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第 2 卷



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Chapter n1: Kaori Orimoto hadn't changed one bit

Evening slowly turned into the night, and the wind gradually changed direction. We crossed the viaduct over the national highway and walked on.

... Do you love any of the two?

We hadn't exchanged a single phrase after that question and simply kept on walking the familiar path. Of course Orimoto told me to forget it immediately after, but I was wondering if she did it out of disinterest or sudden kindness. Or did she regret asking after having seen my lost face? In any case timing for an answer was lost. I'll probably won't discuss that with her anymore anyway.

Except nothing would've changed had this question been asked by someone else. It's just nobody had asked it until now. Maybe with the sole exception of the monster living inside me and constantly whispering it in my ear from time to time. But unlike the human speech the monster's voice is not that important. When me and my awfully high self-consciousness start pondering the questions unanswered and assembling the words for an answer, I really can't stand myself. That was the real reason I never answered that to myself. It's just wrong to answer the unasked question.

Even if someone, somewhere, one day had asked the same question, I wouldn't have given answer; for it didn't exist. All that I could've managed would have been uncertain words, quiet voice, face without no trace of a smile nor frown; that was it. In short, I had lost forever the opportunity for a nonexistent answer to the question, so I just kept my mouth shut.

My cheeks coarsed up due to the wind. I simply kept on walking, as if escaping to the place I should return to. The sound of the bicycle being towed blended with the whisper of the wind. I glanced to the side and saw the girl's face being illuminated by the car passing by. She squinted and clicked her tongue looking at it, vexed. I think it was the first time I've seen the sincere and talkative

Orimoto have this kind of face. She really was sincere. When I think of her I immediately imagine a man cutting a tree with a “hop”, like Yosaku.

So, on one hand I knew Kaori Orimoto’s character, but on the other hand our relationship wasn’t particularly close. Just a former junior high classmate. Our connection is such that, had we missed each other today, we’d never ever meet again. Or maybe we’d do, at the coming-of-age ceremony in three years or at the class reunion in maybe ten. Though the probability of me attending it was really low, so yeah, we’d never met again. And if we did had met each other in the street, we certainly wouldn’t have been walking together like this.

But then I didn’t exactly understand why that was going on right now. Was that fate making jokes? Of course, if it hadn’t been the sincere Kaori Orimoto who had that habit of shortening distance between people, it would’ve been a different story entirely. Who else would shout to a former classmate like me? Not to mention I’ve confessed to her long ago! And yet she contacted me without a moment of hesitation. She wasn’t a normal human for sure.

Because of those sudden memories I stared at her. She noticed my rude stare, frowned and turned to me.

“What?”

“Nah, nothing. Just thought I shouldn’t have you walk with me.” I started making clumsy justifications for my stare. Orimoto stopped, looked at me, then at the handlebar and laughed.

“Hikigaya just said that! Hilarious! Were you always like that?” She continued laughing while covering her mouth. I made a forced smile in response. She was right: those tactful words didn’t suit me, even though I’ve said them out of fake politeness. I really doubt Orimoto knew me all that well, but this phrase of mine did sound very unnatural. The me from junior high certainly wouldn’t have said that at all. Most probably I didn’t even bother with politeness or tact and just wanted to break the silence. I obviously don’t keep quiet because of inability to pick the right words. Though come to think of it, I did have weird theories like “I keep my mouth shut, therefore I’m cool, and those who don’t are not at all”. But still, I did have the habit of running the whole dialogues inside my head and thus not being able to say the correct words.

“How about riding after all?” Orimoto handed me the handlebar, burying the newborn silence.

“Nah, pass.”

“But it’s cold.”

“I don’t get you.”

Orimoto squeezed the fists on her chest and showed me the winning smile.

“You’ll be warmer once you start pedaling.”

“But it’s only me who’ll get warmer. You’re too kind.”

My voice during that sentence was getting quieter by the second. And judging by how she hopped on the baggage rack and tapped the handle bar, she didn’t hear me at all.

Orimoto set her foot to the side to keep the balance and was holding the handle bar. Hey. stop that. Your skirt is now almost higher than your thighs. Oh well, let me take a glance. No-no, Orimoto’s tensed beautiful legs did catch my attention, but only for a moment; I averted my eyes. Wasn’t checking up her nice calves either, honest.

I finally pried my eyes off the seat and baggage rack; all that was left was to take the offered handlebar. I felt the cold wind that was the initial reason for all this. Well, she did walk with me through this cold weather...

“Fine,” I shortly replied and got on the bicycle. Something was wrong. Ah, the seat was too high. I hadn’t paid attention when Orimoto towed it. Now I’ve finally noticed that the seat was higher than on my city bicycle. That didn’t feel right. I looked at Orimoto. She leaned back, then, remembering something, clapped her hands.

“Oh, sorry, I’ve raised the seat like on my road bike. You can lower it if you want.”

“Road bike?..”

Strange. It's a really meaningless detail, yet I'm feeling happy for some reason. That high seat somehow reminded me of To Love-Ru... I pushed the pedal and started riding, slightly upset. I'd gladly follow Orimoto's advice and lower the seat, but I'm a boy, you know. Would've hurt to hear her say something like "Real short legs! Hilarious!". No thanks to those thoughts I started accelerating. Hands and feet tensed up, along with the back. Then suddenly I heard a voice totally unrelated to my tense back.

"I ride the road bike on weekends. Just don't wanna use it to commute to school or job. Afraid it'll be stolen, you know."

I didn't ask a thing. Seemed like Orimoto simply continued from where we trailed off. Road bike, huh... So on weekends she uses it instead of this one. Well yeah, she did look like someone who had such hobby. She's probably one of those trendy gals who ride the road bikes on weekends, carry DSLRs and eat vegetables with Asai juice for lunch.

My god, I'm full of stereotypes... Vegetables and Asai juice are a staple of intelligent people. Considering me being a full antipode of such people, I should eat ground meat croquettes with bratwurst and drink coffee milk or Omikujira soda.

I didn't even consider her having such hobbies back in junior high. Seriously, if someone had asked me what I knew about her, I probably wouldn't had known what to say.

"Huh, you do have various stuff to do," I said turning back for a second. She tried not to touch my back and shoulders, holding on the seat post. When I turned she raised her eyes and looked back.

"Yeah. I'm not into clubs so I have plenty of free time."

"So that's why you're part-timing?"

Having suddenly remembered everything that had happened in that cafe near Kaihin Sogo High, I turned forward again and started pedaling harder.

"Money first of all of course. But I also wanted to befriend the folks from other

schools. There's always many people working there." There was the joy of school life evident in Orimoto's words. Yeah, there's this kind of people; they seek to befriend the students from other schools, and sometimes this reaches absurd levels. They don't stop at the nearby schools either, they attend every single school in town, sometimes even the universities. I'd say that was overboard.

They regularly use the other schools' book bags. I suspect they really value all those symbols; probably their new friends are kind of a status symbol too. These people are proud they wear certain clothes, though in fact they don't all that much differ from the people who use smart English business terms. Maybe she got that "intellectuality" from Tamanawa? It's his favourite words:CONNECTING, SYNERGY, STIMULATION. Meanwhile Orimoto said in a low sad voice.

"I thought I'd make some friends."

Despite the wind I clearly heard that self-deprecation undertone. I turned back and looked her in the eyes. She was staring at the houses and shops passing by, but then noticed my look and made a deceiving smile.

