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青春ラブコメは
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第 3 卷



MARVELOUS!

TBS
animation



やはり俺の青春ラブコメは
まちがっていても。
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法律で禁止されています
ダメ

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◆エビフライ
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◆ナポリタン
◆餃子
◆シューマイ
◆ポテトサラダ
300
こんなにたくさんおかずが入って今だけ300円!! 超お
N
食材は全て安心、安全の国産品を使用。
お客様を満足していただくためのアレルギーの方はお控え下さい。
購入後は早めにお返し上がり下さい。保存料は使用していません。
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猫

第 3 巻

MARVELOUS! TBS animation

Chapter 01: Clumsily, Yui Yuigahama Makes a Phone Call

A sound of the working TV was heard from the living room. It was probably Komachi who turned it on and now was watching it while lying under the kotatsu and holding her ice cream in one hand. I didn't recognize the show broadcasted but it was still noisy, so took couple steps away.

"Hikki, heey!" I heard Yuigahama's voice from the phone. Seemed like she was worried I haven't said a word yet.

"Yeah, I hear you," I said pushing from the wall I had propped myself up against and headed to my room. Without even realizing it I started sneaking, my steps almost inaudible. Probably because I was talking on the phone. The caller on the other side shouldn't be bothered by the noise.

The corridor was much colder than the living room. The floor, of course, was equally chilly. I felt it more and more through the slippers with each step.

"I was kinda curious what happened since you fell silent and all."

"No, nothing happened."

I just needed some time to get a hold of myself. When such an unexpected phone call occurs, the first thing on my mind is always "crap, what did I do this time?!", so I understandingly hesitate before answering the call. Moreover, if I can estimate why I'm being called I'll ignore it altogether. And then, after I've heard it on the answering machine and decided the call's importance, I start thinking "I don't need to call back anymore, right?". So I ignore either way. Because of this the relationships often fall short.

That's exactly why phone calls are so unnerving: you can't see the caller's face, you can completely ignore the call, and as a result relationships wither. I don't understand what others think as it is, and in this case I get even less info. The risk of getting something wrong raises. The relationships established with a couple of button presses can be destroyed as easily. Same applies to Yuigahama. To be precise, because it's Yuigahama calling I have no room for mistakes. It took me some time to calm my nervous voice.

“So what did you want?” I asked. My house was quite small. That was all I had time to say before entering my room. My house’s so cramped.... I turned the lights on, locked the door and fell on my bed. The lights revealed a small cloud of dust. I watched it thinking I should clean the place up.

“Um...” Yuigahama stuttered while searching for right words. Her unsure voice was so loud in my quiet room.

“H-Hikki... Are you free... at the last day of the year?”, she uttered, slowly, word by word. And equally slowly, word by word, her words’ meaning had finally reached me.

“Mhm, I’m free,” I replied. Why ask, though? I’m free year round. What’s more, I’m unpaid year round too. And thank to the Volunteers Club I got used to working with black companies. This means a prominent future for any corporate slave. Though lately I’m scared of getting into all those black deals for different reasons.

But then Yuigahama said something unexpected. Moments ago she quietly breathed into the received but now her voice was energetic again.

“Then let’s go visit a shrine!”

“Ah, sending the year off?”

“Sending off?..” Yuigahama repeated. That meant she didn’t understand what I meant. I could feel her confusion even over here. I vividly imagined her tilt her head, thinking.

“That means we’re going to send this year off and meet the new one.”

People usually plan to come to shrine for that so they can make it before midnight. There are many variants of doing this, but generally it’s a common shrine ceremony.

“Huh...” Yuigahama said vaguely. Wonder if she understood. Probably not. Ah, first shrine visit... Actually it’s a good omen. They say your hair will grow better. Well, yes, I do admit I worry about my hair when looking at Pops’ bald head. I think the appearance of a shrine with a strange slogan “So Your Hair Would Grow Better” isn’t that farfetched. And so I ran away from the scalp condition problems. Yuigahama meanwhile asked curiously:

“Then... Let’s go send the year off, shall we?”

“Sure, why not,” I replied reflexively. But... The thing is... I as a recipient side don’t have enough info. I only knew I’d visit the shrine with Yuigahama at the end of the year and

that was it. I'd like to know more. For example... Is it just us? Yuigahama hadn't mentioned anyone, and judging by her tone the probability of us ending up together was quite high.

It was risky in a certain sense: just two of us, together. And I'm afraid of this risk. Going there to, for example, buy something, like materials for some event, would be okay. If I had a concrete purpose to go for, I'd have justified myself in the eyes of the bystanders who could see us together and could have tuned out the unnecessary thoughts. Who's gonna say anything to me if I came here with a definite goal?

Something personal was another thing entirely. Just what do I do in this case? What does she mean by visiting the shrine together? Walk together as usual, talk as usual, visit the shrine as usual? What does this "as usual" mean anyway? Agh, to hell with that, it's too philosophical. And so I continued thinking those thoughts without any answer. Besides, there was another question awaiting.

Which shrine should we visit? Most probably it's Inage Sengen since it's the biggest in the neighborhood. I mean there's going to be plenty of people besides us. I remembered the summer and the fireworks festival. There was this possibility of Yuigahama being uncomfortable with me. We could meet someone from another clique who despised me like, say, Minami Sagami. And there were quite a lot of such people and I should never forget that. Caste system is still here to stay after all. One misstep on my part and Yuigahama will have a buttload of problems. Yes, no missteps allowed.

Life had shown me many times that you can't make mistakes in cliques, people around you and feelings. Making mistake is very easy, and that's exactly why I had to draw a line.

"Ummm.... sure. What about others?"

Well said, me. I just smoothly asked her if she was going to invite anyone else. Such an evasive question: are we, like, going there together? But next moment I regretted it.

"Ah? Well... others..." Yuigahama said, miffed. Her sad voice made my heart squeeze in pain. She couldn't immediately answer the question. That meant many things, and Yuigahama probably understood that too. That's why her tone became overly energetic:

"I think Yukinon can come! She said she was free!"

I did my best to reply in the same energetic tone. Don't know if I did it right.

"Okay, um... can Komachi go too?" Yuigahama asked, her voice still energetic. I threw a

glance to the door while holding the phone with my shoulder.

“Komachi? Wait a second,” I said and quickly exited the room still keeping the call.

01-2

I entered the living room and saw Komachi. She was sitting under the kotatsu, eating ice cream and watching TV. At some point a cup of coffee with milk appeared near her, and on her knees was lying our cat Kamakura, being the makeshift leg warmer. Rest mode on. Too bad it's not nekomimi mode. That's my Himouto Komachi-chan.

Due to me barging in suddenly Komachi threw a suspicious glance at me. I coughed.

"Komachi, wanna go visit the shrine on New Year?" I asked. Komachi frowned:

"New Year?"

"Yep."

"Why's that suddenly?" Komachi asked and looked at me with mischievous eyes. Because of that I backed off a bit. Komachi hmm'ed and noticed a cellphone in my hand.

"That's Yui-san calling?"

"Yeah..." I replied. Komachi made a disappointed sigh:

"... Bro."

"W-what?"

