

TBS
animation

MARVELOUS!

やはり俺の
青春ブロノメは
続
まじがっつりいな。ほい。

第 1 卷



やはり俺の
青春ラブコメは
続
まちがって
りゅ。



第 1 卷

MARVELOUS! TBS animation

Prologue a1: What's written in a certain diary,

There's something I want.

It's something that probably means a lot to me.

There are other things I find important, but lumped together, you could say they were necessary.

The thing I want isn't tangible, so I really don't know if that's the right idea or not.

I do have an idea of its shape, but I'm not that good at thinking nor am I diligent, so I'm not confident I'm on the right track.

Maybe if I was smarter or purer, I could come up with an answer that would convince myself and those around me.

If only I could properly explain and convey what I wanted. If only I could engross myself in it to the point that nothing else mattered to me.

In the end, I'm not the smartest person around, and I'm unfair, so I could come up with only one answer.

It's just one, yet my idea of something genuine somehow doesn't feel realistic.

That's why, it doesn't matter if I understand it, if I don't understand it, if I'm dumb, if I'm unfair and cruel, I keep thinking of one idea after the other about what that genuine thing truly is.

But it feels like no matter which one I choose, I'd be completely wrong.

The thought that I could possibly end up with the wrong answer and be unable to take it back makes me incredibly scared.

I don't want to be wrong.

I don't want to lose it.

It doesn't have to be right because I want to take those hands.

But I'm sure that's not the answer that they want.

What I want and what they want are so similar, yet why are they so different?

But if that's the only answer I can come up with, then I want to make sure I understand it no matter how hard it is. If it's for that, I think I can hang in there.

But I get scared that the more I try, the more it'll get farther away from me.

The truth is, I'd be fine with a lie.

Prologue a2: The nonsensical ramblings of someone's memorandum.

There's something I want.

No matter how much I rack my head over it, I could arrive at only one, permissible answer. But mysteriously enough, it's accompanied by an echo of ambiguity.

That's why, I actually don't have a tangible understanding of what it really is.

However, every time the words leave my lips, I break into a smile, overcome with the desire to hold my head from embarrassment.

To get a hold of this feeling, I tried thinking of numerous definitions that could be applied to our current relationship, but not a single one fit.

What's the correct way to define it?

I have several candidates in mind, but while they seem accurate, they also seem misleading.

If even my definition is prone to errors, then what others thought of it would exacerbate those errors even more.

I won't make the hopeful observation that those who were wrong should just face the same direction. It's because it isn't difficult to imagine that I would be the only one looking in the direction away from theirs.

I've been thinking ever since then, composing word after word that spring to mind all the while not verifying my thoughts.

Nothing but answers, all fleetingly wrong and whimsical, now and then.

I'd indefinitely play around with words in such a fashion, thinking about their meanings in both a positive and negative light, yet still be left with no clear, right answer.

Even so, there is something like an answer for us, so I decided to vaguely think of it as the right one.

I don't mean that half-heartedly, because I'm thinking of it as a prerequisite for the answer that should see the most mutual agreement amongst us.

I want to believe that is genuine.

Because I can't believe in anything else beyond that, or even in myself.

In truth, I was just being dependent on it.

Chapter a1: And so, Hachiman Hikigaya's Winter Break Started

The Christmas had passed by and the short winter vacation finally begun. The year ends on this note. Though in fact I'd been in a festive mood for quite some time already, it's just it hadn't been acknowledged due to all the hassle I had to deal with. That mood isn't just associated with this particular season; there were also my own feelings and emotions thrown into the mix. I was slowly drifting in time, going with the flow, and seemingly turning my back to the things I should meet head on.

Having woken up not long ago, I was lying idly on my bed and staring into the wall. There was a yearly calendar on that wall, all tattered and forgotten, and I wondered if I should resume tearing the leaves off. Dangling sheet marked "December" irritated me with each passing second. Various useless thoughts appeared and vanished in my sleepy head. Like "I gotta get a popular hyper-yoyo and do loop-the-loop". Strange feeling: like I was loitering in a room with no exit, chatter ring in hand.

Good thing today was the day off. On workdays it's kinda impossible to think about all those Zen-like questions you can't even answer properly. My body and mind apparently wanted to confirm it was weekend, constantly drifting into slumber and then waking up. It was almost lunch time, so I decided fully wake up. I shook my head sluggishly and stood up.

Before my eyes lay one hell of a scenery. Yesterday I had started the cleanup in my room but quickly gave up. Piles of the empty MAX COFFEE cans and currently-read books could almost reach the heavens. There were so many things left lying on my desk during the end of the trimester that the avalanche would start at any moment.

I promised myself I would get done with the cleanup today. I started with all

those copybooks, printouts, various notes and memos scattered on the desk. Having stumbled upon some old papers with the personal info, I suddenly felt an approaching headache. "Dark Overlord's Story" was immediately torn to pieces, along with many drafts and something strongly reminding of the Necronomicon. Thus my dark history finally met its end, having been sealed deep in the trash bag. The tattered calendar followed suit. No need for it since the year ends in a couple of days, right?

It was all that hard and complicated because I had very rarely done the New Year desk cleanup. Usually when I need some space on my desk I simply clear a region of a suitable size. It's said that people with my blood type are tidy; I'd like to disagree. People with my blood type don't really care about the state of their rooms. Instead they are bothered with others' rooms' state. They usually barge into someone's room and are immediately like "Can I clean here?". Those blood type B people are so annoying!

Take me for example. I, having the B blood type, not too long ago had had a habit of coming into Komachi's room and saying "Time to punish the naughty kids who don't keep their room in order!", for which I had been hated a lot. In those old times me and my sister had come into each other's rooms very often and stole each other's manga. I wonder why she thought Big Bro's manga was hers too? For example she was supposed to buy InuYasha volumes herself, but somehow it ended up being my task. That's the kind of family we are. By the way, about her girls manga magazines like Ciao or Shoujo Comic. These magazines were probably responsible for forming my worldview as somewhat girlish. I often watched the anime for little girls under the pretense of having a little sister, but somehow it all turned into me watching them alone. Seems like it always happens when you have a little sister. Probably... That's why roses sometimes bloom in my chest and I become disgusted with myself. Yeah, I'm a moody fellow like that.

However, once Komachi entered middle school, she stopped visiting my room. There were no visitors from there on, my room had been littered with trash ever since. So much that now I need quite some time to clean it up.

But not now. Definitely not now. Things that can be done today can be done tomorrow. I believe in tomorrow! I have faith in the me of tomorrow! That's why I never postpone anything to tomorrow!

Anyway, the great cleanup of my room will be going on for a long time. I have picked up all the papers and empty MAX COFFEE cans, somehow tidied up the desk; everything else will be dealt with in the near future. I tied up the trash bag and put it near the main entrance, so Pops would take it out on the way to the work. Pops is a true pro of throwing stuff away. Like, he easily had thrown away his pride and decency; he's a valuable species. Except when sometimes at night I hear him moaning "yes, yes, I'll think of something" on the phone, I become really upset. Okay, I'll throw the trash away if I manage to wake up early tomorrow. Poor Pops.

I took away the trash, gathered the pile of books and other stuff into the corner... Huh, was my room always this big?

Well, okay, cleanup part one done. As for when part two starts, I don't know. Won't even bother planning. It's often like this: you plan to do something in the Spring, then you look around and it's suddenly Autumn already. What happened? Where am I? Is that some kind of a game?

So, quoting the comic Ikeno Tabari "You're dismissed for now! I exited the room and closed the door.

The living room was quiet. No one there except our beloved cat Kamakura sleeping near the kotatsu. Oh, right, parents were still working and Komachi was at cram school. So it was just me and Kaa-kun. I wonder if it's too warm because of the kotatsu or am I still sleepy?..

I came to the kitchen and opened the fridge, finding some tamagoyaki, karaageyaki and salad. There also was a whole stock pot of miso soup prepared by mom in the morning. Thanks! I turned the stove on, put the pot and heated it. I then quietly thanked for the food even though no one could hear me. Having returned to the living room, I turned the lone TV set on and got ready to watch the prerecorded anime. Ready? Meanwhile Kamakura approached me and made himself comfortable on my knees. I pet him for some time; he curled up and fell asleep. I was warmed by the cat and kotatsu duo, enjoying the feeling of the stuffed stomach after the late lunch. Overjoyed by watching anime in the morning, I slowly... fell... asleep.

And thus one man and one cat were enjoying the warmth and coziness in the living room. Kotatsu had been turned on for some time, the TV was showing some New Year broadcasts, even though no one watched it. I threw a glance: just the usual New Year shuffle. January decorations, o-dera, and apparently crab and salmon discount sales all the way. Indeed, a true Japanese New Year. I yawned; Kamakura followed suit. The yawning is a contagious thing. Hey, you've slept for so long and you're still sleepy? Oh well, I'm the same anyways. I decided to pet him some more.

