, and I blushed anyway.

Actually, though, I had to admit that her statement wasn’t objectively wrong. I was so glad that she and I were alone. Though there was no way we could’ve done this if we *weren’t* alone. Even though all we’d done was talk—about cheer briefs, no less—and Nanami hadn’t even cheered for me yet. Nanami had gone to the trouble of dressing up in a cheer uniform, and yet all we’d done was talk like always. Well, we’d talked about some new things, but still, this was too sad.

“Then, I’ll cheer for you right now,” Nanami said, hopping in place as if to switch gears. She then struck a pose, looking very much like a real member of an actual cheerleading squad.

Fine, I didn’t know that much about cheerleading, but still.

With me as the sole audience member, Nanami began stepping lightly. She looked like she was dancing...or, I guess she actually *was* dancing, as she proceeded to show me the various moves that she must have been practicing. At first her movements were modest, like she was remembering the steps. Gradually, though, she started to move with more confidence, each gesture

sharper and more precise. There was no music, and yet I could've sworn I could hear it playing in the background somewhere.

The swish of the pom-poms and the flutter of her skirt made her dance appear even more dynamic. *Is that why the skirt is cut that way?*

Nanami kicked up her leg high to match the movement of her arms, then gave a spirited yell. My eyes were glued to her beautiful figure.

Then, unexpectedly, my eyes met hers.

And from there, Nanami's movements gradually became smaller and smaller. What had been dynamic and prominent moves shrank in size, almost like a balloon that had had a hole poked into it.

Huh? What's happening?

She almost looked like a video playing in reverse, her movements shrinking until they eventually stopped entirely, Nanami crouching down in place. She was now making herself look tiny, hiding her face with her pom-poms. It was so different from what I had just seen that I almost thought I had imagined her alluring me with her dynamic moves.

Nanami then looked at me and mumbled, "This is super embarrassing when it's just the two of us."

Ah, I see.

While I was watching her and thinking how cute she was, Nanami must have been getting increasingly embarrassed at the realization that she was dancing by herself.

I guess cheers usually weren't meant to be so one-on-one like this. An entire squad was meant to cheer for a whole team. Nanami feeling awkward about this situation made perfect sense.

"I'm so sorry, Yoshin. I just got so embarrassed once I started thinking about it," Nanami continued muttering.

"It's fine, totally fine! It's not a problem at all, so I want you to just relax," I replied.

With her pom-poms still in her hands, Nanami approached me on unsteady

feet, tears welling up in her eyes. She looked like a lost child finally reuniting with their guardian. I opened my arms to welcome her in.

Nanami came to me, magnetically, as if drawn to me, then proceeded to wrap her arms around my torso, her pom-poms swishing. The unfamiliar sensation sent a shiver up my spine.

This was more a hug to soothe an embarrassed child rather than an embrace between lovers. Still, I patted Nanami on her back to comfort her. But even in this situation Nanami still took the time to encourage me. The only problem was that hearing her say those kinds of things when we were holding each other made me remember all the things we did the other day.

My body started reacting funny, so I had to look up at the ceiling to resist any kind of urge. Just then, though, I happened to glance over at the door to the storage closet—which now appeared to be ajar.

“Huh?” I couldn’t help muttering out loud.

“Hm? What is it, Yoshin?” Nanami asked.

I had let my bewilderment slip, but I could’ve sworn that until a little while ago the door had been shut. I was pretty sure that it hadn’t been open in such an awkward way, and what was more, it seemed strange that the door was open but not letting any light in from the other side.

Once I realized, I couldn’t unthink it—because I understood completely what was going on. If anything, I was ashamed for not having considered the possibility earlier. Nanami had her back toward the door, so she probably neither guessed it nor knew what was happening.

So, while still embracing Nanami, I began to move very slowly. My destination was somewhere closer to the door, but at a spot where I wouldn’t be seen from the opening. There just so happened to be a mat there, so it was perfect.

Nanami seemed confused as to why we were moving while still hugging, but after I asked her to wait for a moment and reassured her that it wouldn’t take long, she simply nodded and fell silent.

Now seeing the door from my new angle, everything was perfectly clear. There was no light coming in, but I could see shadows moving on the other side

of the opening. The size of the opening didn't remain the same either; at times it expanded, while at others it shrank.

The clincher was the existence of something distinct from the changing light; if anything, it almost seemed like it was reflecting the light. I should've thought of this possibility when all the girls walked into the storage closet earlier: that in all honesty, there was zero chance that a group of teenage girls *wouldn't* be curious about a couple's secret rendezvous.

Now positioned in the door's blind spot, I abruptly pulled open the door with a good amount of power. It was a sliding door, so all I had to do was yank it with all my might.

Behind the door were assembled all the girls who had brought Nanami earlier.

They were peeking in from what *used* to be the narrow opening. They didn't have their weight on the door in order not to open it accidentally, so no one lost their balance or anything from my little maneuver. I had the mat prepared for them just in case, but it seemed I didn't need to worry about that.

I thought they might scatter in all directions the moment they realized that the door had opened, but instead, they were all frozen in place there. Maybe it was just shock?

"What are you all doing?" Nanami asked in a low voice, staring down at the girls and silently taking a step away from me. The girls, on the other hand, were all quivering as they tried to meet Nanami's gaze.

"Hey Nanami, if you could just calm down," Otofuke-san managed to say.

"I was thinking of picking up some hints on what to do the next time I was alone with my boyfriend!" Kamoenai-san offered.

"For future reference," Shirishizu-san added.

Otofuke-san was apologetic, but the other two seemed somewhat proud of what they were doing. *Wait, why are you all spying in the first place?*

When I glanced over at the other girls, I saw that they were forming what could've passed as a group gymnastics formation. They were all supporting each other, their clump of bodies maintaining a very precarious balance. It seemed

almost a miracle that they were able to do this without leaning on the door, but unfortunately, balance was the kind of thing that could be lost with the slightest nudge.

“G-Get out of here, *now*! All of you!”

At Nanami’s scream, all the girls who had been spying on us fell to the ground before they were able to escape her wrath.



“Seriously! I can’t believe it!” Nanami shouted yet again.

We were eating lunch together, and I was doing my best to pacify her.

Having changed from her cheerleading outfit into her regular gym clothes, Nanami brought a rice ball that I’d made up to her mouth. The fact that she was eating something that I’d made with my own two hands felt somewhat strange.

Because today was the sports festival, the bento menu I prepared was a pretty classic one: rice balls, an omelet, wieners, and fried chicken. Since I couldn’t make that many different items in one go, those were the dishes I was responsible for. Nanami, in turn, had prepared meatballs, potato salad, and asparagus wrapped in bacon.

“Mmm, these are tasty. You’ve gotten so good at cooking, Yoshin. Is it because of your job?” Nanami asked.

“It’s not like I cook at my job, though,” I muttered in response.

Nanami proceeded to eat a piece of the fried chicken I’d made, then slowly broke into a smile. It was a relief that the dish seemed to have turned out okay. We’d traded bento before, but this was the first time that we had both brought things to share.

I placed one of the meatballs that Nanami had made in my mouth. I occasionally had frozen meatballs, but I don’t think I’d had homemade ones before.

Every time I chewed, the flavorful juices of the meat mixed with the sweet and spicy sauce spread throughout my mouth. The texture of the vegetables that had been added to the ground meat was also a nice touch, though I had to

wonder exactly what vegetable it was. It didn't seem like a bell pepper or onion.

"Did you put lotus root in this?" I finally asked.

"Oh, can you tell? Yeah, I chopped up some lotus root and added it," Nanami explained.

"Wow, I haven't had lotus root in a good while. It's cool to put it in meatballs."

"Try this too. It's asparagus wrapped in bacon," Nanami said, holding an asparagus spear with her chopsticks and bringing it toward my mouth. I felt like she hadn't done this to me in quite some time. Because of the weird rumors and the whole kissing onstage business, we hadn't really been feeding each other at school lately. We had decided it would only fan unnecessary flames.

Were we lifting the ban now, though, because it was the school festival? Or was this a reward of some kind?

"This is a reward for you trying so hard during the basketball game," Nanami declared, as though she'd read my mind. *I see. I worked hard, so she's rewarding me with this.*

"But we still lost," I pointed out to her.

The outcome shocked no one at all, but we went up against the team with Shoichi-senpai on it and were—regrettably—defeated in the first round.

Senpai was elated that he could play in an actual basketball game against me, but I was feeling pretty hopeless before the match even began. Had Nanami not cheered me on, I probably wouldn't have been able to withstand the whole affair at all.

It was entirely possible that my aversion toward sports festivals was rooted in the very real fact that novices often competed against people with much more experience, and lost.

"Who cares? You even made a shot!" Nanami insisted.

"I guess that's true, but still," I murmured.

That actually *had* been a surprise. I had assumed that there would be no contest between a team with beginners like me, and one that had experienced

players like senpai. To be more precise, I had thought that we wouldn't even be able to make a single shot. But we all managed to score some points, and even I was able to get a shot in.

More than anything else, though...

"We're probably gonna lose, but let's have as much fun out there as we can!"

Hitoshi had shouted that right as we headed out to the court, and he had looked so overjoyed that even I ended up enjoying the game.

That's right—it was fun. A *team sport* felt fun. As far as I could remember, I only ever wanted team sports to be over as soon as they started. Just having this slight change of heart made participating in the sports festival this year worth it.

"Hey, Yoshin...do you mind eating this? It's getting kind of embarrassing," Nanami muttered.

"Oh, sorry, sorry. Of course," I said, realizing that I'd failed to eat the bacon-wrapped asparagus that Nanami was offering me because I was so lost in thought. It was a reward from her, after all; obviously I had to eat it. Just as I was bringing my mouth closer to Nanami's proffered chopsticks, though...

"Yoshin, are you up here? You wanna eat lunch... Oh, my bad. Am I interrupting?"

Speak of the devil. Well, actually, I wasn't even speaking of Hitoshi, I was only *thinking* about him. And yet he still managed to appear where Nanami and I were having lunch. She and I weren't exactly hiding, of course; we were just on the rooftop, so anyone could show up anytime.

I responded by glancing over at him and nodding slightly, then chomping down on the asparagus that Nanami was feeding me. I wasn't ignoring him; I was just being true to my priorities.

Oh, this is good. I can taste the saltiness of the bacon along with the sweetness of the asparagus. I like the texture too. I didn't notice it before, but there's carrots in here too. And it's even stir-fried in butter and soy sauce. The combination of butter and soy sauce always makes me want to eat more rice. Before I said anything out loud, I grabbed a rice ball and bit into it.

“Yeah, this is definitely tasty. It’s amazing, actually,” I said finally.

“Really? Oh, I’m so glad. It’s my first time making it,” Nanami said.

“Wow, yeah, it’s super good. I think this is my first time eating bacon-wrapped asparagus that’s been flavored with butter and soy sauce. I feel like it’s usually just grilled,” I finished.

Only after sharing my thoughts about the asparagus with Nanami, did I turn to Hitoshi.

“You were saying... Oh, right. Eating lunch together?” I recalled.

“You’re something else, dude. I’ve never seen anyone just continue on with being fed without hesitating even a little bit,” Hitoshi commented.

“Just how many times have you come across situations like this one?” I wondered out loud.

Hitoshi, now on the verge of tears, told me not to ask him those kinds of questions. I was only kidding, but it seemed he always had terrible luck with encountering couples doing that in front of him.

“Anyway, we were all talking and thought it’d be fun to eat together, given that it’s the sports festival and all that,” Hitoshi explained. “You guys just disappeared on us, though, so I came to ask if you guys wanted to join.”

I see. I guess that is something people do during festivals and stuff. This seems like a surefire way to get to know my classmates better. Eating lunch with everyone, though, huh? Wow, I can’t even remember the last time I did something like that. I’m pretty sure that trying out the popcorn for the school festival doesn’t really count, and I ended up eating lunch with Nanami on the day anyway. Though I guess Shirishizu-san and Teshikaga-kun were there too. But really, the last time I had a meal with my classmates must be so long ago that I can’t even remember it.

If I had to be honest, the idea intrigued me. If I had to be even *more* honest, I also wanted to be alone with Nanami. *What a dilemma. When faced with a dilemma, though, I guess I should just talk with Nanami about it.*

“To be honest, I’m kind of curious what it’s like to eat lunch with everyone

else. What do you think?" I asked her.

In response, Nanami simply looked back at me with her eyes and mouth opened wide. *Huh? Did I say something weird?* I wondered to myself. Nanami, though, tilted her head next, as if thinking about something momentarily. She then picked up another bento item and offered it to me, which I proceeded to bite into and chew. Only then did Nanami inhale and open her mouth to speak.

"Um, what do you mean by 'curious,' exactly?" she asked, looking confused.

"Well, I guess I'm not sure how to explain it," I began, crossing my arms as I considered how to respond. I said "curious" simply because I'd never eaten lunch with other people before. I tried combing through my memory, but I really couldn't recall any such occasion. Maybe I used to do it when I was in elementary school, but I couldn't remember clearly. At the very least, I didn't do it when I was in middle school. I didn't do it last year, in my first year of high school either.

As I sat there, groaning, with my arms still crossed and unable to respond, Nanami gazed into my face, worry clouding her face. When I laughed, feeling somewhat awkward about all this, Nanami moved to give me a big hug. *Huh? Why?*

"Wait, Nanami. I don't think it's the kind of thing where you need to hug me," I said, bewildered.

"But if you're curious, doesn't it mean that you felt sad you hadn't done it before?" Nanami suggested.

Is that it? Am I feeling sad? No, I feel like that's not really it. This really is genuine curiosity.

I'd only ever *heard* about eating lunch with friends, so I probably just wanted to experience it to see what it was like. When I told Nanami that, though, she looked at me with an even more empathetic look on her face.

"Yeah, let's all eat together! Let's get all rowdy and have a great time doing it! Let's make lots of great memories!" she exclaimed.

When she then began stroking my hair, Hitoshi started murmuring to himself. I felt embarrassed for having drawn attention to ourselves, but Nanami didn't

let me go. She just continued patting my head, as though she were soothing a child. She had done this to me before when we were alone, but I was pretty sure that this was the first time she had done it to me at school.

“So, yeah. Sounds good,” I said to Hitoshi, turning my face toward him while Nanami continued hugging me.

“I can’t believe you’re telling me that while you’re in such a position,” Hitoshi said, not even bothering to hide his exasperation.

I can’t help it. It’s not like I can tear myself away from her.

“I know I have a reputation for always failing to read the room, but are you sure you’re okay with that?” Hitoshi asked.

What kind of a reputation is that? I kind of knew what he meant, though. Hitoshi came off as the type of guy who would crack a joke even when everyone else around him was feeling really down.

Nanami seemed to have zero intention of letting me go though, as she continued petting me everywhere even as Hitoshi and I attempted to have a normal conversation. *I feel like I’m just letting her have her way with me.*

“Well, I know I said I came to see if you guys were up for eating together, but I kind of lied,” Hitoshi said.

Even though I hadn’t been his friend for very long, he seemed to me like he was hesitating about something, looking away from us as though somewhat preoccupied. I couldn’t move my head to look in the direction he was glancing at, but...

“‘Cause actually, everyone’s already here,” he announced.

“Huh?” I said.

“What?” Nanami also uttered at the same time.

As though Hitoshi’s line was the cue, people quickly gathered around the three of us. Along with Otofuke-san, Kamoenai-san, and the usual gang, there were also Shirishizu-san and Teshikaga-kun, as well as other people from our class that I recognized.

Upon finding me and Nanami in an embrace, some of my classmates looked

fed up while others looked embarrassed, but basically everyone sat down and began eating lunch.

Nanami, on the other hand, now seemed frozen in place with her hand on me, emitting strange sounds from her mouth. I almost wanted to point out to her the fact that she'd kissed me onstage, but I guess that this too, was just another instance of reminding myself that it was all about how she felt about things, rather than what I thought was normal or not a big deal.

Back then, we had both been carried away. Now, though, we had completely let our guard down. Nanami probably would have been okay if we'd been seen by just one person, but with *everyone* looking at us, it must have become too much for her.

"Wow, Nanami. I mean, just wow. You guys don't hold back at all, do you?" one girl remarked.

At that comment, Nanami snapped out of her frozen state and leaped into action. By the time I realized that she had finally let go of me, she was already hiding behind me. She seemed like a little girl who was caught in the middle of a mischievous act. Her reaction must have been rare for the girls in the class, because they began squealing in delight.

"Please take it easy on her," I requested, raising both my hands as if to shield Nanami. That only made the girls even more excited. *Wait, what about that was squeal-worthy?*

Nanami peeked out from behind me, so I stroked her cheek to help her calm down. She closed her eyes partway, seemingly enjoying the touch.

"Anyway, let's eat! Man, I'm starving," Hitoshi said as he opened up his bento box, paying no mind to me and Nanami. He was also laying out sandwiches and pastries that he must have picked up at the student store. *Wow, he sure eats a lot.*

Everyone else was starting to dig into their meals as well. *I see, I guess having lunch with other people means I get to see what everyone else is eating. This is quite the learning experience.*

Nanami and I thus resumed our meal as well. We all talked about a lot of

things as we ate. I wasn't much good at conversation, but even then, there was no end to what we discussed. We talked about how Otofuke-san and Kamoenai-san showed their boyfriends how they looked in their cheerleading outfits, how Teshikaga-kun managed to shock everyone by taking the sports festival seriously, how Shirishizu-san cheered on Teshikaga-kun...

Even classmates I'd never talked to before came up to me and complimented me on the basketball game, letting me know that they had cheered us on. It was a little embarrassing to hear that, to be honest.

Actually, after the game, Hitoshi got scouted by Shoichi-senpai and was asked to join the basketball team. Hitoshi seemed like he didn't know how to respond. Shoichi-senpai really went for anyone, even if they were second-years.

As all sorts of conversations were taking place, two shadows approached me and Nanami. From their small size, I could guess that they were girls. When I turned in that direction, I saw two girls I'd never spoken to before sitting in a spot close to us. They weren't there before, so I had to wonder how they'd managed to approach us so quietly.

I thought that maybe they were also going to start eating their bento with us, but it seemed like that wasn't the case. They hadn't even opened up their bento boxes. They seemed rather nervous, in fact, glancing at me and then looking away. Maybe they were looking at Nanami instead of me though.

The scene somehow felt familiar. If anything, I started thinking that maybe I'd seen these two girls somewhere before.

Maybe I really have met them before.

As I remained silent, unable to recall where I knew them from, the two girls looked straight at me—not at Nanami—and bowed to me. Then, suddenly in unison, they both said, "I'm sorry."

Huh? Wait, they're the ones apologizing to me, not the other way around? Did they do something to me? I really don't remember anything about them at all.

The people around us were all caught up in their own conversations, so they seemed not to notice the two girls apologizing to me. It probably also helped that the girls were talking somewhat softly.

“Um, uh, I’m not sure that there’s anything for you to apologize to me about,” I said, confused.

The two girls, though, slowly raised their heads.

One of the girls had her wavy blonde hair in a ponytail, and she also had healthy-looking tanned skin, with eyes that sloped slightly downward, for a sleepier, sedate look. The other girl had shoulder-length black hair. She was wearing a headband and had slightly upturned eyes.

While the two of them had somewhat contrasting appearances, they both currently had their eyebrows furrowed in an apologetic manner.

“Um, when you two first started going out,” one of them began.

“We said some mean stuff about you to Nanami,” the other followed.

“We’ve felt bad about it ever since, so we wanted to apologize.”

“We’ve watched you two the whole time you’ve been together, and we realized what a stupid thing we said back then. So, we’re sorry.”

And with that, the two of them quietly bowed to me in apology once again. Even though they were sitting right in front of me, though, the conversation wasn’t really making sense to me.

They said something mean about me to Nanami? When I tilted my head in confusion, Nanami did the same. After thinking about what they said, though, I finally remembered what they were talking about. *Ah, that thing that happened about a week after Nanami and I started going out...*

“Ah, right, *that*,” Nanami also said, making a fist with one hand and hitting her other palm with it. It seemed like a theatrically classic response, but it also seemed to suit her.

“Time sure passes fast, huh? How long has it been since then?” I asked her.

“Gosh, I feel like I’ve been with you forever, but I guess it hasn’t even been a year. That’s so funny,” Nanami replied.

Seeing our reaction, the two girls seemed at a loss for words. *Gosh, I didn’t think we were being that shocking.*

“Thank you for taking the time to come and apologize,” I told them.

It wasn’t anything that bothered me, but I still knew that coming up to me to apologize like this must have taken a lot of courage. I was also grateful for the fact that they’d chosen to speak softly, in order not to have the people around us make a big fuss over the situation.

That was why both Nanami and I needed to let them know that we weren’t bothered by it too much.

“I mean, of course you’d think it was weird, given how suddenly Nanami and I started going out. I don’t mind it at all, so I don’t want you two to worry about it either,” I said.

“Exactly. I’m sorry I got all worked up back then too,” Nanami added.

The two girls seemed to recall something with Nanami’s comment, because they both blushed instantaneously.

Why are they reacting like that? Just what did Nanami say back then? Oh, wait...I feel like she complimented me in a super misleading way.

Maybe this was a good opportunity for me to clear up any misunderstandings they had, so I said to the two who kept stealing glances at me, “By the way, what Nanami was referring to was my abs and muscles and stuff. Nothing weird at all, so please don’t misunderstand.”

The two girls only blushed deeper at my comment. *Huh? I asked them not to misunderstand, so why are they reacting this way?*

“Y-You mean you showed her your body after only dating for a week?” one of them asked.

Well, sorry to say, but I actually did that on the very first day.

Maybe this wasn’t going too well, and saying any more would only lead to more misunderstandings. Nanami and I seemed to both realize that individually, because the both of us simply decided to laugh it all off and not attempt to explain the details.

“Yeah, just by accident—just my upper body,” I managed to say.

“O-Oh, really? Um, okay. But, how?” one of the girls murmured.

I seemed to have confused her even more, but it was probably better to leave things at that. The more I said, the more they'd misunderstand. It was better to cut my losses.

"In any case, please don't worry about anything anymore. I know this sounds kind of weird, but I totally forgive you," I said.

Though I might've sounded somewhat condescending, I thought it was important for me to express myself clearly, given that they'd taken the trouble to apologize. That was one of the things I'd learned recently. As proof, the two girls were now sighing with relief.

"I'm so glad. What with our class trip coming up and all, I didn't wanna leave things unsettled. Who knows, we might even end up in the same group," one of the girls said.

"We were cheering you on at the basketball game today too. Plus you were something else at the school festival! Though I guess it's not good to say too many nice things about you in front of Nanami," the other added.

"Is it okay if we say he was cool, Nanami?" the other asked with some hesitation.

I couldn't quite guess how Nanami would feel about someone else complimenting me. I hoped that she wouldn't be too bothered by it. But when I looked back at Nanami, who had been hiding behind me, I saw that she was wearing a look of triumph on her face.

The two girls seemed perplexed by Nanami's expression as well. And me too: What was I to make now of how insecure I felt when I first heard these girls' comments?

"You don't mind even if other girls say something nice about me?" I asked Nanami.

"Well, of course I prefer people complimenting you over doubting you. It always makes me happy when people know just how awesome you are. And besides," she replied.

"Besides?" I asked.

“Even if other girls say nice things about you, you only like me, right?”

When Nanami said those words—spoken with such confidence and absolutely no suspicion, as though she was merely pointing out a simple fact—I found myself immediately responding, “Of course.”

“Then there’s no problem,” she finished.

“But I think *I’d* feel a little weird if someone else said that you were really pretty or something,” I confessed.

“Jeez, it’s totally fine! No matter who compliments me, you’re the only one I like,” Nanami said, coming out from behind me and sitting next to me, as though she was expressing her acceptance of my small, insecure heart. She also attached herself very closely to me. Nanami was acting like the two girls in front of us didn’t even exist, but when she realized that they were still there, she blushed slightly.

The two girls were whispering between themselves, “They’re too sweet” and “I’m so jealous that he doesn’t seem like the cheating type.” We could totally hear them though.

Wanting to change the subject, I desperately moved on to a different topic and said, “Uh, anyway, you mentioned the class trip, right? I wonder where we’re going.”

“Huh? You don’t know, Yoshin? But how?” Nanami muttered, looking at me with incredulity.

I’m sorry, it’s because I didn’t have much interest in school events before. In fact, I had been planning on skipping the class trip too, if I was just going to be by myself.

Even as I thought to myself that I wanted to be in the same group as Nanami, I looked at the two girls who’d come to apologize and bowed to them, saying, “If we do end up in the same group, I hope we can have fun.”

“Um, yeah...same here,” the girls replied, also bowing to me, then looking at each other and laughing softly. I hoped that with this, any other lingering issues between us were resolved. They were right to point out that the class trip was coming up, and no one wanted to feel awkward around one another.

Maybe they really did feel more comfortable around us, because the two girls stayed for a bit to chat. I was happy because I got to hear stories about Nanami from before I knew her.

In the middle of our conversation, the tanned girl said to me, “Actually, with the school festival and the sports festival, you’re getting a lot of attention, Misumi. You should probably be careful. There are a lot of people who’ll try to pull some weird stuff.”

“Right. There are people who’ll talk behind your back, like we did...and also people who’ll try to take what belongs to others. A lot of terrible people don’t even care that you’re already dating someone,” the other added.

I wondered if they should be saying stuff like that about themselves, but I did understand that when my surroundings changed, so did the dangers. If I was going to step out of my super small world and expand my horizons, maybe that kind of thing was unavoidable.

Still, I knew that I was going to prevent any danger from harming Nanami, and I also believed that things would be all right as long as she and I worked together. I just needed to work hard to ensure that.

Hearing that, though, Nanami said loudly, “I’ll protect you, Yoshin!”

“Then I’ll protect you too,” I said in return.

As she and I smiled at each other, we began to hear murmurs of admiration. They weren’t coming just from the two girls sitting in front of us; they were coming from all around us.

“Seriously, you guys are totally made for each other,” someone said.

Hearing that made me happy. It helped me to realize that, maybe, I really had grown somewhat compared to the time when people said I wasn’t a good match for Nanami. I guess it was that my efforts to address that issue had finally borne fruit.

For now, I should let myself enjoy this time that I was sharing with Nanami and everyone else.

“I’ve never eaten lunch with so many people before. This is pretty fun,” I let

out.

It seemed like everyone looked at me with gentle, comforting gazes when they heard that...but maybe I only imagined it.

Interlude: Piggybacks and Hugs

With the first day of the sports festival having gone without a hitch, we entered the second day of events.

I had so much fun on the first day, cheering on Yoshin, eating lunch with him, and being cheered on by him in return. It might have been the most fun sports festival I'd ever experienced.

I was also glad that Yoshin seemed able to enjoy the event too, even though he'd started out disliking it so much. Maybe the cheer I did for him in my cheerleading uniform worked—even if calling it a cheer was actually somewhat questionable.

I had to admit, though, that I didn't even realize everyone was peeping.

Just remembering it now makes me so embarrassed and angry. I mean, come on—you can't imagine the whirlwind of emotions I felt when I learned that all the girls had been spying on us.

At least I felt a little better when Yoshin cheered me on during my volleyball match in the afternoon. I would've never guessed that he would cheer for me so loudly.

There were plenty of occasions for me to cheer on Yoshin, but it was kind of rare for him to cheer me on instead. Though maybe that was simply because there were more situations when Yoshin needed to work hard at something—like with the match against senpai, or during summer school, or at his new part-time job. Though I guess he encouraged me when I did my part-time job too.

Come to think of it, the first time I cheered on Yoshin was when he played basketball against senpai. That was also the first time I said out loud that I liked him. Wow, that feels like so long ago, even though it really wasn't.

I said this yesterday too, but it felt like I'd been with Yoshin for a really long time, even though we hadn't been together all that long. We weren't even in the same class last year, so that wasn't even possible.

Would he have cheered for me if we had been in the same class last year? Though I guess his encouragement yesterday was more than enough to make up for that lack from last year.