Komachi pointedly raised her shoulders, put the finger on her head and started talking.

"Komachi wants to sleep at night. Komachi not leaving the house. Komachi not going with you."

"Fine then..."

I didn't understand her choice of phrasing but somehow got the meaning behind. I should stop relying on Komachi. I should not use Komachi as an excuse or a justification for my actions. It's low and cowardly.

"Komachi's not coming, and you Bro think carefully about going. Decide for yourself. Deal?" She said with a lecturing tone, her stare intense, but kind and raising all sorts of feeling in my heart. I couldn't say anything, only utter "mmhm".

So yeah, I think I was acting lowly and cowardly. Moreover, what I said to Yuigahama

was an act of cowardice too. As was me playing with words. I felt ashamed of myself. I realized I used words like “others” and “all” like a crutch, a justification to evade. I sighed in disappointment.

“Got it, I’ll do that.”

“Good then.” Komachi replied, nodding. Though I understood that even without Komachi. Yet I still chose not to look at uncomfortable truth. I slightly nodded to Komachi too and exited the room.

Every human being must once get a hold of themselves and do what they have to do. Though all I can do now is regret the words said earlier.

01-3

My legs were quickly freezing on the chilly floor, as if telling me to hurry. So I obediently walked faster and entered my room. My hand still held the phone with an unfinished call. I looked at it and made a brief sigh.

“Hello?” I quietly called Yuigahama.

“Hello!” Came Yuigahama’s somewhat hasty reply. Hearing it I relaxed. Quite some time passed since my last reply after all. And she had probably been waiting all this time with a phone at her ear. I’m really sorry. I hung my head in apology, even though she couldn’t see me.

“Sorry for making you wait. Komachi said she wouldn’t come.”

“Yeah, I heard,” Yuigahama said laughing. Wait, she heard everything? My god how embarrassing!

“Hikki, will you... come?” Yuigahama’s careful question tickled my ear. I felt shivers down my spine. So it turns out that even the voice from the phone can affect my ears, my weak spot. Good thing it’s not Skype or FaceTime. My ears were burning red now. I coughed and forced myself to change this train of thought. Taking my previous conversation into account, I decided to say everything clearly, without lies and deceptions.

“I... well, I’ll come. I’ll leave everything else to you.”

“Eh?.. Umm... Yeah, sure!” Yuigahama replied, something akin to confusion or surprise in her voice. Maybe I was too straightforward. Was I wrong? I decided to quickly add:

“Yeah, welll... I’m on winter vacation, so I don’t have any plans. I’ll do it.”

“Yeah. But... others may have plans, you know...” Yuigahama said, but I interrupted her:

“Nothing can be done about that. Let’s settle on coming together and solve other problems as they come.”

Damn. Both excuse and invitation turned out really clumsy. I really should have put more thought into it. Even though I didn’t see her face, but my hand holding the phone was sweating now. I also felt a trickle of sweat flow down my head. Why is it so hard to speak without preparation? I made a small sigh, but the other side kept quiet.

“W-what?” I asked. She seemed to come to her senses at the sound of my voice.

“Ah? N-no, nothing...” Yuigahama said and started coughing, as if checking her voice.

“Well, I’ll send you the meeting place info later.”

“Okay.”

“Mhm” Yuigahama said. The conversation can be considered over, but... for some reason we both still listened to each other.

I even heard her breath. Some time later, though, Yuigahama laughed.

“What?”

“Ah, nothing, sorry. I just thought it’s strange.”

What’s so strange about this? Though I did feel strange too. The conversation was over and I had to end the call, but somehow I couldn’t bring myself to do it. As far as I remember, according to the etiquette the one who called should be the one to end it. Maybe I’m not hanging up because of this knowledge? Though our relationship is not subjected to etiquette. There wouldn’t be any problems if I hang up first, I thought and said aloud:

“Okay, I’m ending the call.”

“Yeah, bye,” Yuigahama said but was still there.

I heard her breath and smiled like an idiot.

“End it already.”

“Y-yeah,” Yuigahama said. She surely was shyly smiling now while stroking the bun on her head. While I was imagining this all Yuigahama exclaimed as if having got an idea.

“How about we count on two and end the call?” She said awkwardly. Hearing her timid laughter I could easily imagine her expression. Realizing what she was offering I felt my neck burn.

“Eh? Hell’s that? I’m off.”

“Hey, wa-”

“Yeah, bye.” I said and pushed the “End Call” button as fast as I could. I looked at the phone in my hand and made a relieved sigh. What kind of conversation was that? Remembering that childishly stupid talk I felt very ashamed. I started rolling on my bed as if trying to swim away from it all. Some time later I abruptly stopped and made a deep sigh. Feeling my throat dried I rose up from my bed with a tired face.

01-4

Wearing that same tired face I entered the living room and met Komachi's look. After seeing my face she made a satisfied hum.

"So you're coming to a shrine?"

"Yeah, probably," I replied after walking into the kitchen and getting myself a glass of water. Komachi smiled smugly.

"Hehehe, right, right."

"Your face irritates me, stop."

"Nah, I just thought my Bro isn't that dumb." Komachi said smiling, though I personally didn't share her opinion. I could've answered the call better. With these regrets I sat at the kotatsu. Komachi meanwhile stood up as if passing me the kotatsu watch duty.

"That means I gotta think which shrine I should go to."

"Well, Pops really wanted to visit Kameido Tenjin. You can come along." I replied. Komachi's face expressed disgust.

"Eh?.."

What's with this reply? Pops does his best to be loved by Komachi. I understand his feelings, but Komachi apparently didn't care.

"Nevermind, I'll go somewhere else then. Night." She quickly said and left the living room.

Only me and Kamakura left. Kamakura sighed, rose up evidently in a bad mood, stretched and crawled under the kotatsu. I followed suit and dove underneath it with only my head outside. Not so long till the end of the year. Seemed like this new year's beginning is going to be more troublesome than the last one.

Chapter 02: Yukino Yukinoshita's Inner Clock is Precise as Always

Nights are usually quiet and calm, but today noise didn't cease even long past the midnight. It's night already yet I still saw the lighted windows and people's silhouettes from the train car's window. Inside the car was equally lively. Having passed several stations in the stuffed train I finally exited through the turnstile along with the crowd. After a short walk down the slope I found myself near the Inage Sengen shrine's torii.

It's said that this huge torii near the 14th National highway had been underwater once. It was stated in the Chiba-kun's official twitter, so it's true. Maybe there was a big shrine long ago, like the Itsukushima shrine from the UNESCO's world heritage list. In other words there's high chance Inage Sengen is in that list too. At least, it is for me.

The shrine was very crowded. It wasn't in my World Heritage list for nothing. What a popular shrine! I went along with the crowd and reached the torii. Underneath I found the person I had agreed to meet with. She saw me too and started waving her hand high, her light brown hair bun shaking back and forth.

"Hikki! Hi-yahallo!"

"What kind of a greeting is that?" I said without a trace of malice. Yuigahama wore fishnet tights, beige coat and a long scarf. Her hands were clad in mittens. Beside her stood someone I wasn't expecting at all. White overcoat, plaid skirt with her slim legs in black tights showing underneath. Yukino Yukinoshita. Apparently she was called by Yuigahama. Yukinoshita threw a glance at me and nodded.

