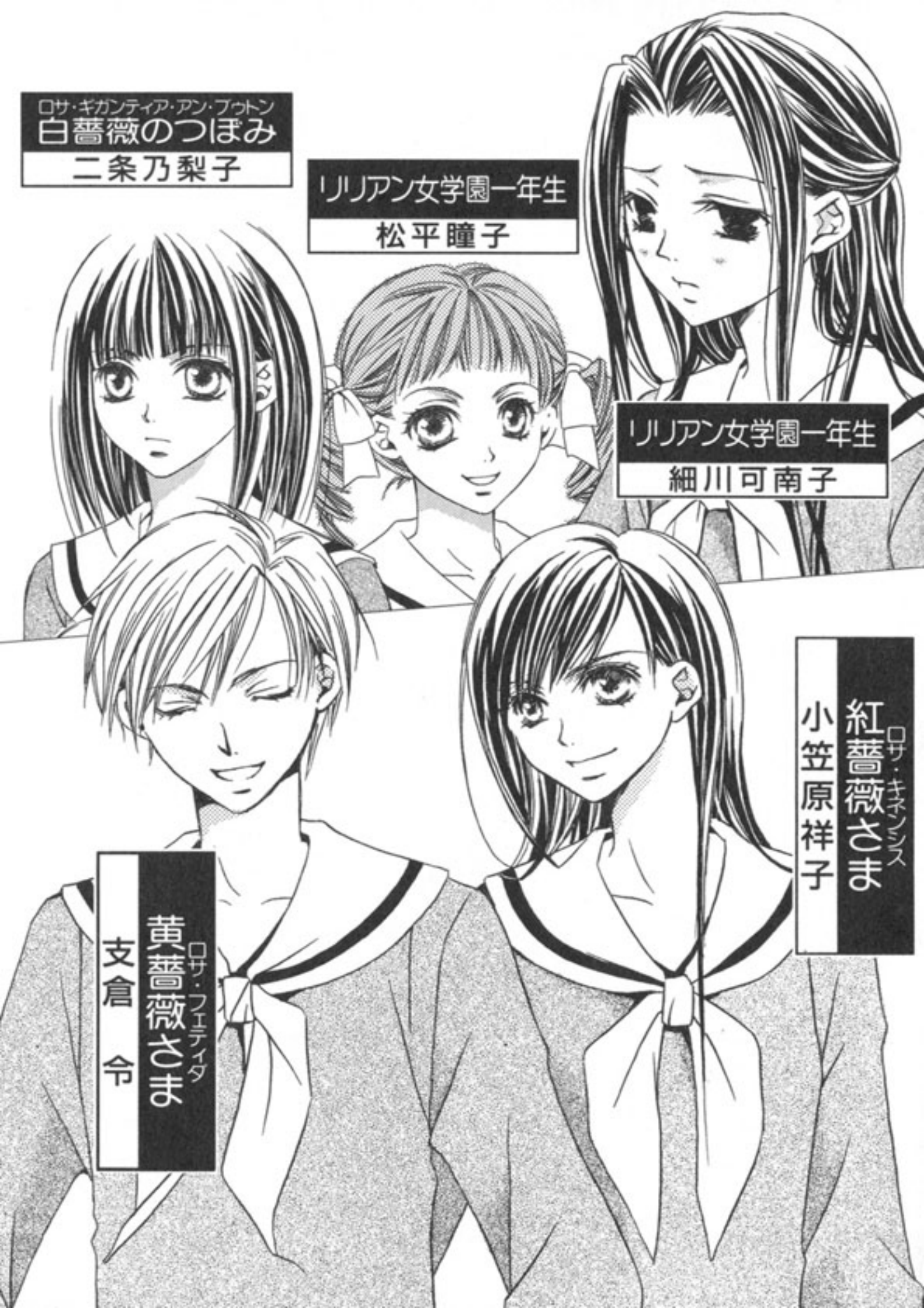
COBALT-SERIES

マリア様がみてる

特別でないただの一日

今野緒雪

集英社


ロサ・ギガンティア・アン・ブゥトン
白薔薇のつぼみ
二条乃梨子
リリアン女学園一年生
松平瞳子
リリアン女学園一年生
細川可南子
ロサ・キネンシス
紅薔薇さま
小笠原祥子
ロサ・フェティダ
黄薔薇さま
支倉　令

Volume 18

Nothing Special, Just a Normal Day

Prologue

"Good day."

"Good day."

Cheerful morning greetings echo through the clear blue sky. Today they once again pass under the tall gates into Maria-sama's garden where maidens assemble with their pure smiles, like angels.

Their bodies, which know no stain, are wrapped in dark-colored uniforms.

The pleats of their skirts should not be disarranged, nor should their white sailor collars flutter; here walking slowly is preferred. Of course, here there are no shameless students that would run to make it before the very last moment.

This is Lillian Girls' Private School.

Established in the 34th year of the Meiji period, it is said that this academy was founded for the sake of the daughters of the nobility, a traditional Catholic girls' school.

It is located within the Tokyo Metropolitan area. Even now, much of the original greenery of Musashino remains as, watched over by God from kindergarten to university, this garden undertakes to the complete education of these maidens.

Times change, and from the Meiji Period, three times a new era has begun, until the present day Heisei, but for eighteen years, pure young women pass through here for a sheltered upbringing and education in culture. It is a valuable education, but something just as precious is left behind in that school.

On this day, one year ago, this lone young woman - Fukuzawa Yumi - became bathed in the attention of the high school. Thinking back upon that year, many things had happened.

In the first place, that meeting had been in front of Maria-sama. At that time, Sachiko-sama had fixed her messy tie--, it was not a situation that was soaked in peaceful memories.

Although she now dealt with many problems, and some were still unresolved, the school festival came anyway, uncaring.

Even if you make an excuse, God does not stop the sun, the hand moves the calendar even as you stand before it and sigh, and the head must do its work.

So, busy, busy.

Shock

Part 1.

It began with that one sentence.

“Right, right, regarding the School Festival performance.”

We have to go back a little, to just before the field trip. It was the Yamayurikai’s play sponsorship meeting and, for the first time, this year’s performance for the school festival was being divulged to the first and second years.

It was lunchtime on the day after the Sports Festival had been completed safely, in the middle of a casual get-together as they all ate lunch in the Rose Mansion, when Rosa Chinensis, Ogasawara Sachiko, stood up and said it.

Right, right, regarding the School Festival performance, just so.

Because she said “performance” so blandly, her sœur, Fukuzawa Yumi, did not immediately comprehend that she was talking about “the play” they would do. Why do you say it like it’s completely about some other club’s problem, Onee-sama.

“This year we’ll be doing ‘Torikaebaya Monogatari.’ That is all.”

And she sat.

“Torikaebaya…”

…Monogatari”

“Ah.”

Commented those who listened, in turn.

First, the person who has said, “Torikaebaya…” had been Rosa Foetida en Bouton, Shimazu Yoshino-san.

At first glance taking over the sentence from her friend, but objectively, just being absent-minded, Yumi has uttered the line “…Monogatari.”

And, although at first the “Ah” appeared to be said by one person, in truth it was two voices layered on one another. In perfect harmony were the duet made up of the two who had been sœur for three months, Rosa Gigantea, Tōdō Shimako-san, and her sœur, Nijou Noriko-chan.

Although it was just lunchtime, all of the official members of the Rose families were present at the Rose Mansion. The two first-years who assisted them were not there – and thinking about it, the Red, Yellow and White all had two members. All told, six people.

"What do you mean, 'Ah.'" Rosa Foetida, Hasekura Rei, asked the White Rose sisters. "That response was different from Yoshino and Yumi-chan's, you two." As if sometime previous to Sachiko-sama having reported the title, they may have already heard it, and so when they heard, they recalled that time.

Anyway, the problem was "Torikaebaya Monogatari."

"Ah." A little late, Yumi suddenly cried out. Sachiko-sama, who was sitting a little apart for the purposes of the meeting said, "That was a late response," with her brows drawn together. But, the Yellow and White Rose sisters who did not know the situation, could not possibly have understood.

"Here." From within her schoolbag, Shimako-san withdrew a copy of a book and laid it on the table.

"A library book?"

Before Rei-sama could reach her arm out, Yoshino-san took the book and flipped through the pages randomly.

"Ah, the book of fables, huh?"

"Yoshino-san, you know it?"

"When Yumi-san was returning it and Noriko-chan borrowed it, I saw it. Ah, that's it. Shimako-san, when you are done, I definitely want to borrow it."

It was a volume of a Japanese classical literature series, which had a number of tales in it. "Torikaebaya Monogatari" was one of those. "I see. That was why you said 'Ah.'" Rei-sama turned the book away from Yoshino-san and gazed at it with a nod. "So? Why did you have the book, Yumi-chan?"

“Onee-sama said I should read it. It would have been nice if she said it had the play theme in it at the beginning.” What a waste, Onee- sama’s face said, when Yumi glanced at it, but Sachiko-sama’s response was unexpected.

“Don’t be silly. I couldn’t tell you could I?”

“Eh, why?”

“If I had said anything, you would have opposed it, right? Therefore, Rei and I discussed a way to prepare you ahead of time without saying anything.”

“Why should we oppose it?”

The “Torikaebaya Monogatari” was a classic Japanese tale, which had patterns of love between men and women at every step, which might be just a little too stimulating for high school students. However, if that were the reason for rejecting it, it would be more likely to be Sachiko-sama than Yumi.

“…That’s it, is it.” Yoshino-san said dryly.

“What is?”

“What Yumi-san said before. Please, say it again.”

Although she didn’t understand why, Yumi did as Yoshino-san asked.

“Why should I… Oppose it? Eh? What - why only me?”

All of a sudden, those who were her companions suddenly treated her as an outsider, as first Yoshino-san, then Shimako-san and Noriko-chan, whose expression said that she already comprehended, all began to nod their heads uniformly.

Still not understanding, Yumi pointed a finger at herself and shook her head back and forth. Feeling her helplessness, her friends felt compassion, so Yoshino-san offered a hint.

“Yumi-san, you read the book?”

“I read it.”

“Then, let’s do an association game. “If I say ‘Momotaro.’”

“Uh, Demon Killer?”

“‘Genji Monogatari.’”

“Biography of a playboy.”

“Hmm, can you really call it a biography, I wonder… Ah well. ‘Taketori Monogatari.’”

“B, beautiful alien, that returns to the moon?”

What, what kind of conclusion could be made from all these answers, that could have anything to do with the topic.

“Then ‘Torikaebaya Monogatari’ is?”

“Identical twins change places with one another---, ehhh!?” And, at last, thickheaded Yumi got it. “Y, you’re kidding.”

“Why would you think that we’re kidding.” The three who were treating Yumi as an outsider all looked at her with the same expression.

“It might be pitiful, but it’s been decided, hasn’t it.” Chuckling, Yoshino-san patted Yumi on the shoulder.

“That’s right. Yūki-san is taking great pains to come over and help us.”

Don’t just blandly consent, help me, please, Shimako-san.

“I’d expect nothing less from Rosa Chinensis. You have a good eye for this kind of thing.” This from Noriko-chan. Although everyone was sympathetic, they all seemed to be glad from the bottom of their hearts that she had been the one chosen.

“We’d be glad to take your place but, unfortunately, none of us look nearly identical to Yūki-kun.” Applying the logic for why the substitution could not ever take place. Yoshino’s cute face now looked like that of an evil witch.

“Onee-samaaaa…” Knowing it was useless from the start, Yumi turned from her loss with Yoshino-san, using the power of her cutest face as she gazed at her.

“It’s as they said. Resign yourself to the decision, Yumi.”

A splendid defeat.

The quantity of affection was not the problem. It was just, simply, that it was Sachiko-sama and not Rei-sama who said it.

“Your answer?”

“...Yes.” In other words, the person who had escaped from the dead heat for the lead role last year, was going to be doing it this year.

Fukuzawa Yumi, in the autumn of her seventeenth year.

Part 2.

“I wonder why.”

The sixth period was about over, phew, another day of classes safely past, as she fell prostrate across the surface of her desk, the words escaped her mouth, but the question repeated over and over in her heart. Because of the shock brought on by Sachiko-sama’s bomb, her time for sleep had been taken up by schoolwork, politics and economics. And on the other hand, the contents of her classes never made it inside her head.

“When you say you ‘wonder why,’ you mean the reason behind ‘Torikaebaya Monogatari’?” Although Yumi has been talking to herself, the words came out instinctively, Yoshino-san responded as she came over to stand beside her.

“Mm. Yeah.”

Nodding, Yoshino-san gestured with her head towards the hallway like she was saying “let me borrow you for a sec.” Whatever it is that she thought she was to go out of the classroom for, Shimako-san was already there, waiting.

“The plan was conceived about a year ago, which Rei-chan told me about back then. Of course, she didn’t know about Yūki-kun’s existence until New Year but, right from the beginning, Sachiko-sama was thinking about doing the ‘Torikaebaya’.”

Back then she was told, when was that. Why was she thinking about that; Yumi leant an ear to what Yoshino-san was saying. She had been spacey from shock during recess while Yoshino-san seemed totally vigorous as she moved around. Was this gathering and exchanging information in preparation for their meeting after school?

“Now that you say that, I remember something about that as well.” Shimako-san said.

What, what, from left and right the two from second-year Matsu class drew closer.

“Last year at the School Festival, it was Eriko-sama.”

“Eriko-sama?” As if Yoshino-san had been shocked by electricity, her body began to shake.

Shimako-san was surprised. “W… What’s wrong?”

“Ah, this is Yoshino-san’s overreaction to Eriko-sama’s name nowadays. Just ignore it and continue, Shimako-san.” Yumi explained for Yoshino-san. Because it would take too long if she told everything that had happened from beginning to end, she abridged the situation considerably, but it was basically correct. Yoshino-san was receiving pressure every day from the graduated former Rosa Foetida, Torii Eriko.

“I… Is that so?”

“Um, so you’re saying that last year Eriko-sama had influence over the next year?”

“Ah, now what I heard comes to mind. We were supposed to do ‘Kaguya-hime.’” Yumi remembered. But Sachiko-sama’s long, smooth, straight hair would be difficult to put up, she had said sarcastically.

“That was a hint, huh.”

“But, ‘Kaguya-hime’ would have been fine, wouldn’t it. Why ‘Torikaebaya’?” “Taketori Monogatari’ was a story that everyone knows, it wouldn’t be good.”

“Don’t be silly. That is not the reason Sachiko-sama chose ‘Torikaebaya’.” Yoshino-san smiled.

“Why?”

“Noriko-chan just tell poor Yumi-sama already.” She spoke over her shoulder to where the latecomer stood.

“Rosa Chinensis has no intention of playing the lead role herself this year. However, if we were to do ‘Kaguya-hime,’ based on her looks, there’s no way she could pass off the role. In order to avoid doing that, she had to pick a story for which she was completely unsuited for the role.”

“So that’s.”

“‘Torikaebaya Monogatari.’”

“I’m going to give her a talking to.” Yumi walked down the hall swiftly. She aimed for the third-year Matsu class. Onee-sama’s class. If Noriko-chan’s reasoning was correct, then because she did not want to play the lead role, she was making a scapegoat of her little sister.

“Wait!” Yoshino-san grabbed her wrist. “Do you even know what you’re going to say to Sachiko-sama?”

“Uh…”

Definitely. If she began with “Why are you doing this horrible thing,” the whole dispute wouldn’t be likely to be cleared up right away.

“W, well. I could say ‘Torikaebaya’ has a pretty heavy theme. The protagonist conceives and bears a child, something that, if played straight, might not be suitable for a high school play.”

“Regarding that, Sachiko-sama already said that we’d cut that part and just do the whole thing about the man and woman switching clothes and having to act masculine and feminine, right? Weren’t you listening?”