"It's just people probably don't like me." she said and fixed her perm hair as if trying to hide her embarrassment. I remembered today's scene at the cafe and got what she meant. Her constant attempts at communicating with everyone around, her barrier-breaking behaviour-- all that to just have friends. No, friends are definitely more than just a status symbol for her. Besides, Orimoto was the kind of girl who'd talk even to someone like me, and status-seekers never do that. There's, of course, a probability of her showing off her kindness ("hey, look at me, I can talk even to the rejects"), but after seeing her sad smile I started thinking it was something else.

"Just a matter of habit," I said averting my eyes from her lonely look. Ah. I wish I had the normal communication skills; I'd easily had helped her out. Too bad I didn't. Apparently these thoughts somehow were expressed in my voice because Orimoto threw a weird look at me. She then weirdly but kindly sighed and leaned to me.

"You think?" She uttered in a quiet voice as if sharing a secret and, leaning

further, put her hands on my shoulders.

“I thought that was because of you, Hikigaya.”

For a second I’ve lost the balance and ran over a small stone. The bike bumped. Orimoto yelped, rubbed her butt and turned to me.

“Hey, it hurts! ‘hell are you doing?! Hilarious…”

“Nothing hilarious about that. Sorry.” I automatically apologized under her intense stare. Yep, 100% my fault. My heart started beating faster because our faces were closer now. But her words made it beat even more faster.

I started pedaling again, thinking about the meaning of the words said aside. It’s probably like that question: no matter how hard I try, I won’t find the answer. Yet I’ve picked the most correct words I could think of and said:

“Don’t know why, but we really had it rough because of Tamanawa. He didn’t make a good impression.”

“Ah, yeah. Was really horrible back then.”

Our memories about the Christmas event were still fresh. It was one tough challenge for me; seems like it was the same for Orimoto. But you should learn from your mistakes, and Orimoto currently sitting on the baggage rack was smiling. And by the way, I do ride carefully so as not to bump on a stone again, so please, stop swinging your legs and slap my back, I can lose my balance that way. Though Orimoto did laugh it off last time, so I made a relaxed sigh.

“I think he’ll get used to being president. Everything’s gonna be alright. He’s a nice guy after all.” Orimoto suddenly said, her tone unexpectedly kind. That again! She had said that consoling “nice guy” phrase yet again! If the girl says this it clearly means that no, he’s not a nice guy at all. You know, better tell everything as is. Because not everyone can immediately understand that “Hikigaya, I really like you and all, you’re such a nice guy, but sorry, I can’t go out with you.”

“Hikigaya, which way do you go?”

“Along the tracks.” I replied to the sudden question. Orimoto tapped my shoulder with her finger and I shivered. Probably because my back was already tense. I turned back to look at her. She pointed at the crossing.

“Then turn here.” Orimoto pointed her finger at the road along the tracks that lead to my home. I thought I was walking her home, so I tilted my head in surprise.

“But your house is not this way.”

“Eh?! How do you know?! Hilarious!” She replied with a strange smile. But I didn’t find it funny at all. It’s mid-Winter and my back was wet from sweat. I almost shouted “Damn, I’m doomed!” but I restrained myself and instead started making silly excuses up.

“Ah? Well... People do say this sometimes, right? By accident... stuff happens, you know...”

“Oh. Probably...” Orimoto lowered her head in doubt. If she starts digging into the topic I’m done for.

“Yeah, just like that. Don’t bother.” I said. Orimoto nodded and seemingly let it slide.

“Okay then,” She muttered. Hurray! One of the good things these simple open girls have is simple free atmosphere. Tell the simple girl not to bother and the topic is changed by itself. Try that at home. Huh... I’ve dealt with the problem but I’ve got another one instead. Orimoto very suddenly offered:

“Oh, right. I’ll be biking to my house anyway, how about I walk you home?”

“You don’t have to. Besides, it’s me pedaling right now.”

“Oh whatevs, let go to your place!” Orimoto said carefully slapping my back. I obviously didn’t want to pedal all the way home, but since I’m in her trap already, I can again get that question about her address to answer. And I’ll have to bear responsibility according to the no-bother codex. Gotta arrive home before she mentioned that again.

“Sure, let’s go.” I said and turned the bicycle to the crossing and along the tracks.

Damn you, past me... Logically speaking, the fact that you know where she lives can only evoke disgust. Guys, why do you search for the house of a girl you like? Like, in junior high one could easily go shopping and walk by the school when the clubs were over. And then, if one was particularly lucky, walk her home. Preach it! Or, in the elementary school, one could walk their dog near the girl’s home and meet her “by accident”. Hilarious! Except the girls saw through all this right away and called me creepy and Stalkygaya. Preach it... Right? Right?..

We passed by the crossing; some time later I arrived home and stopped the bike near the entrance. Orimoto eyed my house.

“Huh, so that’s where you live, Hikigaya...”

“As you can see,” I replied, then hopped off the bike and handed it to Orimoto. She easily leaped off the baggage rack and rode the bike. By the way, all these active thigh movements are guaranteed to affect the skirt... Good thing it was dark already, otherwise I would check it up immediately. Seriously though, it’s real dark already. The winter solstice had already passed, but daytime wasn’t that long yet.

I threw a glance at Orimoto, hinting to leave, darkness and all. But she kept sitting on the bike seat and apparently wasn’t in a hurry. Seems like she noticed my bike parked near the entrance.

“Hikigaya, so you commute to school by bike? How long to Soubu from here?”

“Not that long if you get used to it. Besides, there’s almost no traffic lights in the way.” I replied. Orimoto nodded.

“Ah, right, you use the bike lane. I ride that one too on weekends.”

She truly was a local and knew the roads well. There was a direct bike lane along the river almost all the way to Soubu High. A nice safe ride with no cars around. If you follow the lane down the river, you reach the sea; upstream was

Inbanuma and the road to Sakura district. [So Hikki lives somewhere around here 35°39'57.3"N 140°04'01.4"E]

Lately I did notice increasing number of people riding the road bikes; probably a trend or something. Looked like Orimoto was among them. She meanwhile clapped her hands.

“Hikigaya, how about you buy one too?”

“Nah, too expensive. And you said yourself it can be stolen, so no school commuting.”

“True that.” She said covering her laughter with the hand. What’s so funny? The night city’s silence and the girly laughter raised my spirits for some reason. It was almost akin to talking at night while hiking in the wild or walking in the park late in the afternoon. I gave into that atmosphere and smiled despite myself.

In April or May, when I just entered Soubu High, I happened to see a similar scene. It was evening, with sun already set and night creeping in; my former classmates, in brand new uniforms, were standing near the convenience stores or houses and holding their bikes in the same fashion, talking about news or the events together. To me, the outsider, it all seemed like some of them were brimming with future hopes, and some of them hadn’t gotten used to the new places and people and excitedly held onto the old things. Just like at the class reunions. Their companies were different now, not the same as in junior high. Maybe the new places and nostalgic memories were to blame. They most certainly were saying stuff like “introduce me to your friends” or “let’s hang out together” or something like that. Idiots, go home already.

You could call that a new life’s miracle, the one that happened solely due to entering high school. Every single time I saw them I pedaled harder or even switched the routes home. Never had I thought I’d do exactly the same thing in just two years. I started worrying so as not to meet some other former classmate or something. But in fact Orimoto was the only communicative and kind person of the bunch, talking to me and all. All the others were different. I wouldn’t mind not talking to them till the end of days, but even among them were kind-hearted lads who would ask things like “how’s it going?” out of pity.