"Hello."

"Hey." I replied. At this moment we heard loud bell ringing, signalling the year was about to end. People were constantly checking watch and phones so as not to miss that moment.

A voice was heard counting second to midnight. Five, four, three, two, one, and then people in the crowd started shouting. Among them were the ones who wanted to jump at the exact moment and then tell everyone they weren't on the Earth when the new year started. Wonder where would you all be then? You hadn't even exited the ozone layer. I had the same cold look when looking at them. Yuigahama's eyes, on the

contrary, were fired up.

“Happy yahallo!” She said turning to us.

“What kind of congratulations is that? Happy New Year.” I replied with an ironic smile. Someone coughed nearby and I turned my head to her.

“Happy New Yeah!” Yukinoshita said while wrapping her face in the muffler. Yeah, it’s kinda embarrassing to gather and simply say Happy New Year to each other. I was tugging the end of my scarf now too.

“Yeah, ummm... Happy New Year.” I too said this normal phrase. самое обычное поздравление. After we had congratulated each other Yukinoshita pointed somewhere aside.

“Then let’s enter the shrine,” she offered.

Paper lamps were illuminating the road uphill to the shrine. We started walking up the road. Trees grew on both sides of the road. The shrine visitors were moving along to the shrine itself. This shrine was the biggest around here, so it obviously attracted a lot of people. Even after midnight the flow of people was only getting bigger by the minute.

Yuigahama was turning her head back and forth, looking at the scenery. Ah, she was probably interested in that shop at the edge of the road.

“Just like a festival,” she said.

“You bet. So many people around here. Just the right time to make some money. I wanna go home already.” I replied. Yuigahama pouted.

“Why do you always say it first thing? Let’s go eat something now that we’ve come here and all,” Yuigahama offered and deviated from the general crowd. Yukinoshita stopped her by tugging her scarf.

“Shrine first,” Yukinoshita rebuked, touched Yuigahama’s shoulders and turned her ahead. I turned my head too just in case. The line was really long, we won’t get to the shrine anytime soon. Wish I could do something with this crowd, it was getting on my nerves.

I wanna go home...

I hoped upstairs would be emptier once we climbed there. Wonder if there were stalls up there? Everyone looked at the shrine ahead and slowly walking up. We finally were

approaching the shrine; it would be our turn soon.

“What do you want to ask?” Yuigahama asked..

“You’ve got the date wrong. It’s not Tanabata. ”

“Indeed. Nobody makes wishes here.” Yukinoshita noted looking her in the eye. Yuigahama made a serious face and groaned.

“But it’s like they say, rely on gods during hard times and all that. Like, pray and everything’s gonna be okay...”

Such a wonderful logic. If only the gods had been such convenient creatures, our world would’ve been way more peaceful.

“It’s usually said by non-religious people. Something along the lines of weak people relying on gods in tough situations.” Yukinoshita replied while massaging her temples. Seemed like she didn’t quite agree with Yuigahama on that.

“But you should rely on gods. Ask and you shall receive and all...” Yuigahama said, perplexed. Apparently she was confused. The people in front of us were done and stepped away. Yukinoshita sighed.

“Let it be your way. But I think those who can make an oath would have an advantage,” she said and smiled.

“Ah, got it... Then I have one strong oath to make,” Yuigahama said while stepping closer to Yukinoshita.

“All right,” Yukinoshita replied gently, and they stepped to the offerings box. After throwing the offering they rang the bell, made two bows and two claps and closed their eyes.

An oath before gods... Sounds ominous. I followed the girls and clapped my hands together. A wish, or an oath... I looked at Yukinoshita and Yuigahama standing in front of me. Yukinoshita was quietly standing, eyes closed; Yuigahama was mumbling something, and judging by the wrinkle on her forehead she was nervous. I don’t know what kind of wish they made or what kind of oath they swore. I closed my eyes; I don’t have anything resembling a wish. All that I need I could do if I make an effort.

So I wished for Komachi to pass her exams. That was the only thing I couldn’t affect in any way.

02-2

We were finally done with the rituals and left the crowd behind. I looked around. Wow, so many shrine maidens! Only shrine maidens and nurses. Kidding, no nurses. I passed this shrine maiden paradise and stepped to a long line to the shrine stall. Numerous lucky charms, holy arrows, talismans and other goods were on sale, attracting people. I bought my talisman and decided to draw the omikuji in the spirit of New Year. I shook the wooden box and passed the fallen out paper to the shrine maiden. She handed me the fortune slip and I hurried to the girls.

I've found them near one of the shrine's corners. Yuigahama was smiling ear-to-ear while Yukinoshita was looking at something in her hands with a frown. Did something go wrong? I headed to them.

"Sorry for taking my time," I said. Yuigahama looked at me.

"Not at all. We pulled the omikuji too," she replied and showed me hers. "Great Luck" was inscribed on it. Though I should've guessed based on her expression. I turned my eyes to Yukinoshita. She pursed her lips and stared at me heavily.

"What did you draw? You've drawn the omikuji, didn't you?"

"Yeah," I said and showed my slip I've been holding in my hand all this time.. The girls looked into it.

"Small Luck..."

That was too vague for my liking. Although what would one expect for just a hundred yen? I looked at every sentence on the slip but still didn't understand a thing. For example, there was a reminder to watch my health. All in all it wasn't a bad one, so I wondered if I should tie it.

Now it was Yukinoshita's turn to show her slip.

"Moderate Luck," she said with a smile, her tone proud. She hated losing as expected. Good thing her mood improved. She made a satisfied humph and flicked her hair off the shoulders. Yuigahama was watching her with a smile.

"Good thing no one drew the Bad Luck slip" Yuigahama said with a smile.

"Indeed so, " Yukinoshita agreed and averted her eyes, her face red. Apparently she acknowledged her competitive nature. Her eyes met mine.

“Oh, isn’t it the talismans package?” she asked while looking at the said package with interest. I’d been holding it for quite a while. I showed her the small paper package with “Inage Sengen Shrine” written on it.

“Ah, this? Yeah. Bought it for Komachi so that she would pass the exams.”

“Oh,” Yukinoshita said, then tilted her head and looked at me.

“We can draw on plate for her if you want...”

“Yeah, for Komachi-chan’s luck!” Yuigahama butted in.

“... The line there’s long though,” I added looking at the line to the stall I’ve recently come from. I just couldn’t accept their offer.

“Yeah, thanks,” I said moments later. The girls blinked after hearing it. My shoulders twitched.

“What?” I asked under their impolite stares.

“Nothing. I was just surprised,” Yukinoshita coughed.

“I’m not used to you saying ‘thanks’. Besides, you hate waiting in lines.” Yuigahama added and smiled. Hey, what’s so funny? I do thank people properly. I groaned in defeat.

“I resolved to throw my pride away for my sister. I’d on my way home long ago if not for Komachi.”

“Looks like it’s common sense you’ve thrown away, not pride,” Yukinoshita said in disappointment, then made a sad sigh and started walking.