Yes, she had been listening. However, of course she had wanted to oppose it.

“Um. Since it’s a historical piece, it will need a lot of work for the sets and costumes”

“The handicrafts club and the fine arts club seem enthusiastic about it. Even before they made the request, they went there to talk about it with them.” They hadn’t been given a detailed description at the time but, it seemed that they had had an order for a set of costumes and a set to be made. They weren’t told what the title was, but they were to understand that it was a Heian period tale.

“Then. Um.”

“So, you’re going to just say that it was an awful thing to do.”

“Uh - “

“So, try saying that you’re unwilling to do ‘Torikaebaya’ but will give in if it’s something else, right? If they change the story, you’ll play the lead role.”

“Like what?” Yumi asked over her shoulder.

“‘The Prince and the Pauper’” said Shimako-san who had heard Yoshino-san’s words.

“‘The Parent Trap.’”

“‘November Gymnasium.’” continued Noriko-chan.

“Speaking of stories where clothes are switched, those are all from different times and places. If we can change the story from being a Heian period piece, it’ll be one step up.”

One step up, you say, Yoshino-san. Oy oy. We gathered together during this short space of time before homeroom and the conclusion is “one step up.”

“Ah, it’s just about time to go back.” Noriko-chan said, looking at her wristwatch.

“Really. Yumi-san. We’ll provide all the support we can manage. Well, then.” Shimako-san san left them to join the second-year Fuji homeroom teacher who could be seen walking down the hall.

“…” She thought that they were standing there trying to resolve the issue of her playing the lead role but, but the conclusion of the gathering seemed to be “Give it up Yumi,” instead, perhaps? She was somehow overcome with a feeling of exhaustion.

The remaining two, since the teacher had not yet come and there was no reason to return to the classroom and wait, for the moment remained in the hall, leaning upon a wall.

“Which reminds me, Yumi-san. It’s coming up on a year since you and Sachiko-sama became sœur, right? What was your promise?” In Yoshino-san’s head it seemed that there was already a “settled” mark next to ‘Torikaebaya.’

“Nothing.” Yumi shook her head. What speaking of which was this was this, Yoshino-san, she almost repeated back at her, but the answer was “there are things to do, things to not do, there’s always some kind of event.”

On the one-year day of her having become a student in high school, after school, Rei-sama had brought a homemade cake to the Shimazu house. The two of them had eaten the whole thing by themselves with a fork in Yoshino’s room.

“Thinking about it, Rei-chan’s attitude was just like a husband buying flowers for his wife on their wedding anniversary.” Playing with the rosary chain that hung around her neck, Yoshino-san smiled. But, at the time, she hadn’t noticed Rei-sama’s feeling. “Huh, why cake?” had been her feeling. Of course the cake had been delicious so eating it was nice. “In our situation, we’ve always lived next door to one another. So even if no rosary was given or taken, it was always decided that we were sœur, so there isn’t an anniversary to celebrate, you know?”

It was like saying that the husband goes out and buys flowers for the wedding anniversary, but the wife forgets and makes the usual dinner; what a pathetic husband. That was Rei-sama.

But, it wasn’t as pitiful as when she was asleep recently and thought that she hadn’t been able to eat food that she had made. At least they had eaten the food together.

“But, you know, Yumi-san’s situation is clearly not the same as mine.”

“Mm, yeah.”

“More than what month or what day, it’s the night of the school festival, something like that, right?”

“…Mm, right.”

“It’s a special day for you two, when Sachiko-sama pleaded with you, it must be nice to have such a terrific anniversary.” She stated simply what many others must be thinking. That pleading had been a high hurdle for Yumi and even though she had cleared that, what had just been put in front of her was the problem now.

What on earth was a terrific anniversary?

What could she do, so that their first anniversary event would not be forgotten?

“Ah - there you are, Yoshino-san, Yumi-san.” The School Festival Executive Committee representative stuck her head of the classroom and called to them. “We’re going to decide the schedule for working the food stand before homeroom, can you please take your seats?”

Ah, com~ing.” Answering, they pushed themselves off the wall.

“Phew. Here we go.”

Preparations for the school festival were steadily advancing.

This year the second-year Matsu class was doing a festival food stand. The plan was to do it in cooperation with Shimako-san’s class, second-year Fuji class.

Part 3.

Other than Yumi, there was another lead actor who, when told the information would say “n, no way,” just as she had.

“There’s no way.”

While that was being said; I see - only a few hours ago I made that same face, Yumi thought as she gazed objectively at her younger brother’s face.

“What? I’m in the same situation, and I have no room at all do I?”

You haven’t give me any room either, Yūki’s expression condemned Yumi as he looked at her.

“When I heard about it the first time, my reaction was the same as yours.”

When she had come home, and put some distance of a few hours between her and the shock, so she was able to calm down a little and talk. Surprise does not continue, unexpectedly. But then, if afterwards you just go and do it, then you get a reputation for giving up.

However, maybe the time she picked to begin this conversation was bad, Yumi thought. Because it was thirty minutes after dinner and this wasn’t grandmother’s stomach medicine. Maybe it would have been better to wait a little while longer, upon a little reflection. The shock might make it a little difficult for Yūki to digest the Japanese-style hamburger in his stomach.

But, right after cleaning up after dinner, Yūki had gone upstairs and gotten ready to take a bath, and if she had waited for Yūki to come out of the bath, surely she would have been told, “Yumi hurry and take your bath” by her mother, and soon the television show he wanted to watch would be starting and they couldn’t talk comfortably, and after that Yumi wanted to watch this week’s variety show. Then, when she had caught him, she suddenly wasn’t able to tell him.

Yumi has received orders from Onee-sama to tell Yūki before today was over. Because the second-year class trip began this Friday, and she wanted to hand over the script to the Hanadera side before that, which would give them about a week for them to look over the script.

Having delayed the announcement until this time, maybe the lead actors (the Fukuzawa siblings) wouldn't have the leisure to complain too much. Yumi was off to Italy, where it would be opposed if she wanted to make an overseas phone call, and without the other actor with whom he was intertwined, Yumi, Yūki wasn't free to move on his own, so. If one thought about it.

"Sachiko-san did this, huh." Slapping the script he held in his hand lightly, Yūki aid, "There isn't anyone who can do this other than Yumi and myself." He placed his towel, pajamas and other accoutrements on the bed and sat himself in the desk chair backwards.

"Hmm. So you already know what the contents of the 'Torikaebaya' are then."

Yumi turned around, taking one of the pillows from Yūki's bed and sat down on the floor on it as if it were a cushion.

"I've never read it. But I've never read all of 'Genji Monogatari' either, and I know the main points of the story. That much at least."

Once again "Genji Monogatari" was mentioned. It was easy to make such a reference, since it had a similar atmosphere to "Torikaebaya." No, maybe it was simply that Yoshino-san's and Yūki's thought processes worked the same.

"When I think of "Genji Monogatari" inevitably I think of a record of a single generation of a playboy. Like 'Wakamurasaki'"

All she remembered of that was the scene where the sparrow chick was shot and released by Inuki. "Of course the name Inuki is that of a person and has nothing to do with a dog," the teacher had explained.

“Single generation? That’s got to be wrong, doesn’t it? There’s Kaoru after all.”

“Kaoru?”

Oh, yeah, Yoshino-san has also objected to it being called about a ‘single generation’.”

“The conclusion of ‘Genji Monogatari’ centers around Kaoru. Haven’t you heard of the Ujijuujou?”

Ujijuujou. Kind of heard about it, kind of not.

“Then, what kind of person is Kaoru?”

“Hikaru Genji’s son. No… I should say, the son of his unfaithful consort? Well, a lot happened.” Yūki hesitated. He seemed to be reluctant to have this kind of frank talk with his sibling. Or because it was Yumi, he didn’t want to take the initiative.

“Since you haven’t read it, it’s hard to know all the details.”

“Yes, that’s it.” Yūki sat on the chair and stared up at the ceiling contemplatively. And whatever he was thinking about, his posture returned to normal, and he smiled bitterly. “Maybe that’s it. That it’s Kashiwagi-sempai’s fault.”

“Kashiwagi-san…?”

“When I think of ‘Genji Monogatari,’ I think of Kashiwagi. He was called “Hikaru-no-kimi” by some of the students. Those students who had Genji-mania, and when the student council gathered. Surely he’d be familiar with it.”

“--They called him ‘Hikaru-no-kimi.” Even coming of her mouth now, calling him that was a little embarrassing, but it was an amazing name. It fit his image perfectly. Kashiwagi was handsome, had good manners, was like a young lord and smart. However, you might change the “lady” part of a “lady’s man” into “man.”

“Ahh.” Yūki let out a big sigh. “When compared to Kashiwagi-san last year, what I’m doing is pathetic.”

“Last year, huh?”

Every year Hanadera Gakuin and Lillian Jogakuen Student Councils customarily helped each other out with their school festivals. Last year for the Lillian school festival, the Hanadera Student Council president, Kashiwagi-san, had undertaken the role of the Prince in Cinderella.

“That wasn’t too hard for his turn, was it.”

“That was because it was Kashiwagi-sempai. About this time last year, when we heard what he’d have to do, we all began to shudder.”

“Why?”

“Because he had to dance in the ball scene.”

“Ah. I see.”

Because they had not learned how to, it would have been impossible, is what he was saying. More importantly he was saying that, in front of people, an appearance at a girls’ school gymnasium couldn’t be endured. Therefore, Kashiwagi-san who cleared it so easily was a man who deserved men’s respect. They didn’t want to even learn it, she could understand that, and she couldn’t.

“So, you’re thinking that this time, it will be even harder than the Prince in Cinderella?”

“Well, it’s a double role isn’t it. Isn’t it too much work, since I’m just a person helping out the school next door?”

“Well, I guess. But, in your case, you don’t have to dance, you just have to memorize lines, right?”

“It depends. Sachiko-san might not be acquainted with my acting abilities.”

True, true. Previously Yūki hadn’t spoken more than the one line of, “Hey, Sachiko-san,” while Sachiko-sama was within point-blank range of seeing him.

“It can’t be helped - you were picked for your face, weren’t you?”

“If I had had a choice when I was born, I would have chosen Mom’s face.” The Fukuzawa siblings both had their father’s tanuki face.

“I think that, if I had had a choice for which one I liked, I would have picked Mom’s face too.”

“Oh well, that conclusion’s no good.”

The fact that they were the spitting image of one another in body and face was the very reason their had been picked for these roles in ‘Torikaebaya.’”

“Let’s just give up and try and remember the lines.”

“Yeah.” Talking about their faces was a barren conversation.

“Anyway, I’m going into the bath. You win, my spirit to resist is broken.” Clapping his hands lightly, Yūki rose from the chair.

“…Have fun. I’m sorry for asking you to undertake this important task. But you’re totally saving me.”

Yumi watched Yūki walk to the stairs, then reached out for the door knob to her own room. Three steps down, Yūki stopped and turned back over his shoulder.

“Maybe because you’re a woman, you don’t understand, I guess.”

“Mm?”

“It’s not just that there’s a lot of lines as a lead actor that’s getting me down.”

What, what? The feeling of a confession of something big was drifting about in the air, it seemed. A boy. Yumi let go of the doorknob and turned back to face him.

“It’s called ‘Torikaebaya’. I’m going to have to disguise myself as a woman.”

“Eh?”

“And that’s pretty painful.” Saying that, Yūki waved goodbye behind him and took his polluted atmosphere down to the first floor.

“That what it was, huh?” Left behind Yumi muttered quietly to herself.

Dance in the play, dress as a woman in the play. For a guy, which was more embarrassing.

Fukuzawa Yūki, in his sixteenth year.

In his heart, which way would the balances tip; and even a big shake would not lead to a simple conclusion.

Are You Changing?

Part 1.

Even if we're speaking of men, there are in the world many who do not resist the idea of dressing as a woman.

"How nice, how nice, playing a female role. I'm jealous of you, Yukichi. Not fair, not fair, not fair."

In fact, it was the exact opposite, they want to. This was surely one of these men. Here was that person. Rolling the Yamayurikai version of "Torikaebaya" up into a cylinder, he slapped his classmate's shoulder as if that might, if at all possible, permit him his wish.

"It's not a female role. It's the role of a brother that changes clothes to disguise himself as his sister."

"Well, that's the same thing."

"It's not the same thing." As far as Yūki was concerned, it seemed that it was important that this be made clear.

Speaking of Yumi, it seemed that Arisu was saying, for him there was no difference in playing the female role or disguising one as a woman, and although her younger brother was telling the truth, and not to be trivial, but the idea of Arisu and Yūki gazing upon one another happily did not make her very pleased.

Sachiko-sama, who did not like coming into contact with men, seemed fairly immune to this situation between Arisu and Yūki. Probably because the situation between them could be called man to man, Yūki did not look very happy.

The second-years had been restored to the school safely last Saturday. Today, those Hanadera students who were helping had been come to Lillian for an arranged meeting to practice and concurrently work on costumes.

Next to one another were the third-years Nikkō and Gakkō, aka Yakushiji Akimitsu and Tomomitsu, brothers who were, incidentally, twins. Then the second-years. First of all was over-muscled Takada Magane-kun then accounts-loving Kobayashi Masamune-kun.

The single flower petal blooming at the boy's school, Arisu, aka Arisugawa... (Abbreviation used by the person himself)...-kun. No, -san.

Last was Yumi's same year in school younger brother, Fukuzawa Yūki. Those were the six.

It might have been because the dressing room in a girls' school is so feminine, or because they realized that they were surrounded by twice as many girls as their own numbers, but those from Hanadera were much more reticent than previously. Only one, Arisu, took to it like a fish in water.

"Yumi-san will make a terrific otokoyaku. It really is a fantastic idea, Sachiko-sama. I appreciate it from the bottom of my heart. Until the school festival, no, until the school festival is completely over, I'm here for you. So please, tell me, how I can serve you best."

"Arisu, you're bubbling over too much." Among the five of them, the one who was youngest, currently Student Council President, Yūki warned him lightly. But even so, Arisu was far too stimulated to stop.

"But it's a girls' school festival. I had given up on ever being able to participate in one in my lifetime. Ah - are these the basted costumes?"

The members of the Performance Arts club entered the preparation room carrying costume after costume, which they removed from the folds of cloth and spread out upon the desk.

"Wow, wonderful. I want to try them on."

"Arisu." Yūki said again.

"Oka-y."

"It's all right. We can try them for a little while, anyway. We're not all gathered together yet." Sachiko-sama crosschecked all the costumes with the actor's names while she spoke.

Looking around at the women gathered in the clothing room, it appeared that the trio from the First-year Tsubaki class was not there. With the presence of the Performance Arts and Invention club members in the room, it was a little difficult to identify who was there or not.

“Really!?”

“Don’t get them dirty now. Look, take off your slippers, there, and put them on this vinyl sheet.” Rei-sama chose an appropriate kimono and handed it over to Arisu.

“Yes-. I’ll be careful~.” Following instructions, Arisu excitedly put on the costume. In the circumstances, it really looked like a girl changing into her clothes; that precisely folded gakuran that he had taken off was sure to induce pathos.

“…It looks good…” Yumi-muttered, while Yoshino-san looked at him a little jealously.

“Mm.”

“No offense to Rei-chan, but it feels like Arisu positively looks like someone who should be called ‘Princess.’”

Ah, um.”

Directly in front of him, about five meters away, stood Rei-sama, and although she thought it too, there was no way Yumi was going to say it out loud. It was fine for her relative Yoshino-san to say it, though.

“I wonder. Arisu doesn’t look like a son and Rei-chan doesn’t look like a daughter. It looks as if their fathers inadvertently switched them, huh.”