When he cheered for me, I felt an indescribable strength start to course through my body; I didn't feel tired at all, and I felt like I could keep moving forever. I guess I could describe it as a sense of omnipotence or euphoria, but it really did feel like that was what overcame me.

According to Hatsumi and the others, I apparently felt that way because I was eager to have him see me doing well. Maybe because of that, we were actually able to win the first round. Our opponent was good, but I felt like our team was really good too. Though just because Yoshin was cheering for me, it didn't make me the star player of the game or anything. The fact that we had a member of the volleyball team in our class, and that Hatsumi—who's really athletic—was there too, probably helped a lot. I only managed to do the best I could. I was just happy that I managed to play better than usual, thanks to Yoshin's encouragement.

Unfortunately, we won the first round but lost in the second. We got pretty close though. If only I could jump higher...

Yoshin consoled me after we lost, and he also showered me with compliments. His telling me he knew how hard I worked made me so happy.

It really was nice to be commended by someone like that.

Yoshin always complimented me, even for the smallest things. When he liked my cooking, he told me so. When I wore cute clothes, he told me I looked good in them. Even if they were things I should know without him telling me, he would always put his thoughts into words.

I once asked him, "Why do you say all those nice things to me?" And he just said, "Because you won't know unless you say it."

I thought that meant that *I* wouldn't know, but he added that the "you" also included him—that unless *he* said it, he wouldn't know if *I* knew he thought that way.

It was then that I decided that I would compliment Yoshin lots too. I would

tell him when he looked handsome, and I would also tell him that I liked him. I even swore that I would never treat him poorly, even if we were in front of other people and I was super embarrassed about something he did.

So that was how the first day of the sports festival ended, but by then, Yoshin was clearly exhausted. It was obvious to anyone looking just how tired he was.

He himself insisted that he was fine, but his unwillingness to admit things like that was actually one thing I wanted us to work on.

Regardless of what he said, as soon as he got home he had fallen asleep, like a toy with its batteries used up. He was so cute; he was like a little kid. So I put a blanket over him as he slept, and then I left his house early to go home too. I had actually thought of putting on my cheerleading uniform again in his room, but I guess that would have to wait until next time.

I was remembering all that now, while I was standing beside Yoshin on the edge of the athletic field. It was almost our turn to participate in the piggyback race.

“Let’s kick some butt, huh?! Win first place?!” I shouted.

“Yeah, let’s kick...wait, you want to get *first place*?” Yoshin asked.

Well, I guess I’m only saying that to hype ourselves up. Seeing Yoshin caught so off guard by my exclamation, though, pumped me up even more.

Of course, we didn’t need to win the race. In all honesty, I’d be satisfied if we simply managed to *finish* the race. After all, Yoshin was going to have to carry me the whole time, and the weight of that...

The weight of that...wait. I’m not heavy, am I?

I mean, I’d been working hard to maintain my weight. I’d been on a pretty good exercise regimen too, and every now and then I even exercised with Yoshin. I was too embarrassed for us to practice running while I was actually on Yoshin’s back, so I just got piggyback rides from him in his room without us actually running anywhere. Still, I did everything I should have done. So if Yoshin said that I was heavy now, while we were standing here, I would probably cry.

Like, really, seriously cry. So much that Yoshin would probably find it super awkward. Though there probably wasn't any guy who *wouldn't* feel awkward seeing a high school girl cry her eyeballs out.

Just as I was about to tell myself that I would never enter this competition again if that happened...I remembered just what I thought about this piggyback race last year.

The piggyback race. Just as the name suggested, it was a simple competition where pairs would enter and run while one person gave a piggyback ride to or otherwise carried the other person toward the finish line.

There was no rule about how pairs had to carry each other, even though the name of the race was "piggyback." In other words, this was like another version of an obstacle course or a scavenger hunt. Just that the obstacle or thing to be found was a person.

I had actually disliked this competition last year, so I still couldn't believe that this year I was participating in it.

When we were first-years, Hatsumi and Ayumi learned about the event and said that they wished they could enter it with their own boyfriends. I, on the other hand, didn't feel that way at all. I felt bad for thinking this, but I even wished that the event would just utterly disappear from the sports festival itself.

All the participants looked like they were having fun, and in addition to coed pairs, there were pairs of guys and pairs of girls entering too. So, knowing full well that the event in fact *wouldn't* disappear, I kept my mouth shut. I didn't want to rain on other people's parades when they were having fun.

But, let me repeat: I disliked this competition. Or, maybe it was more accurate to say that I *came* to dislike the competition.

The reason for it wasn't complicated at all. If anything, it was really straightforward.

For last year's sports festival, a lot of guys asked if I wanted to enter this race with them. Quite a lot, to be honest. It must have been at least three guys per day, every day up until the deadline when we all had to submit what event we

were going to compete in.

I was asked in a lot of different places, in a lot of different ways. Some people asked themselves, while others asked through friends. I was asked so many times in so many ways that I couldn't even remember them all anymore. Guys who'd confessed to me before, guys I'd never talked to, guys who seemed like they were joking... There were so many different people.

Everyone around me teased me about it, saying how popular I was, but the whole thing was honestly pretty painful. I really couldn't stand it, even though I knew people didn't mean any ill will by asking, and that maybe I was even supposed to feel grateful to be asked so many times.

But I really couldn't help feeling so sick and tired of it all when I was just asked *so many freakin' times*.

So I declined all the invitations as politely as I could, since back then—and I guess even now too—I didn't want to be touching guys I didn't even know.

The more I declined, though, the more guilty I started to feel, to the point where a part of me wondered if I should just be more open to the idea. But I still said no, because I just didn't want to do it.

It wasn't until sometime around the point I was starting to doubt myself that I discovered that not everyone who asked me was doing it out of pure goodwill.

By sheer coincidence, I happened to overhear someone talking.

"I can get my fill of Barato's boobs if I give her a piggyback ride, right?"

Just a simple comment. Actually, they said lots of other things too, but I really didn't want to remember any of it. Some of it had me mildly traumatized.

It seemed that most people who asked me were only after my body.

I wanted to believe that not everyone felt that way, but after hearing that, I started to think that that was what motivated everyone.

And after that, I came to dislike the piggyback race itself.

That was what happened last year. And that was also why I had surprised even myself when I suggested to Yoshin that we enter it this year. Especially when there were other events that we could've entered together as well.

Maybe I chose this particular race so that I could wipe away all the negative feelings I'd been holding on to for nearly a year. Though that was something I'd only realized afterward.

Out of the guys I turned down last year, there must have been some who genuinely wanted to enjoy participating in the race with me. Come to think of it, Kenbuchi-kun asked me to enter the race too. Though he was clearly joking about it, so he probably didn't count.

In any case, I thought it was wrong to dislike an event for that reason.

I actually shared all this with Yoshin. He had asked me why I thought of competing in this race of all events the festival had, and I remembered it in the course of asking myself that question.

"In that case, we'll have to do our best so that we can get rid of those bad memories."

That was all Yoshin said, without saying whether he agreed or disagreed with what I felt. Still, that made me so happy—and had me leaping into his arms.

That was why I felt extremely motivated today. So motivated, in fact, that it seemed like all the negative feelings I had struggled with last year were things I had just imagined.

"So, shall we do a piggyback? Or should I carry you?" he asked me.

"Piggyback!" I shouted excitedly, raising my hands in the air.

Yoshin looked at me and smiled awkwardly, as though he almost didn't know what to do with me.

I so loved that bewildered smile of his.

Yoshin was probably thinking about what he would be feeling on his back soon. Honestly, he had no need to worry about something like that now. After all...

"You felt them the other day, so it's fine, right?" I whispered in his ear as I approached him to get onto his back. Yoshin quivered for a moment, but then he looked at me with a strange look in his eyes—some mix of bewilderment, shock, and embarrassment.

What's wrong? We've practiced piggyback rides so many times. Maybe he's embarrassed to actually do it in front of other people.

"Then, if it gets too uncomfortable, let me know, okay? I'll try to change things up," he replied.

"Um, okay. Sure. You too, if I'm..."

I stopped myself before I could say "too heavy." I was loath to have those words come out of my own mouth. *I'm not heavy. Well, maybe I'm a little heavy, but I'm not heavy. I might be contradicting myself, but I'm not heavy.*

"I work out, so you're totally light," Yoshin said with a raised fist, as though he was coming to my aid. I had no reason not to believe him, and yet...

"I know you don't mean it that way, but I feel like you're saying I *would* be heavy if you weren't working out. No, I mean, I know that's not what you're saying, but still," I whimpered.

"S-Sorry," Yoshin muttered.

"No, it's not your fault..." *This is entirely my problem. Girls are just complicated. But still, I know I'm being a total pain. Seriously...*

As I stood there feeling mortified and exasperated by my own idiocy, I felt someone come up beside me.

"I'm not gonna lose, Nanami-chan."

"I'm looking forward to this race, master!"

When I turned toward the voices, I saw Kotoha-chan already piggybacking on Teshikaga-kun. *We haven't even started, but that's how you guys are moving around already?*

Teshikaga-kun still seemed to be calling Yoshin "master." Yoshin was asking him to stop because it embarrassed him, but it seemed Teshikaga-kun often asked Yoshin about stuff related to Kotoha-chan. I guess this was another form of friendship, though I never thought that Yoshin and Teshikaga-kun would end up becoming friends.

"Go easy on me," Yoshin said to Teshikaga-kun.

“I’m prepared to learn a lot today!” he replied.

“Wait, what exactly are you planning to learn from a piggyback race?” Yoshin asked him, laughing awkwardly and seemingly bewildered. Yoshin seemed to have some reservations about the whole situation, but since he seemed to be having a good time regardless, I couldn’t help enjoying the situation myself. Except that whenever he smiled that way at someone else, I felt a pang in my chest.

No—no, no. I shouldn’t be getting jealous of his friend. Especially a guy friend. Maybe I need to be more open-minded about things...though not too open-minded. I just need to get some more practice at this, get used to things.

“You haven’t given me a piggyback ride since we were kids, huh?” Kotoha-chan said to Teshikaga-kun, voice full of nostalgia.

“Yeah. Compared to back then, you’ve gotten way heavier. When we were kids, you— Ugh!”

Before Teshikaga-kun could finish, Kotoha-chan punched him full force. I wondered how she managed to do that while being on his back. Kotoha-chan didn’t seem like the type to care about stuff like that, but even she seemed to dislike being told to her face that she was heavy. Actually, Kotoha-chan was so thin that she probably wasn’t heavy at all. Though maybe she was just upset because it was Teshikaga-kun saying it.

“K-Kotoha, why did you punch me?” Teshikaga-kun asked.

“Who are you calling *heavy*?” she growled.

“N-No! I just wanted to say that you’ve developed a lot since we were kids!”

“Taku-chan...let’s think before we speak, shall we?”

Teshikaga-kun, his shoulders dropping, gave a genuine apology. Having him—who, at the very least, *looked* like a delinquent—so under her thumb like that made Kotoha-chan seem almost like a beast tamer. It was no wonder people called her boss lady.

“So you two are competing together even though you’re in different classes?” Yoshin asked.

“It’s because our classes are still on the same team. Wait, how do you not know this?” Kotoha-chan said in reply.

I broke into an awkward smile when I heard Yoshin’s question. Given his aversion to sports festivals, Yoshin probably had zero interest in stuff like this. Once he heard Kotoha-chan’s explanation, though, things seemed to make sense to him.

If Yoshin managed to get over his distaste for the sports festival this year, that would make me happy too. Just like I was able to get over my dislike for this race.

“Oh, it’s almost starting. Shall we, Nanami?” Yoshin said, turning to me.

“Yeah!” I shouted, hopping onto Yoshin’s back as he knelt in front of me. How long had it been since the last time I’d done a piggyback ride like this in front of people?

A sense of safety began welling up inside me, just like I felt while we were practicing. When Yoshin gave me a piggyback ride, I remembered how my dad used to carry me like this when I was little. I thought that my dad’s back was so broad back then, but now that I was older, you’d think that I wouldn’t feel that way. Maybe, though, I still felt safe because Yoshin was pretty muscular.



“Hang on tight, Nanami. And tell me if it starts hurting, okay?” Yoshin said.

“Um, right,” I replied. I could understand why he’d tell me to hold on, but wouldn’t Yoshin be the one more likely to be hurt than me? Just as I grabbed on tightly to him, though, the signal for the start of the race echoed around us.

Everyone set off running at once, and Yoshin held back for just a moment before he, too, slowly began to run. I wondered for a moment why he would do that, but then I soon found out.

O-Ow! Huh? Wait, this hurts!

Yoshin ran slowly as he carried me on his back, but even then, my chest hurt. I was perfectly fine when he was just giving me a piggyback, but now it was super painful.

But this was a race, so I had to bear it. I just had to. Even as I kept telling myself that, though, Yoshin’s pace gradually slowed—and just like that, the pain in my chest subsided too.

I could hear the live commentary being delivered by the broadcasting club. They were speculating whether Yoshin had lost all desire to compete, and even joking whether I was too heavy.

Having come to a complete stop, Yoshin slowly let me off of his back. As I stood there, starting to get concerned if I was really that heavy, I suddenly felt myself being swept off my feet.

While I remained unable to process what was going on, I heard excited voices over the loudspeakers and cheers and squeals erupting all around us—because Yoshin had picked me up and was now carrying me sideways.

He was, in other words, doing the princess carry.

When I finally understood what was going on, I found myself putting my arms around Yoshin’s neck without even thinking. Then, Yoshin looked down at me and whispered, “Okay, Nanami—here we go!”

“Y-Yeah!” I stammered.

My heart leaped when I saw his face, lit up from behind by the sun. Even though he hadn’t said anything terribly romantic, my heart still started to

pound.

As soon as I gave my assent, I felt my body being pulled backward.

Yoshin was now off and running, moving so much faster than he had before. Maybe because we had been going at a more relaxed pace earlier, but now I felt more keenly the breeze that swept over me.

Probably because we had our little hiatus, a few people had already crossed the finish line. Still, everyone was watching us. People all around us were cheering and shouting.

“Wow, wow! This is so much fun!” I shouted, feeling giddy in Yoshin’s arms. Not even my dad had done anything like this for me before.

Still laughing, I tightened my hold around Yoshin—until we crossed the finish line together, just like that.



To offer a sequel, or perhaps, the punch line...

Once Yoshin crossed the finish line and let me down, he immediately sat down on the spot with his arms quivering. He seemed to have exhausted himself by carrying me princess style the whole way.

When I told him that a piggyback would’ve been fine if carrying me was so hard, Yoshin laughed somewhat angrily, his arms still quaking, and asked, “Your chest was hurting, but you didn’t say anything, did you?”

My heart skipped a beat from nervousness, but at the same time, it warmed me to know he noticed I was in pain. Even though all I was doing was clinging to his back.

“You were gripping me pretty tight back there, and...” he began.

“And?” I repeated, now curious.

“Your chest is large, so I thought it might hurt. I just hesitated to bring it up because it was about your chest, I guess.”

That was why he told me to let him know if it started hurting. He must have realized that he had been right to worry, and decided on his own to switch

things up, despite the fact that that was more difficult for him.

We didn't get first place, but *this* was the best prize I could've gotten.

When I glanced around, I saw that the pair that won first place was getting interviewed. Since the interviews seemed to be happening in order of how we'd placed, we had to move to our own spot.

"Here, Yoshin—take my hand," I said, extending my hand out toward him.

"Oh, thanks," he said.

As I helped him stand up, I pulled his hand pretty strongly. Maybe because of both the momentum and his exhaustion, but he ended up leaning into me, just as I had planned.

And right then and there, I kissed him on the cheek surreptitiously, as though to give him the winning prize.

Everyone was focused on the pair that had won first place, so they didn't notice what we'd done. Yoshin pressed his hand to his cheek, as if in shock.

His arms weren't quivering anymore.

This was just between me and Yoshin...

"Wow, master. I can't believe you're kissing out on the field like that."

"You wanna do it too, Taku-chan?"

Whoopsie, I guess Kotoha-chan and Teshikaga-kun saw us. Oh, well. I guess it's fine if it's them.

Today, the event that I loathed with all my might became my favorite. And it was all thanks to Yoshin.

To divert attention away from what I'd just done, I leaped in to hug Yoshin...but due to mild shell shock, he couldn't catch me in time. Needless to say, the two of us fell to the ground together once again.

Chapter 3: The Courage to Extend the Invitation

“Mai-chan, Mai-chan. Is it true that you’re going to Hawaii for your class trip?”

“It seems so...”

Yu-senpai popped her sudden question while we were on break at work, her eyes twinkling with excitement. It was true: Our class trip this year was apparently to Hawaii, and I had to start prepping for it soon.

I had to apply for a passport, submit necessary forms, buy various necessities... I also had to look up what to do while we were on the trip itself.

“Oh man, that’s so nice. I’m so jealous that you get to go abroad for a school event. Hey, could I come too? Claim that I’m your stepsister?” she asked.

“How can I claim to have a stepsister when I’m supposed to be an only child?”

“Cause we work together, and we can claim that we always have to be in *step* with each other.”

“*That* kind of a step?!” I hollered.

We were talking about the dumbest thing, but there were actually several things about the class trip that concerned me. Though there were lots of fun elements too, of course.

I found myself recalling something that happened not too long ago...



“You two do far too much PDA.”

That was what I...no, we were told out of the blue. The declaration came with zero preamble, and it took me some time to understand what the words even meant.

Being called up by the teacher was a common occurrence for me, but this time was different. This time around I was called to what looked like a reception room with a very classy sofa, where I sat in front of the teacher across yet

another very classy coffee table.

Maybe because I usually sat on a normal chair in the faculty room, the sofa into which I was now sinking felt weird to me. Even my knees looked like they were positioned higher than usual.

Plus, this time, Nanami was sitting alongside me.

Nanami and I sat next to each other and were talking with the teacher sitting across from us. He'd even served us tea, so I knew that today there was something different going on. And *that* was when he dropped that particular bombshell.

Nanami and I collectively felt shy and embarrassed.

"Gee, I feel so bashful when you compliment us like that," I said.

"For crying out loud, that was not a compliment," the teacher groaned.

Of course I knew that, but I had to attempt to say *something* funny in order to lighten up the mood. Nanami, too, pressed one of her fingers onto her cheek as she turned away, blushing.

The teacher must have understood what we were trying to do, because he looked at us as though seeing a refreshing sight, even as he smiled awkwardly. Even though how he looked at us didn't match at all what was coming out of his mouth.

"But sir, I don't remember us getting so cuddly recently that we'd end up getting called up now, of all times," I explained.

"Right, right! We just got a talking-to the other day for the whole school festival thing! Of course we've been more careful," Nanami added.

"Are you guys being serious right now?" the teacher asked as if he were exasperated. Wait, I guess it wasn't *if*—he actually *was* exasperated.

But it was just as Nanami said. I could understand why they called us up a little while ago. After all, Nanami and I had kissed in front of everyone.

That was precisely why being called up this time didn't make sense to us.

The teacher, though, asked point-blank, "You two were kissing at the sports

festival too, weren't you?"

Shoot...he knows.

Nanami and I both looked in opposite directions, pretending not to know what he was talking about. We hadn't explicitly admitted to our crime, so we were hopeful that we'd be able to get through this somehow.

The teacher, though, stared—nay, *glared*—at us with narrowed eyes. His gaze basically told us that he wasn't going to stop glaring until we confessed.

"Look, I'm pretty sure that not that many people noticed. But I honestly had to ask myself what you two thought you were doing," he mumbled in dismay.

I was relieved by what he said, but it did make me think that maybe we'd overdone it again. We'd just been given a warning after the school festival, but we'd gone and done it again on the athletic field.

"But sensei, why is Yoshin being called up too when it was me who did it?" Nanami asked.

"Huh? Because if I only talked to you it would start unnecessary speculation. Besides, stuff like this is always handled on the basis of joint responsibility," he explained.

"Seriously? So Yoshin has to get yelled at for something *I* did?" Nanami wailed.

Even though she was protesting like the teacher wasn't making any sense, I agreed with him, given that I believed that the moment I had failed to stop Nanami, I became responsible for what happened as well.

Besides...

"It's better for me to get yelled at alongside you, instead of you having to take it all on by yourself. We should share burdens like these, instead of you getting all sad alone," I said.

"Yoshin," Nanami said, looking at me dreamily.

"So, sensei, if you're going to scold us, please take it out on me and go easy on Nanami," I finished.

“Can’t you guys stop flirting even *now*?” the teacher asked, trying to put a stop to things.

Still, we couldn’t help it. I wasn’t defending Nanami for no reason; I would scold her too if she actually did something bad. Even though I’d never run into a situation like that.

“Anyway, sorry to burst your bubble, but I didn’t call you guys in here today to discipline you like I always do,” he said.

“You’re not...disciplining us?” I repeated.

“That’s right. That’s why I had you guys come here, instead of the faculty room.” He went on to add that if we were in the faculty room like usual, other people would have been able to watch our meeting.

I see, so that was why we came to a place we otherwise wouldn’t. Hearing that we weren’t, in fact, getting scolded, both Nanami and I relaxed a bit.

But if that was the case, I had to come back to my original question: *why are we here at all?*

The teacher donned a somewhat solemn expression, and then he picked up the cup of tea that was on the table before him and gulped it down in one go. Next, he clasped his hands together and opened his mouth slowly, as though to match the gravity of the look on his face.

“To cut a long story short, concerns have been raised about whether it’s okay to have the two of you be in the same group for the class trip,” he finally said.

Huh?

Nanami and I froze at the unexpected declaration. *On the class trip...what? Why is that a worry?* My head was quickly filling with questions.

Seeing us completely speechless at this shocking turn of events, the teacher continued by saying, “You guys kissed onstage at the school festival, and then you kissed on the field at the sports festival...though luckily we were able to bluff our way through that because not that many people witnessed it,” the teacher continued. “Now, though, people are thinking you guys are going to get yourselves in a *lot* of trouble during the class trip, seeing how often you’ve been

skirting the lines of inappropriate conduct.”

Upon hearing his explanation, Nanami and I just looked at each other. We couldn’t argue with him at all. Did we have to accept that we were reaping what we sowed?

Still, to have people question whether we’d be okay being in the same group... *Hey, wait a minute. The groups for our class trip?*

“We haven’t decided on the groups yet, have we?” I asked.

“We haven’t, but I certainly wouldn’t be surprised if you two planned on being in the same group,” the teacher pressed, as though he already knew how this story was going to end.

I mean, you’re right, but still. I had been hoping that Nanami and I would end up in the same group, but since I didn’t know how these things were decided, it was mostly just wishful thinking on my part.

“It’s not like we draw straws or anything?” I asked.

“It’s a class trip, so usually five or six people get together and just make their own groups. Sometimes different groups get together and move around en masse,” the teacher explained.

I felt guilty about asking him how groups were made without meaning to, but more importantly, it was a relief to learn that students could form whatever groups they liked. I was glad that we didn’t have to draw straws, or make groups with only guys or only girls. I guess it was still too early for me to feel at ease though.

“So, people are worried about me and Nanami being in the same group?” I repeated.

“That’s right. There are concerns that you’ll just spend all day making out with each other if you’re in the same group. Regardless of what it’s like, a ‘class trip’ is still a part of class,” the teacher said.

“But Nanami and I definitely go to class, and it’s not like we’re that irresponsible. I feel like this is getting blown out of proportion,” I protested.

“Ohhh, no. Even if it’s a ‘class’ trip, it’s still a *trip*. They’re worried that you

two are gonna get carried away and cross some boundaries that high schoolers shouldn't be crossing."

When he added that we had already done such a thing twice in a row, it was extremely difficult to defend ourselves.

I guess I could understand that a class trip was still part of class. I wished that they'd emphasized the trip aspect of it instead, though.

Still, I didn't realize some of the teachers were *that* worried about us. This was bad. Were Nanami and I flirting at school that much? But it wasn't like we did any of it on purpose, though.

"I know it seems like I'm the bearer of bad news here, but I don't think you two have to worry about it that much," the teacher added. "It's not like we're gonna forbid you two from being in the same group or anything."

"But the fact that you told us about it in the first place must mean that there are still concerns, right?" I asked.

"Well, yeah. Some of the teachers just like to gossip, that's all," the teacher mumbled.

I see, I see. Maybe they weren't going to explicitly forbid me and Nanami from being in the same group, but they'd keep a pretty close watch on us if we were to be. I was grateful that our teacher, for one, was going to let us stay together, so much so that I wanted to bow to him in appreciation. Despite all these concerns, I wanted to do my best to prevent my trip with Nanami—even if it was a class trip—from being ruined.

As I sat there trying to come up with good ideas for the trip, the teacher opened his mouth again to declare, "That's why you two need to get the highest possible grades you can on the next midterm exams. At least ninety percent across all subjects should be good."

"Huh? What do you mean?" I couldn't help asking, somewhat taken aback by his sudden remark. And he was asking for above ninety percent, for starters. Just who did he think he was talking to? I was someone who had to take supplementary classes during summer school.

I remained confused, but Nanami seemed to have understood what the

teacher was suggesting, as she let out a soft “ahhh.” *Uh...huh?*

“There are midterms before the class trip. It’s scheduled that way so that things are wrapped up before we take off, and the teachers can finish grading before the trip too,” the teacher began, explaining to me the purpose of the midterms as I sat there, still not following. That made sense, since having the midterms come *after* the trip would prevent anyone from fully enjoying the experience. However that might have more to do with the drastic difference between the high of the trip and the low of exam season making it difficult for anyone to be motivated enough to do well on the tests.

But what did that have anything to do with getting good grades on the tests *before* the trip?

“Are you trying to say that I’ll have to take supplementary classes during the trip if I get bad grades on the exams? Or that if I do so badly, I can’t go on the trip at all?” I muttered.

“That’s not gonna happen. We wouldn’t want to be stuck giving supplementary classes while we’re on the trip either,” the teacher replied immediately.

I could understand that. The teacher also added that the midterms usually had no bearing on the class trip. If that was the case, though, why was he bringing it up now?

“Your behavior is what’s under the microscope here. We’re talking about whether this couple of adorkables who are constantly behaving inappropriately aren’t going to eventually stir up more trouble,” he elaborated.

Now even the teacher was calling us adorkable. Did we seem that way, even to him? I guess we must have. But being told that we could be troublemakers too was kind of upsetting to me. The concern might apply to me, but Nanami...wouldn’t...

In that moment, though, Nanami’s recent behavior replayed in my mind like a film reel.

Wasn’t this something that happened when your brain was desperately trying to find a solution to some kind of problem? Either way, I couldn’t seem to

identify anything in this mental rewind that would help get us out of this mess.

“We’re, uh...*not* going to cause any problems,” I squeaked out.

“Can you at least look me in the eye when you say that?” the teacher muttered in return.

Okay, maybe saying it while looking anywhere *but* the teacher wasn’t terribly convincing. Nanami was nodding too, though she had a forced smile plastered to her face.

Seeing the two of us in such a state, though, the teacher smiled awkwardly and sighed, saying, “Well, to be honest, the problem you two represent really depends on who you ask. The school nurse, for one, is the type that says anything goes as long as you don’t make a kid.” The teacher went on to add that that kind of viewpoint, however, could be problematic in and of itself. It seemed that even among the faculty the school nurse was an anomaly.

Still, I had to bear in mind that there were people who *did* think we were a problem.

“What I’m trying to say is, not all teachers think about this the same way. As long as you don’t *actually* cause any problems, I’ll do what I can to protect you two. Hence...the midterm exams,” the teacher stated.

“As in, we might have caused some problems in the past, but if our grades go up, then we’ll be left alone?” I asked.

“That’s right. And in your case, Misumai, we might even be able to argue that since your grades went up *after* getting a girlfriend, if we come down too hard on you now, your grades could go back down,” the teacher added, dramatically opening his palms and sarcastically concluding, “when, of course, doing well in school should be every student’s primary job.”

Of course—at this school, it was possible to get away with some things as long as your grades were good. The way Nanami dressed, or even Shirishizu-san’s transformation, was a good example. Maybe Teshikaga-kun was another such case too. That was why the teacher was saying he was willing to have our back as long as we got good grades.