“Shall we?” Yukinoshita asked several step ahead. Yuigahama looked at her and pushed my back. I started walking. We caught on to Yukinoshita and stood at the end of this long line.

02-3

After some substantial amount of time we finally wrote our wishes on the wooden plate. Yukinoshita's beautiful straight-out-of-textbook handwriting, my scribbles and Yuigahama's broad strokes. Now you couldn't say what wish was written on the plate. I feel sorry for the god who was going to bring that wish to life. On the other hand it was now similar to talismans, so grabbing the god's attention was probably a good thing.

On behalf of us all I've hung the plate and clapped my hands. Please, o little plate, let Komachi pass her exams. I mumbled 'namu-namu' and turned to the girls.

"Everything's alright now." I said. The girls nodded in satisfaction. Well, I didn't have it in my initial plans, but now the purpose of going to the shrine was fulfilled. I tried to remember if we missed anything.

"So now what? Going home?" I offered.

"No we're not! Why do you always say these things?" Yuigahama asked with a cold look. I wanted to say we've done all we wanted, but Yukinoshita interrupted me.

"We wanted to check the stalls, didn't we?" she offered. She probably remembered Yuigahama wanted to buy something there before. Yuigahama energetically nodded.

Well, it's still on the way home, so I don't mind. Didn't have the say on the matter anyway, the girls have started walking already. We went back the same road we came here by. Finally we saw the stalls. Mostly there was takoyaki and okonomiyaki, but seasonal goods, like amazake, was there too. Among them I noticed the shooting gallery. I've seen them regularly at the summer festivals, but in winter... Someone started talking nearby.

"Why shooting gallery at the year send-off?" Yukinoshita wondered and approached the gallery to inspect it closer.

"Yeah, it's really strange. Well, some visitors come with their children so maybe someone decided to take care of them."

"Still, why here of all places..." Yukinoshita didn't really listen to me and instead was staring at the shooting gallery with increasing interest. Among the trophies was a Pansan looking panda. Ah, got it.

"Wann give it a shot?"

“No, w-why should I...” She said, unsure. No, she probably does want to. Yuigahama noticed to and was now gently looking at Yukinoshita’s suspicious behaviour.

“Yukinon likes Pan-san, doesn’t she,” Yuigahama mumbled smiling. Usually Yukinoshita quickly tried to rationalize but now she didn’t even hear Yuigahama talk. Is she that concentrated on Pan-san? Yukinoshita was staring at it and saying something to herself. Seemed like we couldn’t move on until we got one. What should I do? I wasn’t sure, but maybe I should try? I was thinking about my money when Yuigahama approached me.

“By the way,” she said tugging my sleeve.

”What do you want?”

“Umm...” She tugged my sleeve again. Apparently she wanted me to come closer. I nodded my head and did what she asked. Yuigahama moved closer to my ear, as if wanting to tell a secret.

Of course we moved closer to each other that way. This was not something to be surprised about or react to. But now I was feeling the citric aroma of her perfume and seeing her face red from the cold, and looking at her directly was hard. Still, I made a quiet sigh and cued her to continue. Yuigahama exhaled and started whispering into my ear.

“Hey, what are we gonna do with Yukinon’s present?”

“Ah,” Yukinoshita’s birthday was in couple of days, I remembered. And we agreed to buy her a present before Christmas. No, I hadn’t forgotten about it. Quite the contrary, I had constantly been thinking what I should do. When, where, with whom, what and how to buy. Almost like a 5W1H. Inviting someone by yourself was hard. I don’t like selecting the date, for one. If I choose a date, it probably is going to be inconvenient for the other person, but on the other hand if I ask them to choose one, they’ll think I’m shifting the responsibility. We won’t decide anything that way... That’s why I was grateful for her to start this conversation. Otherwise I’d delay it all and think about stuff and end up not wanting to go anywhere and leave saying “Hachichika wants to go home”. That’s why I decided to pick the date right now.

“Are you free tomorrow?”

“Ah, yeah, I am,” she replied in surprise and started caressing her hair bun.

“Tomorrow it is.”

“Yeah.” she said and fell silent. I kept quiet too. This silence was probably due to awkwardness. I started looking around to hide the embarrassment and just noticed Yukinoshita coming to us with sagged shoulders.

“What, you’re done already?” I asked.

“Yes, let’s go,” she said with a said smile.

“What?”

Just what happened there? I looked at the shooting gallery again. Ah, got it. It wasn’t Pan-san the panda, but Panta-san the panda. Well, this tends to happen on these events.

“Ah, you mean Pachimon?” I said with an understanding face. Yukinoshita touched her chin and tilted her head.

“Pachimon? I think I’ve heard it somewhere. And his last name, if I’m not mistaken, was Hi... Hiki...”

“Hey! I’m not talking about myself. You don’t even remember my last name anymore?” I said. Yukinoshita brushed the hair off her shoulder in surprise.

“How rude. I remember everything.”

“It’s you who’s rude.”

Well, if she at least remembered my name, it was fine. After all, there people in this worlds who are addressed as Kawasomething and their name is constantly forgotten. Wonder what’s Kawasomething doing right now?

02-4

We left the shrine using the same road we went to it earlier, passed the big torii and exited the street parallel to the national highway. Harsh cold wind was blowing along it. My body started shivering, so me and Yuigahama raised our coats' collards. Yukinoshita, apparently, was unfazed by the cold. She simply affixed her muffler. Her face showed signs of tiredness. She sighed and exhaled clouds of white steam which quickly dissolved in the air. Yeah, she didn't handle crowds well. Same as me.

I looked at the shrine road where crowd was getting bigger even now and sighed.

"Narita line is probably crowded too," I said.

"Then let's walk to Chiba line!" Yuigahama said and clapped her hands. She was looking to the side of the road adjacent to the national highway which led to the sea and passed by our school. Chiba line was further from the shrine, so there should be less people there. Besides this road was familiar to us, so it wasn't that far.

"Why not. What do you say?" I asked. Yukinoshita nodded.

"Then let's go!" Yuigahama said and pushed Yukinoshita's back. The latter didn't resist.

There were many lamps along the national highway, assisted by the light of the cars passing by. In the park nearby youngsters were launching fireworks, seemingly trying to prolong the fun after the new year countdown.

Our footsteps echoed in the night city. And this was no ordinary night city. Noise was constantly heard here and there. Two silhouettes in this noisy bright world seemed like a mirage to me. I hum something to the rhythm of my walk, trying to keep the even distance. My scarf was wavered by the gusts; the girls looked back from time to time in a worry, then smiled for some reason. I'm here, I'm here, stop checking.

More people appeared at the station. The trains were working all night long. Some people went to send the year off, while the others just wanted to return home after midnight. We joined the crowd and entered the station.

Me and Yukinoshita would board the train and go home, but Yuigahama's house was nearby. I threw a questioning look at her.

"Yuigahama, what are you gonna do?"

"Eh? I... don't know..." she replied and looked at Yukinoshita.

“I don’t mind if you stay at my place.”

“Really?!”

“Yes,” Yukinoshita replied and made a kitten-like yawn.