“Ah, then, maybe Rei-chan and Arisu can do it? The ‘Torikaebaya Monogatari.’”

“Please stop, Yumi-chan.” Rei-sama said over her shoulder, panicking. Mm, of course Rei-sama could hear her, since she was standing behind her. “Don’t say such things, not even as a joke.” Her eyes were scary. In the past, Rei-sama might have seen things come to pass that had been nonchalantly mentioned. Arisu, however, did not seem dissatisfied in the least.

“Well. If we did do that, I was just saying they would do it well.”

“There you go, talking in your sleep again.” Sachiko-sama thrust herself into the conversation, handing over a folded kimono to Yumi. “I won’t have last year’s changing of who plays what over and over again continue this year. Those of us who are third-years have already stood on the stage undertaking many and various roles, therefore, we shouldn’t be the lead actors, you understand, don’t you?”

Script writer, stage director, and it looked like today, the people who coordinated a meeting between the art and stage crew clubs, that’s what they would do… Well, that was the way it was, so Yumi had no choice but to withdraw. If you said it the other way that, because they did not want to play the lead roles, they had probably taken on a lot of other difficult work, it would not be reading too deeply into it.

“Then, everyone from Hanadera, it’s a little small, but please change your clothes in the preparation room. As soon as your preparations are complete, please call out, thank you for your cooperation.”

In other words, please don’t come out of your own accord. Because the women will be changing in here, right. Arisu pulled his hair back a little, and took off the women’s kimono he wore, took the men’s kimono that bore his name into his arms and disappeared into the changing room.

When there were no more men in the clothing room, Yumi and the others began to try on their clothes, as well. Because this time was a Heian period play, it was traditional kimonos. The women’s form was a simplified version of the 12-layered kimono.

Of course, they did not have pure silk to use at a girls’ school for the school festival. The cloth was something picked up at a discount or wagon sale, so it was just cheap cotton that had been died with black tea or onion. Basically, what they would wear was four layers.

First was red hakama, which were baggy, slippery pants. Because it wouldn't be seen from the outside, it was gathered at the waist with elastic, so it had the feeling of a large, baggy pajama.

Next, a kimono on which both the collar and the sleeves had many layers sewn into them. This was a trick to make it look like they were wearing one garment over another. It was to be expected that they could not make something to wear that would be the full twelve layers.

From there came the pleated skirt called a "mo" that was wrapped around the stomach from behind and then the long coat worn over the kimono and all was perfect. With the budget they had Katsura had not been able to buy wigs, so they wrapped their hair up in black cloth, like bandannas, with the leftover portion hanging loosely down their backs. From close up it had the feeling of "what were you thinking?" but seen from a distance it wasn't too bad. The invention club had taken a hint from the nun's wimples for this masterpiece. Now that Yumi saw it in practice, it was like "chose the knots for your sideburns" kind of idea, and the clubs seemed to carry back with them a very positive spirit.

When Yumi saw the costume for the lead role, that of the Princess's chief councilor, she noticed something.

"Isn't that a little big?"

"Which? Ah, yes."

As the Princess of the Heian period, tugged herself along to compare herself with Yoshino's hem, there seemed to be a lot trailing. Because she was the lead actress, her hem was longer as a little service, free of charge, it seemed.

"If I pick this up little, it'll be the same as Yoshino-san's."

Sachiko-sama stopped the arts club member's needle as she made the suggestion by calling out "No, don't."

"Don't try to fix that on your own. That has to be worn by Yūki-san after all."

“Ah?”

Two people of a different size were wearing the same outfit, and there hadn’t been a way to estimate how much superfluous material they needed. The Fukuzawa siblings would be using it alternately standing on the stage while turning.

Better too big than too small. In fact, the garment had been made to fit the larger Yūki’s size. Now she could see, that was why it seemed so loose. Luckily there had been a change of course just in time, since if they had matched the hem to Yoshino’s, he might not be able to move.

Still, the women’s outfit hid the feet, which was good. When the man and woman switched and Yumi got into a men’s kimono, the length of her leg being less wouldn’t be given away.

“Look at it and think hard, Yumi,” Sachiko-sama said. “I realized at the Hanadera Academy school festival.”

“Hanadera’s?”

“Yūki’s school uniform.”

“Ah.” As she said when, at the Hanadera Academy school festival Yumi had worn Yūki’s school uniform, the obviously looseness and length had caused her problems. At that time, certainly--.

“No way, Onee-sama, you’re not thinking of making me wear geta again…” The Princess would walk clip-clopping.

The son of a court noble might walk clip cloppingly. However, letting the feet be seen was more like something a crow goblin would do, rather than a young man.

“I’m not saying we should go that far. But something with lift wouldn’t be bad.” From somewhere, Sachiko-sama picked up a box and held it out to Yumi. She took off the cover.

“This is…”

“It’s the kind of geta that a maiko-san wear. I did some research into the period and these will match your kimono.

“Ah.”

Of course. Apprentice geisha moved around Gion snappily, like one saw in movies or on television. Yes, but, how did Sachiko-sama get a hold of a pair? That was the real question, she thought.

“Eh-” It wasn’t normal, to have shoes that a maiko-san would wear in one’s home. ----Although, now that she thought about it, no matter how Yumi looked at the Ogasawara household, there was a part that deviated greatly from “normal household.”

“Nothing bad. These weren’t being used by anyone regularly, they were in the cellar.”

“Cellar.” See, normal households did not have these kind of things. Not unless it was an old person’s house in the sticks. This was hardly separated from the center of an urban area, it was Tokyo.

“My father and grandfather received these from a childhood friend who was a maiko-san, really - don’t react, just ignore it, please.”

“Ah… Yes.”

With that warning, Sachiko-sama made it plain that they had touched upon a point about her father and grandfather’s other women, Yumi was certain. This conversation was taboo. It would be best if she responded quickly. So she took the shoes that Sachiko-sama was proffering without a word. --Really, why on earth would those men of the Ogasawara family go outside the household?

The women’s group finished changing clothes and called the men in, and they got into full-blown alterations. The performance arts club members divided the labor, working around the costume-wearing actors, checking to make things bigger or smaller, and making alterations.

Yumi also behaved well and became a sewing mannequin, when a loud shout of ‘waaaah!’ came from around the corner.

“Yakushiji-san, you two really are big, aren’t you? I’d heard the rumors, but. Mmm, what should we do? If you stand up to your full height, there might not be enough length.”

The Yakushiji brothers seemed to take this as a compliment, with happy expressions that said, “Yes, we’re big.”

“Should we lengthen it, do you think, Rosa Chinensis? If we get the same cloth and match it up, I even think we have the same color, another 20 centimeters might be enough, I think.”

Sachiko-sama, who had been spoken to, came over for a moment. “Wait one moment. Let’s hold off on that.”

“Hold off?”

“I just had a good idea. But, because the first-years aren’t here, I can’t yet make a decision. Just before we were matching the costume to fit Yūki-san and Yumi. I’m terribly sorry to trouble you, gentlemen, but could you join Yūki-san in the preparation room and wait on standby? Ah, and will the others please join them as they are.” This last to Takada-kun’s back, as he was loosening the string to his costume.

“Swapping, huh?” Yumi muttered, as she shed her kimono.

What did that remind her of? A year ago, when they were fitting the costumes for “Cinderella’, right, she had switched costumes with Sachiko-sama.

Cinderella and Sister B. Because she was not sure which one of these two different roles they would play. This was before the two of them had had their talk about becoming sœur.

In the end, it was Sachiko-sama who had been Cinderella and Yumi had been committed to the part of Sister B. This time too, it was decided which of them she would play.

When Yumi, now in her underwear, had changed out of the kimono, the arts club members had taken it and knocked on the door to the preparation room. It was Arisu who opened the door holding the removed kimono and returned after the “exchange.” It was significant to be doing costume for so many men. Last year it had just been Kashiwagi-san, who had been extremely open.

“Well well.”

“Aha.”

When she had changed, they looked at Yumi, the girls in the place all suppressed a smile.

“Really, it suits you.”

“With the exception of the length.”

That could be modified with the false-bottomed clogs. The kimono would hide her figure, which would make it harder to tell which would which. Looking at herself in the mirror, for one second Yumi thought that she was looking at Yūki.

“Fantastic.”

She didn’t quite know why, but someone applauded. It wasn’t particularly laudable that the Fukuzawa siblings looked the splitting image of one another, but Sachiko-sama continued to applaud as if she were doing something meritorious while saying. “Mark that down well.” When the tempo slowed down, she could hear laughter coming from the preparation room. Apparently Yūki had finished changing.

“Gentlemen, please return.” Sachiko-sama called out and, as the door to the preparation room opened, there was the sound of a door and vigorous noise in the hallway.

“Sorry,” the three girls of first-year Tsubaki class called out. “We’re… Late.”

In their attempt to make their sempai not have to wait another second, the three seemed to have not imagined what was going on inside the room. Finding everyone wrapped up in nearly completed costumes in a confined space, much more than just in pieces of the handicrafts club’s work, the room was full of a considerably strange atmosphere. Noriko-chan’s “Sorry we’re late” tailed off and disappeared, while from Tōko’s mouth came a little “Wah” sound.

“Hey, what do you think, Kanako-chan? Doesn’t Yumi look lovely?” Rei-sama smiled, which confirmed that standing in front of Kanako-chan was Yūki.

“Please, Rei.” Even if Sachiko-sama wasn’t reproving her, her glance was understandable. It had been said over and over that they look alike; they weren’t identical twins, because they were different genders.

“…” Kanako-chan looked at Yūki for a full five seconds, then her expression clearly said that he looked foolish. “What is the meaning of this ‘Find the difference” puzzle?” Turning from Yūki dressed as a woman, she asked Yumi dressed as a man with a serious face.

“A, um… Kanako-chan?”

There was no deep meaning, really. Rei-sama was only joking without taking anything seriously. Therefore, that kind of response was a little troubling, she thought.

“Um, Kanako-chan. If you’re going to protest, then direct it at me. Yumi-chan had nothing to do with it.”

Look. As expected, Rei-sama was all in a dither. Rei-sama was, little by little, becoming more like Yoshino-san. Some time, not too far in the future from now, she was going to explode. A Yoshino explosion.

If she did explode, the post-processing would be difficult. She understood that but, even if she mollified Kanako-chan, Rei-sama’s nervousness wouldn’t be at an end. However, there was no way to warn Kanako-chan that easily. But, either way it went, she might be wrong and there would be no problem. Therefore, she decided to find a way to restore things, however difficult.

Now then, what was the atmosphere like, inside the thoughts of the female students? And, the bewildered folks from Hanadera.

“Re-”

“Ah-”

As Yoshino-san started the “Re-” or “Rei-chan,” Yumi erased it.

“Ah, um, this is the first time those from Hanadera Gakuin have met two of them. Um, this is Matsudaira Tōko-chan. And next to her is Hosokawa Kanako-chan. These girls are in the same first year class as Noriko-chan, and are helping us out until the school festival.

Yumi was conscious of acting like a clown. But there was not helping it. Once something started to come out of her mouth, there was no stopping it.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you.” Cleaning up after his sister’s plan, Yūki took the initiative with the introductions, although it looked a little weird, as he was dressed like a woman.

“Which one of you is Yumi-chan’s little sister and which is Yoshino-san’s little sister?”

Sorry, but the question asked by Kobayashi-san was completely ignored. That was more than they wanted to mix into this particularly situation.

Into the middle of this.

“Did something happen in class?” Shimako-san asked Noriko-chan. Tell me why you were late. One hour is not a “little” late.

“After cleaning, we got into a discussion about the school festival, which dragged on longer more than expected. Because we were taking a simple vote, I thought it would be over in ten minutes. But once it began, it went on and on…”

“Something got all confused, right? Tōko said something, then it was like which one, that got changed, or something like that. There are some prejudiced people. It was really annoying that they were thinking about something else at all much less ‘Please think about this carefully’ that those two people were so adamant about. It was a surprising development.”

“A surprising development. Tōko-chan.”

That people in her class would talk to her like that, she could believe there were classmates like that. Yumi had her own unhappy memories, however how she dealt with it, she couldn't remember all that well, but if she was troubled where would Tōko be able to turn for advice and Tōko-chan wouldn't want to cry in front of her.

Immediately, Sachiko-sama demanded that they get their costumes fitted.

Part 2.

After the latecomer first-years had finished changing, all the actors for the Yamayurikai's production of "Torikaebaya" were once again gathered in the clothing room, Sachiko spoke unexpectedly.

"Who here has learned all their lines?"

With a pitter-patter hands were raised; it seemed that not too many knew their cues or lines. In fact, it was Takeda-kun and Arisu.

"I see." Looking around her once again, Sachiko-sama nodded. This was probably the best thing to do in regards to Onee-sama, that those who did not know their lines did not raise their hands. This was Sachiko- sama, after all, lies would surely be seen through. Thinking about what would happen afterward, Yumi began to tremble a little.

"With sincerest apologies to those people, please forget all of your lines."

…

A few seconds passed.

"Eh------!?" Everyone's voice was raised at once.

"Just those people? Don't you mean all of us?" Everyone desperately sought to confirm. Of course. Those who had not memorized had a lot of lines to get into their heads.

"Is the script being changed?" Rei-sama asked, but Sachiko-sama shook her head.

"Some parts of it may be changed, I don't doubt. We should keep that to a minimum. And not until the day of the performance."

If she understood that, why then did she say to forget the lines--. Everyone sucked in their breath, as they realized what Sachiko-sama meant. Then, the words came out.

"We're changing the cast."

There it was.

"Eh--_?!"

This time because they were squaring of for “what’s coming”, there was less shock among them. No, “less” was a faulty expression. This was “not more than before.” Or something like that.

Of course, Yumi also once more joined in the cry of “Eh---!?” If she had though about it “changing the cast” would be something to welcome, since she had the most amount of lines to remember, something which popped into her brain just then. The other lead, Yūki, had a similar expression on his face. -- These two, the sibling destined for poverty.

“What do you mean? Who will be switched with whom?”

“Everyone.”

“Eh…?” Come on, it was getting tiring, being surprised.

“Why?”

“Because of the good idea that just came to me, I realized that it would be stranger to not do it, I think. Does anyone have a different idea from mine?”

Different, you say, Sachiko-sama.

While that was a sound argument, so far as it was cultivated, for the rest of them, if you might give us some time to think about it, it might not be one that can be launched into.

“If tomorrow were the day of the performance, this would undoubtedly be a reckless proposition. I think it’s fair to say that with two weeks to go, it’s still modifiable.”

“Even so.”

Switching all the roles. We’re not just thinking about tempo here. It might be a truly great idea, but if you don’t tell us, we won’t understand.

“Um. So what you’re saying is that I won’t be the lead?” Timidly, Yumi asked Sachiko-sama modestly. Then.

“Don’t worry. Yumi will still play the lead.”

“…Okay.”

She wasn't worried about that. Only a little hopeful. And just for a moment before she was disappointed.

"Then, I'll be knocked out as a lead?" Yūki asked, naturally. Worry and anticipation visible on his face.

"Not that, either."

"But, you said that all the roles will be switched, didn't you. Sachiko-san."

"I did." Sachiko-sama grinned, with a "weren't you listening"-like expression.

"Therefore, in the way that Yumi and Yūki-san are switching their roles. So, every role should be switched, don't you think?"

"Ehh-"

"Not just Yumi and Yūki-san, it's my intention that all of the men and women should switch."

"..."

No way. All of the people present in the room with the exception of Sachiko-sama moved to say that. Not only the actors, but the costumers the props and the stage crew, too.

"Now?"

"Now." Sachiko-sama nodded. "I want it to be a double 'Torikaebaya' on the stage." Upon seeing the sincerity in Sachiko-sama's gaze, everyone started to calculate what had to be done.