The moment they ask that... God. I of course will be at loss of words, the space around me will drown in silence, the world will drop its smiles, the birds will forget their songs and the world will sink into the darkness... Not really, the last bit was too much. But I can vividly and precisely imagine what will follow. Others will start grumbling at the kind-hearted fellow, saying “Why did you talk to him at all? Was it fun?” and the like. My heart hurts just from imagining this. In that case I’d have no choice but to pretend to be a Jizo statue. I’ll probably be so good at it that people will start bringing offerings. A straw hat if I’m lucky.

And thus I exchanged phrases with Orimoto all the while remembering the dark things from my past. Suddenly I felt someone’s stare. Scared to indeed find the former classmates, I quickly turned. The silhouette approached me carefully. After one small step I recognized a stray strand of hair on their head. This trait without a doubt belongs to my little sister.

“Komachi?” I called her in a small voice. She heard that and confidently came to me, her strand shaking back and forth.

“Oh, Bro. Thought so.”

We clearly recognized each other in the streetlamp light. Komachi touched her petite chest and sighed. That’s Komachi’s chest all right. Damn, what a horrible way to recognize someone.

“Oh, little sister... Am I right?” Orimoto said. But she clearly wasn’t sure, so she looked at me for confirmation.

“Yep.”

“Thought so. Why aren’t you alike at all? Hilarious!”

None of your business. And what’s so funny? Though Komachi being cute was a good thing, nothing to complain about.

“Hello! Thanks for taking care of my Bro!”

“Ah, yeah, you too.” Orimoto, being Orimoto, replied something out of sync. Now they stood before me and smiled without a word. Especially Komachi. I

looked at her with suspicion. Usually Komachi started talking to any girl right away, but today something was wrong. I started thinking Komachi didn't want to hand me to another woman and be separated from her dear Bro. In that case you earn huge number of points, Komachi.

Orimoto should be Komachi's senpai from junior high, but apparently they've never seen each other before. Though come to think of it, they didn't even have the opportunity unless they were in the same club. That's why there was some kind of a wall between them. Who would talk to the sister of a classmate they barely knew? By the way, here was a good proof of my point in the shape of a middle-schooler who appeared nearby for some reason.

"Good evening, brother!" He greeted me in a loud manner inappropriate for the night city. I saw his bluish-black short hair glimmering in the street lamp light. His face was decent, like his big sister's. Yep, Kawasomething's little brother. He was my sister's acquaintance, but I didn't have anything to say to him. Same for Komachi: she just didn't have topics to converse about with Orimoto.

"Stop calling me 'brother'. Who are you?"

"All right, brother! I'm Taishi Kawasaki!" Taishi replied raising his hand. What's with this Kiyoshi Nakahata wannabe? And what's 'all right' if you still call me like that? I've been talking to you for just a minute and I'm dead tired already. Orimoto, who followed our conversation, laughed and turned to Komachi.

"Your boyfriend?"

"No, just a friend." Komachi calmly answered, still smiling. Out of the corner of my eye I noticed Taishi's shoulders sag. Right... We've got two pairs who are out of things to talk about. Full House! And so we just stood amidst the evening and kept quiet. The question of what to do lingered in the air. Orimoto seemed to feel that too and put her foot on the pedal.

"Okay, I'm going home." she said in her usual tone. Because of that I didn't manage to reply in time. You couldn't deduce it from her simplistic behaviour, but she clearly was leaving for our sake.

“Ah, yeah, thanks!”

Because of all the pedaling earlier I didn't immediately remember she had walked me home. She apparently didn't get that 'thanks' either and looked at me blankly, but then smiled.

“Aah. No, you're welcome. Tell me if you change your mind about part-timing, I'll introduce you to the right people.”

“Don't need.”

“Heh, sure, bye.”

“Yep. Careful on the road.” The last bit wasn't needed. Orimoto waved and started pedaling. I waved back, Komachi bowed. My eyes followed her till she disappeared into the darkness, then turned to Komachi. Let's go home, okay? At this moment I noticed the boy with bright eyes who was standing nearby and looking at me.

“Brother, is that your girlfriend?”

“Who the hell are you? How did you get here at all? The hell are you talking about?”

“I've been standing here all this time. I'm Taishi Kawasaki.”

Shrill scream pierced the night city. Hope I didn't bother the neighbors. Who the hell was he?

Chapter n2: In a way, Taishi Kawasaki is Cool Person

Taishi Kawasaki. The little brother of my classmate Kawasomething, Saki Kawasaki. He's also the same age as Komachi and they both attend the same cram school. In layman's terms, it's like the whole junior high school attends yet another school. They have the whole dedicated campus out there. Of course, both him and Komachi attend the nearest cram school, so it may seem that Kawasaki's house is not that far away. But in fact it's to the other side of the cram school from ours. And this meant that whichever path Taishi had taken to return home, he in no way couldn't "pass by". Not that it even matters how he had come to us or even which way he went.

There's nothing surprising in Taishi Kawasaki being here: the middle-school boys often try to get near the house of the girl they love. Source: me. Awful. I wanna hit my past self in the face hard.

I looked at Taishi. He was talking to Komachi about something, and Komachi didn't dislike that at all. That meant Komachi let him come here. I waited for a lull in their conversation and asked:

"So you've returned together?"

"Yes, we've finished the self-study assignment and happened to leave together."

I got it. So he had been waiting for Komachi to finish her assignment. It's late already, so seemed like he had waited for a long time. Commendable. Even The Amin wouldn't wait for so long. Or maybe they would. [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cG2N38Eq2IM> this song. What kind of ages-old crap does Hikki listen to?..] I liked how Taishi organized an ambush Yumin-style, but got sad at the same time. Komachi tugged my sleeve:

"Taishi wanted to talk to you."

"Huh."

So he wasn't just waiting for Komachi? I looked at Taishi. He coughed and looked at me very seriously.

"Brother, can I talk to you?"

"No. Stop calling me brother. Who the hell are you?"

"I won't back down! Name's Taishi Kawasaki," he replied making a step towards me. My, what a determined boy, how can I refuse you now? No, no time for shoujo manga heroine's thoughts. He was so serious I averted my eyes. I'd definitely lose were we in the animal world.

"So what do you want?" I decided to listen.

"Talk about the exam. They say there's also going to be an interview," Taishi replied with sagged shoulders.

"Ah. Yeah, they did have an interview." I barely remembered having passed the interview. Yes, it was written tests the first day and a group interview during the second. Now that I remember it, there's also another thought.

"Komachi, will you actually pass the interview?"

"Yep. When I tried to get a recommendation I practiced mock interviews."

"Hm, a mock interview..."

That's some preparation in that cram school of theirs. They even help getting the recommendation. Though Komachi failed recommendation test anyway, if only by a small margin. Besides, there's no way the last communication stronghold of the Hikigaya household fail some measly interview. Concentrate on the written exam, everything else will be fine somehow. Bro believes in you! By the way, when I was applying I didn't bother with recommendation and studied for the written test exclusively. And on the second day, at the interview, I probably just sat and did nothing. Probably because after passing the tests I thought I'd definitely pass, so I relaxed. So unfortunately I don't remember what I was asked at the interview. As a conclusion, if I'm able to remember the interview with such warm feelings it's no big deal anyway. But those who have just applied probably worry about these small things too.