“To Yukinoshita it is, then,” I quickly concluded and passed the turnstile. I didn’t want to leave the girls alone this late. The etiquette require I walked them home. People stood on the platform here and there. Same was in the train which had just arrived. Yet the amount of people was still smaller compared to the shrine. There were no shrines in the coastal district, so there were fewer people.

The three of us sat on one bench inside the car; the train started moving. The floor heating warmed my legs nicely. I made a satisfied sigh. Yuigahama apparently heard it and smiled.

“It’s still cold outside,” she said.

“Yeah. Winter night aren’t made for strolling around.”

“But it was fun! Even more fun than during the day!” Yuigahama said, her eyes sparkling. What’s with that, you like to have fun at night? What are you, whore-tan? Though at least I can related to the fun of night shopping trips to the nearby convenience store.

I looked at Yuigahama who was sitting across and noticed that Yukinoshita was quiet. Oh, she was asleep already. My, my, year’s first dream. That was a good omen, hehe. Wait, or should the first dream be the next night? Then it wasn’t a first dream... Yukinoshita wobbled and propped on my shoulder. I felt her weight and the aroma of her shampoo. Her warmth was easily felt through the coat. And she also slightly snuffled in her sleep, as it turned out.

The car shook from time to time, the wind was hitting the windows, the passengers were talking, and despite all this I heard Yukinoshita’s breath to the right of me shifting with the car’s shaking. My body was tense because of the sudden contact. If I moved, Yukinoshita would wake up. Though I didn’t really need her lying on me in the first place. It was embarrassing.

“H-hey...” I said, but Yuigahama put her finger to her mouth, motioning me to keep quiet.

“Yukinon’s tired after all,” she whispered. How could I object to that? Normally I would

just move away, but now I could only move toward Yukinoshita. So I only nodded to Yuigahama. She leaned forward, propped her cheek on her palm and looked at Yukinoshita's face while smiling. Her eyes met mine periodically, and I turned away.

Thus we passed several stations already. Several... Is Chiba that big? The road seemed almost too long for me.

02-5

The usual voice inside the car announced next station, and the train started slowing down. But Yukinoshita's shining lips still emitted the quiet snuffle, and her small chest was rising and falling. I obviously was fascinated by this subtle movement, but I couldn't let my eyes linger there for too long. I didn't know what to do, we were approaching the station already.

Yuigahama quickly stood up and went to Yukinoshita's side.

"Yukinon, it's our stop," Yuigahama said and gently shook her. Yukinoshita made a mewling-like sound, opened her eyes and was coming to her senses for several seconds. Then she realized the position she was in and bolted upright.

"S-sorry."

"It's alright," I replied averting my eyes. I also flexed my numb shoulder and neck. Her weight wasn't pressing on them anymore but I still felt her warmth.

We exited the train. Cold wind blew into our faces. Quickly, as if evading it, we went down the stairs and passed the turnstiles. This station was half-empty even during daytime, and now there were only us. The silence and the cold wind created a tranquil atmosphere.

Quiet winter city. We headed to Yukinoshita's house. The girls ahead, me couple steps behind. We passed the park near the station using the narrow path. Yukinoshita apparently was keeping her distance from me. I obviously too felt too awkward to look her in the eye, but still...

The girls silhouettes were illuminated by streetlamps. Yukinoshita made a deep sigh and touched her temples. Probably still blaming herself for her perceived fault. Yuigahama, on the contrary, made a quiet sigh and said:

"Yukinon, you look so pretty when you sleep."

Yukinoshita's shoulders twitched. She threw a glance at Yuigahama and immediately turned away. Yuigahama smiled: seemed like her words hit the bull's eye and Yukinoshita was embarrassed now.

"Ah, so fun!" Yuigahama exclaimed.

"Now is it?" Yukinoshita pouted.

“Yep, fun!” Yuigahama replied in a voice so warm it could even thaw the ice of Yukinoshita’s words. After such a confident phrase me and Yukinoshita could only keep quiet.

Really though, we weren’t exactly sad. Yuigahama made several steps forward and turned to us.

“Oh, right! First year’s sunrise! The sea’s close, let’s go watch!” came the idiotic offer from Yuigahama. My smile waned instantly.

“Eh?..” I moaned tiredly.

“Don’t have to react so sincerely,” Yuigahama replied with a stern voice. I’d have to wake up at 6am to watch the sunrise. I didn’t want to.

“Tokyo Bay is to the west of Chiba, so we can’t see the sunrise over the sea...” Yukinoshita said, confused. Yuigahama was startled.

“R-really?” She asked. Yukinoshita smiled.

“Yes. The sun rises at the east.”

“I know that much!”

Seems like Yukinoshita paid her back for sleeping in the train. You girls have so much fun at the beginning of the year...

“It’s true you can’t see the sunrise in Chiba city, but Choushi is well known spot for watching sunrises.”

There, on the Inubosaki mountain, is located Japan’s most eastern point, if you don’t take remote islands into consideration. So the sun rises there earlier than in the rest of Japan. The place gets crowded on New Years, and traffic jams are common. Right now people probably were going there by cars. Small Chiba prefecture lesson over.

I told this all to the girls. As a result they froze. Then Yukinoshita made a tired sigh and Yuigahama looked at me.

“Hikki, you really are a Chiba maniac,” Yuigahama noted. Buzz off. Could have been used to it already.

Meanwhile we reached the Yukinoshita’s condo. She stopped at the entrance and turned to me.

“See you. Thanks for walking me,” She thanked me shyly. I didn’t know what to reply. So I just nodded, like, no big deal.

“Okay, bye,” I said.

“Yeah,” Yuigahama replied.

“Good night.”

I waved my hand, passed the automatic door and again was in the night’s embrace. Looking at the condo’s windows, I mused about this peculiar January 1st. They say the year will be the same as its first day. So it means the whole next year will be this hectic? Though I couldn’t say I disliked it. The last road of the old year is neither sad nor festive. I think it’s Ikkyu Sojun’s words. By this logic any event can be either good or bad.

My only problem was that I had a habit of looking at everything in a negative light, search for some ugly subtext in it all. With these thoughts I left the building. At that moment a hum of the opening door was heard, along with the sound of the footsteps. I turned around and saw Yuigahama.

“Hikki.”

“What?” I asked. She caressed her hair bun and hesitated a little.

“Umm... See you tomorrow.” She exhaled and stared at me questioningly.

“Yeah, see you tomorrow,” I replied looking her straight in the eye. Yuigahama waved to me and disappeared inside the building. My eyes followed her, then I turned and stepped into the new year, a year in which nothing new awaits me.

Chapter 03: Hachiman Hikigaya Muses About What he Knows and What he Doesn't

I raised my head to look at the empty winter sky. Sound of the monorail train passing by echoed above. I followed the train with my eyes and sighed; the wind instantly caught the cloud of steam and scattered it almost instantly. Thinking on what was going to come next was hard, so I sighed inadvertently. Honestly, I didn't have to think about it all today. I thought a day like today would come eventually. I understood I'd get my chance. I don't if I could call it a promise, but if I could, then I've got one. The problem now was how what words to use to say all that. I have too few people communication experience, and it was really hard for me at such moments. Wonder how people ask each other to hang out usually?