The stage set wouldn't have to be changed. It was possible to put the cast's name directly onto the poster without adding the roles. Where the problem lay was, of course, in the actor's costumes.

"We can make Yakushiji-san's costumes a little smaller, right? If Kanako-chan wears it, then we won't have to fix it too much." The truth was that Sachiko-sama has come up with this idea when Arisu tried on the women's kimono, and she became convinced of it as the Yakushiji's costumes were being fitted.

“That’s right. They’re about the same height, the women’s kimono is just straight lines to be sewn, so it could be comfortable.” The president of the handicrafts club nodded. “We need to start breaking up the hakama worn by the men right away.”

“The women’s hakama will have to be lengthened, and we’ll have to put something on the bottom of the kimonos and avoid them being seen as men, something to the back, as well.” Gradually the members of the handicrafts club, who had originally hesitated, got going.

“Um, it’s hopeless, I say it hopeless--”

Pulling a pin from a bracelet-type pincushion, the girl’s energy was now running wildly, as Yumi called out. However.

The words that came back to her were “It’s not hopeless.”

“What, this is all doable. This is all basted, so of course it can be fixed. It’s fine. We can do it. It’ll be an easy victory.” “Team Handicrafts” laughed loudly. When they brought themselves under control, they turned with fire to the challenge at hand.

So that’s how it was.

“We don’t want to do it either.” Yoshino-san, who hated to lose, lifted her fist and shook it. That energy flowed almost visibly, so that the Yakushiji brothers and Takeda-kun who stood behind them said “wahhh”.

“...So then, we’d better increase the number of practice days for the play. We’ll have today and Saturday this week, I wonder if we should also add two days this week. The remaining time can be independent for each school.” It was a snap for Kobayashi-kun to arrange the schedule in his head.

“Excuse me. Will this get approval from the Lillian school side?”

“Ah, if that’s it, it’ll be fine.” Rei-sama waved her hand.

“If, for that time, we meet this and next Wednesday at Hanadera Gakuin, I can prepare the application.”

“I’ll be an onnagata, huh.” Arisu bubbled over.

“This is Tōko-chan’s debut as a male actor,” Tōko-chan was a little giddy.

“I’m saying all this, but I should probably ask. Rosa Foetida, what is your opinion?” Sachiko-sama glanced at Rei-sama.

“I definitely think that if we do this, it’ll make it an interesting play.”

“And Rosa Gigantea?”

“It presents no burden to either Noriko or I. But--” The elder of the White Rose sisters turned her gaze towards the Fukuzawa siblings.

That was it. The problem was the feelings of the lead actors. There were already a lot of lines, and a play that was mixed up with the role switching, would it be safe to add another twist? Honestly, she had no self-confidence.

“That’s so.” As Sachiko-sama turned and spoke over her shoulder, she waked slowly over to where the young men were, until she stood and stopped in front of her target.

“Yūki-san.”

“Y, yes.”

“I wonder, is this hopeless?” Sachiko-sama looked at him patiently. Although she wasn’t the actual person, she could tell that that gaze was exerting a tremendous pressure on Yūki.

“Eh, no.”

More or less used to it because of his sister Yumi, as she drew near, he resigned himself and shook his head back and forth. As expected, Yūki caved pretty fast.

“It’s not absolutely impossible…”

“Thank goodness. Please give it your all.”

“…Yes.”

A woman’s beauty is the greatest weapon of all time. This was not anything her brother could be blamed for at all.

Having extracted the response she had hoped for, Sachiko-sama returned to her original position in front of Yumi, saying, “Then it’s decided.”

“Um. Rosa Chinensis? Shouldn’t we confirm it with Yumi-sama?” Noriko-chan asked, confused.

To which Sachiko-sama replied, “If it’s Yumi, it’ll be fine.” With a self-satisfied smile. “She’ll do it.”

“…Onee-sama.”

Occasionally.

When Sachiko-sama got like this, she had a tendency to overestimate Yumi. At those times, Yumi was happy to have Onee-sama speak for her, but it was often above her actual merit. But this time, she was clearly on a roll.

“Of course I’ll do it.”

It was a profound mystery. Onee-sama’s magic.

Part 3.

There are, in this world, men whose intuition is as sharp as a woman's.

From the point of the discussion of the changing process on, they continued with the fitting of the costumes, and soon it was approaching 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Nevertheless, even though they only had an hour left, the new cast commenced reading the script, after which the six members of the Hanadera council, the six members of the Yamayurikai and the two helpers began to leave in succession. Their aim was for the territory of the Rose Mansion.

Walking at the tail end of the group, Arisu said to Yumi, dryly, "She doesn't like me."

She looked around, wondering to whom he was replying.

"Eh?"

"Um, that Harigane."

"Harigane?"

Harigane, as in "wire?"

Yumi inclined her head questioningly at which Arisu quickly pointed with his chin towards the group of first-years who were walking ahead of them.

"Harigane... You know, that Kanako-chan."

"Don't you think that suits her, harigane. As soon as the new first- years came in together with Noriko-chan I thought so immediately. That girl is like a wire spring."

"...Please don't say that kind of thing." However, in contrast to her words, Yumi smiled.

A wire spring. That kind of nickname was in no way meant as a compliment. Although it was maybe a little too perfect, they really meant it as somehow kind of sweet. Yumi and Arisu looked in front of them where, through the others, they could see the forms of Kanako-chan, and Tōko-chan behind her, appearing and disappearing, until a bend in the corridor.

“I wouldn’t worry about it.” Yumi said to Arisu. “Kanako-chan is, how should I put this… Well, she doesn’t do well with men. So, don’t think it’s just you that she dislikes especially.”

Arisu laughed with self-derision.

“Ah, sorry.”

“Um, it’s okay, it’s okay. I’m asking to be treated like a woman, after all. But, I see. That girl doesn’t like men. Then, as I thought, she must see me as something unpleasant.”

“…”

(That disgusting transvestite.) Kanako-chan’s voice echoed uncomfortably in Yumi’s head. Definitely, this must be the case, although she hadn’t thought about it.

“But, why do you think that? I didn’t see anything, but did Kanako-chan say anything to you?”

“She didn’t say anything.” Arisu shook his head. “When we were fitting the costumes, I had the feeling of something on my back. So, I turned around to find her there. There was nothing particularly hostile on her face or anything. But there was just something there, I felt. Now that I think about it, about a month ago, something similar happened, huh.”

“Arisu, can you feel spirits?” Yumi asked, feeling a little weird.

“Oh no, did Yukichi tell you about that?”

Although she didn’t dare tell Arisu, it had been Kanako-chan who, out of concern for Yumi, that had tailed the Hanadera council member. At the time, Arisu had just had a “unpleasant feeling.” Although it might not be directly related to the revelation, it did seem like it was a correct intuition.

From that point on, as she walked with Arisu towards the Rose Mansion, they discussed other feelings he had picked up with his sensitivity, but for Yumi her memories id not stop.

One reason for that was that she was thinking about Kanako-chan

For another, the topic at hand, her dislike of men, was not simple. She had to make her right ear ignore what her left ear had heard. Although she watched her own speech and shook herself when it was impolite, scary was scary. There was no helping that.

“Anyway, leave Kanako-chan to me. You don’t have to worry about it much. Although she dislikes men, she’s not going to scratch or bite.” And with that, Yumi gave her a metaphorical seal of approval.

Part 4.

“I don’t want to do it.”

Kanako-chan bit. Not Arisu, Yumi.

“Kanako-chan.” And when she said “bit” it was a metaphor. Resisted, is what she meant. Yumi almost dropped the cup, which was covered with bubbles.

It had been a pretty rough rehearsal of the script - they had finished just past 5 o’clock, when the day finally came to a conclusion. Noriko-chan and Tōko-chan had seen the guys from Hanadera to the main gate, and Yumi had undertaken the washing up with Kanako-chan. Her previous words flew out in the middle of their task quite suddenly.

“You don’t want to do what?” Yumi responded in a low voice so that behind them, wiping the table, closing the window, picking up the garbage, replacing the chairs, their companions would not overhear.

“I don’t want to do this play, is what I am saying.” Her hand in the middle of the bubbles stopped, as she answered indifferently. “It causes me pain enough to have to do this play with the males from the neighboring school. Why should I have to play a male role--?”

“But, why now all of a sudden?”

She had read the script. She had done the rehearsal. Certainly, she had not looked like she was having fun at the time, but Kanako-chan had been in step with the others. Naturally, she thought that she had been in agreement. But, obviously not.

“That’s it.” Yumi grabbed the soapy sponge with her right hand. “When we were in the changing room, we never asked for your opinion. It’s not just now.”

“…”

“Right. You didn’t like it. I’m sorry, I didn’t notice.” Yumi lowered her head a little.

To which Kanako-chan shook her head just slightly. “I’m not anyone’s sœur. I had no place stating my opinion.”

But, she was one of the group who would be putting on the play. Since she had missed this fact, Yumi determined to watch Kanako-chan with all her might.

If Kanako-chan was made to feel alienated, that was Yumi's fault. It was undoubtedly Yumi who had brought Kanako-chan in to assist them.

"I understand your feelings. But, more than that, I want to have you be part of the play." Yumi considered it. Why "why all of a sudden" she wondered. In the costume room, they had definitely never asked for Kanako-chan's opinion. But when they had read the script and rehearsed, why had she participated. If she had really intended not to do it, then declaring it when the people from Hanadera had been there would have been more effective.

Of course, she might have been concerned with the Yamayurikai's face, she couldn't help but think. If that were the case, then why would she choose to challenge the situation at this point. Looking quickly over her shoulder, she could see the responsible parties; the Red, White and Yellow Roses were there.

"Hey, Kanako-chan." Therefore, Yumi thought. Maybe no one had ever wanted to understand Kanako-chan.

She had not wanted to destroy the relationship with Hanadera Gakuin for the school play. However, here she was. Embracing her dissatisfaction in her existence.

I want to stop were her words, but that might not be her real intention. It looked as if there were innumerable inexpressible emotions hidden behind those words. Therefore taking the words "I want to stop" at face value was no good.

If she wanted to stop, all she had to do was stop. It was easy enough to throw off. But that probably wouldn't resolve anything. Inside Yumi there would surely be some lingering regret.

“I shouldn’t have made you promise, to help with the school festival, I mean.” Oh no, she shouldn’t have said it that way. What Yumi was thinking was that she couldn’t find words that would bring their connection to an end.

“I’m glad I had to promise,” Kanako-chan said as she rinsed the final cup and put it in the basket.

“Ah, Kanako-chan.” Yumi reached out for the faucet to wash the bubbles from her hand. Shortly Kanako-chan would be leaving her side and Shimako-san would be coming in to do washing. “You are glad you had to promise, huh?”

Kanako-chan had said that clearly. Which meant that it was her desire to continue helping out, was that what she way saying? But, this brought her no feeling of relief. Kanako-chan still felt dissatisfaction. And that held within it some possibility of dangerous conflict with the Hanadera council members. “One way or another, this is no good,” Yumi muttered. Why did she say this is the Kansai dialect, she poked herself.

What Will Happen? What Will We Do?

Part 1.

The “Torikaebaya.”

Author unknown, was written on or about the ending years of the Heian period, sometime after the “Genji Monogatari”; it’s a story that somehow has no spot to hold on to.

Once upon a time, a chief councilor and his wife were gifted with the arrival of a boy and a girl at the same time. Even more fortuitous, they were both beautiful children, which their mother said were as alike as two melons.

However, the young lord was very introverted and as a child stayed in his house drawing or playing with dolls. The young princess was completely opposite she was energetic and liked to play outside, as their father watched them grow up, he thought, “It’s as if they have somehow switched with one another.”

“-baya” - Sentence ending particle.

The imperfect form of conjugation. Meaning a wish to express or reveal.

Thus, the modern version of “Torikaebaya Monogatari” would be “The Tale of Wanting to Switch.”

Nonetheless, at the time, the councilor was not being serious. When they became adults, he was optimistic that they would return to their true selves.

The years piled up, and where was that return to their true selves; more and more the young Lord became feminine and the young Lady became ever more masculine. Then, gradually, they began to pretend to be the other gender while at court and in the samurai service. From that point on, they were successful in that no one noticed.

The young Lady refused an offer of marriage from the Minister of the Right's daughter's son, that girl whose body was innocent of having born a child (obviously); until one of the councilor's close friends could tell them apart, then that colleague pressed the case that "it's no good being a man," to the Lady, all of which is put to an end when she conceives a child. Because when her stomach got too large she would not be able to get along in society doing a man's job, it was necessary for her to leave the capital and give birth to the child in secret… So, that Lady's life was full of ups and downs.

On the other hand, in terms of the Lord's life as a woman, he lived near and served the Imperial Princess, but got too close to her so that the two of them were involved in a love relationship. At first glance this might seem to be good fortune in every way but, one day he learns of the disappearance of his older sister, he suddenly awoke, "I must leave and look for her," and resolved to do this, he had to return to the form of a man.

Once he found her safe and they came back, at that point they returned to their true natures, found a new place to live and lived happily ever after.

"…That' supposed to be good, huh." Upon finishing reading "Torikaebaya" this was Yumi's first impression.

The Lady's child that she bore. The Imperial Princess's child. Why did the story drop them in to be waved around in front of people? Their parents may have started a new life, but they were abandoned, separated without any official proclamation, and because of that, they are left to struggle to find a solution for themselves. –What did the author (unknown) want to say?

Of course, that was thinking about family the way one did in this day and age. From the children's standpoints when you leave probably wasn't "We can make it with our bare hands and reconcile one day." Even if the story ended that way, if you drew a straight line from yesterday through today into tomorrow with an end mark after that, it was still a little worrisome. But after all, the story was an original work right to the very end.

Then there was the Yamayurikai's version of the "Torikaebaya."

"The switch" was the framework, with all the patterns of love and hate between men and women cut. Of course, the strife of the pregnancy was also gone. And the love affairs had all been turned platonic. This was the school festival after all. It was natural to do so.

Wednesday

"'I am such a fortunate person. My wife has just borne two children, a daughter and a son. These beloved children look more like my beautiful wife.'"

Clap, clap, hands struck each other, interrupting the play.

"There. Chief Councilor… Um, Kanako-chan. I wonder if you could you try and say that line looking a little less happy?" Sachiko-sama instructed.

"Less happy?" Kanako-chan slowly pulled her lips down from the overly large smile she had on.

"OK. Say it that way."

It'll be fine, won't it; Yumi was watching, it's a play so it'll be fine. It's okay if it's a little over-exaggerated.

"'I am such a fortunate person.'"

Uh, this time it had become a monotone. And, of course cut was called.

"That was as if you were made to lie."

"Like I was made to lie?"

"That was the feeling with which it was said."

In reality, she was being made to say it, so there really was no helping that, Yumi the amateur thought. But Sachiko-sama would never forgive a compromise of "That's good enough." If you were going to do it, you should aim for your best.

"Made to say it is pretty vague; even if it's pointed out, I don't understand. Unless you instruct me concretely, I can't do anything." Kanako-chan did not hesitate to say.

"Concretely? Just so. Say it with a loud, clear voice. Otherwise, no one will smile afterwards when the spot hits the Yakushiji-sans."

"Yes."

Then, though it became a double challenge, as expected it didn't make her any better. Just the opposite, if anything, she became even worse than previously. She attempted to alter the way she said it in accordance to the way she was corrected.

“I wonder what the problem is. Outside of here your acting is very good. I have the feeling that it is something here that is bothering you. Oh well, let’s move on to the next scene. Kanako-chan, think about you’re acting on your own. As time passes, I imagine you’ll come up with your own feeling.”