I appreciated his offer greatly. I did, but after considering all possible options

available, I asked weakly, “Could we maybe, perhaps, set the goal to seventy percent instead?” Just saying the words made me feel like spewing blood.

The teacher sighed, as though in exasperation.

Oh, come on—I’m doing my best, but I can tell you right now that getting over ninety percent just isn’t possible.

I knew I sounded pathetic, but the actual outcome was somewhat unexpected.

“Well, I guess in your case, getting over seventy still counts as working hard, huh?” the teacher wondered out loud.

“That’s right, sir! Yoshin is working super hard!” Nanami followed, in immediate reinforcement of the teacher’s thought. She even moved to cradle my head and started stroking my hair, adding, “Yoshin can do anything if he puts his mind to it! So it’s really important to commend him for setting such a goal in the first place!”

“All right, Barato. How about you take a minute to think very carefully about what I just said?” the teacher said to Nanami, who was still patting my head with a serious look on her face. His expression was extremely stern as he turned to Nanami with a serious look in his eyes. Obviously he thought that we were being too intimate with each other, despite the fact that we’d just been warned about it. Still, being touched by Nanami like this in front of the teacher was...

“Why is it that the more diligent the student is, the more idiotic they get about the person they like?” the teacher murmured.

I wondered who else he was talking about, but since I had a few guesses, I decided not to say anything. I probably wasn’t wrong about who I had in mind anyway.

The teacher’s words, spoken with an undeniable sense of resignation, thus continued to ring in my ears.



“So that’s what happened. And now I have to study for midterms *and* prep for the trip,” I said with a sigh.

“Wait, isn’t it easy to hit seventy percent, as long as you study like normal?” Yu-senpai asked.

She’s one of those. I wasn’t expecting Yu-senpai to say something like that, so I had to admit I was a bit surprised.

“You’re probably the type to get good grades, aren’t you?” I asked her.

“Shocking, right? But given how I look, it’s just better if my grades are good,” she explained.

Oh, I see. Nanami said something similar: as long as you keep your grades up, the school won’t say anything about your appearance.

Yu-senpai probably worked hard so that she could be the kind of person she chose to be. Now I felt embarrassed for having been surprised by her comment.

“I figured if I looked like this *and* was pretty smart, someone just had to fall in love with me because of the unexpected combo. But you know, it didn’t work at all,” she declared.

Okay, I take back what I just thought.

But it just went to show that everyone had their own ways of motivating themselves to study. Wanting to be popular was a very respectable reason. But I still couldn’t shake off an odd feeling I had.

“Haven’t a lot of guys confessed to you, though?” I asked Yu-senpai.

“Well, I’ve no clue why, but for some odd reason I only get confessions from guys who already have girlfriends. Single people never seem interested in me,” she replied, genuinely sad. Come to think of it, she had mentioned how she had been tangled up in weird troubles in the past because she had trouble with boundaries. Was that separate from her desire to be liked, though? She seemed to want a boyfriend, after all. And the moment I remembered that about her, I pictured in my head the face of one of my own guy friends.

“Actually, one of my friends said that he wanted to be popular with the girls and get a girlfriend too,” I let out.

“Oh, one of your friends? Yeah, that’s totally normal for a high schooler to feel, right? You’d wanna be popular, right?” she pressed.

“If he ever comes here to eat, please be his server.”

“Sure thing! If it’s for your friend, I’ll definitely treat him well,” Yu-senpai said, now in a very good mood and dancing around as she continued prepping the restaurant for opening. Customers were about to start coming in, so this was probably the end of our idle chitchat for the day.

“Anyway, my grades tend to be pretty good, so I can tutor you if you ever need it. Just let me know,” she offered.

“Thank you. I’ve got Nanami, so I’ll be fine. But I appreciate the offer,” I replied.

“Oh darn, so you already have a tutor, huh? What a shame, I was gonna give you lessons in my tutor cosplay and everything.”

“I’m pretty sure *that’s* why weird guys keep coming on to you,” I muttered.



Yeah, Yu-senpai really had no clue how to maintain proper distance from people. She was super helpful, and I knew she was a good person, but I also had a feeling I should never keep anything Yu-senpai-related a secret from Nanami.

Yu-senpai, meanwhile, was getting all downcast, murmuring to herself, “But if they have a girlfriend, you should be able to rest easy that they won’t do anything weird to you.”

Maybe she was just pure, or simpleminded, or even completely oblivious to the ill will of others.

“Well, then maybe I can ask you something,” I started. “What’s a good way to stay motivated while studying?”

“That should be really easy for you right now,” she replied. “You just need a goal.”

“Huh? Oh, I see. Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

The teacher’s suggestion of getting my grades up was so that I could minimize potential problems for me and Nanami. Maybe that was enough to be my motivation?

Enjoy the class trip with Nanami.

Just by thinking that, I felt like I could work hard at anything. Just as I was getting myself fired up, though, Yu-senpai gave me an unexpected warning.

“Mai-chan, you should understand one thing. The class trip started from the moment it was announced,” she said solemnly.

“Uh, what does that mean...?”

“It means that even prepping for it is fun! Studying is important too, but make sure you enjoy all of the stuff beforehand too, okay?”

I see. Just like how a field trip ends only once you’ve arrived safely home, I guess even the preparations should be considered part of the trip too. Thinking about it now, prepping for the school festival was a lot of fun as well.

I didn’t remember anything about my class trip from middle school, so this upcoming one might as well be my first. If that was the case, I would miss out

on a lot of things if I didn't in fact enjoy all the prep work too.

"Thank you," I said to Yu-senpai, to which she returned a very brilliant smile. *She's right; I've gotta enjoy everything I'm doing with Nanami, even now.*

I'll work hard at my studies and part-time job, and I'll enjoy the class trip to its fullest. Even the thought of being really busy had me excited—which was completely out of character for me.

For starters, I should work hard *today*, now, at the restaurant.

"So, Mai-chan. When that friend of yours comes to the restaurant, do you think I should feed him his food?" Yu-senpai asked.

"Is that even legal?" I asked.

That would probably...no, *definitely* make Hitoshi happy. But was Yu-senpai even allowed to do something like that? At that moment I thought that for both their sakes, I should look into whether that was something Yu-senpai was allowed to do.



The preparations for a class trip were very important.

That was especially the case this time, since our destination was in that far off unknown called "overseas." In other words, that world was filled with fears and expectations that I couldn't even imagine in my present state.

When you were going off to such an unknown place, it simply wasn't possible to be overprepared. In order to be as ready as possible for what was to come, even the smallest of details had to be researched.

Therefore, as part of our preparations, Nanami and I decided to go on a shopping date today.

Maybe it didn't qualify as an actual date, but since we'd been having a lot of school events lately, our alone time tended to be more relaxing. We of course still did fun stuff together, but even then, we opted more times than not to just hang out in our rooms and chill. We would buy snacks at a convenience store, sit in one of our rooms, and just talk. Plus if we were at home, we could lie down and rest whenever we felt like it.

Except that it was becoming the norm for Nanami to, um...lie down next to me whenever I lay down on the floor. That always made me a little nervous.

The fact that I couldn't do the same when Nanami was the one lying down was something I had to work on. Unless Nanami explicitly invited me, I just couldn't bring myself to go and lie down next to her. If only I could be a little bit more proactive... Oh, wait. I'm getting off topic. Today was supposed to be all about our shopping date. Our first date in a long while, in fact.

"All righty! Let's go get ourselves some sunglasses!" Nanami said, raising her hand in the air.

"Right on," I replied, mimicking her movement. We had lots of other things to buy too, but our main target today was the sunglasses.

Given that I'd never even bought a regular pair of glasses before, shopping for sunglasses seemed like a big task to me. But since I was with Nanami for this, I felt like I could manage it without being overly intimidated. I guess there were just some things that—even though they shouldn't be a big deal—seemed a challenge to buy, mentally speaking. And I wasn't even talking about pervy stuff.

Maybe it was because we were going to buy sunglasses, but Nanami's outfit today was on the sexier side; she wore a lacy, oversized sweater that slipped off her shoulders, along with fitted, form-flattering jeans that perfectly highlighted all her curves.

Maybe because the top was somewhat revealing, but she was also wearing a necklace to fill in the open space around her collarbones. I had a feeling that once she added sunglasses to the look, she'd appear quite cool and stylish.

I was wearing normal clothes that didn't necessarily pair well with sunglasses, but I wanted to think that I was dressing a lot better than my all-black looks back in the day. For today, I wore a white shirt and a largish black sweater on top, and a pair of khaki-colored chinos on the bottom. Though to tell the truth, I was wearing an outfit that Nanami had picked out for me.

I had asked her at the store if I looked good in it, and she had said yes—which made me happy and propelled me to purchase the entire outfit. I had to admit, I was a pretty simple guy.

“Your outfit today looks sexy and cool, Nanami,” I told her.

“Thanks! Your outfit looks nice on you too. You look really cute,” she replied.

It tickled me that we complimented each other like this, but I knew it was important: to tell each other when the other looked good or cute...

“Wait, I look *cute*?” I had to ask.

“Yeah, totally! The silhouette and stuff looks really cute,” she reiterated.

I looked down at myself, but the word “cute” definitely did not come to mind. *This...is cute?* There seemed to be a gap between my sensibilities and Nanami’s, which made me feel a little awkward. I guess this was what happened when you failed to study fashion and style as you were growing up.

“This is considered cute, huh? Sure, I can definitely say that when it comes to you, but me...” I muttered.

“Huh? Really? Sometimes I look at myself and think that I’m totally cute too,” Nanami returned.

“But that’s because you actually *are* cute.”

Nanami beamed at my response, then giggled a bit. *Yeah, when I look at Nanami, it’s so easy to think just how cute she is. Cuteness is justice, indeed.*

“Well, then. If I may perhaps take Nanami-san’s hand,” I said.

“Oooh, then I might just go ahead and hold my dear, cute Yoshin’s hand too,” she replied.

We both reached out for the other’s hand and started making our way toward the shop we’d picked out. We were planning to go to a lot of different stores if time permitted, but we had one specific place in mind as our main destination.

I’d looked up a lot of things about Hawaii in the last few days, and I found out several interesting things—like the sunshine there, for example.

Although we were traveling there in the offseason, the sun’s rays were apparently still very strong, much stronger than they were in Japan. Like, incomparably so. That was why it was imperative to pack things like hats and sunblock with a high SPF. Another must-have item was a pair of sunglasses.

I had always assumed that sunglasses were something that...well, extroverts and party people bought for the sake of fashion. Apparently, though, that wasn't the case.

"I had no idea your eyeballs could get sunburned. That's super scary," I murmured.

"Seriously. Just the idea of it kinda freaks me out," Nanami agreed.

"Maybe there's some kind of sunblock for your eyes? You know, like eye drops or something," I suggested.

"I looked it up, but I couldn't really find anything. Though I did find stuff you could use *after* you'd gotten sunburned."

Maybe it was common knowledge, but Nanami hadn't seemed to know either.

Therefore, as a protective measure against such a thing, we decided to come and buy sunglasses today. I had totally assumed that Nanami already owned a pair, but that seemed not to be the case.

"I've never been abroad either. In fact, I don't think I've ever even been on a plane," she shared.

"Oh, really? What did you do for your middle school class trip, then?" I asked.

"We took the train. What about you?"

"I haven't been on an airplane either. I think we took the bus and the train too."

Nanami smiled happily at that, saying that we were getting to share yet another first for the both of us. Just seeing that smile of hers made me want to praise my past self. *Great job never flying anywhere, Yoshin.*

How many more firsts would Nanami and I share in the future? Just this small discovery was going to make the class trip unforgettable for me.

Just as I was fully getting into feelings about this turn of events, I saw Nanami suddenly adopt a look of consternation. It looked like a complex mix of regret and distress.

“What’s wrong?” I quickly asked.

“Oh, I was just thinking...that if only I hadn’t made my glasses already, we could’ve made this date another shared first for us,” she replied.

Ah, I see. Nanami wears glasses regularly, so she already has a pair.

Fortunately, in a way, I had good eyesight and didn’t need to wear glasses, so I’d never even thought about it. I didn’t own a pair of glasses for the sake of fashion either. If anything, going to buy a pair together with Nanami felt kind of strange.

“But, I mean, you don’t own *sunglasses*, right? We can share the experience of getting our first pairs of sunglasses,” I remarked.

“Mmm, yeah, I guess that’s true. Plus I’ve been dying to see you in glasses. I’m looking forward to that. Like, a lot,” she said.

“You’ve felt that strongly about it?” I had to ask.

“We talked about it when we went to see the nightscape, remember? When I said that I wanted to see you wearing glasses?”

Wait, did she say that? I can’t remember it for some reason. Was I just too keyed up about giving Nanami her present back then?

As I wrung my neck in an attempt to remember, I felt someone looking at me.

It wasn’t a good stare. It was more of a heavy, damp gaze, like a wet towel being dragged against my skin.

Of course, the only person here who would look at me that way was Nanami.

She seemed upset that I didn’t remember that particular conversation. Even though I had managed to lift her spirits a bit, my blunder had us back at square one.

“I’m sorry, I don’t remember it at all,” I confessed.

“Jeez. But since you are honest about it, I’ll forgive you,” she said, acknowledging my sincerity. Though I felt like she wasn’t actually that angry in the first place.

Nanami then let go of my hand and proceeded to hug my entire arm tightly.

Having linked our arms thus, I had direct contact with the softness of her body. I knew that we sometimes lay down together to relax, but moving around while being so close to each other was different. I felt like I had gotten used to walking around while linking our arms like this. I was pretty sure I was more smooth than I used to be.

“I guess you were juggling a lot back then. Like your fear of heights and stuff,” Nanami mentioned.

“Oh, yeah, true. There was that, wasn’t there,” I replied noncommittally.

Maybe the fear I was feeling at the time wiped all sorts of different details from my memory. Honestly, I couldn’t remember one bit of the conversation Nanami was mentioning.

“But that reminds me, you know how you’re bad with heights, right? Are you gonna be okay being on an airplane?” Nanami asked.

“Oh, true! Who knows.”

“You didn’t know back then that you were scared of heights either. Maybe you won’t be able to tell this time either until you get there, huh?” she commented.

Nanami was right, though: *was* I going to be okay? My potentially being afraid of flying hadn’t even crossed my mind. But maybe being high up on an airplane—higher up than I’d ever been and divorced from any reality I knew—would actually turn out okay for me.

Still, given that I’d never been on a plane, I couldn’t say for sure. I guess I’d just have to wait and see. Was there a countermeasure for acrophobia, just like there was a countermeasure for UV rays?

If the time came and I couldn’t handle it, I’d just have to be prepared for my classmates to see me in a pretty vulnerable state.

“I don’t want you to force yourself, but I also want to go on the class trip with you. I guess this must be what an antonym is,” Nanami wondered aloud.

“Well, it’s just for a little while, so I’ll just have to tough it out. I wanna go on the class trip with you too.”

“But isn’t the flight supposed to be like eight hours long?”

E-Eight...? What is with that unholy number? Is it even okay to be in any vehicle for that long? That might be worse than the whole height thing.

The thought unnerved me, and seeing me in my agitated state, Nanami must have thought I was worried about being at such a high altitude. She smoothly went from linking arms with me to holding my hand. This was different from the way we usually held hands, because our arms were still entwined, and yet her hand was now clasping mine. Our limbs looked like some kind of complicated puzzle.

“Don’t worry. If you feel anxious, I’ll hold your hand the whole time,” she said, flashing me a toothy grin as she proceeded to press her body onto mine. She was right: if Nanami was holding my hand, I probably wouldn’t feel nervous at all.

Well, all right, I guess that didn’t actually work the last time we found ourselves at a high altitude. But that was sudden! If I knew about it beforehand, I could probably muster up some courage.

“I hope we sit next to each other on the flight too,” I said.

“Yeah! Maybe we can change seats if we’re not put together at first,” Nanami remarked.

I had wondered about that too. When I looked it up, it seemed we would all be assigned seats on the plane. Maybe that meant we *weren’t* allowed to change things willy-nilly. Or was it possible to switch if both parties agreed? Like, were they really going to go around checking if everyone was sitting in their assigned seats?

That could be something I looked into over the coming weeks. Since people thought we flirted too much, were we even allowed to sit together on the plane, though? It was, at the very least, a legitimate concern. I guess I just had to work harder at my studies.

“Well, then. As our first step in our trip preparations, shall we go get some sunglasses?” I asked.

“Yeah! Let’s find some cute ones!” Nanami exclaimed.

We thus made our way to a specialty shop that was located inside a department store, one where Nanami also purchased her regular glasses. The shop was pretty large, and it had a unique scent that was different from what I knew from other stores.

A bookstore smelled like books. A hair salon smelled like styling products. An eatery smelled like the food it served. I'd smelled a lot of different smells at businesses before, but this scent was new to me.

As soon as we entered, Nanami was approached by an employee of the store.

"Oh, Nanami-chan! Long time no see. What brings you in today?"

The employee had a soft demeanor, despite her somewhat narrowed eyes, and had her brown hair tied back. She wore a suit—probably the uniform for store employees—and overall had the feeling of a slightly older sister.

"Hee hee, long time no see! I came to look at some sunglasses today, with my, um, boyfriend," Nanami said shyly.

I had never experienced having a retail associate come up and talk to me, so I didn't know what I was supposed to do. Nanami, though, responded to the woman with complete ease.

I bowed slightly to the woman, thinking that it would be rude of me not to say hello to her after having been introduced. I wasn't sure what to say, so I just gave a common greeting.

The associate looked between me and Nanami, then smiled very broadly and said happily, "Well, well, well!"

I thought I saw tears gathering in the corners of her eyes.

"Oh, dear. I'd heard about it, but you really did find yourself a boyfriend! Is it all right if I congratulate you?" the woman asked.

She'd heard about it? Huh? How do the people here even know Nanami and I are dating?

"Tee hee, thank you. But you're being too dramatic, Kasumi-san," Nanami returned.

"What are you talking about? I am *not* being dramatic. Oh, but you're here for

sunglasses, you said? Why don't you two have a seat over here first. I'll bring you some tea."

Huh? Tea? What in the world is going on? In what world are you served tea while buying glasses?

I couldn't help fidgeting after sitting down in the seat I was led to. There was no way I could remain calm when I was experiencing such an unfamiliar kind of customer service.

I looked around the store, acting like a total country mouse in the big city. Was Nanami embarrassed by my behavior? When I glanced over at her, though, I saw that she was extremely calm, like she encountered situations like this all the time. Seeing her helped calm me down somewhat too.

"Um, who's Kasumi-san?" I asked Nanami.

"Kasumi-san is actually my mom's friend. Maybe my mom's kohai? She's just a few years younger, I think," she explained.

Oh, I see, she's Tomoko-san's friend. And that's how she knows that Nanami got a boyfriend. It made sense that conversations among mothers sometimes turned to the topic of their children. And they also seemed kind of similar, like they were the same type, even though that wasn't *because* they were friends.

Hey, wait a minute. A kohai? Just a few years younger? She seems just slightly older than us. You're saying she's actually the same age as our moms? She doesn't look it at all. She looks really young. I know I shouldn't bring up age that much, but it's actually kind of shocking.

"Were you surprised too? Kasumi-san seems really young, right? My mom is always talking about how jealous she is of Kasumi-san," Nanami remarked.

"How did you know I was surprised?" I asked.

"Because you react the same way I do when I'm surprised. She seems like she's just a few years older than *us*, right?"

"Oh, so you must've gone through the same thing."

"Yeah. When I was in elementary... Wait, now that I think about it, Kasumi-san looks exactly the same now as she did when I was in elementary school,"

Nanami said aloud, now her turn to be shocked. It seemed different from the surprise I experienced, though. Every now and then there seemed to be people like this popping up in life. Wasn't there some famous person also like this?

"Here you go now," we heard Kasumi-san say as she placed drinks of a golden hue with a slight green tint before us. The color seemed more vibrant because of the white cups in which the drinks were served.

They were warm tea, with steam gently rising from it. When I picked up the cup in my hands, its comforting warmth seeped into me.

"And what kind of sunglasses are you looking for today? Is it to commemorate the fact that you two are a couple?" Kasumi-san asked.

"Oh, um, we're going to Hawaii for our class trip this year. So, we thought we should get sunglasses to help protect our eyes," I explained to Kasumi-san, finding that Nanami still hadn't snapped out of her state of astonishment. Kasumi-san, in turn, smiled at me happily.

The look in her eyes somehow embarrassed me. I took a sip of my tea so that she wouldn't notice. *Oh, this is good. It almost tastes sweet—and comforting.*

"Nanami-chan's boyfriend...um..." Kasumi-san began.

"Misumai. I'm Yoshin Misumai. It's a pleasure to meet you," I offered.

"Yes, Yoshin-kun. Yoshin-kun...got it. I'll remember that," she replied, smiling once again. Maybe because the tea had gotten me all relaxed, but I couldn't help smiling back. Kasumi-san's smile was the kind that put people at ease.

"And you started dating Nanami-chan this year?" she asked.

"Uh, yes. Um, I guess, we started dating right at the beginning of the school year, so it's been almost half a year," I explained.

"Have you seen Nanami-chan in glasses before? She looks adorable. I recommended them to her, but I really do feel that girls like Nanami-chan should all wear glasses more often."

"Oh yes. I have seen her wear them. She definitely looked very pretty."

Rather than talk about sunglasses, Kasumi-san began to speak very passionately about how cute and fitting glasses looked on Nanami.

It'd be weird to choose sunglasses while Nanami was in such a state, so I felt it best to continue the conversation with Kasumi-san until Nanami returned from whatever place her astonishment had launched her into. Plus, I would get to hear adorable stories about Nanami that I didn't know before.

Kasumi-san shared with me various episodes surrounding Nanami wearing glasses.

"Nanami-chan's eyesight isn't bad, so she has no need for contacts. But when she heard that they were meant to be placed directly into the eyes, she got so scared that she started crying!" Kasumi-san shared.

"Wow, she must've been so cute back then. I mean, she's cute now too. But it's a different kind of cute, if that makes sense..."

"What are you two talking about?!"

It wasn't until I had heard plenty of stories about Nanami and glasses that Nanami snapped back to reality and tried to put a stop to things.

Everything I heard from Kasumi-san was so cute that I felt like I'd already accomplished something big just by coming to this store.

"Why do you look so content?! We haven't even bought anything!" Nanami shouted.

"Well, your mind seemed to be elsewhere, so I made sure to tell Yoshin-kun what a wonderful girl you are," Kasumi-san told Nanami.

"What did you tell him?! What did you two talk about?! You didn't tell him about *that*, did you?!"

Kasumi-san only smiled warmly in response to Nanami's loud protests. What was Nanami referring to, exactly? From what it sounded like, I didn't think that it was included in any of the episodes I'd heard.

In any case, if Nanami was back, then I felt like we could get started on the real business at hand.

"Well, then. Shall we get to choosing our sunglasses? What kind of style did you have in mind?" Kasumi-san asked, clapping once as if to change the subject.

Nanami was still pouting slightly, dissatisfied by the description she was given

of what transpired while she had been...out, so to speak. Maybe she also decided that it was no use pursuing the matter any further.

Either way, I was ready to switch over to choosing sunglasses when Nanami turned to me and said with a smile, “Yoshin...tell me later what you heard, okay?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

That was all I could say in response to the silent pressure I felt from Nanami. I mean, was there anyone out there who could say no to this?

It was impossible for me, at least.



Preparations for the class trip progressed steadily.

I bought sunglasses and sunblock, applied for my passport, filled out the forms I needed to submit to the school...

Every time I completed a task, the realization that I was going to embark on this trip soon mounted inside me, like wood blocks getting piled higher and higher. Although it was just a gradual thing, I could tell that I was getting more excited too; applications and forms, normally a pain to complete, started to seem fun to me.

All of that, though, was probably because Nanami was with me. Going on a trip with another person really *was* a game changer. In fact, it might not be an overstatement to say that it was more important *whom* you were going with rather than *where* you were going at all. To be fair, I wasn’t much of a traveler, having just taken one recent trip with Nanami, so maybe my opinion didn’t mean much.

Anyway, prepping for the trip. Today was the big moment: the day we were going to decide the groups we would be in for the class trip. It had been a topic of discussion in the class for quite a while, though, so a lot of people had already grouped up.

Since the class trip was still a part of the curriculum, what we were going to do as a group—and hence who was going to be *in* the group—was key.

Just a little while ago, I probably would've found the whole of assigning groups pretty painful. Fortunately, though, I felt differently now. And I was truly grateful for that.

"There's no limit to the number of people in a group, but try to keep it to about five or six, all right?"

With the teacher and the class reps making such an announcement, everyone in the class began talking among themselves, breaking off into groups and growing very lively indeed.

All righty, then. I stood up from my desk and approached Nanami, while she remained at her desk, her chin in her hand, as if waiting for me to reach her.

Actually, I had told her beforehand that I would go to her myself. For both the school festival and the sports festival, Nanami had been the one that had approached me. That was why, even though it was a small thing, I wanted to be the one to ask her to be in the same group for the class trip. It really was probably insignificant in the grand scheme of things—but for me, it was a big deal.

When I stopped right next to her desk, I felt myself suddenly getting nervous. For a split second, I recalled what it was like to ask Nanami out on a date. It seemed no matter how much time passed, I still couldn't get used to asking her out.

After a moment of gearing myself up, I asked, "Nanami, do you wanna be in the same group as me for the class trip?"

"Of course! Hee hee, it's always nice to be asked," she answered, breaking into a bright smile with her chin still in her palm. She then patted the seat next to her, indicating for me to sit down.

It was also kind of nerve-racking to sit down in someone else's seat. Still, given that Nanami was the one asking, I went ahead and sat down anyway. *I don't know who usually sits here, but thank you for letting me borrow it for a bit.* All seats at school were the same, so how was it that sitting in a different seat could make me so nervous?

"I mean, if you guys aren't in the same group, who would be?"

“Ever since the school festival, you two have totally stopped holding back, even when you’re in class!”

When I looked up, I saw that Otofuke-san and Kamoenai-san were standing behind us, their exasperation clear in their voices. We hadn’t told them, but a lot had happened, as it were.

As if on cue, Nanami and I both looked toward the teacher. When he saw us looking at him, he nodded—slowly, silently—then smiled and gave us a thumbs-up. *Oh, thank goodness...*

Nanami and I then faced each other and heaved a deep sigh of relief.

I worked really hard on those midterms. Seriously, I studied really, really hard. It’s not an exaggeration to say all that effort helped me survive to live this day.

Over seventy percent in every single subject. For me, that was quite an achievement. This was the first time I’d felt so scot-free after a set of exams, with no supplementary classes to speak of.

I nonetheless had been wary of teachers who might still take issue with me and Nanami, but I was happy to see the teacher gesture that he had been able to take care of any possible dissenters among the faculty. I was therefore confident that there were no longer any obstacles between me and Nanami...or, rather, any obstacle to me and Nanami forming a group together. I could finally embark on the class trip without any reservations.

“What’s with you two? You both look suspicious,” Otofuke-san remarked.

“Yeah, there’s something fishy here. Did you two have sex?” joined Kamoenai-san.

“Oh my goodness, *no*! Why do you always have to take things there, Ayumi?!” Nanami yelled.

“It’s because *I* wanna be doing it, duh. But since I can’t do it for a while, I’m just jealous of you guys,” Kamoenai-san replied with no hesitation.

Oh, Nanami’s gone speechless. Kamoenai-san must have reminded herself of something, because she donned a rather anguished expression herself. Seeing that, Nanami seemed unable to say anything at all. Otofuke-san had an

awkward smile on her face, but she also looked like she knew how Kamoenai-san was feeling. *I guess those two have their own issues they're dealing with.*

"You know, there was just some stuff," Nanami finally said.

"I see. Stuff, huh?" Otofuke-san replied.

"If there was stuff, I guess you can't help it, huh?" Kamoenai-san concluded.

For now, the two of them seemed to have understood what Nanami was trying to convey, as they proceeded to take seats close to me and Nanami. Since it was the usual four of us, I mustered up the courage to pop the next question.