“I never had been to the interviews, so I’m worried.” Taishi said in depressed tone. Though I don’t think his worries are justified. Be it recommendation tests or whatever else, if you are sure about your answers you pass the interview with no problems. Written tests are way more important. But that’s just my opinion. Even if you do well at the interview but have low test score, you can kiss entering the school goodbye. Such are the high school entrance exams.

This is what I wanted to explain to him.

“Those interviews are piece of cake. Could’ve asked your sister, you know.”

“Now way! She wouldn’t know a thing about the interviews!” He had just badmouthed his own big sister and laughed at it to boot. She’ll hit you, you know. Though I can’t say he was wrong. One look at her is enough to determine interviews are not her forte. She may seem like a delinquent who doesn’t care about social norms, but in fact she’s a normal good girl.

Wonder who was the one cool and righteous who thought out the whole delinquent labelling thing. These words were only meant to maintain the order inside the society. So that people would wag their tails and be happy after every “there, there, cutie” and tasty food. Ima serious fella, I live serious life. Though only petty criminals speak like that. They’re no match for our Chiban delinquents. They’ve mugged me for 500 yen back in middle school. I’m still angry at that.

“My sister is like that. You’re the only one I can ask that, brother.”

“Hm.”

I still thought Taishi was badmouthing his big sister. But he still loves her, going as far as approaching the Volunteers’ Club for help. That means he doesn’t want to upset his sister, so he decided to ask someone else. That means I can treat his question more seriously. Taishi coughed again.

“It’s probably going to take time, so let’s go somewhere else maybe?”, He said and stared at our entrance door. So he’s hinting for me to let him in? Alas, I don’t want to let some random stranger into Komachi’s personal space.

“Yep,” I replied and moved to prop myself at the door, in the way of his stare. But he still was looking at the Hikigaya house. And I was still standing at the entrance. Looking at us both Komachi smirked.

“Well, it’s not very clean inside right now. How about we go to McDonalds near the station? Without me though, it’s cold.”

Taishi’s cheek twitched.

“Right, really cold,” He said with a small smile. Yep, a smirk. Komachi, I’m really afraid of you now. Poor Taishi. But, as an older brother, I should kick the enemy while he’s down.

“Well, since it’s cold, we can meet some other time.”

“N-no, now that I think about it, it’s not very cold. Let’s do it now, brother!” Taishi scratched his nose and smiled. Huh, the little twerp isn’t half bad. If he had said it was cold he would have had to leave. Man’s heart isn’t that flimsy to return home because of the cold. I think I’ll respect your bravery and won’t play my role of the older brother today. So be it, let’s talk.

“I can carry a mock interview or give some advice if it’s not for long.”

“Yes, thanks.” Taishi replied lively. I think this liveliness would be enough to pass the interview. Anyway, he wanted an answer, I’ll have to give him one. I raised my collar and made a serious face.

“Why did you pick out school?” I asked while staring at Taishi intensely. He seemed to get the intensity of my stare and cleared his throat.

“Well... My older sister attends yours school, and according to her the school excels in both science and liberal arts subjects. It’s also close to home. That’s why I’ve selected your school.” Taishi said politely and carefully without missing a beat. I nodded to him, smiled and said what every interviewer would say in my place.

“Nice and clear. Took your time memorizing it?” I replied. Next second I felt cold wind blowing through my clothes. Taishi simply stood with his mouth open. Next to him Komachi nodded her head.

“Awww... Bro, that was so horrible.”

“Hey, it’s not me who’s horrible. There are interviewers who say that.”

There are, honest. I had once experienced such a stressful interview and was so broken-hearted I couldn’t work properly. But Taishi’s heart was firm.

“C-can you do it one more time?” he said and quickly muttered “please”. Oh stop it, you don’t have to treat it so seriously. I almost admired him right there, but the man never back down. I had to put more pressure on him!

“Fine. Ahem... Why did you pick our school?”

Taishi deeply inhaled several times and replied this repeated question.

“When selecting the high school for further education i put priority to the thorough college entrance preparation. Having read the pamphlets of your school, as well as having talked to my older sister who’s the student of this school, I came to conclusion your school is fitting for my education.”

What’s with all this “your school”? Are you a noble lady? You’re not going to say “kill him”, are you? I closed my eyes and carefully listened to Taishi’s answer. Finally I heard a loud exhale which meant he was done talking. I slowly opened my eyes again and sent him a scrutinizing look. Meeting my eyes Taishi shuddered. I smiled so he could relax, crossed my hands over my chest and nodded. Taishi visibly relaxed.

“You said something about your development, but you’re supposed to work here. No one’s gonna help you develop in any way.” I said and looked at Taishi. Only cold wind was breaking the silence. Some moments later Taishi finally replied:

“But it’s not for work...”

“The school! Bro, it’s the interview for entering the school! They do help the students develop, you know!” Komachi waved her hands near my face as if checking if I was sane. I evaluated my words again: what have I said wrong?

“Ah, yeah. I used what they’ve told me when I was applying part time. Apparently school’s a bit different in that regard.”

“Brother, how did you pass the interview in the first place?..” Taishi noted, miffed. But seriously, there are people out there in HR who can easily say that in your face. Actually, there was a reason I brought up those horrible memories.

“Well... It’s for your own good to be prepared for the worst.” I said firmly. Komachi made a grimace.

“No no no no no, it’s not the worst, it’s plain horrible. Komachi thinks she knows now why you don’t wanna work. Hearing that is really bad.” she said in a solemn voice. Hey... How could you? You say Big Bro’s feelings were so bad. You didn’t really mean that, did you? Really? Fearing she hated me now I looked at Komachi. Taishi started mumbling something.

“I think my confidence is gone now...” His shoulders sagged. He really felt down after this mock interview.

“Don’t worry. The school interviewers are usually good people.” I said, thinking I scared him too much.

“R-really?” Taishi asked with his eyes begging for salvation. But I’m not that bad and won’t kick people when they’re down. Taishi’s drawback was that this poisonous pest was getting too close to Komachi, but he’s generally a good person. And also his sister is scary. Meaning it’s a good thing? Nah, cute little sister is a good thing, not this. Anyway I decided to console him. His sister was scary after all, if she learns I treated her little brother horribly who knows what happens.

“Well, yeah. If someone wants to perform a stress-interview during the entrance exams, the PTA will sign a complaint. So teachers are very gentle.”

“Such a complicated reasoning...” Komachi mumbled as if complaining about the world’s imperfections. Yeah, our world is far from perfect. Working people don’t like to deal with complaints.

“Anyway, speak loud and clear and you’ll pass.”

Taishi sighed once more and looked at me in disbelief.

“Really? Just like that?”

“Yeah. The most important thing is loud voice and readiness to take more shifts.”

“There’s no shifts at school, Bro.” Komachi noted in disappointment. Damn, that habit from my “Warrior-Skipper” days. Let me explain. When someone blubbers irresponsibly about taking as many shifts as possible, he’ll have to keep his word. And so, when he’s used to working already, learned everything and became a capable unit, taking many shifts became too tiresome, so he skips the work entirely without saying a word and then quietly waits for his payment to be transferred.

I started thinking I’ve said too much. But apparently my talk had a good effect on Taishi. His dying eyes were sparkling with life again.

“Yeah, I’m feeling better now,” Taishi said simply, or more like honestly, and made a weak smile. For you info, I very rarely console anyone.