Sachiko-sama was not an acting ogre. She didn’t want those people who could not do a thing to do more. When it came to being persistent about acting, it was probably Kanako-chan who was the “must do more” type of girl.

--What is the problem, I wonder. Sachiko-sama had whispered, which remained in Yumi’s ear. Being happy over having had two children, that was just a line of the script.

“Is it saying that the children are beautiful that’s the sticking point?” Yūki, who was standing by next to Yumi, said dryly.

“…”

Indeed. Yumi, hanging the Heian kimono over her shoulder, turned her gaze towards the Yakushiji brothers. They looked amazing.

To a woman’s eyes, even if you dressed these giants in women’s clothes, they did not look like women; they needed to prepare for the laughter that would surely occur even if they just appeared on stage. In that situation, saying “Beautiful” with a straight face would sure bring on a fit of explosive laughter. But, before that, the Fukuzawa siblings, who you could call “interesting,” would have been painfully burdened with “beautiful.” Before “Beautiful” was said again, they might look around at their surroundings and say, “well, more like a tanuki, than a beautiful person, really” came poking through.

Therefore, that line was even more abominable coming from the mouth of Kanako-chan. It was like self-torture. As if the title had been altered and this was the “Yamayurikai edition: Tale of the Change, Tanuki Country.”

While she was thinking all this, her name was called.

“Next. Yumi, Yūki-san, please.”

“O-kay.”

The siblings answered in uniform unison as they stepped forward. The Yakushiji brothers had held dolls in their arms, and with the entry scene of the two lead actors, the years and days passed by on a grand scale.

“Ah, let’s do this in the reverse order. Yumi is the Prime Minister’s son, so you should stand in front of Akimitsu-san. Yūki-san, you’re Chūnagon’s daughter, so you should stand next to Tomomitsu-san. Really, you two, you should at least be able to remember who your mothers are.”

“…Even if you say that…”

It’s impossible.

“What was that, Yumi?”

“Ah, nothing.”

When Sachiko-sama aimed her gaze at you like that, it was better to say nothing more.

However. The Yakushiji brothers were identical twins, identical from head to toe, indistinguishable if you looked hard. Still, it was said that, if you got to know them well for many years, they would become distinguishable. However, even if you say that, the simple costumes they wore erased any traced of those differences, and had even brought Yūki to his knees.

“Really, what is it?”

In this version of the story, it wasn’t only the masculine older sister and the feminine younger brother that changed places; all of the actors had switched gender roles. In such a situation, even the person playing the role himself could get all turned around, but that Sachiko-sama had such a concrete grasp of such a complicated schema, well, as expected Sachiko-sama is amazing.

“Uh, so my mother is Masamitsu-san.”

“My mother is Gakkō-sempai.”

Upon receiving their instructions the two moved to the correct location, as if they were the Yakushiji-sempai brother's goldfish droppings.

"Ah, don't move, Yakushiji-sans." Sachiko-sama waved her rolled up script left and right.

"But, I'm Yumi-chan's mother."

"I'm Yukichi's mother."

There were heavy thumps in the sweaty atmosphere.

"...Eh-"

So, in conclusion, they're original positions had been in front of the correct Yakushiji brother. But, as if she hadn't noticed, Sachiko-sama said, "Take it from the first line of the page."

As if nothing had occurred, rehearsal picked up again. --As expected.

"That's fine. Then, next. The scene between the Minister of the Right and his wife."

"But Tōko-chan is off today." Rei-sama said. Since Tōko-chan was concurrently acting in the Drama Club's play, she was attending practice every other day. Being a popular actress is busy work.

"That's right, isn't it? But, because we need someone to stand by Takada-san's position, will someone become the stand-in?"

"OK." At the same time Rei-sama lifted her hand holding the script and stepped forward, the door to the room opened.

"I'm sorry that I'm late!" And so, she appeared.

"Tōko-chan?"

"Yes, Matsudaira Tōko has just arrived. Um, Rosa Chinensis, should I proceed with my scene?"

"You can just jump right in--"

"Yes. If you'd like. Ah, Takada-san, I look forward to working with you." As if she thought it awful making them wait, Tōko-chan put a crown upon her head as if it were a court noble's hat, and threw the kimono over her shoulder, then stepped forward. At the edges of the crown, her banana curls popping out was kind of funny, but as Tōko-chan took on an expression of concentrating on acting, no one laughed.

“‘Indeed, this house now has a son.’”

Her usual sweet speaking voice underwent a complete change, and Tōko-chan took on a dignified presence, as if she truly took on the name “actress,” Yumi’s thought was renewed.

Part 2.

She learned that Tōko-chan had many things going on Thursday after school.

“Tōko-chan’s been kicked out of the Drama Club’s play?” When she heard that fly out like a bolt from the blue from Tōko-chan’s first-year Tsubaki classmate Noriko-chan’s mouth, Yumi distrusted her ears.

“Yeah. One of my classmates heard it from a person in the Drama Club. It seems that she got into some trouble within her section.”

“Got into trouble, you said?”

“I don’t know any more than that.” Shaking her head back and forth Noriko-chan had, just at the end of cleaning time, run into Yumi’s cleaning area. Panting, with the information in hand, she had left without a moment’s delay to bring the news to Yumi. However depressing Tōko-chan always was, this appeared to be far more than just a crisis with a friend.

Yumi put away the cleaning implements, and accompanied Noriko-chan to a corner of the school building. Tōko-chan had been coming to their daily after-school gatherings at the Rose Mansion, but she had not begun any kind of discussion with Tōko-chan.

As if she were sighing, Noriko-chan said, “I can’t be sure that the confusion with the Drama Club has anything to do with the Yamayurikai’s play, but I can’t help but feel that it does.”

“It was a hindrance to the Drama Club practice?”

“It may be. Excuse me, I don’t really know anything about what happened. With this being so vague a consultation, I don’t like to offer a suggestion.”

“That’s fine. Thank you for telling me. Does anyone at the Rose Mansion know about this?

“Not yet.” After saying this, Noriko-chan muttered, “Ah” as if at the last moment she had remembered something. “What was I thinking? Why did I tell Yumi-sama--”

Always cool Noriko-chan. Upon finding her friend in real trouble, apparently she became completely disordered.

Part 3.

Yumi and Noriko-chan went together to the Rose Mansion, where they found that Tōko-chan was already there, humming as she prepared tea. However, if you listened very, very carefully, you could make out that it was an old Enka tune, with lyrics about a "Woman's Grudge." Being sung so brightly, it somehow felt a little uncanny.

"Tōko-chan, you're not with the Drama Club today?" Rei-sama asked lightly, not knowing the situation.

"Mm. Because everything is going well, while they are doing the finishing touches, we have a special holiday."

"Ah, that's why you're in such a good mood."

"It looks that way? Heheheh."

Not heheheh, Tōko-chan. Yumi watched, trembling. You're not in a good mood, and it's either bravado or desperation that's making you do this, isn't it?

"I'm jealous that it's going so well. After we drink our tea, we ought to rehearse. We can't lose to the Drama Club." Sachiko-sama came flying from a corner.

Yumi did not take her eyes off Tōko-chan during that day's rehearsal. And so, she came to a conclusion. Tōko-chan's ability to act was spectacular. She was even able to completely deceive Sachiko-sama who was a relative and had had a long association with her.

Matsudaira Tōko was undoubtedly a gifted actress and, an extraordinary liar.

At the end of practice, because the first-years were allowed to return at their own discretion, Yumi explained what she had learned from Noriko-chan.

At first, everyone was surprised. "So you say," but, as they thought back Tōko-chan's mood today, they found some strange things and agreed.

“Is there anything we can do?” Yumi consulted. When she said that, of course she was directing it at the two third-years.

“There’s no other choice.”

“Are we really thinking of doing it?” Sachiko-sama and Rei-sama met each other’s gaze across the table.

“Um, what are you talking about…” She asked timidly.

“Think about it objectively. Which of these weighs more heavily on Tōko-chan’s mind?”

“That would be, obviously, the Drama Club.”

If one is speaking of the Lillian Jogakuen Drama Club then, in terms of putting on a play, one had to acknowledge their superiority. When thinking about it in terms of advantage or disadvantage, not of which play she might want to choose, clearly the Drama Club would be better for Tōko-chan.

Catching Rei-sama’s “yes yes” nods out of the corner of her eye; she appeared to feel the same as Sachiko-sama.

Thereupon, Yoshino-san stood slowly up from her chair. “Is it all right to just fire her? Because Tōko-chan didn’t actually discuss with anyone whether she was thrown out of the Drama Club play, did she? If you think about it, we’re going to be making her pay the price for our decision.”

“Yoshino-chan’s point of view is, to some extent, the correct one. She is still a first-year, I wonder if it would be all right to make her leave.” Sachiko-sama crossed her arms. “What is Rosa Gigantea’s opinion on this?”

Having been called upon, Shimako-san quietly rose from her seat and stated her opinion. “I also believe that the two are incompatible and that it would be better for Tōko-chan to return to the Drama Club. After all, Tōko-chan is an established member there, but here she is merely a temporary assistant.”

“That’s true. If she is a formal member, then she ought to concentrate her efforts on the Drama Club activities,” muttered Rei-sama, the president of the Kendo club, although who could tell which group she concentrated on.

“Well… Guiding one so that one does not choose the incorrect road is the duty of a sempai.” Both Yoshino-san and Shimako-san, who had been standing, used this as an opportunity to retake their seats.

“So, we’re generally in agreement. Then,” Sachiko-sama said. “Yumi, please go tell Tōko-chan.”

“Eh?”

“That she should step down from the Yamayurikai production and return to the Drama Club’s play.”

“But, me?”

“Yes. You were the one who got her involved, weren’t you.”

“But, I…”

She had certainly been the one who had recruited Kanako-chan’s assistance until the school festival, but in Tōko-chan’s case, she had come along like an uninvited wife, volunteering from her own desire.

But.

Yumi rethought this saying “that’s not so.” It wasn’t really relevant, and it wouldn’t allow her to get out of this.

During the rainy season, Sachiko-sama had taken time out of school because of her grandmother, and Yumi had asked Tōko-chan to help out. Thinking about it, Tōko-chan had also gotten involved when Kanako-chan had been brought in to assist. There wasn’t any doubt about it, mostly.

“Right. Because of me, certainly.”

Thinking in this way, Noriko-chan had come to Yumi to discuss the situation with Tōko-chan originally, which somehow gave her the feeling of consenting to it.

Part 4.

The day after, after school, escaping from cleaning just a little early, she turned towards the Rose Mansion quickly. She wanted to intercept Tōko-chan before she got to the water's edge and went in.

Just as she thought, Tōko-chan, who was skipping club activities, had arrived early and, standing in front of the Rose mansion entrance, gazed at Yumi with a strange expression as she approached.

"Is there something you want to tell me?" Yumi inquired.

"Like what?"

Concerned that Tōko-chan might try and enter, Yumi grabbed her arm. "Why aren't you at your club?"

"Today is an off day."

With all her might, Yumi hung onto Tōko-chan's arm, as she tried to shake her off and handed her over a single sheet of paper.

"This is a copy of the Drama Club's schedule. They received a license to use the gymnasium for the play today, it is not an off day. It's going well, in fact."

There was no way to evade this. At which Tōko-chan became defiant. "It's a day off for only me. That's all right, isn't it?"

"It is not all right. That's called playing hooky, isn't it. If you continue to not go to your club for days, it will become difficult to return."

"..." Although she was silent, she had to acknowledge herself that that was true. Yumi broached the main subject.

"I hard the rumor that you were kicked out. It is true?"

"Yes."

"For what?"

"Nothing," Tōko-chan said, quietly, looking out at the inner grounds. "It wasn't anything, it's just boring, that's all."

"Liar."

It wasn't her intention to stir things up, it just inadvertently, popped out of her mouth. Because it was what she thought.

"Liar?" At Yumi's word, Tōko-chan's eyebrows puckered.

“Tōko-chan likes performing, don’t you? I could see as much. So Drama Club can’t really be boring.”

“Please don’t talk like you understand anything.”

“What happened?”

“Nothing.”

Again, nothing. However, this was different from the previous “nothing”; this time there was more afterwards. “Just, the level is very low. As soon as one bites into a line, one is attacked for doing so. Well… I guess there’s no helping it, that kind of jealousy of a first-year with such a large part. It appears that they don’t like my attitude.”

Apparently it was someone in the Drama Club.

“I was ‘Amy’ in ‘Wakakusa Monogatari’.”

“‘Wakakusa Monogatari’?”

“It’s the well-known story of four sisters written by Alcott. Amy is the youngest child, the older ones are Meg, Jo and… Someone, I can’t remember the name of the oldest sister.”

But, that’s pretty great, isn’t it. You’re one of the leads.” Yumi was happy, bouncing up and down on her toes. That she was one of the leads of the Yamayurikai’s “Torikaebaya Monogatari” was completely forgotten. Because what they were talking about now was the Lillian Jogakuen School Festival play by the Drama Club, so if you drew a line from the School Council’s entertainment to a performance a cut above, this would be the real thing.

“Wow, I’ll look forward to it. I’ll definitely go see it.”

“But, I was using the past tense. Tōko-chan smiled bitterly.

“Ah…” That’s right, Yumi remembered. This was a conversation about her being knocked out. “But, why?”

This conversation seemed to have gained a little momentum, as Tōko-chan ducked her head and spoke.

“It’s not everyone, just one picky, persistent sempai. It’s practice, so it’s natural to make a mistake once in a while. If we’re perfect for the performance, it’s because of that. That was what I said and, even though I chose my words carefully, I was told that I was impertinent. Ah, even remembering it now makes me get angry. Huh, why am I telling Yumi-sama all of this? But, since I’ve already begun, I guess it can’t be helped… Anyway, this sempai’s speeches were always beating me over the head with ‘stupid’ ‘you idiot.’ ‘Really, you’re so difficult,’ that kind of thing. Then, it had to come to a head, right? And it just popped out of my mouth.”

“W, what did?”

“I said, then, you do it.”

Even thought it was not that situation, blood rose to Tōko’s face. Scary, Tōko-chan.

Yumi felt most sympathetic, that the entire Drama Club has witnessed this quarrel. That was a frightening thing.

“Then, the sempai is taking the role of Amy?”