"Would you two also like to be in our group?" I asked them.

Once the words were out of my mouth, I felt my heart start to pound immensely. It was a different feeling from when I'd asked Nanami earlier. This time, it was worry that they might say no mixed with the concern that I was being too forward. I'd never really asked anyone to anything before, so I could feel my palms starting to sweat with the uncertainty of it all.

The tension mounted as I waited for their response, but...then I looked at the two of them and saw that they were looking at me with astonishment in their eyes.

Nanami, too, was looking back at them with her head tilted. *Wait, why are we all reacting like this?*

Otofuke-san and Kamoenai-san turned toward each other like Nanami and I had done earlier, and then they looked back at me. By that point, though, they didn't look surprised—they looked somewhat delighted instead.

I wasn't going to tell them that their expressions reminded me of my own mother somehow.

"I would've never expected *Misumai* to be the one to ask," Otofuke-san said.

"Yeah, yeah! I felt my heart pitter-patter," Kamoenai-san added.

"Ayumi?" Nanami immediately spoke up, her eyes glinting.

"N-No, Nanami! Not *that* kind of pitter-patter! More like, 'Oh, he's growing up!' kind of thing!" Kamoenai-san exclaimed, trying desperately to pacify

Nanami.

Her response actually took me by surprise. It was true that I was asking people for the first time, but I wasn't expecting them to be this shocked. It was embarrassing; it was like I had blurted out something inappropriate. I guess this was what it meant to become involved with others...though maybe it was too dramatic to say that when all I had done was to ask them to be in the same group as me.

"Still, I'm happy you asked us," Otofuke-san stated.

"Yeah, it's nice when you put it into words like that. Thanks!" Kamoenai-san also said.

Their thoughtful follow-up saved me a bit. In fact, I felt bad that maybe I'd made them feel like they had to help me save face. I had to be careful from now on about getting embarrassed like that. Though maybe I just needed more experience to deal with stuff like this.

"So, I feel weird saying this *after* I've already asked you two, but...are you sure you want to be in the same group as me?" I asked.

I knew that Nanami was happy being in my group, but I did worry whether the other two were actually okay with that.

Also, I felt like they might not always want to, um, see me and Nanami *together*. We were definitely going to tone things down, but she and I were dating, after all; there was bound to be some amount of flirting that we just wouldn't be able to help.

Nanami must have thought the same thing, because she was telling the two that they didn't need to force themselves to be in our group. It was a class trip, after all; if there were other students they wanted to hang out with, they definitely should.

This was of course the case for Nanami too, but both Otofuke-san and Kamoenai-san had many friends. No matter what group they were in—if, for example, they were in a group with those two girls who apologized to me the other day—they were bound to have a blast.

It was a trip, after all. We should spend time with people whose company we

enjoyed.

“Ah, right. About that...” Otofuke-san began, as she and Kamoenai-san both looked slightly awkward and leaned in to whisper something in our ears. This was rare behavior on their part.

“To tell you the truth, both of our boyfriends are kind of worried,” Otofuke-san said.

“Yeah, yeah. They’re worried about us being in a group with other guys. They said they were *especially* worried after we showed them our costumes from the school festival,” Kamoenai-san followed suit.

“That’s why, if we’re in the same group as Misumai, they’ll both probably feel kind of relieved,” Otofuke-san remarked.

“And it’ll be easier for us to decline other guys’ invitations,” Kamoenai-san concluded.

Oh, I see. That makes a lot of sense, actually. I could totally understand how a class trip might make guys feel more liberated and carefree, and as a result, get them to talk to girls they wouldn’t ordinarily have the guts to approach.

When I looked around, I saw that several guys were in fact asking the girls in the class whether they wanted to be in the same group, and with varying results.

The two girls from the other day actually seemed to be inviting one of the guys. He seemed surprised by the question, his cheeks flushing pink.

I see. Getting groups together is also part of the fun. That seems pretty interesting on its own.

This was probably one of the highlights of a class trip. For Otofuke-san and Kamoenai-san, whose boyfriends didn’t go to the same school, things were probably complicated. Primarily in the sense that their boyfriends were worried about them.

I could understand how their boyfriends felt. I could understand it *extremely* well. If Nanami was going to be in a group with some guy but not with me, then I would probably go crazy unless there was also someone there whom I could

trust.

“If that’s the case, then I couldn’t be happier. But, actually, is it okay if I ask one more person?” I asked the two of them.

“Hm? Oh, sure. I mean, it’s more like the two of us are butting into *your* group,” Otofuke-san replied.

“Sorry about that! I’m sure you would’ve preferred being by yourselves,” Kamoenai-san suggested.

That wasn’t even a possibility. Even though I knew that Kamoenai-san was perfectly aware of that, I still found myself fantasizing about what it would be like if it *were* just Nanami and I.

Nanami, too, murmured, “Just the two of us...” and became lost in her own thoughts. I brought her back to reality soon after, though, so that she and I could stand up from our seats and together, make our way toward two people in particular.

I felt it a moment ago, but asking someone to join a group took a certain amount of courage. That was even more so if you’d never done it before. Given that it went okay previously, however, I was starting to feel a bit more relaxed. Now, this time, I would probably be able to ask more smoothly.

“Hey, Hitoshi, can I talk to you for a minute? I was wondering if you wanted to be in the same...”

“Of course!”

He answered before I’d even finished the question.

His unexpected response had me at a loss for words. And maybe he thought that was funny, because Hitoshi started laughing heartily. His smile seemed to suggest that he had been pretty much waiting for this moment.

“Jeez, you finally asked! Took you long enough! I was waiting, man! I didn’t know *what* I was gonna do if you asked some other guy,” he continued, as though he was genuinely relieved. As for me, I didn’t even think what he was saying was possible, since I didn’t even *know* any other guy aside from Hitoshi that well.

Oh man, Hitoshi was making such a scene that the people around looked like they were tuning into a very heartwarming performance. I was also pretty certain that the teacher was the happiest looking of them all.

Come on, sir. I know I made you worry, but isn't looking at me like I'm a child who just made a friend for the first time a bit much? I mean, I know that's exactly what's happening here, but still.

"Wait, I know I'm the one that asked, but are you sure? I mean, it's the class trip and everything," I asked.

"Oh, yeah, of course. This is *perfect*. Besides, if I didn't join your group, you'd be the only guy in it. You need other guys with you," he insisted.

"Well, I don't know about *that*. But I do think it'd be more fun if you were there."

"O-Oh, uh, right. Wow, you really went from cold to hot real fast there!"

What is this guy talking about? It's not like I'm trying to pull anything like that, so stop making things sound all weird.

I was happy he accepted so quickly, but I was starting to question my having asked him to join the group in the first place. Just then, though, someone in the class shouted, "Hey, Misumai! Hitoshi's been talking nonstop about wanting to go on this class trip with you, so just let him in, okay?"

"Hey, not cool man! Everything was going, like, really well so far!" Hitoshi yelled back in the general direction of the voice.

"Dude, 'well' is a bit of a stretch," someone else responded.

Hitoshi, now turning red, looked mildly dejected by our classmates' comments. He looked like a kid who'd been caught in the middle of a prank. Still, I was glad that that was how he really felt. It made me grateful that there was someone who wanted to go on the class trip with me that much.

"Were you able to ask Kenbuchi-kun?" I heard Nanami ask as she came up to me.

"Oh, yeah. What about you?" I asked in turn.

"Yup, it all worked out. Kotoha-chan said she'd join us too."

Nanami gave a thumbs-up, while Shirishizu-san stood behind Nanami with her eyes narrowed in her usual way, flashing peace signs. Now that our group had reached six members, we had ourselves a full roster for the class trip.

After two large class events, here I was diving into group activities. Life was truly unpredictable. I also couldn't deny that I was very much looking forward to this next adventure.

"Hee hee, I really can't wait now," Nanami said at the exact same time I was thinking that. Her timely comment warmed my heart. Her words just amplified what I was feeling. This must be what it meant to share—and double—happiness.

If that was true, then I was really glad that I wasn't by myself—not that there was anything wrong with being by myself, of course.

"So, that's all of us. Is that also okay with the two of you?" I asked Otofuke-san and Kamoenai-san.

"Yeah, Kenbuchi is no problem. The guy's as harmless as you are," Otofuke-san said to me.

"Yeah, the class rep is a perv, but he's really not a threat," Kamoenai-san also said.

I was glad that the two of them were still okay with being in the group. Seeing their reactions was making Hitoshi muss his hair out of embarrassment as well.

I knew I shouldn't be saying this, given that Nanami's friends had so willingly let Hitoshi join the group too, but I wasn't expecting them to so easily accept a guy who constantly talked about wanting a girlfriend. Personally, I thought they wouldn't want anything to do with him. Them labeling him as absolutely harmless was, in other words, totally unexpected.

"And are *you* okay with this, Nanami?" Otofuke-san asked.

"Oh, yeah, I'm fine. I talked about it with Yoshin beforehand," Nanami explained, joining Shirishizu-san as she also began flashing everyone a peace sign.

I was prepared to give up on the idea of having Hitoshi in our group if Nanami

didn't feel comfortable with it. Nanami, though, agreed to the idea pretty willingly.

"He's your friend, so of course it's okay. Plus it's just Kenbuchi-kun," she had said so simply, in a way that didn't betray any kind of discomfort. I knew that she had been slowly overcoming her aversion toward guys, but Otofuke-san's question made it sound like Nanami had been working on it with her classmates without me even knowing about it. If that was the case, then I was a little bit envious.

Seeing Nanami making a little peace sign with her hand, though, I recalled what had happened when she and I discussed the potential group for our class trip. At the time, Nanami had said yes to the idea of having Hitoshi join us. In addition, though, she had smiled very eerily and said, in a singsong voice, *"I have no intention of losing, anyway."*

Her expression then had given me the chills, but I was pretty certain that I was also smiling in return, though I wasn't quite sure if I was smiling from fear or delight.

Remembering the exchange now, though, made shivers go up my spine.

I also remembered what Baron-san had told me once, about not mixing up the priorities between friendship and love. I needed to keep that in mind too.

"Man, how awesome it's gonna be to be in a group with all these girls. What a sight for sore eyes!" Hitoshi was saying, giddy with excitement and completely oblivious to my emotional turmoil. He was right, though, that two guys and four girls seemed to be somewhat unbalanced—though I also had to admit that despite that imbalance, this was a collection of people that I could feel both comfortable and relaxed with.

"Is this okay, though? I mean, pretty much all the girls have boyfriends, so you definitely won't be able to date any of them," I said.

"Oh, yeah, totally! If I'm gonna get a girlfriend, it'll be *before* the trip. Make sure you cover for me if I do!" Hitoshi exclaimed, giving me a thumbs-up.

There wasn't a whole lot of time before the class trip, so I wasn't too confident about his odds of finding a girlfriend beforehand. Regardless, Hitoshi

grabbed my shoulder and began whispering to me in a voice that only he and I could hear.

“That’s why, if you ever wanna be alone with Barato, you just let me know, okay? I’ll be your alibi,” he offered.

“Huh?! Is that even allowed, though?” I had to ask.

“Probably? I mean, they’re probably gonna put us in the same room too, so if we play our cards right, you two should be able to get some alone time in the hotel room. I’ll make sure to be off visiting my future girlfriend too.”

“In the hotel room...?” I repeated.

Hitoshi and I were crouching as we talked without even realizing it. Our conversation—which was part strategy meeting, part scheming—was as alluring as a temptation from the devil, and yet so full of hope at the same time.

Is that even possible? I asked myself. But seeing Hitoshi speak so confidently kind of made me think that what he was saying was true. I was starting to feel excited, in a different way from earlier.

“Hey,” someone suddenly said to us, making both me and Hitoshi jump, our hearts in our throats.

When we looked up, we saw that Shirishizu-san was now crouched in front of us. I wanted to pat myself and Hitoshi on the back for not having fallen over from the surprise.

Shirishizu-san looked at us at eye level, her eyes narrowed in their usual, sleepy way. We had no way of guessing what she was thinking.

“Let me in on this too,” she then said, raising her hand slightly. “Will you have my back when I wanna be alone with Taku-chan?”

Hitoshi and I looked at each other—and chuckled. We never expected that Shirishizu-san, our class rep, the paragon of diligence and seriousness, would say such a thing. *Things are getting to be pretty interesting.*

“Are you sure? Isn’t trying to hang out with a guy from another class a little too risky?” Hitoshi asked.

“It’ll be fine. Even if I get caught, I’ll just say that I was keeping my eye on a

delinquent student,” she replied.

“I guess that’ll work. In that case, you’re in. I’ll be counting on you too,” he responded.

The two of them continued having their strategy meeting in hushed voices. I had to admit, too, that it was heartening to have the class rep Shirishizu-san on our side. Even if she dressed like a gyaru, the teachers still had absolute faith in her. Recent faculty discussions were even hopeful that she might be able to get Teshikaga-kun to turn the corner.

A strange sort of alliance had been formed among the three of us. We definitely felt a certain kind of solidarity.

Just then, we all heard Nanami ask, “What are you guys doing down there?”

Well, I guess we’re not being terribly covert about any of this, since we’re still talking in front of everyone. Nonetheless, our strange group became even stranger as Nanami crouched down next to me and joined us.

“It’s kind of a strategy meeting?” I proposed.

“Really? That sounds fun. I wanna...wait, aren’t we supposed to be planning things for our group?” Nanami said in an admonishing tone.

“Sorry,” I mumbled.

“Ha ha, I forgive you,” she said, her tone quickly changing to a more cheery one.

She’s right—half the group shouldn’t be squatting on the floor having a secret discussion. We all stand out too.

While Nanami, Hitoshi, Shirishizu-san, and I were crouched on the floor, Otofuke-san and Kamoenai-san were sitting in nearby seats, their legs crossed and wry smiles on their faces, watching us all with a protective look in their eyes...wait, no. They were looking at *me* with a warm, fond gaze. *Why am I kind of embarrassed right now?*

I cleared my throat as I stood up, trying to mask my awkwardness. Nanami, still crouched on the floor, looked up at me and giggled.

I felt like she already knew what the three of us had been talking about

earlier.

Well, then. Now that we have our group, shall we talk about what to do on the class trip?

Interlude: A Slight Awakening

We bought everything we needed. We had our group figured out. All we had to do now was go on the class trip itself. Still, there was always room for more preparations.

In the meantime, it was inevitable for small worries to come up. Had we actually forgotten something crucial? Did we neglect to buy something super important? Stuff like that.

So, today, Yoshin and I were going through our packing list together.

We *were*, but...going totally off topic was normal, right? Like reading manga in the middle of cleaning your room?

That was exactly what happened to us.

“Oh my gosh, you look so good!” I exclaimed.

“Y-You really think so?” Yoshin said hesitantly.

He was wearing his sunglasses, looking kind of embarrassed, but his voice held a hint of suspicion in it.

Other people might think you look good in something or even suit it perfectly when you didn't think so at all. You might think you didn't look good in it because something about it made you feel insecure, or you weren't used to it, or maybe there was just something about it that just felt *off*.

Just a little while ago, I dressed like a gyaru in front of everyone but wore my more modest outfits only in front of Hatsumi and Ayumi. Even then, I wore the clothes I chose because I felt I looked good in them.

I knew a part of believing that was because I was convinced of it myself, but it was also because others around me told me so—that the clothes suited me, or that I looked cute in them. That was how my love of fashion grew in general. And when the clothes *didn't* look good on me, they told me so—very gently—or suggested items they thought might be better or match me more.

That was why I didn't have too many memories of having had my fashion choices outright rejected. Though there was a chance that I had simply forgotten any negative incidents.

It was because of all this that I didn't quite understand Yoshin's reluctance toward fashion, to tell you the truth. I figured if he looked good in it, then anything was a go.

Even when I saw Yoshin in his regular clothes for the first time, I didn't think that it looked weird. Yoshin had described his own outfit as bad because it was all black, but I liked it because I thought it was cute. Plus I thought it looked good on him. Though I guess Hatsumi and Ayumi did seem to be more doubtful; they said wearing all black from head to toe perhaps required a second thought. That was fine, I guess—everyone had their own unique preferences.

For the most part, though, I didn't like to completely reject other people's stylistic choices, since no one had ever done that to me either. Of course, I might make a comment if someone wore something super outrageous. But Yoshin had never worn anything like that, so I'd never made any such comments either. If I ever complimented something he wore, it was because I sincerely meant it.

Still, Yoshin didn't seem to be able to believe what I was saying.

"Yeah, I think those sunglasses look great on you. You seem so cool. You wanna wear them to the meetup place too?" I suggested.

"I think that'd be a bit much," Yoshin muttered, scratching his cheek in embarrassment, though he was still wearing his sunglasses. It was the pair that we went to buy together the other day, so it wasn't as though I'd never seen them before. Still, I thought they really looked good on him. There was no reason for me *not* to tell him that every time I saw him wearing them.

He seemed tickled, but he also did seem pretty embarrassed. And a little skeptical too.

Maybe because we had been dating for some time now, but I was starting to be able to tell what Yoshin was thinking. Right now, Yoshin was probably...happy, but still wondering whether the sunglasses actually suited him.

This wasn't something I could forcibly change. All I could do was my best to lavish him with every kind of compliment I could come up with. I was going to praise and shower him with all the positive words I had in me so he'd be more confident in himself. One of these days, he'd be able to accept my compliments without a thought. I knew he would.

"They really do suit you perfectly. Sunglasses really are great, huh? I feel like you look even sexier than usual just because you're wearing them," I commented.

"You think these are...sexy? Even though all I'm doing is covering my eyes?" Yoshin asked.

"Yeah, funny, right? All they do is just cover your eyes. Maybe I'll wear mine too," I said, picking up my own pair. This was my first time buying sunglasses too, and I'd never worn them to go out either. But it didn't embarrass me to wear them, not like they did Yoshin. Probably because I often wore earrings and other accessories and things.

In other words, we just had to get used to things. Yoshin just hadn't had a chance to do that yet.

He told me something like that when he had given me my half of our pair of rings for my birthday. That he now had this piece of jewelry, but he wasn't sure if he was allowed to put it on.

At the time, I wondered at his hesitation; to me, he clearly *was* allowed to wear his ring. If anything, since they were paired rings, I wanted him to wear it every day.

That was why I had told him that I would give him a different piece of jewelry for *his* birthday, and that I wanted him to be sure to wear it. I wondered, though, if he actually would. He had said then that he felt kind of embarrassed by the idea. I didn't want to force him, but my selfish desire to see him wearing it was also peeking through.

He wasn't wearing his pair ring now. Though I guess I wasn't wearing mine today either.

"See, what do you think?" I asked, turning toward him with my sunglasses on.

“Yeah, you definitely look great. Pretty *and* cool,” Yoshin replied without missing a beat.

He had no problem complimenting other people like this. That was another reason why I wanted him to have more confidence in himself too.

Could we wear matching earrings, one of these days? I stole a glance at Yoshin’s ear from behind my sunglasses. Right now, his earlobes were bare. One day, I wanted to pierce his ears. With my own hands.

I would pierce his ears in a way that wouldn’t hurt, and then I would put matching earrings on both him and me that I’d picked out myself.

That...sounded good. Like, just thinking about it made shivers go up my spine. Not shivers of nervousness—of pleasure.

I felt like the act was somehow a forbidden one. I had to shake my head to clear my thoughts—as if I could physically throw off the ideas brewing in my mind.

“Oh, but you’re right, you *do* look sexy. Like, even more alluring than usual,” Yoshin continued.

I snapped back to reality when he said that so unexpectedly. *Right, this is no time to be looking at Yoshin’s ears. That’s for next time.*

I lowered the sunglasses that I was wearing and looked up at him at an angle that I knew made me look cute.



It was a slightly calculated pose that Peach-chan had taught me before. Though I didn't ask why *she* knew how to pose like that.

"Tee hee, I'm so glad that we have another thing to match with," I replied, this time posing like a model I'd seen somewhere before. I was pretty sure that the model in the picture was striking a kind of sexy pose, so Yoshin would probably see it that way too.

While I hoped that he wouldn't take his eyes off me while I posed, I also slightly regretted the fact that I wasn't currently wearing my bikini to go along with my sunglasses.

Since we were going to Hawaii, it made more sense to wear sunglasses with bikinis, right? Though I guess it didn't make any sense to be wearing them in my room.

Maybe I should change now?

"But I never knew that there were such things as matching sunglasses before. Did you?" Yoshin asked.

"Mmm, I didn't either. It's exciting just to think that they're the same, huh?" I said.

It was true—we weren't both just wearing sunglasses, we were actually wearing *matching* sunglasses.

When we were at the store we were trying to figure out what to get, but Kasumi-san told us that there were matching pair sunglasses too. When we heard that, our minds were made up.

The shape was pretty classic, one that both men and women could wear. Maybe that was why they were being sold in pairs.

Kasumi-san had recommended to us a popular design, apparently one where it wasn't just couples who bought them, but also families and even friends wanting to match. I had asked Yoshin what he thought, but he said he didn't have a preference and that we could get them if I liked them.

Given that the price was affordable too, we immediately went for it. And that was how we completed our task of purchasing our first pairs of sunglasses. I

was totally not counting on having Yoshin hear all those stories about me and glasses, but it was still a really meaningful shopping trip.

As I was thinking that, something that Yoshin had brought with him today caught my eye.

“Hey, Yoshin—can you put those on too?” I asked, attaching myself to his side almost as if to lean into him.

Yoshin, having been forced to lean back slightly, looked down at me. I couldn’t actually see his eyes because of the sunglasses, but I felt him looking at me. It was a funny feeling, almost like I *wasn’t* being looked at, even though I was.

Wow, this is bad. It’s getting to me. I think I’m going a little crazy.

Yoshin slowly fell backward and lay down on my bed. It looked like I’d pushed him down, but I did it gently and slowly...so it was fine, right?

Having made sure that Yoshin was now lying down, I moved over toward his head, as though preparing to have him put it on my lap. I folded my legs and, sitting on my heels, looked into his face up close.

I felt his gaze on me, but feeling it through the sunglasses felt different from usual, even somewhat strange.

I then slowly reached out toward the sunglasses on his face. I touched the temples, then cautiously pulled the glasses away from him. In this way, I revealed his eyes, so gently that it almost felt like I was undressing him—as if the act of taking off his sunglasses was itself a sexual one.

I became embarrassed the moment I thought about it. My cheeks felt hot. Ignoring my blushing cheeks—as if to suppress my own excitement—I proceeded to remove his sunglasses completely.

All the while, Yoshin looked just a little bewildered. A part of me found all this kind of funny; Yoshin *with* glasses should have been what was unfamiliar to me, but it was his face without glasses—his normal face—I was doing so much to reveal.

As Yoshin lay there, still confused, I handed him the item that I had asked him

to wear: a pair of regular glasses.

“I’m still not used to them though,” Yoshin muttered, hesitating even as he took the glasses from me.

“Just for a little bit! Please? That’s all I’m asking!” I begged, clapping my hands together once and gesturing as though in prayer. I really did feel like I was praying for a miracle.

He’d gotten those glasses separately from our trip necessities. While he was trying on different pairs at the store, Yoshin had decided to purchase this second pair too. According to him, it was something that, for the first time in his life, he’d bought strictly for the sake of fashion. Being with him while he made such an important and memorable purchase made me so happy.

Also, Yoshin looked so cute when he shared that with me. I wanted to praise myself for not immediately leaping in to give him a big hug, even after seeing how adorable he looked, like trying his hardest to endure getting tickled.

Plus Kasumi-san’s sales pitch was something to behold.

She had started off by telling him that, if he got two pairs made, the second would be half off. She then went around the store and picked out a pair that might suit his facial structure. It was a pair of very fashionable, somewhat round glasses. When Yoshin put them on, I immediately told him that I wanted to be able to see him wearing those glasses on a regular basis.

Maybe my remark was what persuaded him, but Yoshin decided to make the purchase. Looking back on it now, I might’ve been a little too carried away. I did feel slightly guilty about that.

“What do you think?” Yoshin said with slightly blushed cheeks, as he relented to my request and put on the glasses. He was still lying on the bed, so he was looking up at me, but his expression was somehow undeniably sexy.

“Oh my god, it’s good! Amazing!” I exclaimed, pressing my hand to my eyes as if I could imprint the sight directly on my eyeballs. I looked back at him again and took in the reality that Yoshin, wearing his glasses, was right beside me.

I didn’t think I was into guys with glasses at all, but this really *was* quite good. I felt like maybe Hatsumi and Ayumi really were onto something—that glasses

were *amazing*. Maybe the two of them had Oto-nii and Shu-nii wear them at some point. I didn't expect glasses to be *this* transformative, though. I mean, this was really incredible.

After I had gotten my fill of Yoshin in his pair of glasses, I cradled his head around my chest and stroked his hair. I held him lightly, so that his glasses wouldn't get damaged.

"You look so cute in glasses. The round frames are really nice, you know. They look great on you," I commented.

"Thanks," Yoshin said in a muffled voice.

Expressing gratitude was important. When someone thanked me for something, it made me want to do it again. In fact, depending on the person, it made me want to do whatever they asked of me.

But it wasn't good to do things *in order* to get thanked. Because then I'd feel unsatisfied if they *didn't* thank me, and that wasn't love; it wasn't about doing things and expecting something in return.

Still, I felt happy to be thanked. I knew it was complicated and contradictory. But I knew that Yoshin, no matter how embarrassed he felt about it, would definitely thank me if the situation called for it. And thanking the ones we loved when we were happy was important.

That was why I really liked that sincerity about him.

"Are you gonna take those to Hawaii?" I asked.

"Not sure. I'll probably be wearing sunglasses during the day, so I probably won't have that many opportunities to wear this pair. I thought it might be better just to leave them behind, since I shouldn't take too many extra things," he explained, as he moved to take off his glasses.

I immediately stopped him, though. I was starting to think that maybe this was the beginning of my glasses fetish. But didn't having a glasses fetish mean I'd like it even if other people who weren't Yoshin wore glasses? That didn't seem to be the case.

"This is tough, isn't it? I wanna see you wearing glasses at the hotel in Hawaii,

but I also don't want anyone *else* to see you in them," I added.

"Oh, come on, it's not that big of a deal. But if I was wearing glasses and other people started commenting on it, that might be troublesome," he responded.

"Because you'd look too handsome?" I suggested.

"Because I'd look really weird," he said simply.

I had actually been pretty sincere, but Yoshin slowly removed his glasses. Except that even him taking off his glasses looked cool, and I again felt conflicted inside. *I see, so even the act of taking the glasses off is important too, huh?*

"Come on, we've gotta check what other things we need," Yoshin pressed.

"Arg, that's right. Oh, but let's wear our glasses on our next date!"

"Seriously? That might be too embarrassing for me."

Seeing his negative reaction, I looked up at him and quickly assumed the pose of asking him for another favor: I attached myself to him and turned my face upward, shifting my eyebrows so that I looked extra sad, and then I clasped my hands in front of my chest in another gesture of prayer.

"Where did you learn to do that?" Yoshin asked, suspiciously.

"This one I just learned from Kotoha-chan."

After a moment of deliberation, Yoshin said with a sigh, "Okay, next time."

"Yay!" I exclaimed, which immediately made Yoshin comment that being so giddy now meant I couldn't possibly have been so sad just a moment ago. But his acquiescence made me so happy, I couldn't resist.

If I pulled this trick too often, though, he would tire of it, so I had to be mindful. Kotoha-chan, too, said that she only employed this tactic in vital moments.

Still, Yoshin was right. We couldn't spend all day doing this. We really did have to check if we were missing anything we needed.

We had our required items like passports, various documents, student IDs, and class trip pamphlets, as well as other necessities like chargers, sunblock,

and convenient items we might need on hand. I supposed that sunglasses, too, fell into that last category. There were other things we needed to prepare. We even got some spending money from our parents, since going abroad would take a toll on our wallets.

“I guess a Hawaii trip is gonna have to cost money, huh?” Yoshin mumbled too, apparently thinking the same thing I was.

“But I sure am grateful that we both get to go,” I replied.

“Yeah, really. I wasn’t even planning on going on the class trip last year, so I’m super grateful now.”