Something clicked. Kamakura looked at the door. I saw Mom entering the room rubbing her sleepy eyes.

“Oh, so you were at home?”

She fixed her glasses and sluggishly looked at me.

“Worked until late yesterday, so I took half a day off.”

“Ah.”

Yeah. Working as a corporate slave was hard. On the other hand, if a company allows its employees take half day offs, it's a good thing. Besides, I had the luxury of lazing around under the kotatsu today because my parents working hard. Thanks, Mom and Dad, props to you both. You probably feel like you've lost the [Poor Man card game] “Thanks, thanks”, I mumbled to myself.

Mom meanwhile was preparing for work. Having remembered something she turned to me.

“Sorry, coming back late today, think something about your dinner yourself.”

“Oui.”

I replied in French for some reason. Um, Mom... that was a simple retort, almost like ignoring, so don't do this. Otherwise Komachi will start doing that too!

“Give me the money then.”

Mom was hesitating for couple seconds, then made a sad sigh and handed me a thousand yen.

“What about Komachi?”

“She made a bento. I prepared some for you too, by the way.”

“Ah. I think I’ve just eaten it. Thanks, it was yummy.”

“Thought so. Boys are always like that...”

Mom mumbled something and prepared to leave. Heh, seems like my mom’s one of those mothers who will feed their grandkids like there’s no tomorrow. Though this probably is true for all the grannies. You know, your grandkids may be young, but their stomach capacity is limited. Though I can feel the whole lot of your love as well. Live long.

I carefully hid the money, still lying beneath the body- and soulwarming kotatsu. I felt someone’s intense stare.

“Hey Big Bro, don’t show up to Komachi like that. Komachi will fail the exams that way.

“Umm... Y-yeah, sure.”

I find it hard to resist when being called “Bro”. Back when I was Komachi’s age and parents scolded me for something, they used not “Hachiman” and not even “you”, but gently said “Big bro”. That conditioned me to be quiet and docile whenever the word is said. Although I used to reply with “Mom, I’m not your big bro”, but I’m too grown-up now to say that.

So I simply agreed. Mom nodded and smiled.

“You can spoil her to your hearts content after the exams.”

“I don’t spoil her, you know.”

What am I, a siskon? Or is that my parents’ admitting of my feelings? Mom made a sad sigh again.

“Right. You’re just like your father in that regard.”

“Oh.”

Please don’t compare me to father, please. I shudder from this comparison.

So we chatted like that for a while; now mom had to leave. I yawned and said goodbye, deciding to go out too. With that thought I slowly crawled out of the kotatsu. It’s not like I decided to listen to maman’s advice-- I just really needed to exercise a bit. That shameful nickname “Hikki” makes me feel like a hikikomori. Princess Cure Hikki even. Yes, that’s what people think of me, but I do get out from time to time. It’s nice at home of course, but roaming around alone isn’t so bad either. You can go wherever you want, after all!

Even if winter break isn’t that long, it’s a very important free time nonetheless. One can use it to find something decent to read or spend the night playing games. So I’ll walk around town, grab something to eat and come back home. Maybe visit a cinema once in a while. I stroke Kamakura the housekeeper one last time and went out in a good mood.

If you want to watch a cinema in Chiba, your main course of action is heading to Chiba station. I once visited the cinema there with Hayama, Orimoto and her friend. I remember one more movie theater around there, but now they only show some arthouse movies there. I didn’t mind going to the station, but I could also watch a movie at Kaihin Makuhari which was way closer to my house. There also was a movie theater in Tsudanuma PARCO, but it was closed now. There was a time, in fact, when the district in Marinpia near Inage Kaigan station used to be filled with them. This makes me sad, really. Well, anyway, Kaihin Makuhari it was. Would have been real fast if I had used the bike, but pressing the pedals in this cold isn’t really fun, so I headed to the bus stop. The bus was warm enough to not to freeze.

I exited the bus. Sea breeze blew right through my coat, so I tied my scarf tightly, hunched and blended into the crowd.

Either a lot of people around me enjoyed the vacation or there was an event somewhere, but the crowd was quite huge. Struggling through the crowd, I went towards the station where the cinema was. It was that same cinema I

went to this Summer, together with Totsuka. This place is most probably a holy land now, and I have to build a shrine here in the future.

Upon entering I heard the music from the game center, sound of the arcade machines and kids' loud voices. I climbed the stairs to the second floor, picked some movie that was starting next and bought the ticket. Apparently it was a popular Hollywood one. A thought crossed my mind to get myself a magic wand and shout "Pyu-Kyu! Go!". On second thought I'll scare all the girls' parents here. I'll better patiently wait for the Blu-ray. Watching movie in a cinema alone, even to just pass the time, was a luxury. Though, come to think about it, going with someone means sticking to their preferences.

I was wandering around the hall tapping the ticket. I planned to go down to the game center but suddenly spotted a familiar face.

"Oh, Hikki! Yahallo!"

"Hey."

Long knee-high suede boots and knitted skirt. A patch of bare skin between the boots and skirt was regularly exposed. Seems like the hall was too hot for her, so her beige coat is hung on her hand. Her hair was tied in a bun and waving along with her head movements. Yep, it was Yui Yuigahama calling me. She ran to me, tilted her head and asked:

"What are you doing here?"

"Killing time."

I was just going to ask what she was doing here, but my answer appeared in the background in the form of girl with a lost expression. Ah, got it.

"Yuigahama-san, the photo isn't very good. It's overexposed and our eyes are somehow bigger than needed. I'd like to redo it."

Yukino Yukinoshita was wearing black 20 den tights[yes, really. 20 den. Hikki, oh you], tight-fitting black leather boots and high-waist pleated dress. Her hair hung freely over her white overcoat, loosely tied at the roots with a pink scrunchie.

She was mumbling something to Yuigahama all the while pointing to a small piece of paper.

“Yukinon, Yukinon! Check it out, it’s Hikki! Hikki!”

“What am I, animal in the zoo?”

“Oh, Hikigaya-kun. Good evening.”

Yukinoshita became slightly flustered, then hid the piece behind her back. They obviously made a photo in a booth together. Even in the age of camera-capable cellphones those booths were still popular.

“So you were in a game center?” I asked. Yuigahama started shuffling in her bad, trying to find something.

“Yeah. We took a photo in a booth there.”

Yukinoshita caught her hand and told her to stop in a very cold tone.

“You have such a... serious look.”

You try to hide it so eagerly that I can’t help but become interested. Yukinoshita has a fair skin and large eyes already, but after such an overexposure it’s going to be something else... I think Yuigahama would agree with me. She’s used to taking photos and isn’t bothered by such things.

“Whaat? We took that photo for nothing? Let’s do it again then!”

“Some other time.” Yukinoshita tiredly replied.

That was an interesting dialogue. Seemed like they became even closer after the Christmas. The meetup of Christmas celebration was seemingly not so long ago, but for them it’s all different, I think. So much stuff happened... As they say, there’s always rainbow after the rain. Even time meaninglessly spent together strengthens the bond. At this rate I will soon wish you to live long until the death does you part.

After we finished discussing the photo, Yukinoshita quickly hid it inside her bag and looked at the piece of paper in my hand.

“Hikigaya-kun, are you planning to watch the movie?”

“Yeah.”

I turned the ticket up for Yukihoshita to see. She read the title, nodded to herself and tilted her head in surprise.

“Strange. I didn’t think you had such tastes. I think more widely discussed titles would suit you better. They are the prime target for mercantile people, who criticize look down on everyone else with contempt.”

“Who do you think I am? Stop it, it’s hard for me to deny that. Besides, I just wanted to kill some time.”

Actually, movie theaters were better for watching good big-budget movie. Even if the plot is bad and the movie doesn’t really have anything good, you still can console yourself with the fact you enjoyed the impressions and you didn’t waste your time. Though even if you pick a mediocre one with bad acting, you still get that well-fed feeling.

“And anyway...”

I stopped, but Yukinoshita ordered me to continue with her look. So I added proudly: “I watch them first, then stomp into the dirt properly.”

“Stomp, huh...”

Yukinoshita pressed her temples with her fingers as if fighting a headache, then made a tired sigh.

Yuigahama meanwhile noticed the title on the ticket too.

“Hey, how about we go watch this movie!” She said and tugged Yukinoshita’s hand. Yukinoshita looked surprised for a second. Then she smirked and asked jokingly: “I don’t mind, but what about the shopping?”

“Eh? Oh...”

Yuigahama furrowed her brows and looked at us. Yukinoshita just broadly smiled: “We can do it later. Or after the movie, if you want.”

“Really?”