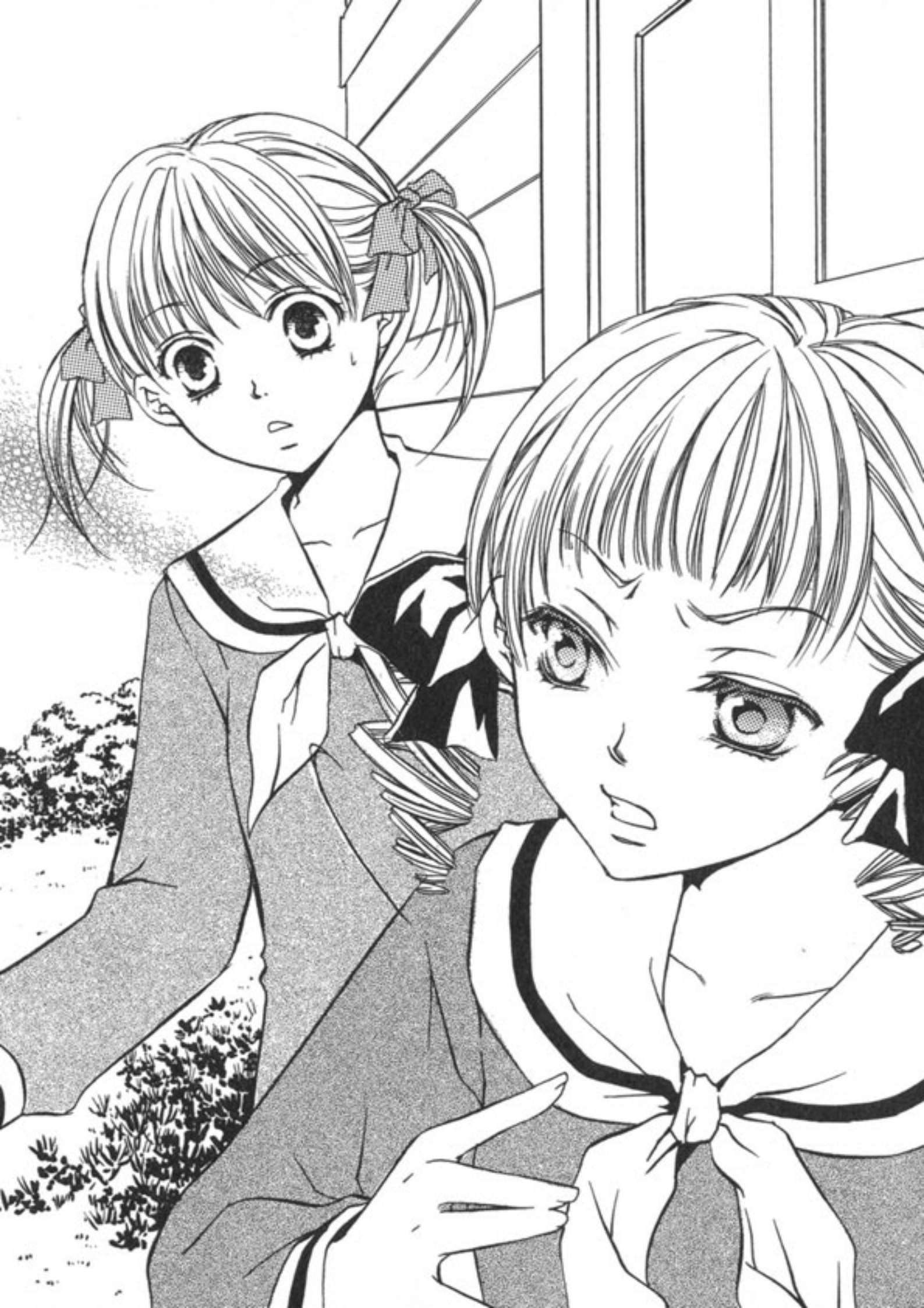
“I don’t know. Since I ran out of practice, I haven’t shown my face.”

“I see.”

“If I’m not there, I still think that they can perform ‘Wakakusa Monogatari.’ But, it will be impossible for that sempai to play Amy with her abilities, you see. I said that, that I knew that. Probably, she knew as well… I see. Because she knew that, I became the object of her criticism.”

Halfway through this, Tōko-chan left Yumi behind and, muttering to herself as if she was thinking aloud, she put it all together. She had flown into a rage and her reaction had been to return tit for tat, Yumi thought.

“We Rosa Chinensis think that it would be best if Tōko-chan returned to the Drama Club.”



“So I’m not needed?” Suddenly Tōko-chan lifted her eyes. She, who hard bared her fangs a moment ago towards the Drama Club, underwent a radical change as she turned toward the Yamayurikai.

“I’m not saying that you aren’t needed. Probably, Sachiko-sama is, for Tōko-chan’s sake, liberating you.”

“How is that?” Not something Tōko-chan liked, not wanting to believe “beloved Sachiko-oneesama.”

“As for me, Tōko-chan. I am incredibly thankful for you coming to assist us. But, if it has become an obstacle to your continuing on with your club activities, then I think it’s a problem.”

“I don’t want to hear such pretty words. It’s like Yumi-sama is saying to me, be a good girl, and it makes my stomach knot up. Isn’t it that Yumi-sama is being pushy, and is just performing last rights over me? Because I would have preferred the single phrase, ‘You’re fired.’ Then, with a word, the whole thing is resolved, isn’t it?”

“No, it’s not.” This wasn’t “you’re fired.” And even if that had been what they meant, it wouldn’t be settled. “Certainly, it does seem that I’m performing last rites over Tōko-chan, however. If that’s the case, then at this point you should say nothing and understand.”

“Huh?”

“Tōko-chan. Go to Drama Club now. I’ll be here for you. Then, if you have once more taken on the role of Amy, let me watch you. Be quiet, and take on the role of Passerby A or Passerby B or even it’s all right if you’re a helper, but come and tell me.”

“Those aren’t roles.”

“This is what if. In any case, it’s no good if you’re not part of the Drama Club performance in any kind of role. Because you are very talented at the role of the Minister of the Right. If they don’t allow you to participate, I think that it would be an incredible loss for the Lillian Jogakuen Drama Club, a serious loss.”

“Is this a praise-to-kill-campaign now?” Tōko-chan’s brows drew together.

A praise-to-kill-campaign. Like when politicians often praise opponents over and above necessity to make them self-destruct.

“That’s not it. Since I think it would be a loss, I said it would be a loss. If you do and just go out for our play here, it would be a waste.”

“Um…”

“In the first place, you prefer the club activities of the Drama Club. Right?” It seems that the members have no complaints against your performance. So, you’ll reserve power to work on ‘Torikaebaya’. If there’s not enough time to practice during rehearsals, I’ll be your practice partner. Right. Can you come to my house? Yūki will be there, so that will be good.”

Imagining what fun that would be, Yumi got a totally happy expression. In inverse proportion to that attitude, Tōko’s face became ill-humored.

“Please don’t say things that can’t be thought about.”

“Why do you say that it’s something you can’t think about?”

“Why, you say?” Was all Tōko-chan said.

“Is it because I’m interfering that’s causing you discomfort?”

“That’s not it all.”

Yumi took Tōko-chan’s hand and gave it a tight squeeze. “Compared with Sachiko-sama’s and Kashiwagi-san’s houses, it’s quite small but, my parents love guests. I think we should try for dinner. How about it?”

“…Again with that guileless face.”

“Eh?”

“I understand. Since I understand, will you let go of my hand?”

“Then.”

Against Yumi and her shining gaze, Tōko-chan’s attitude was cold.

“Please don’t jump to any hasty conclusions. I don’t need to intrude upon your household, I’ll return to the Drama Club on my own.”

“Oh… You will?” That was a little boring.

“I will not be one of those children who gets into an argument outside and must be made to reconcile by her parents.”

“Well, I don’t really understand, but that’s not important.”

Tōko-chan began walking towards the school buildings, it somehow seemed that she was flowing away. “Therefore, please don’t follow me, is what I am saying. Really, it’s just embarrassing, isn’t it?”

Her face was red with anger, so Yumi halted her steps and gave up. Tōko-chan walked as if she was on two springs, shaking and trembling. The power of anger, no doubt, because she seemed to be walking with incredible power, and she wondered if it was all right to let her go alone.

“Tōko-chan.” As she approached the entrance to the school building, Yumi called out for her to stop. “It’s just, impossibility is taboo. Sleep well and eat well and stress won’t build up. If you want to complain, just come to wherever I am. Okay?”

Tōko-chan answered neither “yes” nor “no,” but lowered her head with a bitter smile. Nevertheless, Yumi was satisfied.

When she could no longer see Tōko’s form, she turned around and returned to the Rose Mansion, where she stood next to the door and put her hands together to save a Novena, before opening it.

“Really, you’re so…”

“Wah, wah, Onee-sama!”

What, what, she didn’t know why, but she was filled with panic, as it wasn’t just Sachiko-sama; behind her Rei-sama and Yoshino-san appeared.

Then, she comprehended. Everyone had been worried and, it appeared, had been standing just inside the door, listening. It’s no wonder that everyone had appeared.

Because they had no confidence, they gave the impression of being mad. But, everyone had been worried that Yumi would not be able to accomplish the role as lead actress.

“I’m so sorry, just acting selfishly like that.”

“Really.” Sachiko-sama smiled like she was amazed, and fixed Yumi’s collar. “But, probably, Yumi was the best possible choice for Tōko-chan.”

“…I didn’t believe it though.”

At those muttered words Yoshino-san just blurted out, “Be quiet and believe it. Yumi-san’s heart was all set up with vigor, and made Tōko-chan willing.”

“It’s as Yoshino says.” Rei-sama smiled.

Then, until the school festival Yumi’s favorite motto suddenly became ‘You can become successful.’

“So, now then let’s go to the second floor. Shimako-san has been babysitting the first-years by herself.”

Looking up at Sachiko-sama’s back ahead of her as she climbed the stairs, Yumi met Yoshino-san’s gaze and laughed.

“Babysitting, huh?”

“Right.”

She was walking towards the best possible future she could imagine, Yumi thought.

From now until the school festival, the road might take her through ravines and gorges but, if she cleared each thing one at a time, the goal of a great future awaited. If she could believe that, softly and a little bit at a time, she would not be discouraged and the power would well up.

“Hey, you two, don’t stand there and laugh, hurry up and come up here.”

Rei-sama’s voice responded with “Ye-s,” and with that, Yoshino-san and she, for no reason, started to giggle.

Part 5.

After that, they almost never saw Tōko-chan at the Rose Mansion.

“She appears to be going to Drama Club practice properly. Both the club president and the advisor say that her performance is even better than before the break, worthy of fame.”

Wednesday after school. She heard from Noriko-chan - who she had met upon the way to go meet the Hanadera Council members - that, on that day, after Tōko-chan had left her and headed to the gymnasium non-stop and, in front of all the club members in dress rehearsal, had silently bowed her head deeply and apologized for skipping practice, then requested earnestly to be reinstated in the role of Amy.

‘Frankly, it caused trouble for the Drama Club when Tōko went missing. Therefore, there was no way that they could hold out their hand and tell her to come back whenever she wanted to. It would set a bad precedent for the other club members. However, Tōko continued to bow her head in front of them. So, to preserve face, they allowed a reconciliation, it’s said.”

“So, I’ll be able to see Tōko-chan’s Amy.”

As you say. Thanks to you, Yumi-sama.”

“Me? I didn’t do anything.” Without thinking about her words, Yumi’s eyes grew round and she pointed at herself.

“Really? Whatever you said to Tōko roused her, is what I think.”

“Mm. Not really. I wanted to be useful, but I was rejected.” She had said let’s go together to the Drama Club, she had said, come to my house to practice for the play, every word had been followed with a grumbled remark, all of them. “Well. Whatever it was, Tōko-chan is taking club activities seriously, which is good.”

“That’s right.”

Avoiding the gingkoes that had begun falling, she walked leisurely along with Noriko-chan, as if they were a married couple of many years. Somehow, it was a very “peaceful” feeling. Of course, it was probably just “the calm before the storm.”

At any rate, the guys had entered the premises, and the problem became, should they meet and guide them each one by one or not? It was tradition at that girls' school, but there was an understanding that that might not happen. If they had to do that every time, it would be burdensome.

"So, she won't be coming until the actual performance?"

"Tōko? No, Saturday, when we go to Hanadera Gakuin for the last rehearsal, she'll come. The Drama Club's advisory teacher won't be there in the afternoon so they'll be preparing for the performance the day afterward by resting, she said."

"You're going to go off and suddenly get some kind of reward for Tōko-chan for working so seriously, huh."

"No way."

Noriko-chan laughed explosively but, Yumi couldn't actually deny the possibility. Thinking about it felt kind of nice.

"Speaking of which, Yumi-sama, are there any extra admission tickets for the school festival?"

"Ah, all of them are accounted for."

"I see."

Yumi asked, "why," to which Noriko-chan responded with frankness, "The truth is."

"At the public school I went to, I have some middle school classmates who are interested in what a girls' school festival is like. They wanted to know if they could come. But, our tickets are limited. I was just asking lightly if a few tickets hadn't yet been prepared."

Noriko-chan was living apart from her parents and her little sister, staying with her grand-aunt; she had also given one ticket to her fellow hobbyist Takuya-kun, so she had one ticket left over.

Yumi had also given a ticket to her parents and to Yūki, and after that, if she was able to come, would mail one to her grandmother in Yamanashi. And, after that, one would be delivered at the home of Ikegami Yumiko along with a letter.

Basically, each student was able to receive five tickets for the school festival. Basically, that is to say, they would be accommodated, if they applied for a few more. But the formalities were, sadly, very troublesome. Having to submit an application for every person, their name, and what relation they had to the student, was a lot of trouble.

Therefore usually, friends would give excess tickets to friends. Those students who had attended Lillian since kindergarten had no friends from other schools, so there were only a few with not enough for all their siblings.

“Tōko also said she didn’t have any extra… Maybe I should check with Kanako-san.”

Kanako-san. As Noriko-chan uttered the name, it just seemed right for Yumi to ask. “Hey, Noriko-chan, do you know about Kanako-chan’s family situation?”

“No? Eh, does she have a big family?”

“Uh-uhn, no. I mean, no, I don’t know.”

She hadn’t heard whether she had any siblings or what kind. She probably had a mother but, her father… There was some reason there.

“You don’t know, Yumi-sama?” Noriko-chan asked unexpectedly.

“Mm. So, I can’t predict if she’d have any extras.”

“But, like me, Kanako-chan came her from another school. Surely she has some friends from her middle school days that she wants to give them to.”

That seemed to be well thought out. Noriko-chan had given up a line on receiving Kanako-chan’s tickets.

“Ah, if I can free up Yūki’s portion that would be okay. After all, he’s helping the Yamayurikai so, he shouldn’t need a separate admission ticket.” And, as Yumi muttered this, they came within sight of the school gates. In the middle of the group awaiting them, Yūki was noticeable with his hand raised lightly. He didn’t know that he had been deprived of his ticket.

However.

“No, because the truth is.” As he listened to his older sister’s story, Yūki became increasingly nervous, confessing at the end.

“No?”

“I’m sorry. It’s already taken.”

“Liar.” Yumi froze her right palm onto her younger brother. “Wait, what have you done? My name is affixed to the back of that. If the person you give it to does something bad to Lillian, I’m the one who will be called out for it. In former days, these tickets, which can’t be bought, have been sold for money. It’s your duty to keep that from happening.”

“I don’t think that person will harm Lillian or sell it.” Yūki said dryly, while they walked. “But, I’m sorry. Don’t get desperate. What I’m saying is, everyone just aimed to get a ticket with Yumi’s name on it. I didn’t even realize that there had been a struggle to get it, of course, if I had heard rumors, I wouldn’t have had any intention of anyone getting it. It started a real Battle Royale.”

“B, Battle Royale.”

A Battle Royale, he says. To be the one who remains alive, anyone other than one’s self must become the enemy, is what they called that kind of hand to hand melee’. But, why is something like that going on at Hanadera?

“Everyone knew that Yukichi was getting a ticket from the Yamayurikai. Moreover, after our school festival, the number of Yumi-chan fans increased.” From behind, Arisu’s voice hurried up to them.

“By the time the Student Council noticed, there was no way to honestly settle the situation. But, Yukichi faced down the whole group. But even with Yukichi defending it to the last, he had to back down.”

“Then?”

He then said that it was taken from her little brother. Not Sachiko-sama but… The thought swirled around in her head. What on earth kind of place was a boy's school?

"But, in front of Yukichi, who had given up, a savior appeared," Arisu said, with shining eyes. If the real savior appeared at Hanadera, it would have been a topic of conversation, so this must be a metaphor.

"Who was that?"

"Hikaru-no-kimi."

"…If you mean that it was Kashiwagi-san, say that. I beg you." She collapsed under pressure. If you weren't accustomed to the nicknames at Hanadera, it was severe.

"Kashiwagi-sempai, who had just happened to be passing by by chance, said, "Yukichi already promised to give me his ticket" and took it. In the student body, there aren't too many guys who want to be that person's opponent." Yūki said.