“Wait, *what?*” I blurted, freezing at his unexpected comment. *No, really, why?* What he said went against everything I tended to think about the class trip, so I waited for him to continue.

Yoshin sighed, as though remembering something, then got in a good stretch. Then, while still in that same position, he fell backward onto the bed again.

I lay down next to him. There was still space between us, and that distance gave me a funny feeling. Still, I didn’t feel like it was right to be too close to him in this particular moment.

“Last year I told my parents that I wasn’t going to go on the class trip, since I figured I was probably just gonna be playing games by myself even if I did go,” Yoshin explained, a morose smile on his face. He added that such a trip would be no fun anyway. I knew he was talking about something from the past, but still, he looked so sad, and also kind of lonely...and I didn’t know why.

Yoshin then proceeded to tell me more about what happened back then.

Apparently his parents, like me, had looked kind of sad at the time too, but Yoshin couldn’t understand why they were looking at him that way. Yoshin had simply said to them that he didn’t want to waste money on a trip that he wasn’t even going to enjoy. Except his parents didn’t agree with him on that point; they had their own thoughts.

“*We won’t force you, but you never know. You might change your mind, so we’ll prepare for it anyway,*” his mother had said.

“That’s right. Maybe something will happen that will make you want to go,” his father had also remarked.

Yoshin said he didn’t remember how he had responded back then. He said he probably just said something thoughtless, like a curt “fine” or something.

“You’re looking forward to the trip now, though, right?” I asked. I was slightly worried, but I wanted to believe he felt differently now. He even said that he was looking forward to it. But still, I wanted to ask him explicitly.

Yoshin laughed and said, “Yeah, I’m looking forward to it.” He then muttered, with a nostalgic tone of voice, about how his parents’ decision back then had been correct after all. “I’m so thankful toward my parents now. I also realize just how much of a fool I was being then,” Yoshin continued.

“So is it okay to assume that *I’m* the reason you want to go on the trip now?” I asked.

Yoshin looked at me, his eyes widened in slight surprise. He had the exact same look you’d give a child who asked you a question regarding a very simple problem. Still, he was looking at me like he was seeing something adorable.

He then patted my head and said, “Of course.”

That simple response made me so incredibly happy. I was so, so happy that I was his reason for going on the trip, and I wanted to thank the stars again for the fact that I was going to get to go on this trip with him after all.

“Well, in my case, I was just putting up a front to make up for being a loner. I’m sure there are people who genuinely don’t want...wait, what are you doing, Nanami?”

“I’m sending a message to your parents to thank them,” I replied.

“Uh, why?”

“Because thanks to *them*, I get to go on the class trip with you.”

Without the preparations that his parents had made, Yoshin and I wouldn’t have been able to go on the trip together even if he *had* changed his mind. When I realized that, I knew I had to thank them right then and there—even though I knew that they hadn’t done it for me, and that Yoshin ended up

deciding to go on the trip after meeting me only by chance. Still, even knowing that I was probably being too full of myself here didn't keep me from telling them how thankful I was.

"Maybe I'll tell my parents too. That I have a reason to go now," Yoshin said softly.

"Huh?"

"Even though it's a little embarrassing to make a declaration like that," he added.

Having no way to hold myself back, I closed the remaining gap that existed between us while we were lying next to each other, and leaped into his arms. I pressed myself closely to him, so I could feel his entire body against mine. The warmth I felt might as well have been the heat of Yoshin's very emotions.

I hoped that he could feel the burning I felt inside me too.

When I thought about that, I started to feel like the clothes I was wearing were getting in my way. As if we would be able to feel and understand each other even more if we could be close with our skin directly against each other's.

Wait—no, no, no. That's not good. I'm thinking things I really shouldn't. But...maybe I really should have been wearing my bathing suit. I glanced over at the luggage I was preparing and caught sight of the bathing suit that I had picked out. It was one I had purchased before. *It's cute, but maybe I should consider getting a sexier one for Hawaii. Wait, but maybe that wouldn't be appropriate for a class trip...*

As I lay there going back and forth while still holding Yoshin, my phone dinged.

I didn't leap away from Yoshin just because of the sound. Instead, I shifted away from him slowly, then reached over to pick up my phone. His hand was touching my body, and that spot alone felt super hot.

The moment I saw my phone screen, though, I jumped up. The heat that came over me was more than enough to compensate for the warmth that I lost when I moved away from Yoshin.

“Nanami?” Yoshin asked, confused by my strange reaction.

I turned my phone toward him to show him my screen. It displayed the response I’d received from Shinobu-san.

Shinobu: Enjoy your class trip. We went to Hawaii for our honeymoon too, so maybe for you two this will be like your prehoneymoon?

Maybe it would be better to leave out what Yoshin’s reaction to that message was...

Chapter 4: On the Class Trip, We Shall Go!

Going to Hawaii for our class trip. I thought I fully understood what that meant. I was also pretty sure that Nanami did too.

The *meaning* of something, however, could change depending on the individual. The same exact thing could mean something entirely different to two different people.

And once you learned that, it became impossible to return to a time when you didn't know—or didn't realize. What that same thing meant to another person would continue to hover somewhere in the back of your mind.

What I was talking about now was...

"Baron-san, where did you go for your honeymoon?" I asked.

"Our honeymoon? I think we went to Hawaii. It was a lot of fun," he replied.

"Ah, okay," I murmured.

"Huh? Wait, wait—why are you getting disappointed by *my* honeymoon destination?" he asked, flustered.

No, Baron-san hadn't done anything wrong. Not at all. I was just throwing myself into a pit of hopelessness...no, wait, this wasn't hopelessness, even though I kind of sounded like I was in the throes of despair.

Both Baron-san and Peach-san were probably surprised by my reaction. I was surprised too, though for an entirely different reason.

It had also been a while since the last time we had done a voice chat like this. I had been so busy lately with going out on dates with Nanami, studying for tests, and participating in school activities, that I hadn't really had a chance to talk with the two of them. I had been playing games every now and then, but given that I wasn't skilled enough to multitask, I'd ended up prioritizing my real life over my gaming life.

Talking to them in a relaxed way like this after a while was really nice. Baron-

san also told me that he was sad he wasn't able to talk to me as often, but that I should prioritize my school and social life regardless. I was grateful for his comment, but Baron-san was also worried about just how long I'd been neglecting my school life in the first place. *Yeah, I'm really sorry to make you so concerned for me.*

"So, it turns out I'll be going to Hawaii for our class trip soon," I began.

"Oh! To Hawaii?! That's so cool! I'm jealous that you get to go there for a school event. When I was a student, hearing how other schools got to go to Hawaii and Okinawa and stuff always made me so envious," Baron-san replied.

"Hawaii, huh? I don't think I've been there since I was little. I don't have many memories of it, but I do vaguely remember having a good time," Peach-san joined.

Peach-san has been there too, huh? Baron-san seems pretty surprised about that as well. Can it be that maybe Peach-san comes from a kinda rich family...?

Wait, this was no time to be surprised by an unexpected piece of information. I gathered my thoughts once again and continued my explanation, saying, "And then, the other day my mother told me that, since we were going to Hawaii, it was like a prehoneymoon."

"Ah, right. Hearing that from your mother *would* be a little awkward," Baron-san commented.

"Wow! A prehoneymoon sounds absolutely wonderful!" Peach-san exclaimed.

I was taken aback by the difference between the male and female reactions I was getting. Baron-san's reaction seemed closer to mine, while Peach-san genuinely seemed delighted by the idea of a prehoneymoon.

I hadn't thought of it at all, but when I looked into it, Hawaii seemed to be the most preferred honeymoon destination. Now that I thought about it, it seemed odd that the thought had never entered my mind before.

Of course, Hawaii was a big place, with many different destinations within it. Not *every* Hawaii trip would necessarily be appropriate for a honeymoon. Still, given two actual data points, I could no longer disassociate Hawaii from the

idea of a honeymoon destination. In fact, Nanami was probably also asking *her* parents where they went for their honeymoon right about now.

But now I worried that the word “honeymoon” was going to be somewhere in the back of my mind the entire time I was going to be on this class trip. And I was dead serious about this.

It probably wasn’t a bad thing. After all, even though we hadn’t gone through any of the steps leading up to such a thing, the idea of practicing a honeymoon actually seemed pretty exciting. But that also meant that both Nanami and I would inevitably get more caught up in the moment. And getting caught up in the moment meant that we would probably want to be more intimate with each other too.

That was probably a perfectly natural desire. Just imagine having the thing that you’d considered a “class trip” suddenly be referred to as a “prehoneymoon.” I was pretty certain that every single couple in the world would get at least a *little* bit more worked up about things.

And when that happened, we also naturally—again, *perfectly natural*—would want to be alone as well, despite the fact that the teacher had just recently warned us against doing that.

In other words, there would be a high probability of us getting interrupted during the class trip. And if that happened, our honeymoon...no, our class trip would be ruined. Dammit, even I was getting pulled in that direction too.

That was precisely why I didn’t want to hear anything about honeymoons in the first place.

“And so, that’s why I’m worried about whether I’ll actually be able to enjoy the class trip or not anymore,” I concluded.

“I feel like I’m seeing the negative Canyon-kun for the first time in a long while,” Baron-san remarked.

Honestly, me too. I mean, I know I’m overthinking things, but I still can’t help but worry—what if I get way too excited and end up doing something totally inappropriate?

“These last few days, too, all I’ve been doing is looking up date spots in

Hawaii, and stuff like ‘Top Ten Hawaii Honeymoon Spots for Newlyweds,’” I confessed.

“But isn’t that a good thing? I mean, can’t you two just go...” Peach-san began.

“We really can’t, actually—because all the places we’re gonna visit during the trip are already decided,” I explained, picking up the class trip pamphlet that was nearby and opening it up. It laid out all the schedules and preparation notes for the trip, as well as things we needed to keep in mind. It was an extremely important pamphlet.

Unfortunately, it didn’t indicate much free time...or, rather, maybe because the teachers thought that giving students free time in a foreign country might lead to no good, but there was close to no space in the schedule that allowed us to decide how we wanted to spend our time. If there was any free time, it was given to us at our lodging. There was enough of it, perhaps, but if you asked me if that was where I wanted to go as a couple, then I had to say that it wasn’t.

I suppose this was to be expected. After all, this was a class trip for school.

“Long story short, I have more desire than ever to go to Hawaii...but I’m more worried than I ever was about the class trip,” I finally said.

“Wow...what a first world problem,” Baron-san murmured.

Is there anything I can do? Even now, I’m sitting here looking up romantic places to go to in Hawaii.

I was also looking up things to keep in mind about Hawaii trips, as well as posts about different people’s experiences. Though none of the many stories I read on the internet included anything where someone fashioned their class trip into a honeymoon.

“Don’t you think it’s okay to just go all out and enjoy yourselves, though? I mean, what’s the big deal? It’ll just be a slightly early honeymoon. Your love for each other will just grow stronger,” Baron-san suggested.

“I agree, but if you saw a couple on a class trip that was all over each other like it was their honeymoon, what would you think?” I asked.

“I’d hope that they fell down a ditch somewhere. But there’s nothing to be done now, is there? I mean, you can’t go back to when you didn’t know about any of this,” he said.

That was true too. Now that I had the knowledge, I couldn’t just *not* know it. I could *pretend* not to know, but if something came up that I’d already learned, I wouldn’t truly be able to unknow it.

In that sense, I really *couldn’t* go back.

“But Shichimi-chan is looking forward to it too, right? Then isn’t it better just to double down?” Peach-san asked.

It seemed she felt similarly to Baron-san. Though, truth be told, I kind of felt the same way too.

I guess I just wanted to vent to someone.

“And for the record, I assume you’ll be going around in a group, but who’s gonna be the leader?” Baron-san asked.

“My friend’s gonna do it. He’s actually the class rep, so he told us to leave things to him,” I answered.

We all discussed what we would do as a group, but Hitoshi had handled the submission of the paperwork and other administrative tasks. I was really grateful for that. He told me to count on him this time around, saying that I had worked hard at the school festival and had also done my best at the sports festival.

“You can be sure to make out with Barato all you want during the trip.”

I suddenly remembered what he said to me while giving me a thumbs-up. In fact, he’d been telling me that even *before* the whole honeymoon thing came up.

Given that the group leader was telling me that, wouldn’t it be rude if I *didn’t* enjoy the trip to the fullest? Thought that might seem like I was stretching the logic a bit far.

“I guess I really should gather as much information as I can in order to make the most of things. If they yell at me, then I’ll apologize like there’s no

tomorrow. I'm sure that if I say I'm sorry, most things will be forgiven," I declared.

"Oh, nice. That positive attitude is much more like you. I mean, if you behave within the realm of how a high schooler should, then they shouldn't have much reason to yell at you," Baron-san chimed in.

"With that being said, can you tell me about the time you went to Hawaii for your honeymoon? For like, advice? It's a little hard for me to ask my parents about something like this," I continued.

"Oh, I want to hear about that too. I can also share what my parents did while we were in Hawaii, just in case that's useful to you," Peach-san joined in.

Wow, hearing from Peach-san too would be great. At this point, I might as well just get all the information I can and store it in my brain like it's practical knowledge. And I should just make this trip a school trip-cum-prehoneymoon thing. And whatever I learn from it, I can use as a lesson to prepare for the real deal that might happen one day. Though I'm sure people will laugh at me if I say this out loud, so I'll try to keep it to myself.

"I guess I can share, given that I'm the instigator here. Oh, and I'll also tell you things that I should've done differently. Though I'm not sure how much things have changed since I was there," Baron-san began.

From there, Peach-san and I listened as Baron-san told us his honeymoon tales. Eventually, he must have gotten really into it himself, because at some point he just started telling us about how much he loved his wife.

Peach-san's stories were interesting too. She said that she didn't really remember the trip herself, but because her parents talked about it so fondly and so frequently, she ended up memorizing their stories anyway.

Maybe one day, my parents will tell me about their own honeymoon too.

After having finished, Baron-san seemed somewhat pleased with himself. I was also looking forward to sharing with Nanami all the different things I had learned.

My mind was made up. Now the only thing left to do was to enjoy the trip with Nanami. I guess now I could say that it was at this moment that my

preparations for the trip were finally complete.

“Thank you, Baron-san and Peach-san. I’ll keep all of this in mind,” I told them.

“Of course. I really hope you enjoy your class trip,” Peach-san said.

“Yeah, it’s such a great time of your life. I honestly hope you have fun. Still, coincidences are such a funny thing, huh?” Baron-san remarked.

“Coincidences? Did something happen?” I asked.

The only coincidence I could think of was the Hawaii element itself, but...was Baron-san also going to Hawaii? If that was the case, then that really *was* quite a coincidence. If we were going at the same time, maybe we could have a meetup of some sort. No, I guess Hawaii was a big place. It probably wasn’t possible. But given that I hadn’t had a chance to meet all my gaming friends, it really would be nice to see them in person one day.

Baron-san then explained, “My wife is going to Hawaii for work around the same time you are. Gosh, now I wanna go *with* her. Oh, man...I feel lonely already.”

“Oh, I see. It’s your wife. That *is* quite a coincidence. I thought for a second that maybe *you* were the one going to Hawaii,” I replied.

“I’m afraid it might be too difficult for me this time around. Yeah...but, really. I mean, it must be just a coincidence,” Baron-san muttered.

“What does your wife do?” I asked.

“She works at a school. She’s a school nurse,” he replied.

In that moment, the image of our school nurse—the famous denizen of the nurse’s office—flashed into my mind. She was even making peace signs at me with both of her hands. She was, of course, the one who gave me *that thing*.

Baron-san, too, seemed momentarily at a loss for words. For some odd reason, I hesitated to mention that fact at this particular time.

No way. It’s gotta be just a coincidence.

As I forced myself to reach such a conclusion, neither Baron-san nor I said

anything more about the matter.

For a little while after that, I continued my preparations by listening to Baron-san and Peach-san share with me their various tidbits about things to look out for while in Hawaii.



After finishing my conversation with Baron-san and Peach-san, I switched to talking on the phone with Nanami. I felt like it had been a while since I'd done this particular sequence of events, even though this had been our regular routine until just a while ago.

I dialed Nanami's number. We had gotten used to doing video chats too—including falling asleep while talking—but I still felt nervous during the brief lull in time while I waited for Nanami to pick up the phone. She seemed to be taking a little longer than usual this time. She usually picked up immediately, but this slight wait was probably more normal anyway.

As a sidenote, she and I had decided to intentionally decrease how often we fell asleep while video calling each other. We had gotten our fill of it after doing it a ton, but more than anything, it was starting to seriously impact our daily lives. That was why we made it a point to fall asleep while chatting only when we had no school the next day.

Sometimes Nanami called me when she absolutely couldn't fall asleep. I pretty much always had my phone by my bedside, so when that happened, I picked up pretty quickly too.

"Hello, Yoshin? Sorry I took a while to pick up," Nanami's voice finally said.

"Oh, not at all. It's fine. What's going on?" I asked.

"I was trying on my bathing suit. I'm kind of half dressed right now."

"Right, how about you put some clothes on...as in, aren't you gonna catch cold talking on the phone like that?"

"I'm gonna get dressed in a bit, and I'm also gonna go shower, so I'll be fine!"

It won't be fine if she gets sick right before our trip. But maybe it'll be okay if she's gonna warm up in the bath soon? I also don't need to ask why she's

wearing a bathing suit. She's probably wearing it to do a final check of her luggage before we take off for Hawaii. Yeah, that must be it.

I heard Nanami ask me to wait, her voice gradually moving farther away.

Wait, "farther"? Pause. How come I can hear things? Does she not have me on hold? I moved my phone away from my face and looked at the screen—only to open my eyes wide in shock.

The phone screen displayed Nanami's room.

Shoot, I must've dialed a video call accidentally out of habit. Was it because I had just been thinking about falling asleep during our video calls? No, I was thinking about that *after* I'd dialed Nanami's number.

This wasn't the time to be saying such things, though. Right now, I had my phone to worry about. Was it even okay for me to be looking at it? The screen only showed the ceiling of Nanami's room; she wasn't even near the frame. If that was the case, maybe it was better for me not to point it out.

"Yoshin, can you see? What do you think of this?" I heard Nanami say.

"Whoa?!"

The phone camera on the other end of the line moved, displaying a full body shot of Nanami. She was wearing the bikini set that she wore at the night pool, plus a pair of shorts on the bottom and a shirt on top over it. The shirt was open in the front, showing off her bikini top. The shorts were made of denim and revealed everything up to her thighs. Her hair was tied back with a scrunchie, and she was also wearing her sunglasses.



“I was thinking of wearing this at the beach and the pool. You can kinda see my butt with these shorts, though, so maybe I should wear ones that are a little longer,” she explained. She then proceeded to turn away from the camera and stick her butt out toward it. She was right: when she positioned herself that way, it was...slightly visible.

“You’re right...since it’s a class trip, maybe it’s safer to wear something not too revealing,” I managed to respond.

“Tee hee, you’re probably right, huh? By the way, what kind of shorts do you like, Yoshin? I have ones that are a little bit sexier too.”

You have ones that are even sexier?!

What was she talking about? The ones she had on were plenty sexy already. Or rather, would they even qualify as shorts at that point? Nanami wearing something like that in front of people seemed like a terrible idea.

“Maybe you can...show me next time,” I muttered, unable to resist.

“Yeah, definitely,” Nanami chirped. Her smile was wide, ear to ear like an innocent child’s, a girl eager to show her mother something she was very proud of. In this case, though, she was trying to show *me* a pair of very, very short shorts. Suffice to say that wasn’t quite the same.

“But what’s going on? It looks like you’re having your own fashion show over there. Though the outfit looks great, and you’re very cute,” I commented.

Was she trying to figure out what outfits to pair with her sunglasses? More revealing outfits, rather than layered looks, seemed to suit sunglasses better—though that was definitely my humble opinion.

“Well, I was listening to my parents talk about their honeymoon, and then I just couldn’t resist,” Nanami explained.

“Oh, I see. Your parents went to Hawaii too?” I asked.

“Yup! I’m not sure if it’s like this now, but they told me that when they went a lot of people were walking around the beach dressed like this.”

Each twirl and sway she did was accompanied by a hefty bounce from, well, various parts of her body. *No, I mean, her hair. Her hair, and the shirt she had*

on top and stuff.

Her shirt had half sleeves and a pretty flashy red print pattern. I didn't think I'd seen it before. *Is it new?*

"And this is the Hawaiian shirt that they bought as a keepsake while they were there," Nanami said, tenderly fluttering the front of the shirt with both hands. Every time the shirt shifted, I could see more of her skin, along with parts of her body that I probably wasn't supposed to see. The temptation to look was too much...though I guess I wasn't really planning on resisting all that much.

But, I see, if you'd been to Hawaii before, I guess it made sense that you owned such a thing. Maybe my parents had something like that too.

I felt a stark difference between me and Nanami; whereas I was too embarrassed to ask such a thing, Nanami had no issues asking her parents about their honeymoon. If Nanami and I both had shirts like that, though, maybe our trip really *would* feel like a honeymoon.

Or maybe I was just overthinking it.

"I also have this one!" Nanami said giddily, picking up another Hawaiian shirt and opening it up to show me. The pattern on it looked similar to the one she was wearing, except that this one was in blue. It was fairly large, so it was clear at first glance that it was a shirt intended for guys.

"It was the shirt my dad wore. My parents really hang on to things, huh? They've kept them this entire time since their honeymoon," Nanami explained.

"Yeah, that *is* pretty impressive. I'm not sure if I even have *anything* from more than ten years ago," I said. In fact, I was pretty certain that I didn't. I'd probably gotten rid of them, or lost them, though that was most likely due to the fact that I didn't have a strong attachment to my things.

I had a feeling, though, that I wouldn't be like that with things that reminded me of Nanami. Far from it.

"So, I thought maybe you and I could wear these on our class trip," Nanami suggested.

“Wait, is that okay?” I asked.

“Yeah. When I told my mom and dad about the whole prehoneymoon thing, they practically ordered me to take them and wear them,” she muttered.

Oh, I see. You told them that part too. A part of me thought you might’ve been able to ask them about Hawaii without revealing the prehoneymoon bit.

I guess I had told Baron-san and Peach-san myself, so I could understand that those things just slipped out. And then Nanami’s parents must have also thought that was a cool idea and egged her on. Now that I thought about it, I could really easily see that being the case.

“If that’s how it is, it’d be great to borrow it,” I replied.

“Yay! Then I’ll put them both in my bag,” Nanami returned, hugging the shirts happily for a moment before placing them next to each other on top of the bed, like they were very precious items. Other items were already laid out on her bed as well.

Is she just going through her packing list again? Hold up, what is that highly scanty piece of clothing on the bed? Huh? Strings...? Maybe I’ll pretend like I never saw that.

I thought instead about my parents, wondering if they, too, had held on to any keepsakes from the past. Maybe my thought had worked as some kind of manifestation, because I heard a sudden knock on my door.

“Yoshin, do you have a minute?” I heard my mom ask. *Well, this is rare. I wonder what’s going on.* Even though I was on the phone with Nanami, I asked her to wait, since my mom rarely came by when I was in my room. I then moved to open my door.

“What’s up, mom? It’s rare for you to stop by at this time,” I said to her.

“I thought I heard Nanami-san’s voice. Is it all right to talk?” she asked.

Nanami must have heard my mom’s voice too, because I could hear her voice coming through my phone: she said both a thanks and hello to my mom, which my mom responded to in kind.

I asked my mom if she wanted to talk with Nanami, but my mom declined,

saying she didn't want to disturb us. I had thought that maybe she wanted to talk with Nanami, but that didn't seem to be the case.

When I looked down at my mom's hands, though, I saw her holding clothes that I didn't recognize. *What is that? I've never seen that before.*

She must have noticed me looking, because she unfolded the bundle of fabric she was holding. It was the same item Nanami had shown me earlier, just with a slightly different design. In other words, they were Hawaiian shirts.

"What are these?" I asked, hesitantly.

"They're the Hawaiian shirts that your father and I bought when we went on our honeymoon. They were in storage this whole time. I thought it might be nice for you to take them on your trip, so I went and looked for them," my mom explained, handing me the shirts. She gave me a funny look as she did so, given that I must not have been able to hide the shock from my face. The combination of the shirts and my mom's expression was so funny that I finally just burst out laughing.

My mom, of course, just stared at me as if I had confessed to murder.

Oh, come on. Don't look at me like that. I'm your son, after all.

"What's going on?" she finally asked.

"You won't believe it, mom," I began, then proceeded to explain the exchange that I'd just had with Nanami. My mom, too, opened her eyes wide upon hearing my story, then chuckled softly to herself.

"Great minds think alike, it seems," my mom said, and with that walked away, having completed her task of giving me the shirts.

Maybe now's the time to say it.

"Hey, mom?" I began.

"Yes?" she said as she turned back toward me. When she looked at me, though, the words wouldn't come out of my mouth. It felt weird to be saying it now, of all times—okay, to be honest, I was just embarrassed. I never considered thanking my own parents to be so nerve-racking. But I had to say it, because I felt that I needed to.

My mom stood there, waiting for me to speak.

“Something really did happen that made me want to go on the class trip too. So thank you,” I said.

Though what I said was pretty simple, they seemed enough to take my mom by surprise. Her face relaxed for a moment, and then she broke into a warm smile. It was a relieved smile, the kind you did when a load had been lifted from your shoulders.

“Is that so? I’m glad to hear it.”

That was all she said, but my mom sounded overjoyed. When I thanked her again, my mom simply asked me to tell my dad the same thing as well.

I’ve gotta do this again? I thought, but I nodded. She was right; it was important for my dad to hear this too.

Now satisfied, my mom turned on her heel and slowly walked away from my room.

Good. I managed to actually say it.

Basking in the feeling of a job well done, I slowly closed my door. My phone call with Nanami was still going, so it seemed she was able to hear what I had been saying.

Nanami, in fact, seemed terribly moved.

“How nice...I’m so happy for you, Yoshin,” Nanami said in a teary voice. *Yikes, she heard everything I said to my mom? Why did I think she wouldn’t be able to hear me?*

I had mentioned offhandedly to Nanami that I used to be uninterested in going on the class trip. Still, I had no idea she would react this way to what I said to my mom.

Why was it so mortifying to have someone hear one’s conversation with one’s parents?

“Thanks,” I replied.

Nanami, tears still in her eyes, smiled happily. To see someone be so happy

about something about me...wasn't a bad feeling. Though it was still embarrassing.

I felt like I would be the only one feeling awkward if we kept this up, so I showed Nanami the shirts I borrowed from my mom in order to change the subject. They were green and orange shirts, with the same overall design as the ones Nanami had, but just in different colors.

"Apparently these are the Hawaiian shirts that my parents wore. They told me to take them if I felt like it. I wasn't expecting them to do the exact same thing your parents did," I remarked.

"Wow, those are so cute too! I feel like they're a little different from the ones my parents gave me," Nanami said.

"Yeah. So, um, I'll take these too...and maybe we can wear them together," I suggested.

Nanami had her palms together, her expression filled with happiness. I wasn't expecting my wardrobe for the trip to be organized like this. Since I was pretty sure the trip was five days, according to the itinerary, that meant two out of five days were already checked off.

"I get to wear your family's clothes! I'm so excited! Isn't it going to be the first time you and I wear matching outfits too?" Nanami asked.

"Now that you mention it, you're probably right. I don't think we've ever tried matching our clothes before," I replied.

"I'm so glad that we get to wear our regular clothes on the trip. I can wear all sorts of cute things, and it'll feel like we're going on a date every day!"

Hearing that made even me feel giddy. It would be my first time wearing matching outfits, but since others might not be able to tell just by looking at our shirts, Nanami and I would be the only ones who would know. It'd be our secret.

Well, maybe they *would* know. But even if they did, it wasn't a weird outfit or anything, so it should be fine. As long as we weren't wearing shirts with each other's names written all over them, it probably wouldn't be an issue. Besides, these shirts looked pretty fashionable.

“How about you try one on, Yoshin? I wanna see you in a Hawaiian shirt,” Nanami requested.