“Stop worrying about that interview. It’s not about tanking you, it’s about getting to know you.”

All the questions and answers asked during the interviews are known already. If asked about your choice of school simply say you liked the atmosphere. If asked what kind of a person you are say you’re volatile and soft as a butter. Though it’s not exactly normal if many enrolling students say that about themselves. They better learn that employers seek for cogwheels; if there’s just soft butter in the machine it won’t work. These cogwheels are the driving force everywhere. Take my father for example. So banzai to corporate slaves!

Usually prepared replies are a lie, and you say them at the interviews without even thinking. Though it’s not just interviews. I think even the interviewers understand they can’t evaluate a person with those replies. That’s why they pay attention to their manner of speech and especially at their behaviour.

That's why I was talking about the loud voice. Even though it's a verbal mean, it will be appraised as a non-verbal one. There's this opinion that only 30% of communication is verbal.

If someone during the interview will answer the questions correctly but will be shy and stuttering, on a scale of 1 to 100 they won't be given more than 30. Or will they? I'm not good with math.

Anyway I don't see any reason as to why this lively and decent guy should worry about the interview. But I still was interested in one thing. I coughed and pointed my finger at him.

"Except you should speak politely, not like now."

"No worries, brother. I talk like that only to you." Taishi said smiling and raised his fists. Eh, that's how he treats me? I suddenly lost the desire to advise him anything and shooed him away.

"Ok, that's it for today. Go home."

"Yeah. Thanks!" Taishi didn't notice the change in my demeanor. He perkily bowed and thanked me. Fine, if he was able to thank normally I'll let his manner of speaking slide. I'm so simple. Hachiman the Simpleton, heh.

But then Taishi stood up, raised his finger and calmly said:

"Actually I have one more thing to ask you about."

"What?"

What are you, Ukyou? Here I thought I'm finally done with you and you want something else? No dice, I'm not buying that.

"If it's school-related ask your sister." I said taking a step back. But Taishi's expression was even more serious than before.

"I can't ask my sister that..." he replied abruptly. Now I got it: it's something really serious. Komachi apparently felt it too and decided not to butt it, or maybe not to bother. She hmm'ed and nodded:

“All right, I’m cold already, so I’m going in. Taishi-kun, thanks for walking me home. Bro, talk to him, that’s my request to you, all right?” Komachi said, grabbed the door handle, turned it and snuck inside.

“Taishi-kun, you do your best too.” She waved one last time from behind the door. Wide smile and a smug gesture... My god, what a cute little sister I have. And also suspicious. She probably fled because she didn’t want to bother with all this. Beside me the other deceived guy spoke up:

“Hikigaya-san is so gentle,” Taishi said when Komachi disappeared after locking the door. But for some reason he still looked at it in awe. Nah, that’s not gentle: she’s just tired of us and left everything to me. My god, what an annoying little sister I have.

n2-2

We slowly walked under the cold winter sky. Komachi had hidden inside the house already so I didn't have to force myself to talk to Taishi. But he asked me with such a serious expression I couldn't simply send him home. I didn't want to get the neighbors' attention by gathering near the house entrance and also didn't know if I could go to cafe with a middle school student. So I decided to go to the convenience store on the way to his home and talk to him while walking.

The clear starry sky, street lamps positioned in equal intervals, lights of the cars passing by, bright windows in condos. Me and Taishi slowly traded the brightly illuminated road. Finally I saw the store's entrance. This convenience store was equally distanced from both our homes. Though I didn't really know Kawasaki's house's exact location. I stepped inside, bought two cans of some coffee and exited.

"Here," I tossed one of the cans to Taishi. "It's not dodgeball, catch it. Good."

"How much?" he asked and started fetching his wallet.

"No need to" I waved my hand.

"Really? Thanks a lot!" He gladly said and opened the can. I opened mine. We had nowhere to sit except on the bike stand, so we squatted. I held the warm can tightly and started drinking. You can't buy it for a 100 yen. Taishi exhaled, his breath rising in the cold air.

"About my talk..." he started.

Interested about what he was going to say, I turned my head. His face was serious.

"Brother, can you tell me how to become popular among girls?" Taishi asked. I almost choked on my coffee and started to cough furiously. Taishi slapped my back, worrying if I was all right. I apologized, Taishi told not to apologize. Such a talk we had. I felt better. Taishi looked at me again.

“You’ve asked the wrong person. I’m not exactly popular.”

“That’s not true! You came with a girl today!” he protested with a red face. Ah, he meant Orimoto.

“We just met by accident on the way home. Or do you think it’s love if we walk together?”

According to this logic me and Taishi are in love. I made an ugly smile, feeling the Ebi-mood, even though Ebina-san was far away from here.

“I Don’t think so.” Taishi said levelly with a serious face. Yeah, that’s how the boys turn to men. Maybe he was walking this hard way too? I turned to him.

“Exactly. Besides, if someone told me they’re in love with Komachi, I’d have to get rid of them.” I said tightly squeezing the can, so it crumpled a bit.

“Brother, you scare me.”

He still call me brother after this? You’re a brave one, are you. I won’t be disappointed in you and will even respect you a little. Though to even ask such a question - how to become popular - one has to be brave. On the other hand I think that right now, during the exams preparation, is not the best time to think about it. It’s not the right situation to run away from reality. I remember the time I was busy with everything and still mused about becoming an idol or a professional baseball player. Oh no! I hope Taishi won’t do that!

“Why are you asking, by the way?” I decided to ask. But my suspicions weren’t just baseless, they were far from the truth. Taishi tilted his head in wonder and pondered a little.

“I don’t know... for motivation? There’s a reason to study hard if there’s something interesting in high school.”

You know, he’s right. But if you put high hopes, you may end up in situation like returning a loan: you’ll have to give it all for something unclear. I’ll have to break these delusions! This is the true kindness!

“Nothing I’ve dreamt about while enrolling here came true.”

Taishi slightly pouted and looked at me in disbelief.

“Really?”

“Yep. Nothing turned out the way I imagined.” I said. I felt shades of reality in my voice. But what was said can’t be returned, so I continued saying phrases.

“Still it’s all not that bad” I finished, and we fell silent. The only sounds were monotonous hum from the convenience store, sound of someone’s bike on the other side of the road. Suddenly I heard the satisfied sigh.

“I’ve got my motivation now.”

“Huh? Why?”

Taishi stood up, shook his jacket off and looked at me.

“Don’t know. I just did.” he said, took his bag and fixed the jacket’s collar.

“So when I enroll I’ll come to you to talk about it. See you then.” he was honest as usual. I smiled bitterly. Next year’s april, new students, new school year... These words mean completely different circumstances in relation to the current ones. But this all is going to happen during the next 3-4 months. Everything will undoubtedly change and the way things are now will inevitably end.

“Sure, if possible.”

“What do you mean?” Taishi asked absent-mindedly. I took a pause to remember a prepared answer.

“If your sister allows. She’ll get angry if I teach you weird things.” I said. Taishi laughed.

“Yeah.”

“Anyway come to talk once you enroll.”

“I’ll do my best. Thanks, brother.”

“Stop calling me brother. Learn to address me ‘senpai’ at least.” I said. Taishi froze. But then his eyes relighted again.

“Wow! So cool! I can get used to that! Can I tell my sister about it? She’ll definitely allow then!