"Do I just not remember that kind of a promise between Yūki and Kashiwagi-san?"

"But, because of that, no one had to see my blood. Yumi wouldn't like to see anyone injured because of her ticket, right?"

"I wouldn't, but." She understood the circumstances. However, she couldn't permit her brother to just hand over a ticket so easily. Because it was a shock, she allowed herself to pick at it for a little bit.

"Hmm. I see. Even now, Kashiwagi-san has a lot of influence at Hanadera Gakuin."

"…ut up." Yūki avoided a gingko.

Ah, how interesting. Well, it couldn't be helped, so for now, it would have to be forgiven, right?

Part 6.

“I’ve got extras. How many do you want?” Kanako-chan answered Noriko’s question of “Do you have any extras” lightly, without expression.

“H, how many?” It seemed strange to hear that, how many do you want. She thought she could see Yumi out of the corner of her eye.

Sachiko-sama and Rei-sama were not in their seats, and the Rose Mansion was shrouded with the same atmosphere of disorder as a classroom at recess.

“Two, wait, as many as four would be fine.”

“Wah, rich.” Arisu and Kobayashi-kun, who were watching said at the same time. At Hanadera Gakuin there was a black market for admission tickets to Lillian’s school festival. For Kanako-chan to give them away to her friend free of charge made her a beautiful, magnanimous, young lady, you could say.

Ignoring the arbitrary excitement of the guys, Kanako-chan took five tickets out of her school bag, took one back for herself, then held the remainder out for Noriko-chan.

“She may not be able to come, but for the moment, this one for my mother can’t be taken.”

“Are you sure?”

“Please. It’s pointless if I just carry them. However, these tickets come with a condition. You may not give one to a man.”

This was said not minding that in this small room there were six men. Somehow in order for Kanako-chan to be able to work on a play together with men, it seemed that she was completely disregarding their existence as the opposite gender.

“Roger.” Noriko-chan took the four tickets from Kanako-chan, then pulled two out and returned them.

“Why? Two aren’t enough are they.”

“Mm. But, somehow I think doing this is the right thing.”

“...I see.”

Kanako-chan added the two returned tickets to the one she had previously kept, putting them in her bag. This chain of action was watched droolingly by the boys, although being “men” they would never be able to ask “if those two are extra, can I have them please.” Obviously.

When Sachiko-sama and Rei-sama had returned from their business outside the Mansion, as they began practice, she thought, when the two had come in, the group had become more lively with more and more people.

“It’s second-year Sakura class. We’re doing a café for the school festival, so we’ve brought coffee and cake.”

“Yay!”

Because young girls have a genuine love for sweets. The boys from the boys’ school were positively starving for something “handmade by girls.”

“Afterwards, we’ll take away the tableware, so at that time, please give us your honest opinions.”

These girls who were seeking knowledge were wearing pink aprons with “Sakuratei” written on them. which she knew by sight. Last year they made something as well. She thought could see the stains on the aprons from last year where curry had been dropped, but because she couldn’t be sure, she decided to not see them.

It was very nostalgic meeting them again, after one year had passed she felt keenly. One year ago, it was still “which one will play Cinderella” rivalry with Sachiko-sama. Or, more properly, it was “which one won’t do it?”

Noriko-chan, helping out the second year Sakura class carried the coffee over to the table so, as expected, Kanako-chan carried over the cake without being asked.

“Kanako-san, I think will be it for the time being.”

Kanako-chan had no answer then as, in the few minutes from coffee time to the beginning of practice, she was seen taking the tickets from her bag.

Part 7.

The three tickets Kanako-chan originally had left were, for a little while, asleep in her bag. Not that they were seen, but they were just understood to be there.

Kanako-chan was chatting during an interval in the play, and while letting her mind wander, happened to look at her bag.

But, she wasn't uneasy about the bag itself, she was just concerned for what was inside. After what Noriko-chan had said, she hesitated a bit. The ticket's future.

Yumi had not asked Kanko-chan about the tickets. She had given Noriko-chan her advice once. That was enough, she thought. But it wasn't her imagination. She had a thought that one of those tickets was for her father.

Kanako-chan had previously said that she had no father. But, the expression hadn't been one of bereavement. She could assume that they probably didn't live together. What the circumstances were, she didn't know. One didn't usually intrude upon other's family situations by asking.

She didn't know the circumstances but, she understood why Kanako-chan had hesitated. Obviously, it was over a ticket for her separated father, about which she was thinking for quite a while.

As in, if she mailed it now would it arrive on time. If she sent it out express mail today, it ought to arrive the day before the festival. If she used a city delivery company, half a day.

If she kept on that way, maybe a bad day-to-day situation might gradually be sent off. And, maybe her father's ticket is still inside the bag. Today was Saturday. The school festival was tomorrow.

But, it wouldn't be good to give up. Grit one's teeth, tomorrow Father will come to the front gate, and maybe the method of handing it over will be in person before he comes in.

(Huh...?")

Yumi, who had a pleasant desire for Kanako-chan to hand her father a ticket, noticed something. Somehow, maybe she had the feeling that Kanko-chan wished that her father would come to the School Festival.

“Hey, Sachiko-sama? Did you give a ticket to Suguru-oniisama?” Tōko-chan asked Sachiko-sama directly, during the short break at the end of rehearsal. Although it had been a while and this was the final rehearsal for the play, the feeling from Tōko-chan had been anything but blank, instead her performance had had an overwhelming power, to the extent that Sachiko-sama had instructed her to “hold back just a little more.” The Minister of the Right, Tōko-chan’s wife, Kobayashi-kun, had received a power up now that his husband had returned, which had made it very interesting.

“Ticket?” Sachiko-sama stopped her hand from writing things to remember on the script. “Yes, tentatively.”

Tentatively or not, of course she had presented one to him. When Yumi heard that, she honestly became a little interested. Laugh at a younger sister’s jealousy. But, even if it was an unexpected accident that Kashiwagi-san had in his hand one of her tickets, when it came to Sachiko-sama, there had to be some of his will in there, surely.

Tentatively, since they were cousins. And tentatively, they were still to be called engaged. Naturally she would give one, or conversely, it would be strange if she didn’t give one. --So her heart muttered, so she consented. However, she joined Sachiko-sama and added “tentatively” to the thought.

“Then, when I present one, the tickets will have doubled. The truth is that I was thinking that tonight, the plan was to go over the Kashiwagi house and give him one to the Drama Club play together with ours.”

Should I not do that, Tōko-chan was asking. If Sachiko-sama were opposed, of course she would keep it in reserve.

“Ah, you don’t think it would be good to present that to him?” Sachiko-sama said lightly. “If you use this one now, Tōko-chan’s feelings of what you wish will be transmitted.”

Nicely said, Sachiko-sama. Those words would probably reach Kanako-chan sideways. Yes, important feelings are important.

As she thought that, Yumi was startled. So by saying that, maybe Sachiko-sama had given thought of her wishes to Kashiwagi-san… It was complicated.

“Yes, that’s right. I’ll do it.” Tōko-chan stepped on the cuff of her hakama, then grabbing it at the crotch and pulling, she skipped off, swish-swished off the stage.

“I’m a little jealous, Kashiwagi-sempai…” The two guys, who had been pretending to be working and had been eavesdropping on the conversation, let out a little sigh.

“It won’t be doubled. It’ll be tripled.”

And so, the final practice ended safely.

Fitting the costumes perfectly in time, tomorrow would be the actual performance of the Yamayurikai’s play.

Ah, Misunderstanding

Part 1.

"Good day. Welcome to the Lillian Jogakuen School Festival."

Upon hearing the words thrown at someone who was not her, Mizuno Yōko checked her wristwatch. 9:40.

She had been standing in this place for half an hour. In front of her, who knows how many people had passed by her. Various sizes and shapes, various ages, like they were being sucked in by a vacuum cleaner, they entered the tall gates at her back.

Men and women who were clearly students' parent. Grandparents. They were usually accompanied by small children, the brothers and sisters. --The bundle of people, family.

Standing on tiptoe a little, that group in school uniform, probably friends from school. Companions who went to the same elementary or middle school.

Wearing that finely patterned kimono, had that grandmother graduated from Lillian? Or was she a Japanese traditional dance instructor, come to see her student's school life?

"Can you please show me your admission ticket? Thank you very much. Please take this pamphlet. Please do not let go of the ticket until you are returning home."

The voices of the School Festival Executive Committee sounded briskly. Really, from the number of times she had hear it repeated, she absolutely had it memorized.

"Good day. Welcome to the Lillian Jogakuen School Festival."

Would it be all right if she didn't stand here, but moved to another location? Yōko began to wonder. However, as simple as it sounded, there was no place to the right of here. She didn't want to hear "I couldn't find the right place" from the person for whom she waited and have to apologize.

"People without tickets, please come this way. People with some relation to a student--" 9:45

However, it was the person who had said “Let’s go to the school festival together” and who had specified the meeting place and time who was late. For pity’s sake, she hadn’t changed a bit from when she was in school. (If she’s not here in five minutes, I’m going in by myself, I’m getting tired of observing people.)

As she thought that, from far away, her attention was caught by two gaudily dressed men, who could be seen slowly descending from the pedestrian bridge. (If Eriko was here, she’d find them of great interest, very unusual.)

How would you say it? That was an unusual type of group to be in the middle of the people coming to the Lillian School Festival. As a first impression, you might say, “Standouts.”

They were not just a sample that would draw Eriko’s interest. Right before Yōko’s eyes, as they passed by, entering the gates of Lillian, she observed them closely.

One was a slender, middle-aged man, who had lost some weight, wearing a black satin shirt, grey and white necktie with blue dots, bright blue suit, his silver-grey hair covered by a white panama hat.

The other man went a little ahead of the other. A red and green pattern on a black background Hawaiian shirt and white suit, his bare head that was beautifully curved raised up. His face the same suntanned color, he was a fair example of a skinhead.

The finishing touch was the sunglasses that they both wore. The feeling was one of one-upmanship.

Well then, they welcomed the reaction they received.

“G, good day. Welcome to the Lillian School Festival.” Of course the students, and the teachers were a little afraid.

“D, do you have a ticket?”

“Ticket, you say…?” The two men shared a glance, then searched in their chest pockets.

“Hya-”

The students were taken aback. The teachers surrounded them. If he was called, the security guard would come flying. However.

“Got them.”

He pulled out the tickets. That was it. He did not pull out a pistol.

“Yes, please let me see them.”

The members of the Executive Committee pulled themselves together and managed to interact. Keep it up. The previous “hya-” notwithstanding.

(Ah, I want to see which student’s name is on the other side of those tickets.) Yōko thought. These people were whose, and what relation did they have? She was seriously interested. But, there was no way she could go rushing up to them and ask, “Please let me see.” That would be against the rules.

Parent or older brothers, maybe?

(Maybe they’re a student’s father and grandfather… If that’s the case, they don’t look alike, though.)

No, if they were “Father and mother’s father” then the fact that they didn’t look alike was OK. However, their taste in clothes engendered an atmosphere of close similarity.

(With such harmony, more than father and grandfather, it feels like boss and henchman somehow, huh.) So she thought at the time.

“Sorry to keep you waiting.”

The person she was waiting for had come. And the two she was interested in had disappeared down the tree-lined lane.

“You’re late. I had to wait so long, I was thinking of leaving.”

“How long did you wait.”

“Forty minutes, I guess.”

“If you show up twenty minutes before the time we promised to meet, that’s your own fault.”

“But, that leaves twenty minutes that are your fault.”

“Shorrrrry.”

The person who apologized, completely not listening or reflecting on the situation, was Satō Sei.

Yōko's dear friend with whom she had a close (but undesirable) relationship.

"Eriko's not here yet?" Sei swiveled, looking at the area around them. Mizuno Yōko, Satō Sei had come, afterwards was Torii Eriko, the three formerly of Lillian and the three former Rosas.

"She called, but said she won't be able to come." Yōko smiled bitterly, shaking her head. Sei was obviously thinking that Eriko was even later than she had been.

"A date with Yamanobe-sense?"

"It wasn't that at all. She said that it would be hard on Yoshino-chan, her appearing and disappearing in and out of her life. Hey, did Eriko tell you that she had appeared at the high school?"

"No. I hadn't heard. Except, it looked as if she was holding a cake that time."

The two exchanged glances.

"...She's planning something."

"Indeed."

They had no idea what Eriko was going to do but, they knew she was going to do something.

"Because the three of us together would stand out, maybe she's coming afterwards in disguise or something."

"It's possible. Well, shall we go in quickly? If we stand here in front of the gates, it might be a bother for Eriko's entrance... Ah, that's right." As she said that, Sei searched around in her bag and pulled out a paper bag then, with a "here" handed it to Yōko.

"What is it?"

"A souvenir from my trip. Dried porcinis. You said you liked them."

"...Thank you. So, you went to Italy?" Porcini mushrooms are what they call matsutake in Italy. "Why?"

"Because I wanted to go."

“We went two years ago on the class trip.”

“That’s fine, it was nothing.”

“I still don’t understand you.”

“That makes me happy.”

“It wasn’t a compliment.”

“Don’t be embarrassed. Let’s go in, let’s go in.”

There was no reason for her to be embarrassed. But, whatever it was about this conversation they were standing there having, she found herself moving forward a step.

“…Wait a second.” As she was about to enter the school gate, out of the corner of her eye, a spectacle that she was suspicious of thrust itself into her view. That was, some dozen meters away from the gate, a woman was ascending the wall.

“Stop that. What are you doing?”

She rushed over and pulled her down, bringing her feet back to the ground. As the wall was extremely tall, with no protuberances for either feet or hands, it was impossible to even speak of climbing it.

“Are you all right?”

The girl, once she had been propped and regained her balance struggled violently to separate herself. “Please let go. I need to get inside by any means.”

It was likely to have been some kind of challenge. Where her hands had scrambled for a hold, the ivy that covered the wall, was cruelly ripped and scattered.

“And what are you?” Sei laughed.

“That’s a rude expression.”

Taking a good look at her, they could see that she was of an age that could still be called a girl. Two or three younger years than them? She wasn’t wearing a uniform, but she wasn’t a Lillian High School student.

“It doesn’t matter to us if you tell us what you were doing. It’s just that climbing the wall is impossible. You’ll just hurt yourself, is the advice I have, that’s all. Well then, good day. Let’s go, Sei.”

Yōko let go of the girl’s hands and turned her back. At which point Sei took her arm and they aimed at the gate.

“Uhn. Good Health, huh?”

Sei whispered to Yōko in a voice that wouldn’t be heard. Really. If she understood, it would be better if she were silent.

“Um-”

As expected, the girl called out for the two of them to stop. So as not to give the feeling that they were waiting for it, they waited two seconds before turning and looking over their shoulders. At which she rushed up to them and said, “I. I’m a... Relative... Of one of the students here.”

“Relative?”

Perhaps this was in answer to the earlier “what are you” but it was totally not that answer they expected.

“Then why don’t you have a ticket? If you’re someone’s relative, aren’t you holding one?”

That this girl had tried to climb the wall was completely unexpected. The thought that the kind of person that this might be in range of predictability for would be two male students, floated into her head. If that was the case, however, in the years that Yōko had been enrolled here from middle school on, no one had ever been successful.

“You lost it? Or did you forget it? Come with us to reception and explain the situation. The student’s class and name and then your name, contact address, relationship with the student and I think they’ll let you in. Since you’re a woman.”

“I told them that I had one previously. But.” The girl hemmed and hawed. “I don’t know her class name.”

“Aren’t you a relation?” Sei asked teasingly, to which Yōko said, “Keep quiet for a moment” and continued.

“You know roughly what year she’s in, right? So it’ll be fine if you look into it.”

“Yes. Just, to make sure, I was here calling out to some students.”