“Well, I guess,” I replied, then proceeded to put on the Hawaiian shirt over the one I was wearing now. Nanami, though, gave an audible reaction of disappointment.

Huh? Wait, why are you sighing?

“I really wanted you to take your shirt off,” she murmured.

“I can hear you, you know,” I said.

“That’s the whole point!”

What kind of a response is that?! She clearly had zero intention of masking her desires, but I still hesitated to just take my shirt off right then and there.

That was why I pretended not to hear her. Even though I’d just told her that I could.

“So, uh, did your parents say anything else about the whole prehoneymoon thing?” I asked instead.

“Yeah. They were like, ‘Oh, you’re right, totally!’ And then they just said, ‘Well in that case, you should go all out,’” Nanami explained.

“Hence the Hawaiian shirts.”

“Yeah. They also gave me some recommendations and stuff, though some of the places seemed a little out of the way for our trip.”

That kind of made sense. Baron-san also gave me a lot of recommendations, and many of those places seemed to me like spots we wouldn’t be able to visit this time around.

A lot of the free time we had was scheduled when we were already at a particular destination. Still, maybe it wasn’t a bad idea to look into some of the places they mentioned anyway, just to make the most of all the tips we’d received.

“After talking with Baron-san and Peach-san, I decided that I might as well just enjoy the whole idea too,” I told Nanami.

“Oh yeah? That’s good. In that case, let’s enjoy our honeymoon...just, in a high school friendly way,” she said.

I guess it’s not even a prehoneymoon anymore. Not that that’s a bad thing.

I couldn’t tell Nanami this, but a prehoneymoon sounded to me a lot like a trip that an engaged couple would take before getting married. Not just any trip, but one that people took as they waited to get married.

I wasn’t going to tell Nanami this quite yet, because if I did, I was pretty sure that both her excitement *and* embarrassment would go through the roof. I should probably wait to tell her this until *after* the trip. That way, she should be able to take in the information more calmly. Or maybe even during the trip itself.

A trip with Nanami... I knew that we were just going on a class trip, but maybe because I was currently wearing a Hawaiian shirt, it hit me all over again that she and I were going on a trip together.

I was looking forward to it so much that I wanted to scream.

“Oh, hey. So, I have something I wanted to ask you about,” Nanami began, a strange expression on her face.

“Hm? What’s up?” I asked, trying to suppress that urge rising inside of me. *Something she wants to ask me? Of course I’ll listen. Does she wanna ask me about what we should do during the trip? If there’s anything I can do, I’ll definitely...*

“I’m thinking of getting a little bit of a tan while I’m in Hawaii. What do you think?” she asked.

“Huh?” I muttered, picturing Nanami with more golden skin. My immediate mental picture was of Nanami in a bathing suit—as in, exactly the way she was dressed right now.

She’s gonna look great, no questions asked. But wait, I like her milky white skin too. But she’d look so sexy with a tan...

I ended up holding my head in my hands as I struggled to answer Nanami’s unexpected question.



The last time I wore my regular clothes to school was over the summer, back when I was taking supplementary classes. At that time, Shirishizu-san and I, along with Nanami and her friends, were all hanging out in the classroom together; the fact that we were wearing our regular clothes despite being at school felt both strange and also undeniably fun.

Today on campus, there was a mix of students in both regular clothes and school uniforms, making it look like the student population had somehow drastically decreased overnight.

In reality, the students in regular clothes were the same year as me, while those in uniforms were either one year above or below.

“Thank you for dropping us off, Genichiro-san. My parents say hello as well,” I said.

“No problem at all. I’m glad I could take a day off from work today. I could’ve taken you guys to the airport too, but Nanami wouldn’t let me,” Genichiro-san replied.

I was looking at the crowd of students on campus while sitting in a car. I had assumed I would have to lug my suitcase on the train to get to school, but instead Genichiro-san offered to drive me along with Nanami, saying that it would be too much trouble for me to try to go to school as usual with all my luggage.

As a sidenote, my dad offered to pick us up when we got back from our trip. Our parents all must have discussed it beforehand.

“You stand out, dad. I can’t have you doing that,” Nanami said, looking slightly embarrassed, while also appearing somewhat guilty and apologetic toward her father. It was the response of a normal teenage girl, and it seemed Genichiro-san understood that, backing off from the idea of taking us all the way to the airport.

“So you’re meeting up on the athletic field today?” he asked.

“That’s right. We’re supposed to be taking a charter bus to get to the airport,” I explained.

“A charter bus, huh? Nice. How exciting. It reminds me of the field trips I took back then,” Genichiro-san said, nostalgia coloring his voice, as though just the mention of a bus threw him back into his memories. *Was the last time I took a bus to go on a trip when I was in middle school? No, I must have had a trip last year too.*

Getting on a rental bus was pretty exciting. I didn’t remember where I went the last time I got on a charter bus, but I did remember enjoying the scenery as it passed us by.

“Come to think of it, do you ever get car sick or anything?” I asked Nanami.

“No, I don’t think so. I’ve never gotten sick on rides and stuff,” she replied.

Awesome—then even our bus ride will make for some fun times. It’d be a bummer if we got sick at all during our trip.

Seeing Nanami humming to herself put even me in a good mood.

Today, Nanami was wearing a fairly tame outfit...as in, she was wearing tight, formfitting jeans, but with a plain shirt and light jacket on top.

The weather here was pretty cool, but she was probably wearing light layers because it would be quite warm in Hawaii. And since we had quite a bit of moving around to do today, she most likely wore a more comfortable outfit on purpose. She seemed to be going for functionality above all, given that she was also wearing sneakers. Those were probably way more comfortable than any kind of dressy shoes.

Like Nanami, I was also wearing normal jeans and a T-shirt, along with a pair of sneakers. Though I definitely didn’t look nearly as stylish as Nanami did.

“Wow, our trip is finally here. I’m so nervous, I’m, like, ticklish all over. Hold me, Yoshin!” Nanami said, her whole body trembling.

“Um, uh...here? How?” I asked. Not knowing what to do, I placed my hand softly on her shoulder.

“Aaahn!” Nanami let out.

Oh my god, please don’t make sounds like that when we’re in the car with your father. Oh, look, now he’s trying to see what we’re doing back here even

though he's supposed to keep his eyes on the road. This is super dangerous.

The moment I quickly removed my hand from her shoulder, Nanami placed her own hand where mine used to be. Her body had already stopped quivering.

"S-Sorry Yoshin, I wasn't expecting you to touch me there," she muttered helplessly.

"I-I'm sorry too," I replied.

In my head, I had asked Nanami to stop making sounds like that, but it seemed *I* was the one responsible for her outburst. I felt like a complete fool. *But, I mean, where was I supposed to hold her? Should I have touched her scalp or something?*

"Make sure you two keep things in check while you're on the trip, okay? We're almost there," Genichiro-san admonished us, making both me and Nanami look down at our knees in shame. We couldn't argue with him at all. It felt bad that he even had to tell us that in the first place.

Nanami must have felt embarrassed too, because she didn't seem to know what to say either. Genichiro-san, too, certainly seemed awkward as well.

The mood in the car had turned quite strange, but having arrived safely at school, we took our luggage out of the trunk and got ready to make our way to the meeting spot.

"Well, it's not like it's a bad thing for you two to be close. I hope you enjoy the trip," Genichiro-san said.

"Thank you," I said.

"Thanks, dad," Nanami added.

As Nanami and I began to make our way toward the others, though, Genichiro-san grabbed me—just me—by the shoulder. Nanami didn't seem to notice and kept going.

Is he gonna yell at me for earlier?! I wondered, but it turned out that wasn't the case at all. What he did was give me a very plain and simple warning.

"Yoshin-kun...please do watch out for Nanami's behavior," he murmured.

“Huh? Wh-What do you mean?” I stammered.

“If she gets too excited during the trip, there’s a chance she might get a little carried away. If that happens, I need you to take care of her.”

“That can’t possibly...”

“It’s what happened to Tomoko.”

You mean you’re telling me this based on...experience?

When I looked at him, Genichiro-san nodded, face entirely solemn. I could do nothing but nod back in return.

Genichiro-san then tapped me lightly on the back, propelling me to walk forward. When I glanced back at him over my shoulder, I saw him waving at the two of us.

I waved back, then hurried toward Nanami, who had stopped to wait for me while I spoke with Genichiro-san.

“What were you talking to my dad about?” she asked.

“Hm? Oh, you know, just to look out for you and stuff, since we’re going abroad and all,” I answered.

I really, really had to watch out for her. It was true that when Nanami got excited and carried away, she became almost dangerously unpredictable. I wanted us to have fun on the trip, but I also had to keep my head on straight. *I’ve gotta keep things under control!*

Having renewed my resolve, I held hands with Nanami and headed toward the meeting spot. Our friends were already waiting there, their suitcases by their side, waving at us.

We seemed to be the last ones to arrive out of our group. As I pulled my suitcase behind me alongside Nanami, I felt myself growing more and more excited.



What’s the best thing about riding a charter bus?

The way I saw it, the simple fact of riding a vehicle you didn’t normally use

was in and of itself exciting. And another thing was that, on a bus, you could continue feeling the pre-trip excitement. Technically, our trip had begun the moment we got on, but there was something about the bus that made it feel like we were still waiting for everything to start. Was I the only one who felt this way? Maybe this was just another instance of enjoying the process rather than the result.

“You want a snack, Yoshin?” Nanami asked.

“Oh, yeah. Thanks,” I said, reaching out to take the snack from Nanami...only to find that she kept it in her own hand rather than give it to me. *Huh? We’re doing this here too?*

I opened my mouth in silence, though, unable to resist Nanami’s guileless smile. She slowly brought the snack up to my mouth while she remained silent too, since saying anything would only bring attention to ourselves. The seats on the charter bus were fairly deep, though, so people around us probably couldn’t see what we were doing.

“Must you guys start that *already?*” muttered Hitoshi as he stared at us in exasperation from across the aisle, making both of us jump. Nanami was so surprised that she grabbed onto my arm.

“Weren’t you all excited earlier because you got to sit next to Kamoenai-san?” I asked.

“Yeah, that’s been great. She gave me snacks just now, and she’s super nice, even to guys other than her boyfriend,” Hitoshi described.

“Isn’t that pretty normal?” I muttered.

“No way! Hatsumi pretty much ignores any guy who isn’t her boyfriend. But people think that’s what makes her so cool and attractive too,” Kamoenai-san explained, leaning over to talk to us. Her body almost cleared the entire aisle in a kind of physical bridge. *Doesn’t it kind of hurt to do that?* I wondered.

Otofuke-san had never treated me that way, so I was surprised to hear Kamoenai-san say that about her. I guess she did sometimes seem brusque, but I was pretty certain that at her core she was quite kind.

“Quit saying stuff like that,” Otofuke-san cut in. “Besides, Kenbuchi seems

happy that I treat him that way...though I can't understand why."

"I'm always grateful!" Hitoshi exclaimed, saluting her. Otofuke-san only furrowed her brows in response and turned around to look at us. *Wow, this guy's pretty much invincible.*



Right now, Otofuke-san and Shirishizu-san were sitting in the seats in front of us. The six of us were sitting together so that we could more easily discuss what we were going to do as a group. Not everyone was staying close to their group mates, though.

I'd seen Otofuke-san and Kamoenai-san in regular clothes before, but it was a new experience to see Hitoshi and Shirishizu-san in anything other than the school uniform. Wait, what had Shirishizu-san been wearing during supplementary classes in the summer? I couldn't really remember. Maybe she wore her uniform then too.

Like Nanami, both Otofuke-san and Kamoenai-san had opted for pants today, but Kamoenai-san's outfit seemed to be slightly more revealing. Shirishizu-san was wearing a breezy dress, while Hitoshi was wearing shorts and a T-shirt. Everyone gave off a different impression from when they were wearing their school uniforms, but their outfits all suited them.

Maybe because we were headed to Hawaii, but many of the other girls chose to wear more revealing outfits today as well. I could only be impressed by them wearing such clothes, given that the weather had turned chilly.

Hitoshi only nodded and murmured, "Nothing beats dressing for warm weather," appraising the girls like he was an artist of some kind. The other guys also followed suit.

Hitoshi was pretty good-looking, but maybe it was little things like this that kept him from getting a girlfriend.

We were taking the bus to the airport, going through the necessary procedures before getting on the plane, and then taking off for Hawaii.

"I wonder why our class trip destination is Hawaii though," I suddenly thought to ask.

"Apparently back when the students at our school were more rowdy, the teachers decided that they wouldn't be able to make trouble if they went to a foreign country and couldn't speak the language. And then I guess the students actually did behave a lot better, so they just kept things that way," Hitoshi explained.

“What kind of a reason is that?” I had to ask.

“Not sure if it’s true though,” he added.

How did he even know stuff like that? More importantly, our class trip pamphlet said so many great things about what this trip was about, and yet *that* was the real reason we were going to Hawaii? Well, I guess maybe that was as good a reason as any. Things could start in whatever way; we just had to justify them later with reasons that sounded good. And since all these reasons were why we could even go on a trip in the first place, I should probably just be grateful.

“Then does that mean that if we cause trouble in Hawaii, then our school won’t get to go to Hawaii anymore either? I guess we should be careful, huh?” Nanami commented.

“True. Maybe I *shouldn’t* hit on any hot blondes, then,” Hitoshi mumbled.

Yeah, definitely give up on that. I mean, he was probably joking, but it would take a lot of guts to try to hit on someone while on a class trip. Wait, he was gonna hit on the locals there? In Japanese...?

“Maybe I should’ve studied English more,” I muttered as well, opening up the class trip pamphlet, only to find printed on the page simple English phrases as well as manners and etiquette we should keep in mind while in Hawaii. It only reaffirmed to me that things in Hawaii would be different from how they were in Japan.

I did of course study English and American culture a little bit in school, but I still couldn’t shake the feeling that I should’ve done more. I bookmarked language sites and downloaded some translation apps on my phone, but still.

“Oh, come on, Yoshin. How about we try being more positive?” Nanami suggested.

“Positive...like what?” I asked.

“Like...food? There’s a lot of tasty things in Hawaii, right?”

Food, huh? I guess they did mention that at the class trip info session too: that there are a lot of dishes in Hawaii that Japanese people would probably be

familiar with, and that even if it looked different, it was seasoned in a way that Japanese people would like. Yeah, food definitely is important. It can get pretty tough if you don't feel comfortable with what you're eating.

"Does everyone have stuff they wanna eat?" I asked.

"Meat! I wanna eat *meat*, man. I heard they sell big chunks of steak and that they're really good," Hitoshi shared.

"Maybe some chocolates? I read somewhere that there are shops that only sell their stuff in Hawaii, and that their chocolates are really good," Kamoenai-san explained.

"I think I wanna have some garlic shrimp," Otofuke-san said. "I've been tasked with bringing back the sauce they sell here as a souvenir."

"I'm hoping to try some poke. I like meat too, but it would be nice to try some seafood as well," Shirishizu-san added.

Wow, everyone has stuff they wanna eat. But how much of that can we actually have during the trip? I feel like I wanna try all of them, but I wonder if that's too difficult.

"Do you have something you wanna try, Nanami?" I asked, having noticed that, even as everyone else shared their thoughts, Nanami alone hadn't spoken up. I turned to her, thinking her silence was somewhat out of character, only to see Nanami had covered her mouth with the trip pamphlet.

"I think I wanna try *all of them*," Nanami whispered.

It seemed she couldn't bring herself to decide, because she looked more than slightly embarrassed, a sheepish look on her face.

Everyone was taken aback for a moment, but then they all smiled at Nanami's adorable response.

Maybe she thought they were all laughing at her, but Nanami removed the pamphlet that was hiding her face and started protesting angrily—though even that was cute, since she was turning as red as a tomato.

"Jeez! I can't help it, okay?! I wanna eat hamburgers, but the loco moco sounds good too, and then there's pancakes and malassadas and acai bowls

too!" she wailed.

As Nanami listed off a bunch of different food items, everyone else also agreed that they wanted to try those as well. Everyone's food list was getting longer, it seemed.

From dishes we knew, to dishes we didn't. It was definitely true that trying local foods was one of the best things about going on a trip. All this indecision and hubbub probably couldn't be helped.

"Your eyes sure are bigger than your stomach, huh?" I said playfully to Nanami.

"Oh, come on! Seriously?! I mean, how can I not?! My mom told me about them, and they all sounded so good. And besides..." Nanami said, her voice trailing off.

"Besides?" I asked.

"Sh-She told me that she made such great memories eating all those things with my dad. That's why..."

I wanted to eat the same things too, and make memories with you, Nanami finally said. I had thought that she was sounding particularly eager to eat this time around, but I didn't realize she had a larger motivation for saying what she did.

Talk about being mortified. I didn't even appreciate the fact that Nanami was trying so hard to think of ways to enjoy our trip together.

I mean, of course I was thinking about that too. But it never even occurred to me to trace my parents' steps and recreate those memories with Nanami.

"You're right, Nanami. Let's eat *everything*," I declared at last, doing a complete one-eighty from a moment ago.

"But that's impossible," everyone else said.

I mean, I know that too, but...

"But the malassadas are like the doughnut thingies, right?" I said. "I'm pretty sure that there's a malassada shop near where we're going on the second day. And there's probably pancakes and acai bowl places near the hotel. The poke... I

can't remember. Maybe that one's kind of a challenge?"

I tried to list off the foods we might be able to eat during our class trip, digging through my memories of all the Hawaii research I'd done. I should've noted all these things down in my phone or something.

Considering the itinerary for the class trip, we should be able to hit up a bunch of different food places, even if we couldn't quite eat *everything* we wanted to. I had to think about what to do for the ones we might not be able to squeeze in. They could maybe be at the market we were going to during our free time?

"You looked up all those things, Yoshin?" Nanami asked, incredulous.

"Yeah, I just got curious when I was flipping through the pamphlet, so I decided to check stuff out online. But if we were actually gonna talk about this I should've done a better job of noting it down," I replied.

I did make a note of all the different places that Baron-san and Peach-san recommended to me though. Still, I should've thought to discuss these things *while* we were preparing for the trip. The pamphlet had timetables and brief descriptions for each day, so we'd talked about what we wanted to do where, but still.

"That's pretty impressive though, man. I mean, I was excited about stuff, but I never thought about doing my own research," Hitoshi admitted.

"Oh, I think I just happened to do it this time, really. I mean, it all started because I saw that our trip was six days, four nights, and I had no idea how that was possible. So I started looking things up," I confessed too.

"Ah, yeah, that freaked me out too. For a second there I thought maybe they were gonna make us pull an all-nighter," Hitoshi shared.

I actually thought that too. Also, maybe because it was a class trip, but we definitely had less free time than I thought we would; I assumed that we might get a whole day to ourselves.

Maybe this was the way things had to be, given that this was still a part of class. But I wished we had a *bit* more freedom. Well, the itinerary did say we had time to go to the hotel pool. Could we go to the beach too? I was pretty

sure that the pamphlet mentioned the hotel being attached to a private beach, which made it a pretty safe place. If that was the case, then maybe Nanami and I going there could be nice.

The beach, or the pool. Both seemed like good options.

“And? What do *you* wanna eat, Yoshin?” Nanami asked me.

“Huh? Me?” I had to ask.

“Yeah! You asked all of us, but you didn’t say what *you* wanted to eat. Tell us!” she urged.

Ah, true. I guess I looked up a bunch of things, but I didn’t really stop to think about what I wanted to eat myself. When I was searching I always found myself thinking that things looked tasty, and that Nanami might like them; I’d completely forgotten to consider what *I* wanted to eat.

As I sat there, groaning and trying to come up with a response, Nanami continued watching me, her eyes glittering with expectation. I never knew that she could look at me with so much interest. Maybe she was extra curious about what I wanted to eat, given that she had declared her desire to eat everything. *Hmm...what I wanna eat, huh...?*

“I guess when I’m eating out, the only thing that really matters is that I’m eating with Nanami,” I muttered.

Everyone around me fell silent. Nanami turned bright red, while the others grinned from ear to ear, which made Nanami blush even more.

But wasn’t it true that when you went out to eat it mattered more who you were with than what you were actually eating? As in, even cheap stuff could be tasty if you were sharing it with the right person.

I had said it off the cuff, but I felt like I had kind of hit the nail on the head. If I thought of things that way, then maybe whatever I wanted to eat would simply reveal itself to me. That being whatever would elicit the cutest reaction from Nanami, in any case.

I pictured Nanami, breaking into a smile as she tasted something truly amazing. *That* was the cutest expression of all. A girl looked the cutest when

she was happily eating something.

That meant...

"I guess I would have to say pancakes, then," I said.

"Wow. I don't often hear you say you want something sweet."

"You look happiest eating pancakes," I replied. "Plus I thought they would be easy to order a lot of so we could try different kinds."

"O-Oh, so I really *was* the criterion for your decision," she muttered.

I thought really hard about my response, but Nanami ended up with a pretty awkward smile on her face.

Sure, I *did* use Nanami as my criterion, but I also genuinely wanted to try eating pancakes. In Japan I didn't have many occasions to eat the kinds of pancakes that were popular in Hawaii, and I honestly didn't really know the difference between those and regular old hotcakes.

I guess I'd been caught up with the idea of doing everything with Nanami, but I was also getting pretty excited myself.

"Jeez, Misumai really does put Nanami before everything. Ugh, why couldn't I have gone to Hawaii with my boyfriend too!" Otofuke-san suddenly exclaimed.

"Literally! Why can't we bring our boyfriends on this trip anyway?" Kamoenai-san jumped in.

"Probably *because* it's a class trip, you love fools," Hitoshi remarked.

Otofuke-san and Kamoenai-san seemed completely earnest in their complaints about the class trip, but hearing Hitoshi's comment only made them pout even more.

Love fools, huh? I guess he's not exactly wrong about that.

"Man, are the class rep and I really the only ones in this group that are single? Wait, I guess the class rep is taken too?" Hitoshi asked, shooting an accusatory glass at Shirishizu-san.

Shirishizu-san had been fairly quiet until then, but when Hitoshi looked at her, she jerked a bit. *That's right, she's totally not single... We formed that alibi*

alliance with her because she wanted to hang out with Teshikaga-kun, remember? Hitoshi must have remembered too, because he sadly murmured, “So I *am* the only one...”

But we were all expected to move around in groups while in Hawaii, which meant that it seemed pretty difficult to spend time with people from other classes. Would Shirishizu-san be okay with that?

Wait, more importantly...

“Teshikaga-kun’s coming on the class trip too, right?” I asked.

“Yup, Taku-chan’s definitely coming,” Shirishizu-san replied.

Oh, good, he was here. Though I guess I should’ve known, given that we talked a lot about the class trip beforehand. He also let me know that classmates had started to see him much differently after the school festival.

I knew that he and I were in different classes, but I really did hope that we would be able to enjoy the class trip together a bit too.

“Where are you planning to meet up with him?” I asked.

“Well, we decided that it would be pretty hard to see each other during the day, so we thought we’d meet up at the hotel first. We also promised to send each other pictures when we were out with our groups,” she explained.

That seemed like a pretty cool idea too: being in separate groups, but taking photos and sending updates just to keep in touch.

Seeing Shirishizu-san look so happy despite being apart from Teshikaga-kun made me and Nanami...or, rather, everyone in the group feel all warm and fuzzy inside.

This actually wasn’t too bad at all—riding the bus and chatting together, thinking about where we were going and sharing how we felt about the trip.

We ended up really focusing on food, but it was still somewhat difficult for me to come up with dishes that I wanted to eat. It’s funny; whenever we talked about Nanami’s cooking I could go on and on about food, no problem.

Hmmm? Nanami’s cooking?

“Wait, does this mean that I won’t get to eat Nanami’s cooking while we’re on the trip?” I suddenly blurted.

“Well, of course. This is a class trip, after all.”

“Wait, you thought of that just now?”

I was in so much shock that I didn’t even know who made those comments—an exasperated Nanami, or maybe Otofuke-san and the girls, or perhaps even Hitoshi had said something.

Seriously? No, really—seriously?! I hadn’t even thought of that. Maybe I had just been too excited about the trip to realize it, or maybe a part of me intentionally didn’t want to consider the idea in the first place.

That’s right, we’re gonna be at a hotel. Of course we can’t cook anything. Wait, maybe we’ll have home ec classes during...er, no we won’t.

“I’m pretty sure you’re the only high schooler who tumbles into a pit of despair because he can’t eat his girlfriend’s cooking,” Hitoshi said, clearly exasperated. Still, I couldn’t argue with him. Nanami was smiling wryly too, and Otofuke-san and the others had their mouths hanging open as well.

I see...for six days and four nights I’ll have to go without Nanami’s cooking...

“Could the class trip get canceled somehow?” I murmured to myself.

“What are you saying all of a sudden?!” Nanami yelled.

Of course I was joking, but I felt so devastated that I almost meant it. I mean, we were talking about me giving up *Nanami’s cooking* for so long.

We’d had something like this before, but that was just for two days and one night, so I could bear it. And that time we had a barbecue, so in a way I was still eating Nanami’s cooking.

But this trip is twice as long as that. Am I going to be able to get through this alive? No, this is bad. I can’t be getting depressed like this; I need to snap out of it. This is supposed to be a fun trip. No bad vibes Yoshin. I can’t bring everyone else down.

For starters, I slapped my cheeks with both hands to switch up my mood. I didn’t do this terribly often, so even a light touch left my cheeks stinging.

The others seemed shocked by my sudden, strange action, but it did the trick.

“I should look at it this way: I have something to look forward to *after* the trip,” I declared, forcing myself to think positively. *That’s right—hunger is the best sauce, so getting to eat Nanami’s food after a long dry spell will be amazing.*

“Jeez, Yoshin! Seriously! I mean, seriously!” Nanami yelled, turning red and looking irate as she began hitting me lightly. Her punches didn’t hurt at all, though; if anything, they felt quite relaxing.

Nanami probably wasn’t *actually* angry either. When I put my palms together in a gesture of apology, she laughed, clear joy audible in the sound.



The airplane seats were a lot more comfortable than I was expecting them to be. I’d thought they’d be small and cramped, but in reality they weren’t that bad.

We arrived at the airport without any hiccups, and the class had one final info session in one of the airport meeting rooms. We also checked to see if we’d forgotten anything, and then we went through security. In the end, we were able to get to our gate with plenty of time to spare. Apparently they had scheduled in ample time at the airport to accommodate any potential hiccups, but fortunately there was no such trouble for us this year.

In past trips there were people who’d forgotten their passports or neglected to submit necessary paperwork, so they weren’t able to go on the trip at all.

How bad would it feel to show up at the airport and find out that actually, you weren’t going on the trip at all? It would probably make my earlier despair over not getting to eat Nanami’s cooking incredibly trite.

Now, all we had to do was just sit on this plane and head toward our destination. I was pretty sure the flight was eight hours. Maybe seven and a half, though there wasn’t a whole lot of difference between seven and a half and eight hours anyway. In other words, we were going to be on this plane for about as long as we usually spent a day at school.

I’d never experienced something like that before, but I was confident that I

would be able to get through it. Right now, I felt like I was better positioned than anyone else to do so.

Because...

"It seems so weird to leave and arrive on the same day," I mumbled.

"The time difference is so funny, isn't it? Technically we'll get there this morning," Nanami said, seeming amused.

"I feel like I'm time traveling. Like I'm in a sci-fi movie or something."

"Oooh, that's cool. Maybe I wanna see a sci-fi movie sometime. Should we go watch one together once we get home?" Nanami suggested.

A sci-fi movie, huh? It's true that on dates we usually see action or romance movies. I don't think we've watched sci-fi together though.

You guessed it—right now, Nanami was sitting next to me.

She, like me, was stowing her carry-on luggage and checking out the feel of her seat, adjusting the backrest and tightening her seat belt.

"Nanami, are you sure you don't wanna be in the window seat? Do you wanna switch?" I asked her.

"Oh, no, I'm good. If I wanna look outside, I'll just look with you," she replied.

"I guess that sounds good...wait, how would you do that, exactly?"