Apparently it was Yuigahama who organized today’s entertainment trip. Though her last reply was somehow sad and she generally behaved like a scolded puppy. In contrast to that Yukinoshita’s voice was warm and kind.

“Really.”

Yuigahama gladly smiled, let go of Yukinoshita’s hand and headed to the entrance of the movie theater.

“Then let’s go! The three of us watching a movie together for the first time!” She exclaimed, looking at us. She was right. Time spent in the club was useful too, but we never simply enjoyed ourselves just for fun, without requests, never walked around the city and never went to the cinema.

“Right.”

But even if we did have such an opportunity, the one to grab it would be Yuigahama anyway. Yukinoshita, who was walking ahead of me, half-seriously said: “Except the seats are predefined here, so we’ll be sitting too far from each other.”

“Yeah? O-oh well...”

Yuigahama took Yukinoshita’s hand again and stepped on the escalator.

I waited for them to buy the tickets; it was time to start. We went straight to the entrance, handed our tickets’ halves and entered. The auditorium was quiet. I like it like that. As I was looking for my seat, I felt my heart beating faster. A familiar sense of anticipation no matter the movie: be it a known masterpiece or an utter failure. Movies are awesome! Never seen this one, though.

“See you then!” Yuigahama said and moved to her seat. In Yukinoshita’s hand I spotted a popcorn bowl and a cola bottle she bought in advance. Huh, you have quite serious approach to movie watching, Yukinoshita-san.

I headed for my seat in the center of the last row. I could see the auditorium being about 70% full. Even though it’s the end of the year now, it’s still a workday, so there were too many people. But I still looked at the empty seats; it’s a strange habit of mine. I always search for something missing. And even though I know exactly what’s missing I still look for confirmation. Why? I won’t fill that emptiness anyway.

While playing my “spot the missing” game, I stumbled upon two seats. Two people there, two rows in front of me. Even the outlines gave clear picture of who they were. I watched them talk about something and laugh.

Then the auditorium went dark. Some trailed started. But I’m not interested in it at all. I look at those two only. There’s a movie going on for some time already and I still can’t concentrate. Light emitting from screen highlights two shapes two rows in front of me. I just keep watching one hair bun waving back and forth and a flock of long black hair dancing as in in amusement. Seemed like their conversations was way more interesting that the stuff on screen. I got a strange feeling, like words unsynched with music, even though I didn’t hear anything, only watched them. The more I looked at them, the more I realised there was a certain sort of strange attractiveness.

In the end I had been watching both girls exclusively and didn’t remember the movie at all.

Chapter a2: Where the Faint Black Tea Aroma Lingers in the Air

The lights were turned on. I heard someone sigh. People were rising from their seats and headed to the exit while sharing their impression about the movie. Some people speak like friends, some like lovers. I simply made a deep sigh while staring at the empty screen and finishing my cola, then stood up too. People exited the cinema and wandered off. I saw someone standing near the vending machine and waving to me.

“Heey, Hikki! Heeey!”

Yuigahama and Yukinoshita bot exited before me. Yuigahama was waving, stretching her hand as if trying to get taller. It’s kinda shameful, being waved at like that. I could see zettai ryouiki between her boots and knitted skirt. Hey, I can almost see your thighs, so please stop that.

Without even recognizing it I skipped to their direction.

We did meet after movie, but as to what I was supposed to say, I didn’t know. Moreover, I didn’t know how to behave in such situations in general. So first I nodded as a greeting. We hadn’t planned the meeting in advance nor hadn’t promised anything. Saying “sorry” or “thanks” wasn’t appropriate, but so wasn’t keeping quiet. Nodding to me, Yuigahama walked forward, leading us both. Don’t think it would mitigate the silence, though.

Having exited in the street we were greeted by the evening wind. I think my neck just shrank into the collar by itself. I wrapped up my muffler I held in my hand, put my coat on and headed to the girls. Yuigahama turned to Yukinoshita who stood beside her on the stairs.

“Was so awesome, like ‘Boom!’, right?”

What was that, Slayers? Yuigahama usually doesn’t even bother picking the right words, so sometimes I don’t get her at all. Though Yukinoshita apparently

did get her. She smiled gently, like mother would smile to a child.

“Agreed. The effects were good, and the main topic of the movie was amusing. And the acting was so good it was indistinguishable from reality.”

“Mmmm, yeah... Was very pretty!”

That's the two girls near me discussing a movie. And their opinion was rather even-handed, which was something new to me. So Yuigahama did diligently watch the movie?.. I was astonished. Well, didn't matter all that much. I heard girls discussing movie for the first time in my life and it all was very interesting. Usually, when me and Zaimokuza discuss movies, our judgement is mostly negative. Maybe this was key difference between boys and girls. Everything's so bad from the boys' point of view: the script, the camera work, the acting, the scriptwriter sucks, the book author's a scum, and all that... Guys, seriously, praise even mediocre works more, their creators will do better next time!

Anyway. The movie was over and I still didn't know whether we would return home or go out somewhere else. So for now I simply followed Yuigahama and Yukinoshita.

Yuigahama hopped off the stairs and abruptly turned to us.

“Wanna grab something to eat?”

I looked at the sky. Crimson sunset illuminated the western sky. Not exactly the time for a supper yet, but grabbing some snack would be nice. I only drank some cola in the cinema, so my stomach was empty. So it's up to Yukinoshita who had eaten the caramel popcorn earlier. I turned to her: yes, she was pondering while touching her chin.

“I wouldn't mind a cup of tea.”

“Oh, Cool! Any places you want to go?” Yuigahama said while looking at me. Don't. I don't think I have the right to decide this in such situations. Hachiman-kun, you do remember everyone laughing when you pick something wrong in the cafe. Remember Kaori Orimoto-chan and her friend

something-Machi-chan? So I look aside, at Yukinoshita. She, as always, didn't speak up any preferences, just turned to Yuigahama too.

"I... don't really care where we go."

She meekly smiled and tentatively looked at me once more. Here we go again... We won't ever decide anything this way! Oh well, if they don't care, I'll try choosing something. Even if they refuse we'll still shorten the options available. So I decided to choose something.

"What about Saize?" I asked and looked at Yuigahama. She simply replied:

"Sure."

Eh? What? 'Sure'?! That was really unexpected. I turned to Yukinoshita. Seems like she didn't mind either since she kept quiet. What, we really can go to Saize? I mean, I do like Saize, so I don't mind either, but because of Orimoto and something-Machi I thought girls didn't like Italian food. Wait, this is Yuigahama! She may not recognize 'Italian' and come to wrong conclusion. Even though they don't really make Italian food, but Chibalian. All hail Chiba! They can cooperate with anime producers and cook something horrible under the guise of Italian food. How's that for a plan, huh? Seriously, consider that.

So I'm not sure if she got me correctly or even if she would like Saize at all. But she said she likes Saize! But that still might sound like some jewelry to her! I don't know, Shaz-Elize, or Shanzelion!

"You really sure you want to go to Saize?"

"Eh? What, we can't?" Yuigahama said, confused.

"Of course we can. I love Saize, it's the best."

Right. Let's turn to Yukinoshita then.

"It's just your opinion about Saize being the best. I've never been to there, but I don't have any reasons to object either." She calmly said while brushing her hair off the shoulder. So, no rejections, all right.

Something stirred in my chest. I coughed.

“Now, wait, wait, wait. Wait a minute. Come to think about it, we don’t need a bar as in a place for drinking. We drank enough while watching the movie. So a hitting cafe would fit better...”

“Hitting?..”

Yuigahama’s face was weird. Something between sadness and discontent. When I was talking about Saize her face was different. Apparently she liked it better. Damn, gotta fix things real quick.

“Oh, sorry. There’s no hitting cafes in Chiba.”

“You’re underestimating Chiba, Hikki! There’s a lot of good cafes here!”

“I don’t understand. You love Chiba but say bad things next moment.”

Sorry! I wanted to apologize, but you... So you like Chiba, huh? I love both its good and bad sides. This is my blind unconditional love. I considered telling about my love of Chiba, but apparently there was no need.

Yukinoshita got my instructions and started thinking while putting her hand on a chin again.

“If you say it that way... I have an idea.”

“You can recommend something? Whooa, so cute!”

Yukinoshita took a quick step back, startled by Yuigahama’s reaction.

“Umm, no, I haven’t been there myself, just passing by. So It picked my curiosity.”

“Sure thing, let’s go see it!”

Yuigahama gave me a questioning stare. Well, if Yukinoshita got an idea, I don’t mind either. I wouldn’t mind even going to Saize. Though, on the other hand, hmmm... Going somewhere new from time to time wouldn’t hurt.

“Why not?”

Yukinoshita politely agreed.

“Sure. Let’s go.”

“Yep!”

“Yuigahama-san, I have trouble walking...”