“Shut up, stop mocking me. Seriously, stop. Go home already.” I tried to hide my embarrassment. Taishi just smiled. I felt even more embarrassed, and I tried shooing him away. Taishi turned and started running. After crossing the road, far enough from me, he turned and bowed.

“Thank you very much, Hikigaya-senpai!” He loudly said and headed home.

“That was fast,” I mumbled while watching him.

Chapter n3: Whatever Happens, Komachi Hikigaya is Always Going to be on her Big Brother's Side

Having said goodbye to Taishi Kawasaki I entered the convenience store and roamed between the aisles a little. One could feel the New Year mode here too. Like all these red shoes filled with sweets anime characters-themed kids' champagne in the 50% discount corner. There were also red flyers for the New Year soba preorders scattered around, and the stand near the fridges was filled with empty packages from the New Year food. Small trinkets were placed on the side of it.

Next was the bento aisle, with various curry packages and a hand-drawn poster that read "Tired of New Year food? You never get tired from curry!". Probably drawn by one of the employees. Yeah, it's not often that employees are ordered to draw those posters. I regularly see such posters during various events and new arrivals. But you can't make people do it all the time, you know. Or maybe the managers got strict orders from the head office and they themselves are overworked. They'll have to prepare for Setsubun after the New Year celebration, make the ordered ehomaki and eho-rolls and immediately after that is Valentine's day. What's eho-rolls, by the way?..

I've seen this all a hundred times and I'm still not used to all this New Year hassle. Everything's turned into something else in one day, and that makes me feel the dullness of my usual life even more. Moreover, I can't resist the flow of time. No doubt I'll spend both this and the next year lazily traversing days until it's spring already. Whether I want it or not but there's only a handful of days left of this year, and only three months till my school year ends.

Although just to sit and do nothing while the world spins around you is the biggest luxury you can ever have. I'm saying that for a long time already. Don't rush, the next year will come. What is it, world's end already? Hahaha! Should I make a wax figure out of you?

This thought made me laugh creepily, and several customers looked at me. I had to move to different aisle. I looked at some magazines on the shelf while passing by; next was an aisle with some sweets and cup noodles. Finally I've stumbled upon the beverage aisle. The slapped a "New Year" label over usual "popular" one, while the contents of the aisle stayed the same.

And so I reached the goods labelled as seasonal winter arrivals. While the nomenclature is very diverse, there are goods that are so popular they're bought out instantly. I forgot about that entirely and hadn't bought it as a result. This happens pretty often, I guess. When will I be able to taste my favourite Haagen-Dazs, I often thought. And finally I've got my chance. It's very tasty for its price, so I took one box. Gotta buy one more for Komachi. Right now she was probably lazing out under the kotatsu and wanting some ice cream. The best winter ice cream probably would be yukimi daifuku[as in "daifuku while looking at the snow". Yes, it does exist]. If it had the corresponding anthropomorphized mascot, it probably would be a classical Japanese beauty with snow-white skin and large chest. I know that for sure. I'm a Chiba Lotte fan, so I know. Go, Marines, Go! I'm with you!

n2-2

After paying for the ice cream I leisurely walked home. It was winter now, so the ice cream won't melt. But the wind was cold, so my feet moved faster on their own.

It was quiet inside the house, so quiet that my footsteps fell awfully loud. As mom said at lunch she was working late today. I entered the living room and found Komachi there, just like I expected. She was lying under the kotatsu, petting Kamakura and watching TV. Probably taking rest after exams preparation. I called her:

"I'm home. Want some ice cream?"

Komachi turned to me and mumbled in agreement. Strange, she's more glad usually. I sat at the kotatsu, crossed my legs, and lay my phone, wallet and the store package.

"Here," I fetched yukimi and handed it to Komachi.

"Thanks, I'll eat it later," she briefly replied, took the ice cream and went to the fridge. Then she returned to the kotatsu. Seems like she was in bad mood. Watching her cautiously I grabbed my yukimi and started eating.

After I finished it Komachi abruptly turned to me and tapped her hand on the floor.

"Bro, sit."

"M? I am already." I looked at my legs to check if I wasn't just in case. Well, yes, my legs were crossed and I was sitting on the tatami chair. That's what Komachi probably meant. She was telling me to get off it and sit beside her.

"Sit."

"I'm sitting already," I said. You want me to stand beside you? What for? Fine, I thought, why not sit there. Some serious talk? If so then the ice cream will melt, so I tossed the last bit into my mouth and readied myself for the

upcoming talk. She coughed and looked at me, her eyes squinted.

“Might explaining yourself?”

“What?” I asked after swallowing my yukimi. Explain why I bought the ice cream for you? Because I love you of course, though I won’t say that aloud: it’s too embarrassing. One could already recognize I was embarrassed, but Komachi just stared at me coldly. Meant it wouldn’t be a pleasant talk. But I still didn’t understand what Komachi wanted to hear, so I tilted my head quietly. Komachi made a small sigh.

“I mean Orimoto-senpai. What was that?”

“What? We’re just former classmates from junior high.”

“I know that.”

“Then why are you asking?” I said in irritation. Komachi simply continued to stare at me with some discontent. I felt I had to say something.

“Nah, there’s nothing between us, honest.” I said meekly. I somehow felt I was lying. I wasn’t, of course, but it’s hard for me to talk about it since I had confessed to her in junior high and got rejected. That’s why I abruptly shut up now. I could have told about this male suffering of mine and that would be enough, but no way I’d tell it all to my little sister. And she wouldn’t want to hear Bro’s love stories anyway. At least I don’t want to hear my family members’ love stories for sure. If I had an older brother who would constantly talk about his relationships with girls, I’d have thought like “what the hell’s he yapping about?”. And if Komachi starts talking about her love life, I’ll cry immediately.

Sensing my silence, Komachi moved closer to me while still burning holes in my head with her stare.

“Just!.. Just former classmate? Why’s she come to us then?” Komachi demanded. She knows what I was like in junior high. And for me to friendly chat with someone of my former classmates was... too unusual.

“She hadn’t. She just walked me home. She works at the cafe I had visited

today. We met on the way home and had some smalltalk.”

“So you’ve accidentally met, went to your home and talked on your way?”

“Well, yes.”

“Hm...” I couldn’t say if Komachi was satisfied with the answer. She slowly looked around and calmed down.

“All right. So she hadn’t entered then.”

“Do I look like I let random people inside?” I countered and remembered that Yuigahama actually had been here once. Though that didn’t count: Komachi invited her, after all. Anyway, it’s Komachi’s problem, not mine. Currently she was looking around the room with the eyes of a wild animal tied with the ropes. Or like a detective looking for clues. I felt I had to say something.

“Listen, Sister-in-Law-chan...” I started. Komachi shot me a glare.

“What sister-in-law? I’m your actual sister?”

“You sister-in-law, you. Why are you bothered by this? You behave like a jealous girl who restrains her boyfriend’s freedom. Are you that madly in love with me? You know no one likes such girls?”

Komachi smiled.

“You know, my trashy Big Bro...” said Komachi in an unpleasant tone. Hm... Ah, got it. It probably hurt to hear it from a guy who’d never had a girlfriend. But apparently Komachi meant something else.

“I’m worried about you, Bro. It’s ok if you’re not popular among girls. Worst case, I’ll just have to take care of you till the old age. But if you become too popular you’ll be fought upon, and that’s a problem.”

“Nah, ain’t happening.” I replied. Komachi made a tired sigh.