Okay, enough of that. Let's think about today. Yesterday, when I have returned home from the shrine visit, I've got a message from Yuigahama regarding out shopping trip. Our meeting place was at the Vision entrance at the Chiba station. Easy to find. She could see me the moment she'd exit the station. Or maybe she couldn't. I was agonizing over it, clouds of steam from my sighs dissolving in the evening air. And finally I was Yuigahama exiting the turnstiles. She spotted me and now was waving her hand.

"Yahallo!"

"Hey."

"Sorry for being late," Yuigahama said and ran to me, her heels clicking, beige coat flapping behind her back. Her long knitted dress was reaching her knees with shorts-like skirt showing underneath.

"So where are we heading?"

"I suggest we just roam around and pick something," Yuigahama said pointing to the station's general direction and started walking.

"Sure, I'm leaving it to you."

I don't know a thing about picking presents to the girls; I'd rather leave it to someone

with the expertise on the subject. How do they say... Leave the mochi cooking to the mochi chef, a snake will always use snake's ways, render unto caesar... wait, the last one's not fitting. Anyway, let's just trust Yuigahama's tastes. So I just settled on following her.

Chiba is a shopping maniac's paradise. The PARCO retail network caters to the high schoolers' tastes. Just the right thing for the trendy youngsters. Moreover, many high school student can be easily divided into factions depending on what shops they prefer. They could even wage all-out war on each other for all I know. Please don't! Let's be all friends! We're all Chiba citizens! Except Tsudanuma, that's Narashino already.

"Oh look, C-ONE! Let's start from here, okay?" Yuigahama offered after some time. Ah, C-ONE, I know them. It's where Ichiran ramen shops are located. They have separate curtained seats at the counter which allows you to concentrate on your food. I'd like to use this system on every occasion. If separating customers allows them to enjoy their food, then separating humans from one another allows them to enjoy life too. I really ought to patent it!

C in C-ONE probably means CHiba. Or Chiba's local hero, Captain C. Not to be confused with Chibatman, be careful.

We entered. All the shops' signboards sparkled with the New Year decorations. They also used the viaduct, so the rows of the shops were seemingly endless. The place was way livelier than usual, probably due to Christmas sales. It was also very noisy: girls were shopping, shop clerks were telling something, helping with the selection and discussing fashion. I, being a guy, couldn't enter there, so I stood three steps behind feeling like a fish out of water.

"Hikki, look, so pretty!"

"Not bad," I agreed. "Take whatever, I don't care," I thought to myself.

"Yoiu can wear this in spring too..." Yuigahama grabbed one item, then another, being really giddy all the while. Not my business, of course, but we came here for Yukinoshita's present, not your shopping trip, right? Yuigahama was twirling before the mirror while checking out the outfits.

I was embarrassed, being a guy and all, so I watched from afar. Yep, Yuigahama was a girl all right. In this regard she was Yukinoshita's total opposite. I remember me, her and Komachi selecting a present for Yuigahama. I was really surprise back then at her indifference to modern female students' trends. Though, come to think about it, I wasn't any better. But comparing myself to Yukinoshita was really impolite. She still made an

effort to pick the present for Yuigahama after all. Did she dislike buying things for someone else? Seriousness and clumsiness in such matters-- typical Yukinoshita. The question was, what was I supposed to buy for her?

"I'll go look around," I said to Yuigahama and went to check the surroundings. Maybe I'd think of something while looking at the goods. A present for Yukinoshita... what would it be? For our clumsy Yukinoshita-san, or Clumsynoshita for short... Agh, you're so complicated, our dear Clumsynon. Her hobbies aside, she liked things practical and pragmatic. So books and everything related were no go: she picked them herself. She also lived alone, so kitchen utensils and such were no go either.

What to choose?.. Hm... I entered the Destiniland goods shop. Pan-san... She knew about it all way more than me, so no. Next was the pet accessories store. Cat... she didn't own one, for one reason or another. Though her condo probably held "no pets allowed" rule. Cats photo albums were also out of the question: she probably had piles of them. So maybe something from this various accessories shop? Hm, hm. I roamed that shop and returned back. Yuigahama was standing there with several clothes items in her hand and looking around, searching for something.

"Ah, Hikki! Don't disappear on me without saying a word!" She motioned me to come to her with a stern stare.

"Actually I did say. Besides I feel uncomfortable in the shops like this one."

"Why?" Yuigahama asked curiously.

"Well... kinda embarrassing."

"What's so embarrassing?"

What's with those why's and what's, like in that BLACK BISQUIT song? I just don't know. Can't explain properly either. Well, maybe she'd get it on the emotiona level...

"Think yourself... When the two people do such thing together..."

"What's wrong with tha-" and then Yuigahama stopped mid-sentence. She tilted her head, her cheeks getting redder by the second.

"Somehow I'm overly concious about it too now."

"Told you."

Good girl Gahama-san. Your emotions recognizing skills are high as always. You got it

even from my jumbled phrasing. The problem was, now that she understood it, we really were too embarrassed to be here together. Yuigahama clutched her head.

“We should have invited Komachi-chan,” she mumbled.

“That’d be harder than you think.”

She would do her favourite trick and leave us together in the middle of shopping. Like making a hint for me. That’s how it was when we went out shopping with Yukinoshita. Anyway, the conclusion is she can’t be relied upon in such situations.

“Yeah, she’s preparing for exams and all,” Yuigahama said. No, that’s not it, that’s why I said “harder than you think”. But Yuigahama raised her face, clenched her fist and was readying herself to say something.

“I’ll do my best!”

“Do your best to what?” I asked, but Yuigahama seemingly ignored me and nodded to herself. Some time later she seemed to gather her thoughts, fixed the clothes she held in her hands and threw me a questioning look.

“I think... Hikki, can you help?”

“Don’t expect me to be useful though.”

“Yeah... Wait what do you mean not being useful? You should be!”

“I’ll try,” I said and Yuigahama headed to the large mirror inside the shop; I followed her.

“I had this thought that a sweater or a cardigan can be worn over the blouse, so you can go to school in it,” Yuigahama said while putting her coat and knitted garment off. It dawned to me that I shouldn’t look, so I turned away. And anyway, there’s a dressing room for that. Or do you think that having a shirt underneath was enough a justification for undressing like that? Maybe it was normal for you but definitely not for me. So stop it. Despite some music playing inside the shop I still heard the rustle of the clothes and Yuigahama’s breath accompanying it.

“There... how does it look?” Yuigahama called me and I turned back. She wore a warm-looking knit cardigan.

“Don’t know. Seems okay.”

Not good and not bad, but certainly looking good on you. The only problem was it was supposed to be a present for Yukinoshita. It was going to be too baggy for her... in certain places. Not saying which ones.

“What about the Yukinoshita’s measurements?”

The most important thing in picking clothes is size, good fit and stuff. Komachi’s words. By the way, my today’s clothes passed a thorough Komachi-test. No matter what I chose by myself, Komachi rejected it saying “I’ll stomp on you!”. Just like Osugi. Or was it Piko?

“Measurements?..” Yuigahama parroted me and traced her belly with her fingers.

“Probably too big...” she said in despair. Then she moved her hand from belly to her arms and her face became even more desperate. No, don’t worry, it’s not that big? Well, not small either, but not that big!