And so they walked to the cafe with Yukinoshita trying to pry her hand off Yuigahama. But Winter Gahama-san loves the warmth so much, so it was a futile effort. Seems like she got used to walking like that. Can’t say for sure, I don’t have the necessary experience.

And so the girls were walking ahead in this entangled state. I was following them. Their pretty clothes and accumulated yuri-ness grabbed everyone’s attention. I was too ashamed to walk along. Pretending to be a bystander was one of my powerful skills. I used to deceive my classmate in the past. Yay! Seems like that experience is still with me!

a2-2

Further behind the station was a block of expensive condos. This whole district had been built very recently. Because of this the local cafes and such were immensely popular, and this wasn't a temporary thing. Yukinoshita lived in one of those condos, by the way. It's said those are inhabited by the real estate businessmen, both from higher and lower strata of society; sometimes they disagreements occur. Though these all are just some gossip from Hikigaya household maman, and I don't know the details anyway. Those are just gossip! All Chiba people are friends!

But the district was really nice, with a lot of stylish shops and cafes. And currently Yukinoshita was heading to one of them, confidently and without hesitation.

"Huh, so you're know the district very well."

"Your sarcasm is somehow gloomy."

A smile adorns her face. So you know you're prone to get lost. Hehe... Err, no, your smile is too cold, so no laughing.

"Hikki..."

Yuigahama looked at me disapprovingly and tugged my sleeve, hinting to apologize.

"Umm, no, that wasn't sarcasm. I'm amazed and relieved, really."

I decided to make a menacing smile to mitigate it, but Yukinoshita's piercing glare hadn't changed one bit. Not letting your guard down are you...

Actually I'm kinda local too here, you know. I once came here with a family to eat at the restaurant with pasta specialization. The restaurant was bicycle-themed, by the way. I remember liking women who cooked home-styled pasta. so I liked that restaurant very much. Even now I dream of becoming a house-husband who can cook pasta like that. Alas, the restaurant has been closed ever since and I didn't learn their wonderful recipes.

So I walked down the Valentine street thinking those warm thoughts. The sea at end of this street wasn't far away when Yukinoshita stopped and anxiously looked at us.

“We're here.”

“Hmm...”

This was it! The cafe this woman recommended! It occupied the whole first floor of the large building. Modestly decorated interior, barely noticeable black coffee aroma, multicolored sofas for the customers, round stools, potted plants and a whole lots knick-knacks meant for the girls.

[I'm pretty sure it's Iris cafe several blocks southwest of the Kaihin-Makuhari station. It's right on Valentine-dori, near the intersection with the coastal highway, and the interior photos mostly fit. 35.638648, 140.040702]

Yuigahama approached the large window and peeked inside.

“So pretty!”

“All right. Shall we enter then?”

Yukinoshita, showing visible relief, went for the entrance. We were greeted by the waitstaff and lead to the table in the middle. I let the girls occupy the soft sofa near the wall while sitting on a more hard one. The window showed winter sky with the sun slowly hiding behind the horizon. The air was nice and warm. There were a few groups of customers besides us. Calm comfy atmosphere. Probably a New Year's influence. Most of the customers were young women. I rarely saw flocks of girls talking while typing something on their MacBook Airs. Oh, got it. Yukinoshita wouldn't visit the place all too often because of such groups. If I were alone I'd never enter either.

Yukinoshita, who was sitting along with Yuigahama, didn't look all that lost anymore. This place was known to her, so she behaved more mature. Maybe she'll be accustomed to visiting here alone. Yuigahama was also comfortable around here and now was behaving just like the normal young girl would in such a cafe. Even more relaxed than in school. So maybe...

“Oh!” She softly exclaimed, leaped from the sofa and briskly walked to the exit. Upon closer inspection she fetched a magazine from one of the shelves and returned back.

“What was that all of a sudden?” I asked taking a closer look at the magazine Yuigahama took. She in turn just smiled.

“Townwork.” She replied, frowning.

“Ah, got it. You just can’t help but pick such magazines around here.”

“Yeah, totally.”

“Hikigaya-kun, does that mean you read job offers magazines? That’s quite strange.” Yukinoshita remarked tilting her head.

“Of course I do. I mean, they’re everywhere. And also job applications, CVs and other related stuff.”

“Oh, yeah, I’ve seen them too!”

Huh, so you read them too, Yuigahama. Good girl!

“Yeah. I read them when I’m free during part-timing.”

“You read at work?!”

“You’re supposed to work, you know...”

Yuigahama moved away from me in shock while Yukinoshita sighed and started massaging her temples. No, seriously, what am I supposed to do when I have no work? I can’t read books or fiddle with my phone, not to mention chatting with the coworkers. All’s left is reading Townwork. I almost considered it another (part-time) job, but the girls apparently held a different opinion. They just looked at me expressionlessly. I was sure every part-timer did that. Does it mean it only was like that at my workplace?

“Ok, anyway, let’s order.”

Yuigahama put the menu over the magazine. In these situations I order blended coffee so I don't choose for long. The girls on the other hand were eagerly studying the menu. Especially Yuigahama.

"What black tea would you like?"

Yuigahama is overwhelmed by the sheer amount of black tea varieties. She tugged Yukinoshita's sleeve.

"Well... Assam tea, Ceylon, Earl Grey maybe. Chamomile tea if you want a herbal variety, along with the dog-rose or mint. Sakura petals tea is not bad either, although the taste is slightly strange." Yukinoshita calmly recounted. Judging by the look on her face Yuigahama was flabbergasted. By the time Yukinoshita finished she was just nodding and staring aside as if tolerating a severe headache.

"What's with all those incantations?"

"It's the tea types." Yukinoshita tiredly sighed.

Hey, Yuigahama, the only incantation-like name was only 'Elohim, Essaim' which sounded like Assam. Gahama-chan, you don't mean you gave up in the very beginning, do you?

"Then I'll leave the tea choice to Yukinon. We can order two different types and then switch."

"I don't mind. What tea would you like?"

Previously relaxed Yukinoshita frowned again and gave her full attention to the menu. Yep, the girl became very reliable when being asked by Gahama-san.

"I'm calling the waitstaff."

I thought we'd be choosing till the end of the world, so I raised my hand and called. Besides, no one would probably notice me here so I'll have some time to choose an order myself.

Except I was noticed pretty quickly. The girl behind the counter saw my hand

and quickly walked to us.

“I’m sorry for the wait- oh...”

She nimbly put three glasses of water and then suddenly went silent. So was I. Starchy white shirt and black shorts. Simple apron on her waist, black curly hair carefully tucked behind. Underneath those hair were a pair of surprised eyes and a kind welcoming smile.

“Hey, it’s Hikigaya! Long time no see! What are you doing here?”

“I’m just a customer.”

“Huh, so you attend such places...”

She smiled and reached for the tablet in her apron pocket. She hadn’t changed one bit. She probably didn’t mean anything wicked but somehow I still heard only “Wow, so Hikigaya can visit an awesome cafe! Hilarious!”

“And I just got a part-time job here.”

She started typing something on her tablet to write down an order and threw a glance at the girls. They clearly recognized each other in an instant. Moreover, they saw each other not under the most favourable circumstances. They first met during that double date with Hayama. We were in the middle of student council elections and the situation in the club wasn’t very good. The second time we met at the recent collaborate Christmas event organized by Soubu and Kaihin-Sogo high schools. I’d rather say it was a battlefield, not an event. That’s why today’s encounter hardly could be called lucky.

The three of them were looking at each other apprehensively without saying a word. Yuigahama managed to smile, though it was somewhat strained. Yukinoshita sent a very direct cold stare. The air was getting cold. Except Orimoto looked at them with curiosity. I felt uneasy. If only we had met under different circumstances... This silence is choking me.

Orimoto sighed.

“Ah, yeah, we hadn’t spoken properly yet. Name’s Kaori Orimoto. I was

Hikigaya's classmate in junior high. Now I'm Kaihin Sogo High student. We had met this Christmas."

She talked as politely as she could but clearly wasn't really good at that. Typical Orimoto. Though is better like that: it's easier to reply that way.

"Umm... Hi. I'm Yui Yuigahama. I'm Hikki... Hikigaya-kun's classmate, and..."

Though stuttering, Yuigahama managed to reply and introduce herself. Orimoto started shaking.

"Hikki? Ahaha..."

She turned her back to us and started laughing while clutching her stomach. Hey, is this really a laughing matter? Am I missing something?

"Hehehe..."

Seeing Orimoto laugh, Yuigahama politely, but somehow anxiously chuckled too. Orimoto noticed that and stopped laughing, then wiped the tears and explained herself.

"Sorry, sorry. Just never heard anyone call Hikiagaya Hikki. Didn't mean anything bad."