“If you’re caught while I’m not looking, I won’t be able to do anything,” Komachi said and slowly shook her head, meaning she did everything she

could but it was too late already.

“Stop worrying about me that much.”

Nothing will change regardless of you looking after me or not.

“Don’t worry. There’s nothing between me and Orimoto. You treat this problem more seriously than it deserves. You’re on bad terms with her?” I asked. Komachi’s shoulders quivered.

I remembered her strange behaviour when she met us at the door. I got a different impression of her then. So it wasn’t my imagination. Komachi has great communication skills and treat everyone more or less equally friendly. It was obvious when she talked to Yukinoshita and Yuigahama, and even Haruno-san, so I always thought she could talk to an unknown person just fine. Even during that summer vacation when we went to Chiba village Komachi, being the only junior high student back then, naturally mingled with both our club and Hayama’s clique. That’s why I couldn’t comprehend what was her problem with Orimoto. For Komachi to treat something so seriously... Most probably someone stepped on someone else’s landmine. But it’s impossible to take your words back, only to add something and thus fix things.

“You don’t like people like her?” I carefully masked “you hate her?”. Komachi shook her head and continued, as if wanting to add to the words:

“No, it’s not like that. I don’t hate Orimoto-senpai, on the contrary I like open people like her.”

Of course. Kind and open Orimoto shouldn’t be hated by Komachi. And here I thought stuff...

“But the people surrounding her... you know... like... left a bad impression.” Komachi uttered lowering her head. Because of this I couldn’t see her expression. Ah, that was the reason Komachi kept her distance with Orimoto. Even these scattered replies were enough to get what she wanted to say. I think the funny story of me confessing to Orimoto got spread among many people. Nothing surprising about Komachi, who attended the same school, hearing the rumors too. She probably didn’t like listening to someone speak

with laughter about her rejected brother. She probably felt ashamed and had bad memories because of it. She didn't say it clearly but I see it in her behaviour.

She had many friends, in other words many people to communicate with. Many people with various values systems, including those who could mock someone for their amusement. What'shenameMachi, a Kaihin Sogo student, is one of such people. They mock not just one person, but their contacts as well.

"Sorry," I blurted. I should have noticed it way earlier and then say it. Probably it's meaningless to talk about it already. So it's not an apology or atonement, just a promise.

"Well, no worries. It's not like that anymore. I won't let you suffer. High school is wholly different from junior high," I soothingly said and put my hand on her head. I don't want to live or make others live through that. The most important for me is to live the way I feel necessary and protect my surroundings. I won't express my thoughts or desire, won't shape them. Maybe, when I get older, I'll think of what to do with it. But it's probably going to be too late, and I'll remember these times with pain and sadness.

While I was pondering about it Komachi stared at me with the empty eyes. Looks like there was a huge question mark over her head and my hand. But after I had shaken her head lightly she sighed and looked at me strangely.

"Ah... That's how it is... That's how Bro thinks, huh..." Komachi said and put my hand off her head.

"Listen up, Bro," Komachi said. She sat in the same position as I did earlier, coughed as if to check her throat, raised her finger and said:

"I think you got me wrong, so let me explain. Orimoto-senpai's friends just plain piss me off. I can't stand them. But them mocking you doesn't bother me at all. I even agree with them on this."

"Aaaa..."

A-Agreed?! Komachi went on:

“Because you’re a walking joke for everyone without even needing to do anything. Even I was spreading the jokes about you.”

“Aah....”

That’s how it is?! I’m crushed. That’s so cruel, Komachi. I sagged my shoulders and stared at the floor. I even got mad. Oh that’s how you treat me. I shot an angry look at Komachi. She looked back.

“So no matter what stupidity you ever do, or whatever dumb look you have, I’ll acknowledge you. I’ll always be on your side. Because I’m your little sister.” Komachi finished and looked down in embarrassment while making that cute smile. But that smile was way more mature than mine.

“I won’t do stupid things or have a dumb look. I got it, fine, thanks.” I replied, my answer crude and child-like. Komachi nodded in response, looking like an older sister.

“Good. Do your best and don’t think about this stuff for Komachi’s sake. All right?”

“I don’t anyway.”

Komachi clicked her tongue and smile in satisfaction.

“Now time for some ice cream, I think,” she said and rose while using kotatsu as a support. The kotatsu tilted a bit, then stood straight again, its cover jittering. I wondered why, but then notice my vibrating phone.

I grabbed it, looked at the screen and saw the called ID, ☆★ Yui ★☆. It was Yuigahama calling. I threw a glance at Komachi. Well, I could have picked up the phone here but Komachi’s words were still lingering inside my head: don’t think about this for Komachi’s sake. As I made Komachi my reason to run away. But I couldn’t just rely on Komachi all the time. Besides, I wanted to talk to Komachi right now just because she was nearby. No, I’ll deal with it alone.

I exited the living room and stepped into the cold corridor. Standing on the freezing floor on one leg like a flamingo I propped myself up against the wall. I felt the ringing phone’s vibration. It didn’t stop. I made a small sigh as if to

pacify the vibration and pushed the call answer button.

“Hello...” I said. By the way I still hadn’t figured out what she wanted to talk about; too late anyway. There’s no point thinking about it anymore. If I think of an answer and the correct words in advance, it’ll be a lie and nothing but a lie. It’s just prepared answers aren’t felt as a lie at all.

“Ah, Hikki! Can you talk?” The familiar voice called. It crossed my mind that I didn’t have to answer with prepared replies, or lie at all.

Afterword

Good day to you all, I'm working. Though it's not the right time of day to say that greeting. Why does time fly so fast? And so, it's the second part of the author's afterword. The name of this volume is Oregairu.n, the continuation of the story started in the first BD/DVD special Oregairu.a. You can assemble 'an' from these two letters. What would the next one be? Torou! Aww, I just wanted to show off my French skills I've gotten in my college and got a French joke instead. By the way, French is so complex one has to relearn it the second time to properly memorize. In other words I hadn't memorized it at all. The only thing I remember is "J'ai me pelle Pierre" which means "My name is Pierre" [Google Translate disagrees]. Also, the grasp of the language to actually compose your speech... I've forgotten! Besides, some memorized sentences alone are not enough to actually learn the language. At least if you only learn it from books. Well, anyway, sometimes it comes in handy at exams. It's akin to memorizing the mathematical formulas.

It's just my opinion of course, but lessons are mostly memorizing stuff. Originality and creativity are almost unneeded there, and if someone told me I was developing my skills that way I'd think they're morons. Then you come to work and they ask you to "think of a plan no one had ever thought out before". So you sit, think about all your studying and ask yourself why the hell you had memorized all that? By the way if you do think out a plan, you may very well get "We've never seen someone do it, so rejected" or "this method is unknown, we can't implement it" in response. Why am I working here then? And so you're standing there thinking "now really, just what am I doing here"? Sometimes you want to become the strict class rep and tell all these adults "no double standards, boss!".

Though for me, the liberal arts student, this "learn=memorize" formula is obvious and I mistake it for real learning a lot. Or maybe it's just me.

But again, that's just me, and for me the preparation to the employment is "oh, piece of cake, I'll simply memorize the answers they need and that's it". If I fail, then oh well. If the written exam at the employment agency is relatively easy,

the interview is a really strange thing; you can't just "pass" it. And even if you're lucky with the first one, the second onwards becomes unreal, and suddenly you realize you've got rejection letters from 50 companies already. The first one to send it was Shogakukan by the way. I'm still angry at them.