"Hm? Like this!" she said, unbuckling her seat belt and leaning over my body to bring her face closer to the window. As expected, her torso crossed mine and created what must have been a very scandalous image.

I was pretty sure we couldn't be like this terribly often: me sitting down and Nanami stretching her body across in front of me. We were so close, and yet just barely touching each other.

Nanami immediately returned to her seat, and I couldn't be sure if she realized just how close she had been to me. She, for one, was opening up her palms as if to indicate that she'd pulled off some kind of a magic trick.

"I'm just so glad that we got to sit next to each other," she said.

"Same. The person I switched seats with was really a lifesaver," I replied.

I had thought that our seats were already assigned, and that we weren't able to choose them freely. It turned out, though, that our seats had been reserved as a block, and that we were simply going to sit in the seat of the ticket we were handed. In other words, individual seats were not assigned to specific people.

Students who hadn't gotten the seat they wanted, therefore, could simply trade tickets with others. Some wanted window seats, while others wanted to sit with certain people—that kind of thing.

That was also how Nanami and I ended up swapping one of our tickets with someone else—or, rather, *someone else* asked us first if we wanted to switch with them, saying that I probably preferred sitting next to Nanami.

I was grateful. I really was. Except...the person who asked me was a girl from a different class.

I knew this already, but it shook me to see evidence that people from other classes knew Nanami and I were together. Though I knew that was because of me.

I mean, this was to be expected, given all the things I'd done at the school festival and the sports festival. Still, being reminded of it made me want to hold my head in my hands.

Regardless, that was all in the past. The fact that Nanami was sitting in the seat next to me now let me forget all the painful truths from just moments ago.

Conquer reality with reality.

Otofuke-san and Kamoenai-san, on the other hand, were spread apart, since they seemed not to care too much who sat next to them. The one that was most impressive, though, was Shirishizu-san.

Right now, she was sitting right next to Teshikaga-kun. She was supposedly doing so in order to keep an eye on a delinquent student, and to provide support if anything were to happen.

Uh, *right*. That was usually something that the class rep from *his* class was supposed to do. Still, she managed to win that seat for herself.

Actually, though, the class rep from the other class seemed pretty relieved

when Shirishizu-san took the spot, so maybe some of Teshikaga-kun's classmates were still afraid of him. I had heard that they were slowly starting to accept him, but it would probably take more time for him to completely become a part of his class. Still, I felt like he was doing so at a much faster rate than I was.

He's living his best life.

"Something wrong, Yoshin? Oh, if you're cold, do you want me to warm you up?" Nanami asked.

"What do you mean, warm me up...? No, I mean, I was just thinking that everyone seems to be having a good time sitting where they wanted to sit," I explained.

When I looked around, I saw that Hitoshi was having a great time being surrounded by girls. It seemed his seat was coincidentally located in the midst of a bunch of female students. I thought that maybe the girls would be annoyed by him, but they seemed to be enjoying his company as well. Hitoshi was technically pretty good-looking, after all.

"We all made it on board, and there doesn't seem to be any pre-departure trouble. I guess we'll be able to take off without a hitch, huh?" I remarked.

"Seems like it. Though there did seem to be something up with the teachers earlier," Nanami noted.

We heard a bit of a commotion among the teachers when we all went through security. It seemed that one of them had submitted a slightly incorrect application, and that they might have to stay behind because of it.

Just then, though, our homeroom teacher and the school nurse seemed to give them some advice, thus resolving the issue.

Apparently the teacher in question had written down their passport number incorrectly, but because of the time difference that Nanami also mentioned earlier, it was going to be fine as long as the teacher submitted a new application immediately.

I had no idea that could even be a problem. Knowing that now could come in handy for the future. I'll try to remember this.

And? You want to know how I know all this? Because our homeroom teacher just told us about it.

“That teacher coincidentally was the one who had the most reservations about you two. But since I just did them a favor, and with your improved test scores to boot, I don’t think you’ll have anything to worry about during the trip.”

Our teacher had approached me and Nanami and explained all that, though he prefaced it by saying that he was simply talking to himself. The teacher in question had thanked our teacher and the school nurse profusely, tears in their eyes and everything.

The school nurse winked when she saw us, while our teacher flashed us a peace sign—though he made sure no one else could see it.

Nanami and I both bowed to express our thanks. I knew that they weren’t supposed to be playing favorites, but I was nothing but grateful for the fact that they were willing to go so far to look out for us.

In any case, because of this, we no longer had anything to worry about during our trip. Nanami and I would be able to enjoy our trip together to the fullest.

“I’ll have to find a way to thank the teachers,” I murmured.

“In that case, make sure you get good grades. I’ll be expecting high marks on your next set of exams too,” the teacher said.

“Whoa?!” I let out.

He must have been making one final round, because he totally heard me talking to myself. And, uh, did he just say “good grades”?

“We’ll have to study hard, huh? I’ll be sure to give you more private tutoring sessions then,” Nanami said, a teasing smile playing on her lips as she looked into my face. The teacher, too, waved and said, “Good luck,” though without much energy or sincerity at all.

Nanami, her face still close to mine, then added in a voice that only I could hear, “If you work hard, I’ll be sure to give you a reward.” She then poked her index finger hard into my chest and leaped away from me. I knew I was the only one who witnessed it, but that was what she most definitely did.

I could still feel her finger pressing into my chest.

“I’ll work hard,” I replied, my face breaking into a weird smile out of embarrassment. I didn’t know if my smile was that amusing, or if she was just happy I was willing to work hard, but Nanami smiled happily once again.

Soon after that, we heard the plane engines start up. As if that was the cue, the cabin attendants began coming down the aisles, checking on our luggage. Once all the overhead bins were closed, an announcement came on—and the plane began to move.

“Wow. This is it,” I whispered.

“My heart won’t stop pounding. This is my first time, you know,” Nanami said, growing quiet, perhaps out of nervousness. We...as in, this giant mass of steel was going to fly through the sky. I knew I sounded like some kind of out of touch hermit, but it was finally hitting me that, yes, we were actually going to be *flying*.

The invention of flight allowed humans to travel long distances quickly. But doing so also introduced the possibility of a plane crash, with all the damage included.

Thinking that scared me instantly. When I was looking up things about Hawaii, I had foolishly looked up things about plane crashes too.

I really shouldn’t have looked that kind of stuff up, thinking back on it; if I didn’t know about it, I wouldn’t have been scared of it.

The tragedy and scale of a plane crash were incomparable, making it something I absolutely did *not* want to experience. It seemed that the rate of accidents were pretty low, but it still wasn’t zero.

I found myself shifting my feet nervously.

This floor wouldn’t give out in the middle of the flight and send us tumbling into the sky, would it? Like an extreme candid camera thing? There’s no way there’d be some other trick, like we’d be forced to leap off the plane wing or something, right?

Thinking that made me remember the story of a passenger who got pulled

out into the open air because their window cracked. *No, no. Don't think about it. Just calm down.*

Unfortunately, human beings were strange creatures: when you told them not to think about something, they did. Maybe this also had something to do with the fact that I was afraid of heights.

Just as I sensed the plane vibrate and begin to move, I felt Nanami's hand gently touch mine.

"It's okay. We're gonna be fine," I heard her say.

When I looked over, I saw that Nanami was smiling at me, even though she was clearly also a little scared. She must have been nervous about her first flight too, and yet here she was, looking out for me.



Feeling pathetic but also grateful for Nanami's kindness, I squeezed her hand tightly.

"Yoshin, are you okay? I know you're not good with heights, so I thought maybe you were in a rougher shape than I was," she said.

"No, I'm okay. I'm doing okay," I replied.

I guess Nanami had her own fears to deal with. I loosened my grip slightly and then enveloped her hand once again to try to comfort her in turn.

I had been totally helpless last time, so this time, I had to make sure to be the one to allay her fears.

Nanami squeezed my hand back. As if to exchange the heat from each of our hands, we just sat there, fingers entwined, clasping them like lovers did. We felt reluctant about having other people see, though, so we made sure to place our hands out of plain sight.

When the noise of the airplane grew louder, I felt the pressure on my body grow stronger too. I smiled at Nanami to soothe her, and she smiled back at me in return.

It's okay. We're gonna be fine.

And then, we felt a vibration run through us, low and heavy. The plane picked up speed, and in the next moment, we felt a floating sensation lift up our bodies.

"Wow. Did we just...take off?" I murmured.

"Seems like it. Look, we're getting away from the ground," Nanami said.

When I looked out the window, I saw the scenery at a diagonal. It was slightly terrifying, but the curiosity in me won out and I brought myself closer to the window.

And then I looked out at the ground below.

"Wow. That's amazing," I let out.

The sight before me was like nothing I'd ever seen before. As we left the ground farther behind us the buildings grew smaller too. Cars were still slightly

visible, and white clouds got closer and closer to us.

The ground, as it grew farther away at incredible speed, seemed like something entirely unreal.

“Hm? Yoshin, are you doing okay? I thought that maybe you would be scared,” Nanami asked.

“Oh, I guess I *am* fine,” I returned.

“Oh, darn. I thought maybe you’d jump into my arms, and I’d get to comfort you again,” she said.

No, no, no. We can’t have that on the plane. Everyone else is here with us. But...it really is strange that I feel perfectly fine. Is it that we’re so high up and far that I don’t feel afraid anymore? Like, maybe if the earth was closer, it’d seem more real and I’d be more scared?

Maybe now, though, I wouldn’t have to worry so much about being afraid of flying.

“Are you okay, Nanami?” I asked.

“Um...I’m still a little scared. Could you hold my hand for a bit longer?” she replied.

“I’d be happy to.”

Even if she looked fine, if she was still feeling uneasy at all, then of course I would keep holding her hand. In fact, we should stay this way until she was no longer scared.

After that, Nanami and I softly exchanged words between ourselves as we held each other’s hands tightly. We only let go once the airplane had stabilized and the in-flight announcements began. Until then, we kept our hands entwined. Neither one of us felt nervous by then, but we just didn’t feel like letting go.

Once the plane began to cruise, the people around us began to chat more loudly among themselves.

Since we’d all switched seats to our hearts’ content before boarding, there weren’t that many people making the move. Just a couple of people started to

shift around, while the rest just chatted more comfortably. It felt kind of loud, but this was probably expected for a class trip, though I imagined if you weren't part of the trip you'd think we were being far too noisy.

I had wondered why we all boarded the plane first, but this must have been the reason: this entire section of the plane only seated students from our school.

"We're in the long haul now, huh?" I said to Nanami.

"Yeah. Even though the seats here are bigger than I'd thought they'd be, I'm still probably gonna be pretty sore by the time we arrive," she remarked as she got in a long, good stretch. That made one specific part of her body jut out, but given that I was the only one watching her right now, it was probably okay.

Yeah, I'm probably gonna get really stiff too.

"What is it, like, that venous thrombosis or whatever? The thing where it's dangerous unless you drink lots of water and move around?" I said.

"Oh, right. That. It's why they say to stay active even if you're on a plane, right?" Nanami said, immediately taking off her shoes and proceeding to move her cute little feet around. I didn't have a foot fetish or anything, but the sight still made my heart skip a beat.

"Something the matter?" Nanami asked, looking right at me as she probably noticed me staring at her feet. Her face suddenly moved much closer to mine, shocking me. I turned red at once and quickly moved away from her.

Nanami must have thought my reaction strange, because she looked up as if trying to better recall what I was looking at a moment ago. That was a habit she had—to look up when she was thinking about or remembering something. She must have realized what I was looking at though, because as soon as she did, she smiled mischievously and said, "So you like legs, do you, Yoshin?"

I had no idea how she knew, but if I asked, she'd probably just reply with something like, she was my girlfriend, so of course she knew. Or was I just being super obvious? I had thought I had just glanced over, but maybe she had the same sense for this as she did whenever I looked at her chest.

"Oh, I was just thinking that you were wearing a super cute pair today," I said.

I should've known then, though, that whenever I was trying to muddle the truth, I had to choose my words carefully, lest I cause a misunderstanding between me and the other person.

Nanami gasped quietly, then turned bright pink as she looked down at the lower half of her body. I thought this odd; she was wearing jeans that suited her perfectly, but I didn't think there was anything else particularly noteworthy in that area.

As if confused, Nanami began touching her waist and the area around her hips with her hands. Well, maybe she wasn't so much confused as she was flustered. *Huh? What's going on?*

With tears in her eyes and a flushed, pink face, Nanami murmured in a quivering voice, "D-Did you see? My und-..."

"I'm talking about your socks!" I blurted.

So that's what it was! I understood when she began to speak: Nanami must have thought that I saw her underwear! *No, no! Socks! I was talking about socks!*

"Socks...?" she repeated.

"Yeah, socks. I was just thinking that you're wearing really cute socks today."

Nanami looked down at her feet, which were currently covered by really cute patterned socks. I couldn't resist pointing them out; since her outfit was going for a more cool vibe, the contrast with her socks was irresistible.

Nanami looked back and forth a few times between her socks and me as the redness in her cheeks gradually subsided and was no longer suffusing her entire face. Once she had calmed down, though, she breathed in and out deeply, twice, then donned an expression of serenity as though nothing had happened—though it seemed a bit late for that.

"That's right," she said. "They're cute, aren't they?"

"Uh, y-yeah. Super cute," I said in agreement, knowing that literally any other response would throw us right back to square one. I mean, her socks really *were* cute...though it was hard to explain why I felt that so strongly.

But why did commenting on it make Nanami react so weirdly? It seemed different from the reaction one usually had when their underwear was slightly showing.

A cute...pair...

“Wait, don’t tell me...” I muttered.

“Yoshin...?”

I stopped myself right then and there. Nanami spoke my name in a low voice that seemed to rumble from the depths of hell. I knew it was her talking, but I shivered because it almost sounded like it *wasn’t* her. My instincts screamed at me to move on, that dwelling any further on this particular topic was dangerous. I was starting to sweat, and my throat suddenly felt parched. Was it just me, or was the plane starting to shake a little bit?

“Jeez. I’m not gonna give this to someone who’s thinking dirty thoughts,” Nanami remarked, returning to normal most likely because she sensed that I’d managed to rein myself in. *Hm? What is she not going to give me?*

As I sat there, curious, Nanami opened up the backpack that served as her carry-on bag and rustled through it. What she eventually pulled out was a small package: a drawstring bag made of cute, light pink fabric.

“Guess what this is!” Nanami said, handing me the bag. It was surprisingly heavy in my hand. *What exactly did she just decide to give me?*

Actually, the weight of it felt oddly familiar.

“Can I open it?” I asked.

“Yup!” Nanami replied in a singsong voice, gesturing with her hand for me to do so. When I opened the bag slowly, a pleasant smell wafted up, immediately making me feel hungry. I peeked inside and found...

“Rice balls and...a small bento box?” I murmured.

I pulled out two round rice balls, one with a coating of flavored seasoning, and another with some kind of stuffing inside. The bento box was one of the disposable plastic kinds, and contained within were pieces of omelet and fried chicken.

When Nanami saw my reaction, she looked momentarily bashful, but then puffed out her chest with pride and said, “You said earlier how you were sad that you couldn’t eat my cooking for a while, right? I was thinking the same thing too, so I packed you some!”

Seriously? No, seriously. I think I could literally lift up a car with my bare hands right now. It was my turn to look back and forth between the bento and Nanami, just like she had done earlier. I was so surprised that I couldn’t even speak. I never imagined that she would make bento for me on a day like this.

“When you started talking about my cooking I thought I might not be able to surprise you with this,” Nanami said.

“No...well, that’s...” I muttered.

Yeah, I did do that—but that was because I thought I *wasn’t* going to be able to eat her cooking for a while. I didn’t imagine at all that I *actually would*. It must have sounded like I was expecting it or something, and realizing that was so embarrassing.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t bring anything for you,” I said, feeling remorseful. Nanami had gone to such lengths to make me happy, and I had done nothing. I was mortified, and feeling completely inadequate. Just in that moment, though, I felt Nanami pinch my nose.

No, that wasn’t figurative language—she literally pinched my nose. I wasn’t expecting that at all, so my body didn’t even have time to react; it just froze completely still.

“Don’t apologize over something like this,” Nanami said.

With my nose still between her fingers, I had no choice but to look straight at Nanami. She was smiling gently. That was all.

Just looking at her made me feel like I’d been forgiven for everything.

“You’re right. Thank you,” I said.

“You’re welcome,” she replied, smiling even more broadly as she let me go, a sense of deep satisfaction radiating from her. She was right—in times like these, I should say words of gratitude, not of apology. I had to enjoy this food with all

the gratitude I could muster.

“But why did you want to make a bento for me in the first place?” I asked.

“Mmm, it’s not anything big, but I heard that airplane food can be real hit-or-miss. I figured you should eat something tasty.”

“I feel like I read that somewhere too.”

“So, you know. It’s more like I wanted to eat it, and I just made extra for you. So you don’t even have to worry about it,” Nanami continued.

It was unlikely that Nanami, who usually ate less than I did, would really need to make anything in addition to the meals that were going to be served. I thought that she was just being extra thoughtful toward me and was trying to be modest about it...but then I saw her take out her own drawstring bag as well.

Oh, so she really is going to eat bento too.

When Nanami realized I was looking at her, she smiled shyly, seeming slightly embarrassed.

Interlude: Expectation and Excitement

I woke to quiet, having somehow sensed an unfamiliar sensation nearby. I didn't detect much light through my eyelids, so maybe it was also dark.

Still, despite the overall lack of noise, I could hear people breathing here and there. There were so many sounds, actually, but for some reason my mind still labeled things as quiet. I felt like I was in a very strange space.

Wait...where am I...?

I couldn't figure it out because I couldn't bring myself to open my eyes. *Um, what am I supposed to be doing today again...?* I tried to get my brain to function by recalling what I was doing earlier in the day.

Oh, right. I'm on a plane right now.

Maybe because I'd woken up funny, but I couldn't immediately recall. And while I was still pretty out of it, I did my best to start moving around a little.

Maybe the way I slept is making me feel like this. I always lie down to sleep, and I can't even remember the last time I fell asleep in a chair. But no, that can't be it because I fell asleep while sitting on the way back from the night pool and on the way home from our family trip, and I was okay both times.

The difference between those occasions and now, though, was most definitely the size of the seat. Though airplane seats were more comfortable than I expected them to be, they were still far too narrow to sleep comfortably in.

I can almost feel my body cracking right now. Guess car seats really are pretty spacious.

I let out a soft yawn. *Maybe I'm still sleepy. My eyes are all shriveled. What was I even doing before I fell asleep? I think I was sharing a bento with Yoshin, and then... What then? Oh, that's right. What's Yoshin doing?*

I opened my eyes slowly. My field of vision gradually became clearer as I did

so—as did all my senses. I was feeling warm, but I assumed that that was because of a blanket. I was wrapped up in one, after all. But I also noticed a different source of warmth. *Definitely not a blanket. What is it?*

Once I got my eyes fully open I realized how dark it had gotten around me. There was a little bit of light, though, so I could still see well enough. It probably wouldn't become completely dark on a plane anyway.

When I turned to my side, I saw Yoshin—leaning on me.

I wasn't fully awake yet, so just seeing his face was enough to fill my brain with joy. However, that turned into panic fairly quickly, and I got flustered. But I still wanted to praise myself; I managed to stay still and not wake him up.

Yoshin was wrapped in a blanket of his own as he leaned on my shoulder. That was when I realized that I, too, was leaning on Yoshin.

An old memory came to mind: in elementary school, I learned that the kanji for “person” originated from a depiction of two people supporting each other.

I was on top, and Yoshin was attached right underneath me. *Oh, my neck pillow is out of place too. No wonder I feel so squished. Hope my neck doesn't get all stiff. It feels okay right now, but still.*

“How did we end up like this?” I asked myself softly, careful not to wake Yoshin. I still hadn't woken up enough to remember everything. *Oh, right. I think we were eating dinner.*

The cabin attendants served us our meals as they came down the aisles. I had heard that you could choose between chicken and beef, and I was excited to learn that that was in fact the case.

As for the taste...it was all right. I had chicken served on top of a bed of rice, like a chicken bowl. If I had to describe the taste I would say it was interesting.

After Yoshin ate his meal, he also ate the bento I'd made for him.

I was glad that I'd prepared it. The menu was a simple one, with rice balls, omelet, and fried chicken. It was only after Yoshin ate the bento that he finally seemed satiated.

As for me, I couldn't quite finish everything. Even though I felt like I'd started

eating a lot more since I started dating Yoshin, this time it was still a little too much food for me.

I wasn't plumping up from happiness. At least I was pretty sure I wasn't. I was still working on my abs and also exercising regularly. Though my chest *had* gotten a little bigger. I guess I hadn't said that to Yoshin, not that it was something I should really tell him. Maybe he would be happy if I told him about it in Hawaii, though. Yoshin seemed like he liked large chests. I understood where he was coming from, at least, and plus, if it was *my* chest that he liked, then I had no complaints. He could get a fill of my chest in Hawaii...no, wait, that sounded misleading. Yeah, he could enjoy it like normal... No, that sounded bad too.

Anyway. As long as Yoshin enjoyed it, then that was all that mattered.

I guess I could save my leftovers for Yoshin's breakfast tomorrow.

I leaned back a bit in my seat and got in a little stretch. *It's quiet cause everyone's asleep, probably.* It was hard to believe that I was currently up in the air, flying.

The more clearheaded I became, the more I picked up a muffled roaring sound. It was probably the sound of the airplane cruising through the sky.

Wow. This really is strange.

It was dark and quiet, but there was also a loud, vibrating hum, and to top it all off, Yoshin was sitting next to me. Even though I knew there were lots of people around us, it felt like Yoshin and I were the only people on this flight.

I guess it's not that bad to have such small, tightly packed seats.

"Mmm...Nanami...?" Yoshin softly murmured.

"Oh, sorry. Did I wake you up?" I whispered.

"No...I thought I saw light coming in."

Light? Oh, he's right. I didn't notice at first, but some light's coming in through the opening of the lowered shade. I thought that it had been dark until just a minute ago.

Yoshin's eyes opened slowly. He was still leaning on me, so I could watch him

up close. He must have been feeling drowsy still because he'd just woken up, but he just turned his head to look around, tickling me a bit as he did.

The moment he realized how close my face was to his, though, Yoshin opened his eyes wide in surprise.

"S-Sorry," he mumbled, trying to pull away from me.

In that moment, though, I put my hand down to hold him in place. It wasn't possible with my level of strength to *actually* hold him in place, but Yoshin stopped for me anyway. He probably got an inkling of what I was trying to tell him.

"I'm not too heavy?" he asked.

"Nah. You feel nice and warm," I replied.

Yoshin seemed uncertain about leaning on me, but he honestly *wasn't* heavy. It actually felt really nice.

"It looks like I was asleep for...quite a bit. It's all light out now," Yoshin said, raising the shade and narrowing his eyes at the bright light that immediately came in. He let out a gasp of excitement at the view outside, though, so I leaned over to look out the window alongside him.

Blue sky stretched out all around us, and below were clouds and the ocean. The scenery was filled with various shades of blue and white. *Wow, it's so bright...*

I was thinking of having the bento leftovers for breakfast, but it seemed like it was morning already. Having some sunlight on me again had me stretching once more.

The others must have started waking up too, because a variety of sounds began to echo all around us.

"It's already the next day, huh? No, wait, it's still today. Because it just started? Wow, this is confusing," Yoshin mumbled, the time difference inscrutable to him in his half-awake state. *Keeping track of all that is too much. Let's just say we fell asleep in Japan, and woke up in Hawaii.*

"That was pretty quick, huh?" I said.

“Yeah. It’s funny, because now I wished we could stay on the plane for a little bit longer like this,” he replied.

I leaned over slightly and attached myself to Yoshin. To those around us, it probably just looked like I had my head on his shoulder.

“Is breakfast coming soon you think?” he remarked.

“Probably. Oh, you want the rest of my bento, right?” I asked.

“That’d be nice. I wonder if we’re having bread for breakfast...”

I wonder. Yesterday...well, I don’t know if it was yesterday, but the dinner we were served on the plane was rice, so maybe it’s the same for breakfast too.

Yoshin and I remained in that position and continued talking for some time. It was all idle chitchat, since we’d both just woken up and our brains weren’t fully functioning yet. Still, whispering to each other in the semidarkness felt like we were doing something forbidden, which made it feel kind of fun.

We talked about the things we were looking forward to in Hawaii, the things we wanted to do at the hotel, the idea of Yoshin cooking for me when we got back to Japan...stuff like that.

When we came to a lull in the conversation, Yoshin slowly got up from his seat and said, “Sorry, Nanami. I’m, um, gonna hit up the restroom real quick.”

Oh, right. We’ve been sitting on this plane for a really long time. Of course we’d want to go to the bathroom at some point. Plus the cabin attendants kept giving out lots of drinks too.

I had somehow assumed that we only got served drinks once, but they really came around multiple times. And since they had so many different kinds, I had tried a new one every time.

Maybe I should go to the bathroom later too. It’s a little embarrassing, though, so I’ll have Yoshin go first and then I’ll go after him, I thought to myself as I watched Yoshin walk away. *So the bathroom’s at the front of the plane then.*

I was now sitting in my seat alone, and I probably had a little bit of time to myself before Yoshin came back.

On Yoshin's seat lay the blanket that he had been using while he slept.

I touched it gently. It was still warm. I remembered how in one of the movies I watched with Yoshin, there was a scene where one of the characters could tell from the blanket still being warm that the other character had only recently just left, and was still close by.

I guess that's actually true. Yoshin left only now, so he really isn't far.

I picked up the blanket and squeezed it tight. It had that brand-new smell, but also the faint trace of Yoshin's own scent.

My cheeks and my body began to feel hot.

I'm just keeping Yoshin's blanket warm for him, that's all. I'm just being considerate. That's important, isn't it? I'm sure he'd be happier with a warm blanket than a cold one when he gets back. Of course I'll put it back before he returns. I'm not pulling anything like Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Nope. In no way is this like when he put Oda Nobunaga's slippers in his shirt to keep them warm. Stuff like this is embarrassing unless you do it in secret. Once the other person finds out they'll feel bad for you doing all that, and the whole thing will be ruined.

Okay, I've finished making excuses now.

With all my excuses out of the way, I felt fully justified in clinging to the blanket even more, holding it tight to my chest. And while I did, I let myself imagine the day when Yoshin and I would finally be able to hold each other, just like this.

Just as I was about to ask myself what in the world I was doing on an airplane...

"What in the world are you doing, Nanami?"

The exasperated voice snapped me back to reality. *H-Hatsumi? And...Ayumi too? Why are you both here? You're not supposed to be walking around the plane aimlessly...*

"Sorry, I was on my way back from the bathroom, so I'd thought I'd come ask how you two were doing," Hatsumi muttered.

"Nanami...I get how you feel, but doing that on the plane makes you seem

like a total perv,” Ayumi added.

I couldn’t argue with that. Not at all. *Yes, ma’am. You’re absolutely right.*

“Though it does make total sense to be excited about going to Hawaii with your boyfriend,” Hatsumi commented.

“True, true. Times like this are when you become just a little bit bolder than usual too,” Ayumi said.

I immediately found their comments odd; it was like they were speaking from experience. They were also blushing, as though remembering some precious memory. It was rare to see them like this.

“Don’t tell me you guys have gone to Hawaii with Oto-nii and Shu-nii before,” I said quietly.

“Uh...yeah. A long time ago, on a family trip,” Hatsumi mumbled.

“Me too, actually. I tagged along when he went before,” Ayumi said as well.

Their faces turned an even deeper shade of red as they both guiltily raised their hands to confess. *I see, so these two have already been to Hawaii...*

I could understand Hatsumi, but I wondered if Ayumi was okay. Oto-nii was Hatsumi’s family, but for Shu-nii, it would really have been that he was going on a trip with a high school girl.

More importantly, just how did Ayumi pull it off? I wanted to know, but I was too afraid to ask.

“Was it that good?” I asked, to which they both responded with silence. Without saying a word, they just started grinning like crazy and blushing all over again. *Okay, yeah. I think I get the point.*

They do say that going on a trip makes people braver than usual. Did that also happen to their boyfriends? I couldn’t really imagine it, but my friends’ reactions seemed to suggest that that was the case.