I don't think Orimoto was dishonest. Her words didn't carry any hidden meanings. But it still was rude and insensitive on her part. Not that I really care what she thought anyway. She was just honest and insensitive. That's what kind of a person she was.

Very few of those who knew me in junior high could remember my name. They usually called me "Hikkifrog" or something else equally degrading, that's why to them 'Hikki' can be surprising and overly funny. Now whether the nickname itself is degrading was another matter.

Peoples' nicknames is a common topic among socialites, but Yuigahama apparently didn't get that part.

"Well, he is funny sometimes..."

“Yeah...”

Yuigahama quietly agreed. I wasn't overly eager to continue this conversation, but the air of misunderstanding wasn't good either. Had Yuigahama acquainted Orimoto earlier, she wouldn't have been so sad right now. They would've chat freely and now could be laughing together. Even Miura, who was Yuigahama's friend, sometimes could be very rude. Or do they get closer that way? Probably so: Orimoto, who was laughing earlier, was now smiling like an idiot, regretting what she had said.

You need to have communication skills to shorten the distance. I don't know if they ever meet again in the future, but I'm sure they'll get along. Okay, there's one person left here.

“And you....”

Orimoto tried to be polite and looked at Yukinoshita. The latter was sitting motionless, same as before, and coldly staring at Orimoto. What's with this dangerous irises' color? Stop it, I'm scared!

Orimoto tried to pick the right words, but instead let out a helpless groan. Having heard that Yukinoshita sighed. What was all that? It's just like two beasts meet and the one who averts its eyes has lost. Yukinoshita calmed down, coughed and looked at Orimoto.

“Yukino Yukinoshita. Hi... Hiki. Hiki....”

Yukinoshita stuttered. Yukinon, did you perchance forget my name. She averted her eyes and muttered:

“Hikki's... in my club. I'm the president.”

Immediately after her face and neck were shaded deep crimson. We opened out mouths in surprise. Since when have you started calling me like that? Yuigahama hugged her, as if trying to defend.

“Sorry, Yukinon! No need to force yourself if you're too ashamed!”

“It's not that I'm forcing myself...”

Even though she still was in Yuigahama's arms, Yukinoshita's face was still red. By the way, it was Yuigahama who made up that nickname for me. Yukinoshita either decided to mock it or defend me. Either way the result was clumsy. That's Yukinoshita for you. Anyway I don't even know if it's all about my name, so sorry if it's not. Well, if Yukinon and Gahama-san are merry and friendly, then let it be so! Orimoto looked at them drinking water and whispered:

"Friendly, huh..."

"As you can see." I said throwing a glance at her. She looked somehow alienated, watching the girls and smiling sadly. I'm used to that already, but for any stranger two pretty girls hugging is not just "friendly", but a very attractive thing.

As far as I remember Orimoto was close with several girls, but this hugging in plain sight never occurred. Though I don't know her all that well to say for sure. Even though they're all fellow girls their communication culture may be different. Wonder what Orimoto thought about them. I looked at her, waiting for any reaction. She lowered her eyes and sighed.

"Wish I didn't say that."

Orimoto sighed again, opened her tablet and raised her eyes once more. Her face now was her usual.

"I'll make a service discount for you."

She typed something and looked at Yuigahama.

"Umm... Why?"

Of course it was Yuigahama who asked that. She and Yukinoshita were looking at Orimoto suspiciously while still hugging. The latter answered plainly:

"Why not? We're acquaintances."

She really didn't think what she was doing.

"We're grateful, of course..."

I looked at the girls. Yukinoshita eyed Orimoto with doubt, then shifted her gaze at us.

“It’s just service, right?”

And then immediately averted her eyes again. Just like a feral cat. Well, seeing Yuigahama alternate her gaze between me and Orimoto, people would think she’s a street dog too.

“But you’re Hikki’s friends. It’s alright, we constantly do that here.”^T»

Orimoto frantically waved her hands while looking at the feral cat and the street dog. I was pleased, really, but was she really allowed to do so? Well, there’s this saying “In Rome do what Romans do”. And also “Takeo Gouda’s height was 2 meters and he weighted 12X kilograms”. Or is there? No, there isn’t.

Well, if Orimoto wanted to make a discount, then so be it. If problems occurred, only Orimoto was to blame! No! Not that! Hachiman, you’re horrible! Scum! Though, taking Orimoto’s insensitivity and communications skill, she probably did know the ropes around here.

There is this kind of girls at any workplace. It’s not really clear why they’re so popular, but you keep talking to them constantly at your free time and gradually fall in love with. But the girls themselves only talk to kill some time, so the probability of anything really happening is zero. No, seriously, stop whispering things at work if you don’t feel anything to me. Go do your job. I remembered one unpleasant episode from my previous workplace, after which I resolved to receive the politeness of strangers, but never their friendship. Nope! Never!

So if Orimoto decided to be nice, we’d better accept it just to be safe.

“Thanks! Then, please, blended coffee for me. As for them...” I looked at the girls.

“Ummm... Thank you... a lot.”

Yuigahama tried to thank Orimoto, but didn’t do it very well. Yukinoshita

settled on simply nodding.

“Then montblanc and canelé, and...”

“Can I pick the tea to my liking?”

“Yes, please.”

They were scanning the menu cheek-to-cheek while Orimoto was waiting.

“Our Sachertorte is very tasty,” She said.

“Thanks.”

I noticed Yukinoshita was her normal self again. She hadn't changed at all... Come to think of it, Orimoto hadn't changed one bit since junior high. Neither did Hayama since my first meeting, and neither did Yukinoshita's harsh directness go anywhere. Even the way I communicated with What's-Her-Name-Machi was still the same.

But Yuigahama surprised me most of all. She was talking to Orimoto almost too politely. I felt a certain distance being established. Even though they've met plenty of times, it was not all that much. By the way, of all the people sitting here I've met Yuigahama most times, and our distance still hadn't changed. Except we don't even meet in that sense! Damn, I'm being dumped preemptively! Oh well, let's forget about it.

I think Yuigahama is really good at having conversations. Even Orimoto was way more friendly now. So Yuigahama, humble and friendly as she was, managed to hold a conversation with someone like Orimoto. Though, on the other hand, human communications is one huge mystery. You never guess when people get closer and when they become enemies. Often it's just you talk to a person, everything's fine, then you step on a landmine and suddenly you never want to see them again.

I think Yuigahama and Orimoto can be friends given reasonable time. But them not meeting anymore was equally probable.

Yuigahama raised her eyes to me and asked:

“Hikki, ordering anything else?”

“Nope.”

I quickly responded. Orimoto closed the terminal.

“Okay, roger. Please wait.”

She slipped the tablet into her pocket and took the menu. The Townwork magazine was still underneath. Orimoto noticed it.

“Hikigaya, looking for a job? You can work here, we’re just searching for kitched and waitstaff.”

“Nah, don’t need it.”

“Why not? Coulda work just fine.”

Orimoto was disappointed for some reason. Why are you disappointed? It’s like you wanted to work together with me. I didn’t get it. I was thinking about it when I hear laughter nearby. It was Yukinoshita.

“Hikigaya-kun won’t work no matter the job. He doesn’t have the desire to work in general.”

Yukinoshita was smiling while Yuigahama was approvingly nodding. Yeah, that is true, but when someone points out your desire not to work you start feeling like a scum suddenly. It’s hard like that. Anyway, I didn’t plan to work here. Orimoto straightened her hair and made a sad sigh.

“It’s easy to work around here if you have someone you can switch with. It’s just really hard to find the person.”

“Aah, got it.”

That’s why you were miffed earlier. The only question was why a person who’s currently resting should switch with you to go to work. It’s the shop manager’s job or something. It certainly was a good way to raise the staff’s reliability, but then again, what about the manager’s reliability then?

“Oh well. Tell me if you change your mind.” Orimoto said while tapping his shoulder with the menu. Yuigahama smiled politely and replied:

“Nah, Hikki won’t work here. It was me who grabbed the magazine anyway.”

“Oh. Tell me if you wanna work here then, I’ll show you the ropes.”

“Who would want to work here after what you said?”

“Oh, right. Agreed.”

This time it was Orimoto who smiled. Yeah, same way she spoke in junior high. Strange, but I didn’t feel neither nostalgia nor unpleasantness. Orimoto turned her back and headed to put the order.

“Nah, seriously, there’s not much people here, why not apply for a job?”

How long are you going to stand here? I’m waiting for my coffee. Talking about jobs is one thing, but I’m your customer and need to be server. Though I really wouldn’t mind working here, what with few customers and all...

a2-3

Some time later our tea and coffee arrived. They were followed by montblanc and canelé desserts Yuigahama ordered.

“Thanks for the wait!”