Sometime between those attempts a thought came on my mind: what's the point of preparing to the interviews? I've realized it way too late. Next thing I realized was "damn, I'm going to stay jobless after graduation... wait, I'm a ranobe writer already". So I roamed from company to company, BSed everything everywhere and by the graduation time I've found the job-- a ranobe writer! Then I gained some muscles and found a girlfriend. Not really, I didn't. There are some negative connotations in "lying at the interview", but now I think they wanted not elegant answers for prepared questions, but own honest answers instead; the ones you don't have to struggle to utter, or the ones they guided you to.

But the moment you throw this beautiful theory away you're left empty-handed. Except you can use those empty hands to grasp something. Wonder what can I grasp.

Anyway, Oregairu.n is ready.

Aaand so, what to write next... I think you guessed that already, so hold your breath for the next volume. We've got quite a long story and it's still five volumes left! It may seem slow-paced but things will speed up later. Ahaha, I'm like a rogue biker! You know, time flies so fast... probably because I myself will turn 30 so soon. I think by the moment you'll read this afterword the anime broadcast would be over. Time flies so fast. And this anime season passed by in a blink of an eye! So, you liked it? I sure did!

You should know how good it feels to remember the good events from the past. You feel filled to the brim with happiness, but then you open your eyes to the reality and amount of work left and want to just die. But until that moment, you're happy.

Anyway, I clearly have some problems with the space for text left, so I'll go straight detailed anime episodes tall. This BD/DVD contains the second and third anime episodes, and I'll share my impressions as a viewer, listener and

also the original author. Ready?

Let's start from episode 2, "His and Her Confession Won't Reach Anyone".

K-K-K-Komachiiii! Komachi was a real cutie even before the opening. Finally, from episode 2 onwards, we've got our best little sister in the Universe Komachi Hikigaya! This week was so long. And it doesn't stop at just Komachi. Totsuka's cute too? Oh, stop it. My favourite was Kawasomething in the haunted house.

I'd like their journey be beautiful from start to finish, but... how did this happen? It's all Hachiman's fault. And Hayama's. They were compared and contrasted before, but these episodes made it real and standing out. But keep in mind that "contrast" doesn't mean they're counterparts. Their differences are evident but they have similarities too. That's why they both can't comprehend their similarities nor differences. Though compared to the events of before Volume 6 Hachiman starts to understand Hayama a little bit more.

In the second episode Hachiman and Hayama already know the situation with the request, so they both had the reasons to do something. Initially they took different sides, maintaining the equilibrium with their actions. But after the talk at the Togetsukyo bridge it was destroyed and we've got what we've got. Had Hachiman not understood the situation they've got themselves into, he wouldn't have come to his solution. After all, he's not friends with Hayama, Tobe and probably Ebina, so he wouldn't harm himself just because of the simple talk. So it wasn't an expression of Hachiman's kindness, just the mitigation of the damage. So his actions can be considered arrogant, done for self-satisfaction. Watching his actions you can't help but say "Like, what the hell?". Or let's put it like this: if Hachiman, having encountered so many problems, chose this plan as the best, he certainly was at his wits' end. It's similar to the feeling of a player whose opponent has just revealed his deal while he himself will certainly lose; so he thinks "and what now?"

As a result we see all the characters' reactions. Denial. Yukino's denial, Yui's denial, Hachiman's denial. Of course each one has their own brand of denial. But they can't attune to each other anymore. My god, how boorish!

He himself didn't doubt his actions. Him, her, them, all the boys and girls, they

didn't notice anything in their thoughts. Hm... Just read the original.

It all became even more entangled after appearance of the new player, Hina Ebina. She's yet another mirror for Hachiman to look at. Though if you put it like that, every human being is a mirror for someone else... This atmosphere carried on into the third episode. Komachi's such a cutie in the beginning! Cutie! Here I thought it and the friendly brother and sister had a quarrel. It's all Hachiman's fault. Jerk.

He's lost his last oasis, Komachi. Usually cute Totsuka would appear, but not this time. This time, during his trip, Hachiman received a push into the different direction; I watched it in fascination, and even my usual coffee tasted strange at the time. He's so boorish! Even the atmosphere in my room had changed.

And then the saviour appears. Well, not exactly a saviour. It's the new character, first year student Iroha Isshiki. Just like ILOHAS[Irohasu is omonymic to ILOHAS, a drinking water brand]. Irohasu?.. Well, yeah, Irohasu. But her request reflects her own circumstances. The story is narrated from Hachiman Hikigaya's perspective, so the details of her circumstances are not yet known. But as you should guess already, even as a background character she's already a mirror for Hachiman too.

In the second part of the episode we see the symbol of Hachiman's past, Kaori Orimoto. The events tied to her name were mentioned already. I hope the readers have seen her name already. No? Well, then... This girl, one of the causes of this story, doesn't seem unusual in any way. Blatantly open fan of some subculture, and you think you'll fall in love just by talking to her, but it's not true. Source: me. Sooo, the new character has appeared on the stage, what's going to happen? See it in the next episode. There are many points during these episodes I'd like you to pay attention to, but one key event hadn't made it into anime apparently. The dreading atmosphere at the bamboo forest and on the roof was especially well-depicted, and Orimoto's and Iroha's weaknesses in regards to boys are shown even better than expected. I even had chills running down my spine. Watch these episodes several time, there are many moments impossible to describe in the books.

And seriously, where's the romantic comedy in this anime? There's none! It's

mentioned in the title and that's it! So irresponsible on creator's part. Of course it's a part of the series' structure, no doubt about that. So even a romantic comedy in these novels may be an important part, showing its true value. What direction will the plot head to from here on? I'll be glad if you watch yourself to see.

So I've written here my personal impressions about anime episodes 2 and 3 . Thanks for watching them together with me. I'm going to write many notes and impressions in the next volumes too, so check them out if you want; I don't want to waste paper for nothing. Read the next volume! This a-series is here to stay, so pay attention.

xxx

Now for acknowledgements.

Ponkan8-kami. Yahallo! I still wonder about that "kami" thing. By the way it's the second BD/DVD volume already! Our battle is yet to begin! Let's work for another day. Thank you very much and let's continue to work together.

Executive editor Hoshino-san. Ahahaha! Laugh while you can. I'm sorry for the problems I constantly create for you. Though wasn't it you who always said the chance appears amongst hardships? Well, here's your chance! Sorry. Thank you very much. Looking forward to your editing of the next volumes. Although that's gonna be a piece of cake too! Ahahaha!

Director Oikawa as well as the whole staff! Thank you for your broadcast efforts. I had been watching you create the anime all this time. It was very interesting! I'm sorry for causing so many troubles. I'm very very sorry for being such a troublesome author. Thank you for listening to all my stories and wishes. We're almost there, please bear with me some more.

Takuya Eguchi, Hachiman Hikigaya's voice actor, and all the other actors: I'm very grateful for the outstanding performance for these episodes. You excellently performed at all the scenes, even those not originally in the novels. Thank you very much. looking forward to working with you some more.

And finally, to the readers and viewers. Do you like the main novels, their

manga and anime adaptations, and BD volumes? I managed to develop it in so many aspects all thanks to your support. So thank you. And I'll still do more! I'll be happy if you stay with me till the end. And so I'm out of reserved text space; time to put my pen down. See you!

Yours truly, watching the anime BD with a can of MAX Coffee,

Wataru Watari.

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