“Nanami, there really *is* such a thing as a travel high. So...”

“If you’re gonna do it with Misumai, Hawaii would be the place!”

Their remarks were so obscene that I was about to yell out loud. Instead, I just

held the blanket in my arms more tightly.

Really? Is it really time? Am I...gonna go for it?

My heart started beating faster. I was surprised I hadn't already torn the blankets to shreds.

Then, out of nowhere, someone asked, "What are you all doing?"

When the three of us looked up, we saw Kotoha-chan suddenly beside us. It seemed she had gone to the restroom too and had stopped by to chat with me as well.

We would probably be in other people's way if we stayed like this, so it probably wasn't polite to talk for long. But the three of us used to talk a lot just like this, so I guess the nostalgia of it all had gotten me carried away. Hatsumi and Ayumi seemed to have felt the same way, because they were smiling awkwardly too.

"We were just talking with Nanami about the time we went to Hawaii with our boyfriends," Hatsumi shared.

"Hee hee, yeah! We were saying that Hawaii made our boyfriends a lot more *proactive*, and that Nanami should really go for it too," Ayumi contributed.

I thought I saw Kotoha-chan's eyes glimmer, and for just a moment, I had the feeling that a ferocious carnivore had suddenly turned its head.

"Details later, please," she simply said.

"O-Oh, uh, right," Hatsumi said, Kotoha-chan's aura startling Hatsumi into an uncharacteristically meek response. That was definitely rare, but it seemed like in this case, it couldn't be helped. Kotoha-chan seemed like she was all ears already.

Kotoha-chan, too, was perhaps trying to move her relationship with Teshikaga-kun forward. No, she probably most definitely *was*. I mean, she was sitting next to him even now.

Maybe I should ask about that after we land...

"All right, Nanami. We'll see you later," Hatsumi said.

“Later!” Ayumi said happily.

“See you, Nanami-chan,” Kotoha-chan also said.

Since all three of them standing in the aisle to chat would bother others soon enough, they quickly returned to their seats. I waved my hand and saw them off as they walked away.

For so long, Hatsumi, Ayumi, and I stuck together, just the three of us. I had thought it would be that way for all of high school, and for this trip too. But gradually, things had changed from what I had envisioned for us back then.

Maybe it meant that my horizons were expanding because I was with Yoshin. Or was it the opposite; was my world narrowing down, closing off so that only Yoshin and I were the only ones who really existed?

But now there was Kotoha-chan too, plus Shoichi-senpai and Teshikaga-kun. I was starting to talk with more guys, so it probably meant that my world *was* getting bigger.

Not that I mind a world of just me and Yoshin, though.

“Oh? Was someone here?” Yoshin asked as he returned.

“Huh? Oh, um...Hatsumi and the others stopped by,” I explained.

“I see. It’s just that my blanket was gone...but I guess you were holding it for me, huh?”

I jumped at his comment. He didn’t seem to have guessed that I was hugging or sniffing his blanket, but I still panicked a little. Because I couldn’t very well tell him what I was actually doing, though, I simply said, “Yeah. I was holding it for you. Here you go,” and handed him his blanket.

“Cool. Thanks,” he said, taking it from me and putting it over himself. The sight of him made my heart beat so fast. I almost felt as though I was the one that he was actually holding.

In order to wipe away my excitement, I instead unnecessarily attached myself to him, giddily ate the breakfast that was served to us, and repeatedly fed him the rest of the bento.

Still, my heart wouldn’t stop racing. Maybe I was feeling guilty, like with his

blanket I had pulled off some kind of prank. Because I couldn't take it anymore, I eventually confessed to him that I had been sitting there hugging his blanket in my arms. That made me feel a lot better, but then I immediately became scared that Yoshin would think me a creep of some sort.

Of course, I had nothing to worry about. Yoshin laughed and forgave me without question, and then he gave me a big hug in return, though his doing that so unexpectedly made me freeze a bit.

Seeing him smile and tell me that he was returning the favor made me want to squeeze him back, but the next moment, an in-flight announcement came on overhead. It seemed we were going to be landing soon.

Because of that, we had to stop hugging each other and fasten our seat belts. The fact that we were interrupted somehow made me feel even more excited.

I looked outside the plane window with all those feelings bubbling in my chest. Eventually, the floating sensation I had come to associate with being on an airplane disappeared, and I realized that we had finally landed.

Our bodies gave one gentle jolt, and then I saw that the view outside had changed to something completely unfamiliar. Yoshin's smile looked so eager and giddy, it was like he was a little boy all over again.

"This class trip is gonna be great, huh?" he said to me.

Seeing Yoshin's smile maxed out my excitement as well. We'd only just landed; what was going to happen to me from here on out?

"Yeah. Let's make it count," I replied, trying to act as calm as possible. I had made one simple resolution: to move our relationship forward. Even if it was just a little bit, I wanted the two of us to grow closer than we were now.

The moment we got off the airplane I felt the difference immediately. It was bright, really bright, and the air was both hot and somehow even a little sweet smelling. That smell alone let us know that we were, in fact, no longer in Japan.

Yoshin took my hand as I was overcome by excitement, and a heat almost hotter than the fresh Hawaiian air coursed through my body. Yoshin and I looked at each other, and we both smiled.

I can hardly wait. What amazing memories am I gonna make with everyone...and with Yoshin?

Our unforgettable class trip was about to begin.

Afterword

Thank you for deciding to pick up volume 9 after volume 8. This is Yuishi.

I assumed that you also read volume 8, given that few people start series with the ninth one, but maybe that isn't really the case. I guess that means I should say: Thank you if you started this series with this volume. This is Yuishi.

Whether you've been following the story from before, or you're just picking up this story now—were you able to enjoy what you just read? If so, then I couldn't be happier.

In an age when the world is brimming with a plethora of entertainment options, I am extremely grateful that you've chosen to pick up this book. And if you were indeed able to enjoy it, then that would make me very happy indeed. It makes me want to do my best to write even more books that you will be able to enjoy.

In any case, it's been four months since volume 8 came out in March. Time goes by so fast—this year is already half over. The year is passing way too quickly, and I feel the phrase “tempus fugit” is highly appropriate here. Though I do feel like it's every year that I say, “This year feels like it's passing quickly.”

Even in such a year, though, I still managed to bring you volume 9. The ninth volume... I would've never thought that I would be able to publish nine volumes of a single series. I know I say this every time, but I genuinely thought that I would only make it to about the third volume for this series.

Therefore, I'm truly glad that I was able to come this far.

This volume covered the sports festival and the preparations for the class trip. For me, my memories of the sports festival are less about actually doing sports, and more about hanging out with my classmates and having a good time. Walking around the second floor of the gym—which we rarely did—and cheering on our classmates. Lying around the athletic field, doing not much at all, only to have lightning strike very close to us. Getting hit in the face with a

dodgeball because we weren't paying enough attention...

I literally have zero memory of actual games or competitions.

Because of that, even though this volume was supposedly about the “sports festival,” I captured a lot more of the “festival” rather than the “sports.”

If anyone out there wished there had been more depictions of the actual sports games, then I do apologize. To be honest, I had actually started out with a rather detailed scene of a basketball game. As I continued writing, though, I started feeling that it just *wasn't it*. As in, I felt that there wasn't enough of Nanami and Yoshin flirting with each other.

The second half of the volume, of course, is the class trip—or, rather, the preparations for it. Even preparing for a trip is fun, so I do hope that you were able to feel some of the enjoyment that the characters felt before they actually took off on their trip.

The next volume will be the class trip itself. Are our two protagonists going to be making out even when they're overseas? They most definitely will.

That's right, the next volume...the next volume.

Hooray! Volume 10 is coming out!

Those who have been following this series would know this, but this is the first time where a story arc carries over from one volume to the next.

The fact that I was able to do this, as well as the fact that I'm able to release ten volumes for a single series, is all thanks to the support I receive from all of my readers.

Actually, I'd gone to a purification just before I began writing this afterword.

In the update I had printed on the cover, I mentioned that I was planning on going to a purification—and, yes, I was indeed able to accomplish that. I'm therefore writing this afterword after having done a purification to exorcise any evil spirits, as well as to wish for good health and to be able to continue publishing more books.

Now I should be able to release volume 10 without any problems, and I shouldn't have to deal with any weird illnesses for the rest of the year. I'm pretty sure that I'm not raising any weird red flags here or anything. As always, health will continue to come before everything else.

Now, as usual, I want to give my thanks to all the people who were involved in the production of this book.

Kagachisaku-sensei, thank you for all the fabulous artwork for volume 9, as with all the previous volumes. The illustrations were more powerful than ever. I still remember being so incredibly moved when I first saw them.

Volume 10 will be in Hawaii. I thank you in advance for all your hard work.

Nagomi Kanna-sensei, I'm so sorry that I always have all these comments and requests about your storyboards for the comic adaptations. The quality of your work always surpasses anything I can imagine, though, and I am always simply amazed. I do look forward to being able to see the adorable Nanami and others through your work moving forward as well. Thank you again for everything.

To my editor, S-sama. Thank you for giving me so much great advice, even from the planning stages of this volume. Because of that, I was able to produce a volume where our two protagonists are able to flirt to their hearts' content. I look forward to working with you on volume 10 as well.

I want to close out this afterword by thanking everyone else that was involved with the production of this volume, even those I haven't had the pleasure to meet.

Next up is the monumental volume 10. It is a very emotional thing for me to be able to release my first ever double digit volume, for the first ever title I published in my life. I shall be sure to continue doing my best on this series!

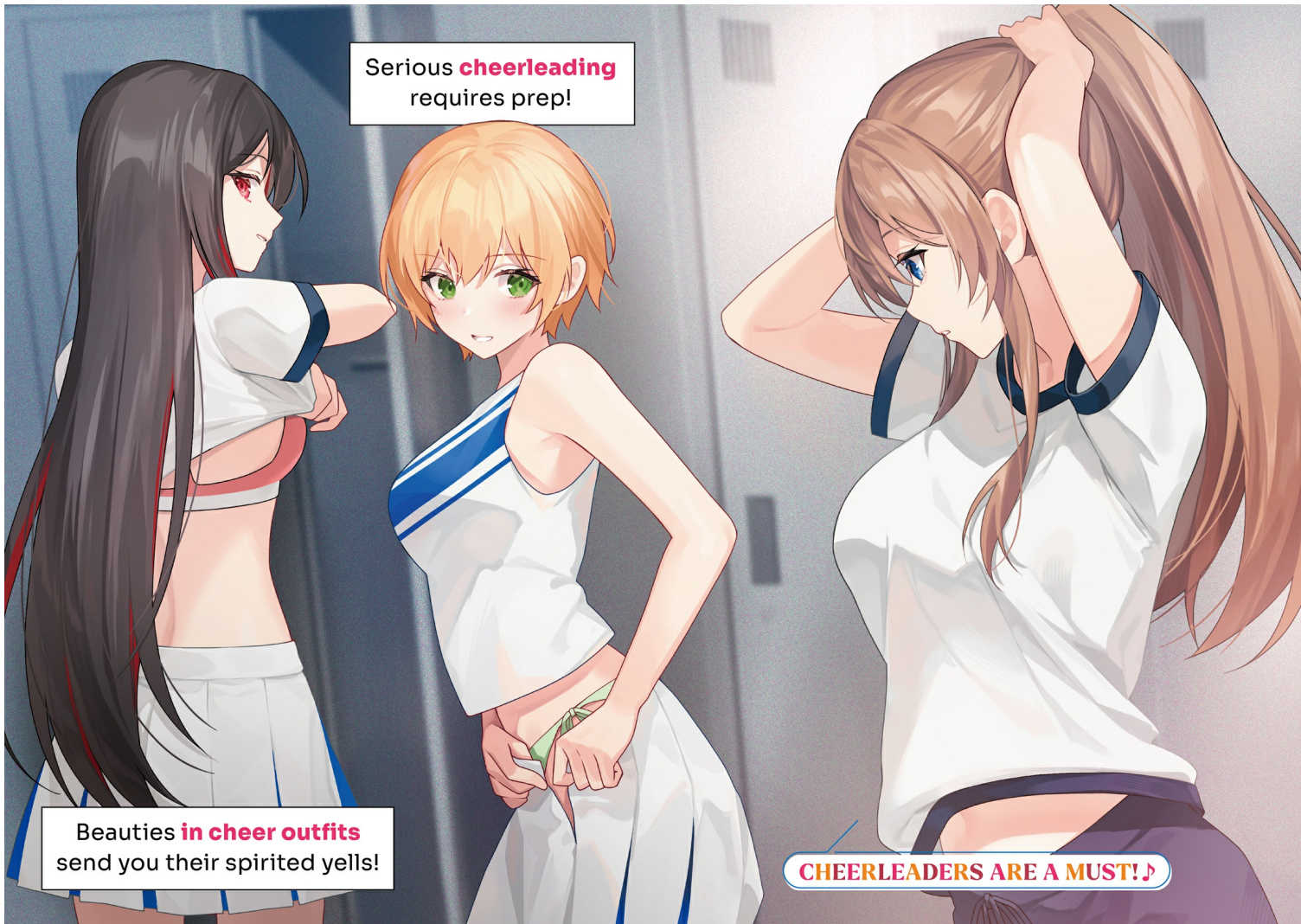
Yuishi, Who Wants to Be Healthy by the Time Volume 10 Comes Out

July 1st, 2024



“Go, Yoshin, go!
You can do it!”

IT'S SPORTS FESTIVAL TIME! ♪



Serious **cheerleading**
requires prep!

Beauties **in cheer outfits**
send you their spirited yells!

CHEERLEADERS ARE A MUST! ♪



OFF TO HAWAII!♪

“Wow, our trip is finally here. I’m so nervous, I’m, like, ticklish all over!”

We bought everything we needed. We had our group figured out. All we had to do now was go on the class trip itself. Still, there was always room for more preparation.

Bonus Short Stories

A Toast in the Sky

Every now and then there were moments where an epiphany came out of nowhere, and now was one of those times.

Well, to be more precise, I had this epiphany *before* we set off on our class trip; it was just that *that* realization was somehow more abstract, like I was observing the situation from afar.

The plane took off without any problems, I had received my bento from Nanami, and I was just sitting in my seat next to her chatting about nothing in particular...when it really hit me. Like this feeling of my mind finally catching up to my body. Was this what manga characters meant when they talked about all the pieces falling into place? It was like a *click* or a *snap*. In any case, it just felt like something inside of me finally came together.

So much so that I ended up muttering out loud, “Oh, so I really *am* going on my class trip.”

The plane was currently cruising. Perhaps the tension had waned a bit among us, because a few of our classmates stopped by to tease us, while others had swapped seats and were now chatting a bit more audibly. Everyone was spending time however they pleased. I was now also in the middle of a more in-depth conversation with Nanami, both of us raising the bar on what we hoped for from our Hawaii trip.

Even conversations like that, though, had their lulls. When the aforementioned utterance tumbled out of my mouth in one of those quiet moments, Nanami blinked a few times and then smiled at me and inquired, “What’s gotten into you all of a sudden? Yeah, of *course* you’re going on your class trip.”

“I know. It’s just that all of a sudden...” I began, trying to explain to Nanami what I had been thinking as she continued looking slightly surprised.

She seemed not to understand at first, but then she slowly nodded, as though it had started to sink in...but then she furrowed her eyebrows and tilted her head in the most adorable way.

Dammit. Why does she have to look so cute?

“Sorry, I’m not sure I get it,” she murmured.

“Um, yeah, that’s okay,” I replied.

I guess I’m not doing too good a job of explaining.

I was probably having this moment because I had experienced a lot of “firsts” in a short period of time. Among all of them, I was initially pretty petrified by my first flight. Even *that*, though, I was now adjusting to perfectly fine. Probably. The fact that I was scared probably meant that I had been feeling pretty tense earlier. Now that the tension had dissipated somewhat, other emotions were able to sink in properly.

Since this was Nanami’s first flight too, I thought she might understand where I was coming from, but it seemed she had registered her other emotions before I did.

That didn’t mean that I needed to force Nanami to try to understand what I was saying, of course. Even though we had only been dating for six months, it was still true that the longer you were with someone, the more likely you were bound to have moments like this.

What mattered was me letting her know that I felt a particular way. That way, even if she couldn’t *understand* what I was trying to say, she could at least *know* how I felt. Even if it was a small thing, by making a regular practice of it, we would be able to avoid misunderstandings. After all, we were about to go overseas; I wanted to be able to prevent misunderstandings of *any* scale, if at all possible. If any problems arose going forward, we wouldn’t be able to enjoy our class trip to the fullest.

“Oh, but now that I think of it, I might have had something similar happen to me too,” Nanami shared.

“Really?” I couldn’t help asking.

“Yeah. What was it? I think it was...” Nanami began, sorting through her memories as she closed her eyes and tilted her head back, her hand slightly covering her mouth. Seeing her groaning as she did so made me feel happy and grateful. One might point out that my relief might suggest I was quick to change my mind, but if she *could* understand how I felt, then of course that would make me happy. I mean, wasn’t it a good thing to be able to share not just feelings, but other experiences and sensations too? So if she *had* experienced something similar before, then I definitely wanted to hear about it.

Though I guess if it was about Nanami, then sharing *anything* with her would make me happy.

“Oh, right! It was when I realized that I liked you,” Nanami finally said, bringing her palms lightly together with a broad smile on her face.

Hearing her sudden and unexpected reply, I opened my eyes wide—as wide as they could possibly open. I mean, come on—I definitely didn’t see that one coming.

Sometimes Nanami took me by surprise with her seductive remarks. It was, however, her utterly pure and unintentionally inviting comments that brought me the closest to a heart attack.

Maybe because Nanami had also said the words without thinking, but she fell silent with her palms still together as well. Her cheeks slowly began to flush, and her face was frozen into a smile.

With both of us in our narrow airplane seats, Nanami was sitting so close to me that I could touch her without moving at all. The actual distance between us wasn’t much different from what we often maintained when we were in our rooms. If anything, at those times we often sat even closer to each other.

So why did it feel like we were nearer to each other now than we usually were? Was it because we were on an airplane? Or was it simply because we were in a new environment?

Nanami met my gaze but quickly looked away from me. She didn’t seem upset; she seemed more uncertain of what she should be doing.

I turned away as well and decided to look out the window instead.

A sky so blue that it nearly blinded me filled the entirety of the small window. Maybe because we were so high up in the air, but there wasn't even a single cloud in sight. The white puffs below us were probably clouds, though. I unfortunately didn't get to see us flying *through* the clouds, but maybe I could do that when we were landing, or even on the way back.

The more I looked at the blue sky, the calmer I became.

What am I doing, getting so shaken up? This is about Nanami liking me; it's important. If anything, I should feel honored. In fact, I really should be more proactive here. That's right. Don't be shy. I just need to ask her with the purest of intentions, as pure as this clear blue sky.

"And what kind of a situation was that, exactly?" I asked slowly, ultimately failing to ask the question with the kind of authority that I'd hoped—though I at least managed to bring my gaze back to meet Nanami's.

"Y-You're really gonna ask me *that*?" Nanami murmured, looking slowly back at me.

When our eyes met, we both smiled, as if to reassure each other.

"Well, um," Nanami began softly, "it was when I was talking with my mom, a little bit after I confessed to you. And I just realized right then, 'Oh, I guess I already *do* like Yoshin a lot'..."

"I-I see..."

"I mean, I thought before then that I liked you, but I guess that was when it really hit me. So I thought that maybe that's what it feels like to have all your feelings kind of come together."

A bit after the confession? That meant that she liked me from pretty early on. Hearing that actually made my face begin to feel super hot. But I was much more happy than I was embarrassed. Slowly, I laid my hand on top of Nanami's.

Nanami looked down at my hand on hers and smiled softly.

"Hee hee. Remembering it is pretty embarrassing, huh? But I'm kind of glad I was able to remember how I felt then. And now I feel like I'm gonna explode once we land in Hawaii!" Nanami said, swaying her body excitedly. Seeing her

like that made me realize just how much I, too, was in love with Nanami.

At the same time, though, I remembered what Genichiro-san said to me.

“If she gets too excited during the trip, there’s a chance she might get a little carried away. If that happens, I need you to take care of her.”

I stole a glance at Nanami, who seemed to be having a fantastic time already. She was excited, and she just said she was about to explode. I felt like this was all foreshadowing some very ominous event.

No, maybe I’m just overthinking it. Exploding takes a lot more than just feeling a lot of emotions. She knew that when she said it. Yeah, that’s gotta be it. As I sat there trying to convince myself of that, though, an animated Nanami leaned over closer toward me. Maybe it was because the plane was cruising, but she also had her seat belt off.

“Hey, Yoshin?” she whispered.

“Hm? What’s up?” I asked.

“I really wanna give you a smooch right now.”

This is not good. Not good, I repeated to myself. Here she was declaring that she wanted to kiss me—on the plane, no less. And I was pretty certain that she was saying “smooch” on purpose.

Even if we are cruising, we’re probably not allowed to do that kind of thing on the plane, I thought to myself—despite the fact that cruising had nothing to do with kissing—and patted Nanami on the head a few times.

I did that to signal that she should hold back a bit, but it seemed to have flipped a switch inside her instead. She leaned in even closer and completely attached herself to me.

We did this often in our own rooms, but here my heart was pounding as though this was the first time I had held her like this...though that sounded kind of misleading too.

It was probably because we were in such an unusual place right now, but like Nanami, I seemed to be reliving a past experience of some kind. I snuggled in closer to her, even as I tried to hold myself back. Maybe it was because our

seats were so narrow, but we felt closer to each other than ever before, and also getting kind of turned on in a weird way.

“Excuse me...”

It was then that a cabin attendant came up to us.

Nanami and I were so startled by the sudden appearance of a stranger that we pretty much jumped away from each other. It had been a while since the last time we had to do that.

We’d gotten to a point recently where interruptions no longer startled us; sometimes we brazenly stayed attached to each other. In fact, Nanami sometimes even went so far as to hold me tighter.

Actually, I said that this third party came out of nowhere, but the fact that we were on a plane meant that other people were around us the whole time. We were essentially in public, and we shouldn’t have been doing anything indecent in the first place.

“I’m so sorry, um, we weren’t going to do anything weird, we were just giving each other a hug. I swear, we won’t bother anyone in any way,” I still said in an attempt to apologize our way out of this mess. I felt so guilty that I was talking a mile a minute. Even Nanami was apologizing alongside me.

I mean, the cabin attendant had called out to us so reluctantly. It *must* have been because of how unwilling they were to tell us how bothersome we were to the other passengers.

I’m so sorry, everyone. Though I guess it’s all just people in our grade sitting around us. Still, we’re totally in the wrong for doing something that we really shouldn’t be doing in public.

Those were the thoughts that were running through my mind, but...

“Oh, no—that’s not it. Would you like something to drink?” the cabin attendant asked us.

Oh, gotcha. I now saw that the cabin attendant had a cart in front of them. It was a relief that they had never intended to scold us, but the fact I had misinterpreted the situation so badly was pretty embarrassing.

Maybe I should get a drink. It'll probably help me calm down.

"I see that you're on your class trip as a couple. That's so nice. I hope you continue to enjoy your trip," the cabin attendant said as they handed me and Nanami our drinks. They then smiled kindly at us and continued on with the cart toward the back of the aircraft.

Nanami seemed tickled by the fact that the cabin attendant had called us a couple.

"Hey, Yoshin," she said, "maybe we should give a little toast."

"To what?" I asked.

"To a great class trip...and maybe to our relationship progressing even more from here?"

Progress...progress, huh? The idea both excites and scares me. But I do want us to get closer over this trip.

"In that case, here's to a great trip. And to progress," I said.

"Cheers!" Nanami replied as she and I both touched our paper cups to each other's. Just as I was about to take a sip, though, Nanami muttered, "This kind of does feel like we're kissing in a way."

Her remark made me nearly spit out my drink. Looking at me with eyes bright with glee, Nanami finally brought her own cup to her lips as well.

Oh, man. Am I gonna be able to get through this class trip in one piece?

Can I Be the One?

"Don't you ever feel like you wanna do it, Yoshin?"

"Wait, what are we talking about?"

By not directly replying, I made sure to buy myself some time before answering Nanami's deliberately vague question.

Maybe because we'd been showing each other how we looked with our sunglasses on, but Nanami was still wearing her pair. Her eyes were thus hidden, making it impossible to deduce what she was thinking. The corners of

her lips were turned upward in a mischievous grin, though, so she was probably half joking. If I just willy-nilly answered in the affirmative, who knew *what* she would say to me next?

“*What* don’t I feel like I wanna do, exactly?” I asked.

“Getting your ears pierced, of course. Ohhh? What were *you* thinking about, Yoshin? Could it possibly be...something naughty?” Nanami responded.

Dang it, I can’t see her eyes because of the sunglasses, but she’s definitely smirking. She’s gotta be grinning with her whole face, I just can’t see it. But if I back off now, I’ll be playing right into her hands. I can’t have her thinking that I haven’t learned anything from my past mistakes. It’s definitely time to fight back.

“Well, gosh,” I began. “Exactly what sorts of naughty things could one possibly think of, just by hearing the phrase ‘wanna do it’?”

“Huh?” Nanami let out, her eyes widening in surprise.

That’s right. That’s how one would respond to a surprise counterattack. Now it’s Nanami’s turn to be flustered...

“Um, I guess today, maybe I’d pin you down to the bed like this, and then...” she began.

“Wait wait wait wait!” I shouted, panicking as Nanami lay down on the bed and began slowly lifting up her shirt.

Seeing Nanami starting to undress herself while she kept her sunglasses on seemed like a *very* naughty thing. It felt practically illegal.

“Piercings! We’re talking about piercings, right?!” I let out.

“Huh...? O-Oh! Yeah! I’m talking about getting your ears pierced!” Nanami also exclaimed. She seemed to have regained her sense somewhat, or maybe it was the power of my scream shaking her out of whatever mindset she was in; it was the scream of the truly desperate, a warning signal before the two of us went down a path we could never turn back from. Nanami raised herself slightly from the bed, trying to get back on the topic of conversation.

Given that her shirt was still slightly disheveled, I could see her stomach and

her belly button. *No, no, no. We're talking about piercings, so just look at her ears. Her ears, dammit!*

"You talked about that before too, didn't you? You asked if I was going to get my ears pierced," I followed up desperately.

"Did I really say that? Then did I ask you for it then?" she wondered out loud.

"Ask for what?"

"To let me do it if you were ever to get your ears pierced," Nanami replied.

"I...don't think I've heard that before," I said.

Yeah, probably. I'm pretty sure that she only asked if I wouldn't consider getting my ears pierced.

"I see. Then I guess I'll make the request now," Nanami said, laughing softly as she removed her sunglasses and sat upright. She then very adorably—and cunningly—said, "Can I be the one to pierce your ears for you?"

What she's asking for is actually super terrifying! What kind of a person asks that of their partner?! More importantly, is that even allowed? Like, legally speaking, shouldn't it be a doctor who punctures a hole in your body? Maybe I should look it up at some point.

If I let things continue, though, I felt like I would just be bowled over by Nanami's charms—so in order to change the subject, I just started saying whatever words came into my head, without really thinking about what I was saying.

"Th-Then, is it gonna be okay for me to pierce *your* ears too? You're not good with pain, are you?" I asked.

"What do you mean? I already have my ears pierced. Where else are you planning to do it?" she asked.

"Your...belly...button?" I squeaked.

"What...?"

I think I chose the wrong subject to switch to. I'm sorry, I only said it because it was like the last thing I saw. I'm not actually sincerely saying that I want to give

Nanami a piercing at all...

Blushing at my thoughtless remark, Nanami covered her belly button with her hands. She looked back and forth between her stomach and my face, bewildered.

Nanami-san? Hello? You're not seriously considering it, are you?

Whether we would actually end up giving each other piercings...was, at this point, still a mystery to all.



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An Introvert's Hookup Hiccups: This Gyarū Is Head Over Heels for Me! Volume 9

by Yuishi

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