Orimoto lay the plates with trained motions, tucked the tray, courteously bowed and left. The table now was full of plates with sweets. For a sweet tooth like me this was a staggering sight. I stared and stared, considering what I should taste. Yuigahama put her fork into one of them.

“Here, Hikki!” She said and shoved me one of the plates with different desserts. Think chocolate sauce and fudge was dripping from each slice. Montblanc looked like it was seriously injured and was dropping its intestines, like from Hokuto Shinken technique. Hm... I always considered dessert the cute things but now they seriously scared me. I knew they were cut wholeheartedly and with good intentions, so I couldn't complain.

“A, yeah. Thanks!” I said and tentatively took the plate.. There no way the dessert wouldn't be tasty. No need to worry. Quite the opposite, they'd be even tastier after all the care showed to me. Most probably.

“Here, Yukinon.”

“Thanks you. You should take some too.”

Yukinoshita put some of the desserts back on Yuigahama's plate. Except her cut Sacher still looked appetizing, even after being cut. Did you really use the same forks?

“Hikigaya-kun likes sweet things, right?” Yukinoshita said, made a vexed sigh and offered me a small piece of sachertorte. I love sachertorte. Of course I love all the other sweets too.

“Yeah, thanks.”

“You're welcome. Bon appetite.” She replied while pouting tea to herself and

Yuigahama. I grabbed the fork and started eating the desserts while taking sips of coffee in between. They all were very tasty. This was a nice cafe. Yukinoshita clearly liked her tea and desserts too. She was actively eating them without saying a word. Yuigahama happily looked at her, then turned a page in her Townwork.

“By the way, are you really looking for job?”

Yuigahama clearly wasn't reading the magazine out of boredom. She paused with a piece of cake in her fork and looked at me.

“Not right now, but maybe it'll come in handy. It's almost January and I didn't get to do much in Summer.”

“Hm...”

What, didn't make it somewhere fun because you didn't have enough money? Well she is a friend of Miura, so they should have a lot of plans for Winter. Snowboards, skateboards, hot springs... So cute. Gotta make an anime and write a song about it.

There was a ski stadium in Chiba some time ago which the youngsters should be frequenting, but it's long since closed. Now young people have to travel far away to get a snowboard ride, with the prices obviously high. Normalfags sure have it tough, with their pricey entertainment and all.

Yukinoshita peeked into Yuigahama's magazine while swallowing a piece of cake.

“Found something interesting?”

“Don't know yet.” Yuigahama answered resting her cheek on her hand.

“It's hard to find anything just looking in Townwork. Work's best searched on foot.”

“I think you've got it wrong. It's hard to judge about real situation just by the magazine info.”

“Yeah. You should pick a job right at the place of an offer. It may turn out they’re overstaffed or pay is too low.”

Having listened to me and Yukinoshita, Yuigahama looked at us with shiny sparkling eyes, with something akin to respect and admiration.

“Hikki, you, like, have experience in all this?”

“I’ve avoided work in so many places. I’ve got plenty of experience. So I’m pretty sure I know a thing or two about part-timing.”

“I think you wouldn’t have fled every single one of them if you did have known a thing or two. Now do you really?” Yukinoshita said dismissively and made a sad sigh. How rude! It’s because I’ve skipped work at so many places I’ve got all the experience, and you could say that’s precisely why I’m jobless now.

People constantly fall into traps after judging the book by its cover, illustrations or the fact it’s being adapted into an anime. This way they gain experience, they learn. That’s why the current me is a traps expert. Do you know just how many time I had to spend to become one?..

“Recently I started to realize what details you should pay attention to.” I said with probably more self-importance than needed. Yukinoshita nodded requesting me to proceed.

“First thing to look at is whether the coworkers talk to each others.”

Yukinoshita looked surprised.

“That’s an unexpectedly sound advice coming from you. Indeed, if the employees don’t follow the rules, the work spirit is diminishing.” She said, nodding to her own words. What kind of logical chain was that? Are you a head of the disciplinary committee or something?

“Can’t say anything about their work spirit, but there’ll be some problems I’m certain about.”

Yuigahama turned to us.

“No way? Is it a bad thing to be on good terms?”

“That’s the problem. Their friendliness comes from already established relationships between them. Any newcomer is guaranteed to have trouble fitting in. For me personally it’s impossible.” I harshly said. Yukinoshita put her teacup on the saucer and nodded with a serious face.

“For me too.”

“Yukinon, you too?!”

Not bad, Yukinoshita! Sometimes I think you’re worse at human interactions than I am! Thanks to your support unpleasant memories about my past part-times started to pop up.

“They can demand to tell about the previous work experience or make welcome parties I didn’t ask for.” I tiredly said. Yuigahama wasn’t satisfied.

“So what? That’ cool! Feels like home and stuff!”

“That ‘Feels like home’ of yours only means you were accepted as one of their own. But the newbies can enjoy life on their own.”

I stopped to cough, then continued.

“Try to imagine all the sadness when someone of the older employees approaches you at the party and asks to tell something interesting. If you refuse you’ll be looked down on as a boring person. If you agree you’ll be told you’re boring upfront. What are you supposed to say in such cases? And tomorrow you have to go work in the resulting hell. Can you comprehend that?”

I said “Imagine” so much I’m like John Lennon now. Yuigahama became sad.

“I kinda changed my mind about working...”

She understood the whole situation and her shoulders sagged. You got what I was saying, good. Yukinoshita patted her back several times in consolation.

“Hikigaya-kun is good at exaggerating the fears, he’s better at that than most con men. But you do have to learn about your workplace.”

I was please Yukinoshita agreed with me. Though she probably agreed not with me but with her own loneliness. Not that I would say that to her.

Having heard the opinions of two people, Yuigahama contemplated something.

“Got it... I’ll try searching near my neighborhood then.”

“Better not.”

“Eh? Why?”

“If you start slacking in the cafes nearby you may be prohibited from entering. I can’t enter several cafes near my house because of that.”

Slacking is the worst way to quit a job. Of course it’s bad for the employer, but it’s also bad for me too. All my shelves and closet are filled to the brim with the uniform I couldn’t manage to return. Every time I open the closet I’m overwhelmed with “Sound! Uniform!”

Slacking is a no-no. Returning the uniform in a parcel with recipient paying is a no-no. You have to pay for it yourself!

Yukinoshita started massaging her temples and made a very sad sigh.

“My head starts hurting every single time I hear Hikigaya-kun’s live stories.”

“Ahaha... Sometimes I think like ‘Oh Hikki’ too...”

I couldn’t understand who Yuigahama was taling about too, but somehow I thought “Yep, that’s Gahama-san for you”. You have to feel her words instead of listening to them. Her speech skills are far from perfect anyway. Yukinon too was behaving like the usual Yukinon. She tilted her head, slightly bit her lip and made yet another sad sigh.

“I don’t like to say that but you really don’t need to look for the job.”

She gave up.

Sometimes the line between “give up” and “admit” is blurred. Yuigahama stared at me while twirling the fork in her fingers.

“Hikki, you say so much things about work but still work in school.”

“Mmm, yeah. You can quit your job at any time but you can’t quit school. That’s why I have to do at least something.” I said trying to find the right words to justify my actions. I don’t think I managed to do it. I probably had very different reasons to do so; I don’t think it would be right to form them into words.

In truth I haven’t found the correct words for my feelings and emotions myself yet. Seemed like their meaning was wrong from the start. That’s why I tried to find an answer that wouldn’t be a complete lie for myself. But Yuigahama-san, why are you still drilling a hole in my skull with your look?

“I don’t think you quit the job just like that.” She finally said waving her hands. Yukinoshita, who was listening to us before, smiled a bit.

“The club is one thing, but I would never work together with you.”

“I could wrap your hands in a ribbon and present them back to you.”

Right, and a gift-wrap too, forgot about that. Yukinoshita as she is is a capable person; she would make a decent employee. She can plan things and work accordingly, as well as solve the problems as they come. But her lifestyle is fatally clumsy. She probably can become a manager, then be promoted even further, but her words will still be sharper than a knife, killing everything around. It was horrible. Yukinoshita too understood what I meant, humphed and averted her eyes.

“We can’t work anyway, since part-timing is against the school regulations.”

“Like I care about the regulations.”

I had worked part-time and I’m sure many students had too. Even if someone learns about them, there’s no actual punishment, and school doesn’t bother

look for those people anyway. It's called letting it slide. A classical example of "it's not a problem until we make it into one".

"It's still not a reason to violate the rules."

Another good point from Yukinoshita. Probably because she was drinking Ceylon tea.[pun: Ceylon->Seiron(正論)] But it was stated just for the sake of arguing with me. So I ignored it. If we were outside I'd whistle to show I didn't care. Yuigahama on the other hand not only didn't ignore it but decided to accept. She ate the leftover desserts and turned to us.

"But you can get a school permission, right?"