“It’s alright. Will be okay, I think,” I meekly said even though this wouldn’t lift her moods. Yuigahama looked at me in suspicion. Aaagh, damn! What am I supposed to say during these moments anyway?!

“I think it suits you, so it’s fine,” I finally uttered.

“Hehe, thanks,” Yuigahama said and started taking the cardigan off. I was to embarrassed to look so I turned back again. Then suddenly it hit me.

“But Yukinoshita follows the school regulations so she won’t wear this to school.” I said. Even though purely formal, but rules were rules. Of course the regulations described the uniform code too, including sweater, cardigans and the like. Even most model students don’t care about those, but some, including Yukinoshita, follow them be the letter.

“Yeah. Then...” Yuigahama pondered, folded the cardigan and headed to the isle with mittens and other small stuff.

“So cute! Would be real nice playing with them,” Yuigahama said and picked cat- and dog-styled mittens. The cat-styled ones resembled the cat paws, while the dog one were slightly different. They sported the dog’s face and ears on the back of the hand and fangs at the thumb. Yuigahama put them on and tried clenching her hand.

“Kinda hard to grab anything with these.”

“That’s how mittens are.”

Yuigahama umm-ed in agreement, pondered over something, then suddenly looked at me and unclenched her hand.

“Take that! Woof!” she said, and the dog-mitten suddenly bit my hand.

“J-just kidding,” she added trying to fix the situation, her cheeks burning. Don’t do it if you’re embarrassed then. I set my hand free and started fanning my face. The heating in this shop was apparently too good.

“Well who cares, she can wear it at home.”

“Maybe,” Yuigahama nodded. Yukinoshita normally didn’t wear cute things, at least not in the open. Even when presented with one she probably wouldn’t wear it anyway. Though maybe if it was a present from Yuigahama, she would accept it with a deadpan face while jumping from excitement inside.

“We gotta look for something else then...” Yuigahama turned to the aisles again while swaying the cat mittens in her hand.

“Hm, how about this one?” and she fetched the cat socks from the nearby aisle.

“This ones are probably hard to wear.”

“It’s the indoor ones! Of course you wouldn’t wear those outside,” Yuigahama said. Well, following your logic, those mittens weren’t supposed to be worn outdoors too. I noticed the pink rubber paw-like attachments on the bottom.

“Well, she could wear them indoors without bothering about others’ opinion, right? What do you think?”

“I think she’ll be glad.”

Though Yukinoshita would be glad with whatever Yuigahama gave her. It was not the present that mattered but the person who gave it to you. The one who uttered the words is sometimes more important than the words themselves.

“These ones it is then,” Yuigahama said, gathered everything she picked and carried it all to checkout. What, cat mittens too?.. Hm, cat legs, cat hands... Wonder if they sell tails somewhere around here too...

03-2

Okay, I needed to pick a present too. Besides there were no cat tails in that shop. So we moved to Sogo Chiba Sencity. As you can see from its name it made emphasis on the trendiness. No, on second thought, it would've been "sensitive" that way. I usually attended the male clothes stores, but today I was supposed to buy a present for Yukinoshita and thus followed Yuigahama to female ones. Though I still didn't know zilch about women's accessories, so I again left it to Yuigahama. She chose a shop with women clothes and various accessories.

"Maybe we check everything? Gloves, accessories, scarfs and all," Yuigahama offered. I entered the store too and started checking out the shelves. Yuigahama offered me everything she saw. I kept close to her, so the clerks didn't call the police on me for being too suspicious. Had I entered the store myself the clerks would've constantly ask me "looking for something?", and I would've felt someone's heavy stare from the cashier corner all the time. That's how it was last time I entered such a store. I know, lonely guy is a rare customer, but still, I'd like you not to guard me all the time like that.

Still worried about how the store clerks would react to me, I followed Yuigahama from isle to isle. She stopped at one marked as "OPTICS". What's with this? Couldn't just write "glasses" instead? You have nothing else anyway. What is it, an attempt to look smart? Why use loanwords anyway? It's like some people call meat sause BOLOGNESE, or call spaghetti PASTA. Wait, those are also loaned... Don't they have a Japanese name? While was thinking about this Yuigahama patted me on the shoulder. I turned to see her wearing glasses, her face proud and satisfied.

"Hehe. So, do I look smart?"

"I you think it's glasses that make you smarter you've got something wrong with your head."

"You... Dummy!" Yuigahama pouted and turned to check other glasses. I did the same and took one pair too. So many of them. They differed not just by the design, but by functionality too. They all were marked, like "non-staining", "blue-light cut" and others. Apparently the glasses were not just for sight correction nowadays, and the pricing was alright.

Yuigahama meanwhile offered me another pair.

"You to try wearing some. Here, these ones."

“Eh?..”

She clearly wanted to make fun of me. I hesitated, and Yuigahama shoved them into my hands.

“Wear them already.”

I gathered my courage and put them on. Per...sona! By the way, I liked the third more than the fourth, so I'd like a gun instead.

“Okay, done,” I said fixing the glasses with my index finger. Yuigahama burst out laughing.

“Totally don't suit!”

“Buzz off,” I replied. That's why I didn't want to wear them. Yuigahama instantly shoved me another pair, with a different design.

“Check these ones now.”

“Don't wanna.”

“Why not? Come on!” Yuigahama ushered me. Annoying. I fixed the glasses and turned to Yuigahama to hear her complaints. She instead stared at me with her mouth open and said nothing.

“What's with the silence?”

You gave me them in the first place and now you're ignoring me? I looked at her questioningly, awaiting for her to say something. I frantically waved her hands.

“No, no, nothing. Just surprised they suit you so much.”

“Well thanks,” I didn't understand how to react to praise. So she was surprised. huh... There were many things which I only thought I knew about. For example, Yuigahama, who usually didn't wear glasses, looked surprisingly good in them. I remembered Yukinoshita bitterly stating she didn't know a thing about Yuigahama. Same for me.

Before I didn't even try to really get to know either of the girls. I was still far away from the complete understanding of them, but we've spent enough time together. Though a little more than half a year still was not that much. But still, I knew them better than after entering the club.

What did I know about Yukino Yukinoshita? That she was easily coerced by Yuigahama, that she liked cats, that she spent her weekends watching cat videos while hugging a Pan-san plushie. That was quite substantial. If Yuigahama wanted to present her indoor cat socks, I'd present her something in the same vein. Just to keep her warm and soothed when she spent those weekends alone.

03-3

After finishing our shopping we walked around for some time and decided to get something to eat. We could come to Starbucks but it was too cold for that. Besides I didn't know how to order there. We decided on a cafe we've visited several times prior.

"Coming here?" Yuigahama asked.

"Yep," I replied and we entered. The cafe was isolated from the outside noise, so inside was quiet and peaceful.

"For two persons please," I said to the waitstaff, and we were escorted to the table close to the window. I could see the whole Chiba station from here. I let Yuigahama go ahead, sat down and was now watching the panorama behind her back. I spotted the monorail train and thought that Chiba was really a technologically advanced city of the future. My eyes followed the train and then suddenly met with ones of the person sitting on the sofa diagonally from me.