"Well, yeah."

Suddenly! A normal response from Yuigahama. Yukinoshita stuttered.

"B-but... Um... Yuigahama-san, you don't have clear reasons to work, so obtaining such permission won't be easy. Besides, you're a club member, so Hiratsuka-sensei, being our advisor, won't allow you to." Yukinoshita noted while touching her chin. Yuigahama, not being able to hold back anymore, leaped to Yukinoshita and hugged her.

"Don't worry, Yukinon! Club is still important for me! I won't hide from you if I find a job."

"It's not what I meant..."

Yukinoshita fiercely blushed in Yuigahama's embrace and tried to say something. My, they were so close. Well, I understood Yuigahama's feelings, since I felt something similar, even though our thoughts weren't similar at all.

I don't think either me or Yuigahama wanted to work all that much. Same probably could be said about Yukinoshita: she treasures the time spent in the club together, and so doesn't want her to leave for work. I had similar feeling, except for different reasons. I simply didn't want to multiply the unknown variations in the equation. Of course it was a bad thing. Know everything? How horrible.

Seeing these girls is sweeter than any dessert would ever be. Sitting in a warm cafe on a soft sofa gazing at them, I feel sleep taking over me. That's why I drank my already lukewarm black coffee in one gulp.

Chapter a3: Quietly and Carefully, Kaori Orimoto Asks a Question

By the time we exited the cafe the sun had already set. We stayed there way longer than we planned, and the cafe switched to evening mode. The sea breeze became even colder after dark. We were slowly waking to the station, passing by various people. Yuigahama looked at them and said:

“The year’s over soon...”

Walking alongside, Yuikinoshita remembered something and muttered:

“Indeed. Time for a big cleanup.”

“I’ll help today!” Yuigahama eagerly offered. Yikinoshita smiled:

“Oh? Good then. We need to clean the clubroom too.”

“That’s right.” I noted. We were very busy during the Christmas and hadn’t cleaned the room ever since. Not to mention a pile of stuff left there by Isshiki. Currently the club was in the state of the hugest disorder in its history.

“Then let’s clean it when the classes start.”

“Yeah.”

Yuigahama apparently is eager to start cleaning at this very moment; Yukinoshita on the other hand is cold as usual. By the way, I can’t really remember me and Yuigahama cleaning up in the clubroom. That means Yukinoshita had always done it alone. Sorry and thanks, namu namu, I silently said my prayer.

We approached the crossing near the park. To the left is the station entrance;

to the right is the road to Yukinoshita's condo. She pointed her finger to the right.

"Farewell, Hikigaya-kun. We're heading that way."

"Sure, by. Getting some ramen and heading home too."

The girls left for Yukinoshita's home.

I started walking when Yuigahama called me. Turning back, I saw her wave at me.

"Hikki! Happy New Year!"

"Yup, see you next year." I replied quietly and started walking to the station. Cold wind chilled my cheeks. Because of that I felt my ears burn. Gotta tie the muffler tighter.

x x x

I like to say I have a separate stomach for ramen, so now, even after all the sweets earlier, I ate the ordered ramen without leaving a single bit of food. I went to the bus stop to return home. There's not many buses that commute from Kaihin Makuhari to my neighborhood; I miss one, the wait will be rather long. Of course I could simply walk on foot, but seeing a bus pass by when you're out in the cold(lol) would be too sad.

Even with the New Year approaching, many corporate slaves Japan is famous for are still working. Even now, at night, silhouettes of those slaves were all over the place. That included the bus stop too.

The waves of people around me were an awesome windstopper, so I could stand among them and not feel cold. Suddely the bike bell rang. Of all the places at night I hear it here! I frowned, silently ordering it to stop. Heeey, Belly-Belly, you're annoying! I angrily looked at the source of the sound only to see a familiar figure waving at me.

"I'm being ignored! Hilarious!"

“No, it’s not.”

Kaori Orimoto was slowly moving to me, standing on her bike and kicking the ground with one leg. Seemed like her shift was over and she was heading home. I just happened to be standing by, so she called me.

“Hikigaya, you coming home?”

“Yeah,” I shortly replied. Orimoto tapped on her baggage rack.

“Sit down.”

“No way, it’s a bike. Besides, it’s cold.”

Orimoto calmly replied:

“Step on the pedals then, you’ll warm up faster.”

What? She wants me to step on the pedals? Jerk! And saying it like it’s the most natural thing to boo! I considered getting angry and shoo her when I heard someone shooing her nearby. I glanced in that direction and saw some fellow (28, single) look at us with a “stop that lovey-dovey stuff or I’ll kill you” look. Corporate slaves sure are scary. Feeling that pressure, I decided to leave the crowd. Yeah, you should be a nuisance to others.

A approached Orimoto. She clapped with her glove-clad hands and pointed to the seat.

“Here,” She said, passing me the handle bar.

“I told you I’m not riding on a bike with you.”

Disappointed, Orimoto said:

“Oh... Whatever. Let’s come home then.”

She started walking holding her bike.

That was fast! No need for my reply, eh? I didn’t bother with that and followed

her. Didn't have a choice anyway. So rude, her. I wouldn't call it a good quality. On the other hand, when people talk to you like that it's not that bad. I might even fall in love with you that way! Stop it, I'll die!

No, I don't like that friendly treatment after all.

Orimoto meanwhile remember something and reached into her pocket.

"Oh, yeah. Did your mail address change?"

"Aaah," I replied without thinking. That wasn't a precise answer, not a "yes" and not a "no". In fact it was "YES!". The first thing you do to reboot the relationships is clear the contacts and other electronic communication. By the way, that's not the first time I changed the email. Not the second either. Though I don't think I have to do it anymore: people constantly forget them anyway. But changing the email helps commit the sacrifice of that "weak hope for relationship" concept and thus call a level six mailer daemon. It's too strong, its card should be prohibited!

What's with all the email talk, by the way? Curly-haired girl walking in front of me apparently didn't notice my surprise and said:

"We're planning a class reunion after Christmas, so we decided to gather somewhere to eat. Wanted to contact you too."

"Ah, right. But I wouldn't go anyway."

"Knee it." Orimoto said and laughed to herself.

And thus we talked like that all the way to our block. Explosive silence occurred twice or thrice. I can't even call that a conversation: I mostly just nodded. Orimoto didn't seem to mind at all. Her mood reading skills hadn't changed since junior high.

Near the large viaduct over the national highway Orimoto turned to me and asked an unexpected question.

"By the way, you going out with any of those two?" She asked in her usual manner, her face expressing curiosity. Yeah, she had asked something like that

before.

“No one.” I tiredly replied.

“Hm...” She humped and turned forward, as if the question had lost the meaning..

We both fell silent, the only sound was our footsteps and bike tires. She asked once again, in a quiet voice and not turning.

“And do you love any of those two?”

The question was similar to the previous one, but somehow I couldn't answer it. I couldn't even deny it; words simply stuck in my throat. The silence was even more sudden than the question. Orimoto, expecting the reply, turned to me in surprise. She saw my face, then smiled uneasily, as if apologizing.

“Oh, forget it.”

Maybe I should have replied her. But, really... Why didn't I? I should know the answer to that question.

The rest of our walk was simply me nodding to her phrases, not saying anything meaningful.

Afterword

Hello everyone, Watari Wataru here. Never thought I'd write another author's afterword so soon. By the way, last time I'd been writing the enigmatic words was exactly two years ago. All this thanks to those who had supported Oregairu and its first season. Thanks to you all!

It was decided to issue this new story together with the BD/DVD special editions. It's called Oregairu.a, that is, its numbering is different from the main volumes. I guess I'd elaborate on that name.

I'd been thinking for a long time about how to name this story. The thing is, there's a huge gap in the main timeline I wanted to fill. I could make it a normal volume, but didn't manage to do it for this particular story.

And so I present the Volume a.

Those who've read it probably see that the story goes in a different direction. In a very different way, to be precise. This is a special story which will assemble into a complete novella made from seven parts shipped with each BD volume. That's why I've created a unique script and a very differing structure. So there will be a lot of differences from the main series.

It probably may be said that this is even more of a "main" story because it's going to be a separate entity. So I guess you understand now that I couldn't give it a number. Though there's still a lot to be done before all the seven parts are complete. This novella is very unlikely to be included into the main series. Anyway I'll be grateful if you read all of it.

In fact it took me quite a lot of thinking to let you enjoy it the same way as the main volumes.

The producer asked me "What's this 'a' series?" in a very dark tone while the editor crumpled the manuscripts in his hands.

I tried to put a special meaning to this 'a' name. For example it's a first letter of

the English alphabet. Or maybe a 'Plus Alpha'. Or an abbreviation of many English words. I for one can think of 4-5 right off the bat. I guess the name will become more appropriate as the story is unfolding.

One of those 4-5 words would be 'alternative'. I tried to tweak it since it has so many meanings. Why is English so hard? All the Englishmen are probably geniuses if they can speak it freely.

It's not just 'alternative', there's a whole bunch of others. Like 'answer', or 'unbelievable'. Yes, 'unbelievable'. Is especially cool since there's no letter A there at all. Just why is English so complex? And one of my junior high teachers told me that it sounds like 'ah'. Anyway, there are many words starting with 'a', so I'm glad you're trying to crack this puzzle.

Even though I'm currently working on this novella, I'm not abandoning the main volumes. So read them both! Promise me, okay? Till the end! I sound like some grade school kid now, but seriously, read them both. The resulting effect will be, so to speak, a WIN-WIN! Oops, out of that grade school kid mode. By the way, Tamanawa's movements in the anime were really funny. My brain was trying to fly away just by looking at him. I'm worried it will take off some day that way.

In fact I was eager to see events both big and small. I enjoyed the second season both as a source author and as a viewer.

Let's talk about Oregairu itself. Its story is really unusual in and on itself, and adapting it into anime was not a trivial task. But that's my own opinion. When I told about my very reckless plan to make an adaptation, I was told "sure, whatever". But I was really scared not even of the adaptation process but the immense plan of what to do and how to start.

Well, anyway, his movements in anime were cool. Now, really, this is a story about high school kids, most of the conversations and actions happen in the same rooms over and over. What good can you draw there? What animation skill should one possess to do all that? I was told that it's the other way around: it's interesting to make a frame where almost nothing moves. In my personal humble opinion making an anime where everything moves and spins and flies is way harder.

And the second season has even fewer events. Making such an anime so that viewers wouldn't die of boredom is one thing, but the director has to work on the scenes too. There are many moving things besides Tamanawa's hands, all the small details, and they all show the director's work!

Aside from that, unlike the ranobe, the anime is time-constrained. The episodes number is limited, the episode length is finite. So you have to decide what to fit into each episode. It's not that simple in fact. I once attended the series composition meeting. Everyone was all like "Aw daaamn! Daaamn! We won't cram it!", lotsa headache, yeah. Director Oikawa was constantly saying that he wanted to leave this bit and that bit and cut these bits, and those will hurt to cut, and cutting the characters' phrases wasn't good. But... the ranobe is long! My apologies to you, directors Suga and Ochi, and the rest of the team too. Who writes such long stories anyway?

There was another reason adapting it into an anime was so hard. It's written in first person, from main character Hachiman Hikigaya's POV, and all the other characters surrounding him are quite a pain in the ass. Such a pain in fact that it's appropriate to ask "You wanna destroy this anime? What kind of characters are that?"

You constantly want to shout "Stop arguing, dammit! Talk properly to each other!". Though after finishing the season I thought it's the main attraction of the anime.

During those series composition meetings all those middle-aged men were talking while putting their hands to the foreheads:

"I so get Yui's feelings."

"Yeah."

"Though we've forgotten Yukino's problems at our age."

"Right. And Hachiman has the same problems. But they're mostly different after all."

"Agree."

“Don’t know ‘bout you but I like girls like Orimoto.”

“Yeah, I totally get that.”

“Right.”

This “meeting” was really strange to look at. I mean, they did discuss the series’ composition. But they still tried to comprehend the characters’ personalities, their features, to try to emphasize them and feel the things they felt. The series is really hard to adapt, I think.

In my opinion the biggest reason not to adapt this novella is its author being really annoying jerkass! He was getting in the way all the time: at scriptwriters’ meetings, at voice recordings, even during recording of the songs! He’s in no way a specialist in all this! I think everyone’s shuddering at his mere mention. Even the producer told him with the teary eyes “Write some bonus instead, I don’t know!”. And then I was constantly verbally kicked at every editors’ meeting with “Wataru Watari, where are the goddamn manuscripts?!” Sorry for that, phehehe☆!

Anyway, as you see I’ve had a lot of problems, so let’s just thank all the anime staff, starting with director Oikawa, for all their hard work. Thanks to them you are holding these BDs and DVDs in your hands. So, do you like them?

I’m going to talk about the first episode, so careful there! I had some space in the pamphlets last time and now I’ll be using up the space in this book. There was a whole lot of stuff, starting from avant-frames, to lives, and I even swayed the glowsticks with Chad and Eguchi-kun once. Author of the original had to beg a lot to be let into that roof where the live event was staged. That was one of the series-defining scenes. I wish I could come too!

This episode covers the events of the seventh volume. Totsuka cute. Let him stay that way. Oh, and... Yahallo! I’m glad I’ve heard that Yahallo. Such a soothing word. Nothing more to say here.

I mean, I wanted to wrap this up, but I won’t. Gotta talk about the clubroom too. I was glad like a child when I saw all the stickers on the nameplate! I hope those who remember the first season felt warm and fuzzy too.

That was the first scene when their relationships started to change after volume six. And here's where the new thematic thread starts. Part of what the characters have, what they say, what they feel, it's all hidden. You'll have the opportunity to pay attention to that in the next episodes, and I'll be glad if you do.

The main feature of this episode is Kakeru Tobe and Hina Ebina. They've appeared all the way back in the first volume and gave a hand to the Service club in Volume four. If, say, Hayato Hayama was the protagonist, those two would have been the supporting characters. Except the protagonist here is Hachiman Hikigaya, so this assumption is ultimately meaningless. Though I do consider writing a spin-off with him as the main character. Hey, anyone wants to publish a Hayama spin-off?*wistfully*

Uhm, I was getting sidetracked. So Tobe and Ebina are friends. In the novel they're just fun fellows. Some mentions of them pop up here and there up until Volume seven... I think*mutters*

Maybe in this episode, maybe later, but we'll dig deep into him and her, and also all the Hayama's circle. By guiding Tobe and Ebina Hachiman will broaden his worldview, because to reach the goal of the novel his worldview has to be broadened and slowly changed..

In this changing world Yukino will show her unknown side, which the last scene demonstrated where they return to the hotel. What kind of feeling did we want to convey in that scene? Neither Hachiman nor Yukino can express it with words. I'd like to call that scene "the sprouts". Beautiful scene, isn't it?

As for the club itself, there's nothing changed, but that doesn't mean the characters' feeling hadn't changed either. The sprouts of these boys and girls' feelings have just popped out and just start living in this world.

You can say it's the real beginning of the Oregairu story. Anyway, now you know what to look for, so I'll continue in the next volume. Don't forget to read it!

And the last page is, as per customary, is the list of acknowledgements.

This series will go on. There'll be different twists here, even though similar to the main volumes. Let's pray we get an answer to the unspeakable question.

And this marks the end of Oregairu Volume a.

Acknowledgements.

Ponkan8. Many thanks for working on the main series, anime, CD, DVD and BD covers. There's even more work ahead, and I'll continue relying on you at that. I won't let you rest! Thank you.

Executive Editor Hoshino-san. How many times will I lie to you with that "Oh come on, I'll make it into deadlines this time, hehe!"? Though it's not my fault. It's society's. And the company to boot. It's strange to say that, but I do think I'll make it before the deadline next time. Strange. Sorry for causing so many problems every time. DVD and BD, as well as the ranobe will continue, so keep me in check! Thanks! Ahaha!

Director Oikawa and the rest of the anime staff! I think it's the first time you see such an annoying original creator. I want to prostrate before you and beg for forgiveness for me being me. I beg of you to forgive me! Thank you for adapting it into the anime! I understand both seasons had a lot of unadaptable things. I'm really grateful for you taking on the work and completing it, as well as managing to deal with the author. Here's hoping we'll continue working. Thank you!

Takuya Eguchi, Hachiman Hikigaya's voice actor, and all the other seiyuus! It's been three years since the radio drama was published. Or is it four already? We know each other for so long I can't count straight anymore. I didn't expect to work for so long when writing the radio drama script. Thanks to it we saw the second season of Oregairu. Troubled characters became even more troubled, the twists more twistey, and the original creator is running around even more than usual. Sorry.

The characters have provided both freshness and rottenness, but I still was glad seeing them. Let's continue working together. Thank!

And lastly, thanks to all the readers and viewers for your support. I hope you'll

continue doing that. There are many event in the series going off course, but I'll be glad if you follow it to the end.

Kimi ga iru, that's why Oregairu.

The space is almost up, and thus I'm wrapping things up. See you... ugh, so much work... so see you next time.

Sincerely yours, watching anime with a MAX Coffee can,

Wataru Watari.

Credits

Translators:

Excorcism (aka Spyro) @[Kyakka](#)

[/u/some_chinese_guy](#) @ [/r/OreGairuSNAFU](#)

ePub version: johny_dmonic

This ePub was created using Sigil.