"Oh, it's Hikigaya-kun!" the person said and sat with her back to the window. White T-shirt with some inscription, a silk crepe ribbon with a golden decoration hanging on her bosom... This decoration was shining brighter than the sun. And smiling eyes darker than the night sky. After fixing her red palantine, Haruno Yukinoshita called me.

Yuigahama abruptly turned to the voice and called her name in surprise.

"Haruno-san! And..." Yuigahama looked at the young man sitting a bit closer. He wore black, or white... ash-grey shirt and black jacket. The dark chestnut hair framed a familiar face of Hayato Hayama.

"Hayato-kun!"

"Hey," he said briefly and raised his hand in greeting, his watch sparkling. Seeing these two I yet again remembered the old adage of spending the year the same way you've started it. My head started hurting from the bad omen: the year was promising even more troubles and tribulations.

Afterword

Hello there. I'm working. Lately I write "working" way more often than I write "Wataru Watari". God I need a break. And so, here's the author's afterword, part 3.

The name of this volume is Oregairu.o, number three in the a-series, bundled with the BD/DVD limited edition. First was a, then n, and now o. I wonder what letter will be next? ano...hana? No way, I don't want to cry in the last part. Better hide somewhere far away when it's published instead. And then I'd suddenly hear my editor exclaiming "Found you, Wataru Watari!" And then he'll grab me, lock me and make me work like a zombie. A true Kaisha Gurashi!

Locking somewhere means I'll work hard, but due to lockdown you'll always have this feeling that you're locked. Like you're working hard but the results don't get any better. Not that rare occurrence, by the way. The world is chock-full of zombie office slaves! Source: me. That feeling is the most dangerous illusion of them all. When I was a newbie, I too stayed overnight, gladly shuttled to the convenience store for food, slept on the table and got a strange feeling of content, except in the morning it turned out the work was far from over. The perceived events not related to reality only do no good to your nerves. But the contrary is equally bad for you: dry result without any feelings don't let you grow.

What does he feel now, a reality or some illusory mirages? Time goes by, the environment changes bit by bit, but what temporal axis the events are aligned by? That's regarding the o volume. Finally, the o! Or maybe o, as in zero. How will the next volume turn out? Anyway, I'm planning to continue the a-series for some time.

But... If I don't speed up, I probably won't make it in time. What's definitely speed up is the rate of my hair ceding. I noticed it after getting the recent haircut... I've finished watching anime, thinking it turned out so good and I gotta go sleep now, turned my TV off... and saw a reflection inside the black screen.

I saw a thirty-something fellow with a big shiny forehead, and he was staring right into me, here, in reality. In fact I've been watching anime for my whole life and never turned TV off. You should do that too: screw this horrible reality and go watch Oregairu's second season instead. Now I'll share some thoughts about the anime and explain several thing.

This third volume brings us anime episodes 4 and 5. I'm sharing my thoughts as a

viewer, the reader and the sole original creator. So on to my first impressions.

First, the episode 4, “And so, Yui Yuigahama Declares”. And the episode instantly starts from the sparkle of passion between Hachiman and Hayama... I would have said were I a fujoshi. Pay attention to Hayama’s behaviour. Hachiman had learned the inner workings of Hayato Hayama and now sees his distorted nature. These episodes demonstrate the fact in the fullest. So we’re watching Hayama’s behaviour and then suddenly... Komachi appears! And I’m sure many of you instantly forgot about Hayama. She was too cute! Even her irritated phrases were cute. And Haruno’s phrases were gloriously scary as usual. I was scared myself, really. That’s the beauty of the anime: you can achieve such an effect there.

Remember the phone call from Haruno? Words like “monster of logic” and “monster of self-awareness” stood out, but I’d like you to pay attention to that “you can’t call it genuine” of Hachiman’s. That “genuine” word, or, to be precise, the meaning put into this word are very distinct for our heroes, and they’ll return to it in the later episodes.

On to the fateful double date with Orimoto and Nakamachi. Boy had they shown their true colors. That “Hayama said so, so whatever” wasn’t really disliked, but the Saize bit was uncalled for! Nevermind Hayama, even I was offended. Oregairu decided to support Saize. Generally, this episode is about the preferences and people who are interested in other’s preferences, ask about them, then ask again; about people who change their preferences, who aspire them, who doubt them and who don’t have any at all; about those who mock the preferences. Among those were the ones who gave him the new purpose and decisions for the new year.

Next up is episode 5. Komachi is mega-cute regardless of anything. And Zaimokuza’s phrases were cool. Totsuka was the angel incarnate as usual, and Kawasomething, as usual, good-looking. Irohasu behaved like Irohasu was supposed to, and Hachiman fit into his role. I’d like to end here, but that last phrase made me worried. “And here I thought you’d understand”. This phrase includes many meanings and can be understood in million different ways, and currently we can’t say what she meant. Though we all should understand who her words are directed to, judging by the emotions in her voice. Though I don’t think anything would change if she didn’t say anything: after all, even if what you say is true, it still can be interpreted differently.

By the way this anime doesn’t look like a romantic comedy at all. Do something with it, I thought while looking and then voila - we’ve got us some romance! What is it, a romantic comedy? For real?

Meguri-senpai’s word immediately after were very heavy. I wonder if his plan of the

future is right? Obviously if people are changed by other people, then the room's interior can also be changed by them. But if someone thinks that if everyone's in the right place and the interior isn't changed, that nothing is changed, they're wrong. At least, the tea's aroma is no longer in that room.

Time to wrap things up. I think I've also written my own vision and point of view. Please continue to stay with us. Yoroshiku! [TL note: written as 夜露死苦, as in Night, Open, Death and Hard.]

Acknowledgements.

Ponkan8-kami. Aren't you almost too godlike, I thought looking at Volume 3. Well, only a half left! Do your best!

Executive editor Hoshio-san, ahahaha. No, the situation really isn't of a funny kind, but I know that no matter how hard it is you always should keep a smile on your face, that's why I'm laughing. It's basically the only thing left for me to do. As usual, sorry. Thank you very much. Okay, I'm going to submit my work way before the deadline, haha.

Director Oikawa and the rest of the staff! As before, thank you for your hard work on the volumes. And as before, the irritating original creator begs your forgiveness yet again. Let's do our best.

Takuya Eguchi, Hachiman Hikigaya's actor, and the other actors too! Thank you for the outstanding and nuanced performance which I can't even describe properly and of which is quite a lot in these episodes. Thanks a lot, it's clear you put your heart into it. Oregairu-related events still go on, let's work together some more!

And finally to the readers and viewers. Thank you for your unchanging support. This is the third BD/DVD issue already. Thank you for staying with us. I'd like to thank you all personally, but unfortunately this isn't going to... wait! The events! As was with the previous volume you'll get this one bundled with the priority sales coupons. Come to the event, it's gotta be fun! Check the submission times. And even if I don't manage to thank you all in person, I, the main novels and the a-series original author, want my feelings to reach you. I'll be glad if you stay with us till the end.

My free time's over and I'm putting my pen away. See you again!

Looking at the reality with a can of MAX Coffee on a July day, yours truly, Wataru Watari.

Credits

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