“Wasn’t it okay when you called out then?” Even if a store was left unattended, someone would come running when you called.

“It was no good. No one came. Even if someone came and looked at my face, they couldn’t think of anyone they knew.”

“That’s pretty awful.” This time Yōko didn’t warn Sei when she spoke, since she had had the same thought.

“Really. So give up hope.”

“So, I’ll be climbing the wall again?”

The girl looked up at the wall in front of her. Maybe to her, the existence of that student was another wall.

“Um, you know. The walls of a girl’s school can’t be climbed simply, so it’s no good.”

“Is that so? If I got some rope or something I could make a rope bridge.” Even as she said it, she appeared to withdraw the idea. “That’s true isn’t it? If we put some kind of tool up, it would draw guys who didn’t have a ticket to get in.”

The girl, who was wearing a knit skirt, spoke from far away as she planned. “If I was a ninja or a gymnastics team member, I probably wouldn’t even need an apparatus… Do you do any athletics?”

“In middle school I played basketball. For something like this, you’d need a pole vault.”

As if to say ‘I see,’ Yōko and Sei stuck their fists into the palm of their hands. In this situation, even using that technique, it would be virtually impossible to clear it. Still, depending on the pole one used there wouldn’t be enough space.

“Better than that, can’t you just find a person with an extra ticket and take it quickly?” Sei proposed.

“I think that will be difficult. I get the feeling that there’s never enough tickets any year. And if they had an extra ticket, and the students have relations and friends, and if a student was troubled by a strange person, they probably wouldn’t give it up. I called out to those two middle-aged guys from before, but neither would be a partner. And if someone warns them about me and the security guard or a teacher comes out here to see, I’ll be removed from this place.” If she was at the back gate about now, there’d be no one to ask.

“Please excuse me. Very much. Um, don’t mind me, please enter now.” The girl smiled and bowed her head.

“What will you do then?” As she said this, Yōko was thinking, “This girl reminds me of someone.” Not in looks, but in her whole attitude.

“I’ll do something.”

“Tell me what are we going to do… Sei what do you think would be good to do?”

“What are we going to do, you ask. It’s already been decided.” Sei, as if she were saying, dear is me, handed over to Yōko the ticket that she had been sent from the Yamayurikai.

“Thank you.”

“For a troublesome person, you’ve become domesticated.” Yōko smiled, then held it out to the girl.

“Here. Please use this.”

“Eh. But, if I do.” Then one of you will have to go in alone, her uneasy eyes said.

“She… Satō-san is a student at Lillian University. If she shows her student card they’ll let her in.”

The girl’s eye lit up quickly.

“So, in return, you will come with us. Promise?”

“Y, yes.” Her answer was very energetic and she came happily. When she was one step in front of the gates, she stopped and swiveled, looking around.

“What’s the matter? Are you looking for something?”

“No. Nothing.” The girl shook her head slightly and stepped through the gates.

Good day, welcome to the Lillian Jogakuen School Festival.

Yōko flew past the phrase she was so tired of hearing and proceeded into those nostalgic grounds.

“That reminds me, what is your name?” Sei asked, to which the girl clearly replied, “Yūko. Hosokawa Yūko.”

Part 2.

From behind the high school buildings, next to the road that went towards the cafeteria, by the side of the second gymnasium, when one was passing the area with the old greenhouse or the pool. In that obscure place, was the “Fujimatsu Village” Festival.

You could call it a village, in which every object that occupied the space, cherry trees, and gymnasium building, storehouse, hurdles or poles had rope tied to them to delimit the space. Cooperating for the day of the festival, there stood, with their hands joined together, the two second-year Matsu and second-year Fuji classes.

In the first school term, they had chose a project to put on but, you could say that, after several discussions in which they made some adjustments, the plan they ended up with was “let’s do a store together” that the members of the festival committee had decided upon with one voice. That was the real story, which the members of both classes shouldn’t know in order to keep a harmonious atmosphere inside... But no, instead it was passed around causing a great fuss. Now that they had reached the most interesting part of the preparations just before the village opened, they were even busier.

Yumi sat by the entrance in a chair, collecting food tickets, switching the position of the change box in order to make it easier to fish change out.

A big pot boiled upon a fire, although they were controlling the temperature on the hot plate, but stuck there “being the accountant” when all around her were foods, she couldn’t forgive. If she was free to join the people coming and going in and out in disorder, then the fire might spread dangerously. --In other words, it was a nuisance.

Even if it was just putting money in and taking it out, it would be bad if the person handling people was changed, it was thought, and just as one thought, (the cashier responsible for money had to be responsible,) so Yumi and Yoshino had been named the assistants for the position. In other words, she was missing the play and the other parts of the school festival that was going on.

It was fine, but it was boring.

Fuji class's Shimako-san, wearing yukata, had been handling the yo-yo fishing booth for about an hour.

Even though they were running the same fair in the village, each class had its own person managing the money.

At any rate the plan had been to open the "Fujimatsu Village Fair" at ten in the morning. Please just wait a little while longer.

It was fifteen minutes before the village was supposed to open, and visitors and students were flowing towards the exhibition, and were starting to surround the roped off area.

"Hey, keep up the good work." Yoshino-san waved her lifted fist in a way that strangely suited her. "We're the second-year Matsu class idols. Sell, sell, sell those food tickets… Uh, Yumi-san, why didn't you say 'Yah!'?"

"Yah-… As usual, the tension is very high." When did they go from "assistant" to idols." Yoshino-san was in high, high spirits.

This was her first festival after the surgery, so her power was at its greatest. "First post-operative" was slowly, slowly becoming a beat that was calming down a little, she thought.

In about 30 minutes, the village was crowded.

Because of that, it wasn't necessary to call in the self-styled idols, on the contrary, in an hour, they would have to limit the amount that could enter, everyone in the class shouted happily.

"Yumi-sama." Tōko-chan appeared unexpectedly when the wave receded for a moment. "I see you're thriving, huh."

“Ah, have something to eat if you’d like.” Yumi conducted herself like a cashier, advancing her three food tickets. Enough for three frankfurters. The other two tickets were for Noriko-chan and Kanako-chan.

“How much is that?”

“It’s fine. It’s my treat.”

“I’m not going there.” Tōko-chan pulled out her purse.

“That’s not very cute of you, is it? When someone says that to you, it’s best if you reply thank you for the food.” Yumi had heard those words somewhere, she thought.

“I’m supposed to accept a treat for no reason?”

“Reason? Reason---” What the heck, were the words that came after that. She should have decided to accept gratefully, which wasn’t happening. “Uh, I feel like I want to thank you for your assistance with the play, I suppose.”

“Thanks?”

Just so.

“Thank you for the fo-od.” From somewhere several male voices bubbled over energetically, surrounded Yumi, then bowed.

“…”

The members of the Hanadera Student Council had crept up during this time and gathered. Because they were wearing street clothes, she hadn’t noticed at all.

“We would like to partake in the feeling of being thanked for assistance with the play.”

“Eh, that’s,” but Tōko-chan is her cute underclassman, she was saying. And to add one thing to another, the innocent call came, “Frankfurter, Oden, O-shiroko.”

That slipping out of the mouth was surely worse. But, before her, the boys became a bit more reserved.

“Yūki.” Looking around like she was searching for her brother to save her, her eye was clearly drawn back. Was this going to be something that would be difficult to settle? Yoshino’s face said, “I know no-thing.”

Yumi casually laid three tickets down on the corner of the desk, and opened her purse. In addition to the three before, it equaled the cost of six frankfurters, which she handed over as cashier. This month was going to be tight for personal expenses. Little brother, I’ll remember this.

“Itadakima-su!”

When the boys had taken the food tickets and flowed by to the food carts, Tōko-chan spoke, as if she were saying, “sheesh,” “I just saw Noriko-san with the handicrafts club setting up the exhibition of the costumes for the play.”

“Ah, is that so?”

“Yeah.”

Those costumes would be brought to the gymnasium just before the performance, and would be exhibited again when it was over. To learn what the impact of the publicity was, it looked like she’d have to consult with the president of the handicrafts club or Sachiko-sama.

“Afterwards, I’d like to go look around. I’d like to go and see what display Tōko-chan’s class has.”

“My class? Then I’ll be your guide. Until what time is Yumi-sama working?”

“You’ll come to guide me? Really? Um, then I’ll bump up the time.” As she said that, Yoshino-san’s voice spoke from a space a bit separate.

“Rosa Chinensis en bouton, excluding her performance in the play, is scheduled to be here.”

“Wai… Come on Yoshino-san, what are you saying?”

Three first years came rushing up to stand in front of Yoshino-san. Therefore there was no response to Tōko-chan's question from before.

"Don't just ignore me."

Yumi interrupted the three first-years with "I'm sorry, just a moment," grabbed Yoshino-san by the arm and walked her to a place just a little apart. The three first-years, upon the appearance of the rumored person herself screamed "Hya!".

"What did you tell those girls?" Yumi asked in a soft voice; Yoshino answered, "That Yumi-san will be here till whenever. That's all."

"But, that answer is a lie."

Outside performing for the play, no one had ever told her that she was going to be here.

"If there's a better way to put it, tell me. A moment ago, when those gakuran-wearing boys from Hanadera arrived, Yumi didn't ask for her time to be moved up. Why, didn't you want them to guide you? I don't know why but you are paying attention to a Lillian first-year over the students from Hanadera. It's just mid-morning, so saying that your mouth is torn is no good. It's not even like you've got a date with Sachiko-sama."

"It's not a lie. If that was your intention, then we would have planned for you to be allowed to leave your post. I'm sorry to keep you waiting."

Yoshino-san, leaving Yumi some space to ponder what she had said, returned to where the first-years were waiting.

"...I wonder if that'll be okay." Yumi also returned, but had the feeling that she'd forgotten something. "Ah."

That's right, Tōko-chan was waiting. All through that discussion.

"Darn it." She returned, confused, to find that Tōko-chan was not there.

“If you’re looking for the first-year with the banana curls, she went off somewhere. Like she was in the middle of something. She said to excuse her.” The person who was acting as cashier informed her.

“I see… Thank you.”

Tōko-chan, wouldn’t it have been okay for you to wait here a little.

“After that she said thank you for the food. I was to hold on to that message and give it to you?”

“Eh, what is that Tōko-chan thanking me for food for.”

The cashier pointed to the corner of the desk where the three food tickets were no longer there.

Part 3.

“Excuse me.” At the rear gates of Lillian Jogakuen someone called out to Kashiwagi Suguru.

“Yes.” He turned around to look over his shoulder smoothly, with the sensation that not only was he aware that he had been spoken to, but also that he was making time for that person. The kind of person who would sometimes answer a religious solicitation with a smile, who would say “I have time” and provide a gentle smile, that would never mean any real harm.

“Um… You’re going to the Lillian School Festival, right.” The one who had called out was middle-aged man.

“Yes, I am.”

That road that continued on was a straight path to the rear gates of Lillian Jogakuen. To have said, “You’re mistaken” would have been unnatural.

“Do you by any chance have an extra ticket…”

As the man inquired timidly, Kashiwagi watched him with deep interest. You could say that this man had considerable character.

“I do have an extra.” Kashiwagi answered this, because he didn’t think that the man in front of him looked like a scalper.

His fashion was that of an ordinary salaryman, the kind one might see on the morning commuter train, going to work, wearing a somber colored suit. Proper for a well- dressed middle aged man, owing to his tall physique. Like a boss of a supermarket or an ad agency kind of guy.

(Nikkō and Gakkō would look small comparatively… Pretty fairly.)

But the fact that he was “big” was not the only reason he stood out. The bag he held in his arms was a mismatch with the salaryman look, the item inside was likely to draw attention.

“That extra ticket, won’t you hand it over?”

When the conversation came to that point, Kashiwagi wanted to ask, “why?” It was too simple to just say, “yes, take it”, he wanted a reason to rescue him or he wouldn’t do it.

“I want to see my daughter.”

“You want, to see your daughter?”

That seemed strange.

“I understand. It’s not believable, is it? If your daughter attends Lillian, why didn’t you receive a ticket, is what you’re thinking, right. But, I am truly her father. I’m not suspicious.”

“No. I don’t know your daughter, it’s indescribable… Just, if you are willing to tell me what’s going on, then I won’t be sorry to say that you look more like a worried father than a suspicious person.”

Kashiwagi was thinking as he spoke. Then this tall man with the air of a salaryman “not a suspicious person” shook his head back and forth vigorously.

“No… I’m not a good father.”

“I don’t know why but I understand. From house to house there are many circumstances one doesn’t hear about and one doesn’t inquire. But, if I give you a ticket, something could happen that would cause problems. Can you show me something that is proof of your position?”

“Like a license?” The man searched in his suit pocket, pulling out his driver’s license, then passing it to Kashiwagi.

“That’s fine. Thank you very much. You came here specifically from Niigata today,” Kashiwagi said, returning the license. His eye had accidentally come to rest on the address column.

“Yes. Last year I inherited my father’s farm in my old hometown.”

This self-styled “Not a suspicious person” who had changed to “not a good father” put the license back in his pocket, resettled the large bag he carried obliquely across his shoulder and chest with a “here we go.”

“It seems heavy.” Kashiwagi murmured thoughtfully.

“Hahaha. Yeah, But, I’m used to it. Like a second person… It’s pretty blank though.” As if to say I see, his glance turned forward. Today was the day of the high school festival.

“Well then.”

Kashiwagi pulled a ticket out of his pocket. Moving the first ticket out of the way, he spread the remaining eleven like a pack of cards.

“Take whichever one you want.”

“Eh-” Seeing so many, the man was clearly surprised.

“D, do you have some relation to this school.”

No, no, Kashiwagi smiled brightly. “I attend the university next door. I’m just fortunate to have gotten presents from so many people. I can only use one ticket, so I feel sorry for the rest of them. Please, don’t hold back.”

“…Yeah.”

As he hesitatingly pulled the one on the end out, Kashiwagi said to “Father” “Won’t you take another one?” with a serious gaze.

“Huh?”

Kashiwagi pointed a finger at “Father’s” chest with a strange look on his face. “No, I guess a baby doesn’t count as a person.”

Part 4.

“Hey, Yumi-san. Hold your frankfurter up and smile.”

Ka-sha.

“Yoshino-san, hold a bowl of oden out, like you’re saying “here” then look this way. Ah, I’d like a little more of an “over there” expression. Okay, Tsutako-san is pressing the shutter.”

Kasha. Kasha

“Um, you know, are you asking us to fake it?”

Yumi had been acting as the ticket cashier’s assistant for a long time without a break, so it was natural that Yamaguchi Mami from the newspaper club and Takeshima Tsutako from the camera club would come and, standing in front of Yoshino-san’s food cart, take a lot of pictures in a variety of poses. Since the wave of people had just receded, they had come just when there was some space in front of the frankfurter and oden sections. Nothing was different, except if you thought about them as poses.

However, there was Mami-san.

“What are you saying, Yumi-san? If we took pictures of you carrying Sakuraitei aprons, then that would be faking something. But, this is just our class doing the jobs are class is doing. Where’s the problem.”

“That’s it.”

“Yeah.”

Rosa Chinensis en bouton and Rosa Foetida en bouton met each other’s eyes.

“But our classes program is a festival, and if we didn’t have pictures of the two of you selling food tickets, the readers of the “Lillian Kawaraban” would never forgive us. Okay, next, the oshiroko corner.”

“Tsutako-saaan.” Say something, save me, the look on her face said, but she didn’t lower her camera.

“I’m just doing this as a favor for Mami-san, that’s all. Well, whether the paper uses a photo or not will be a two-way conversation, won’t it?”

“As you say. Objections will be accepted afterwards. We’re busy. All of the second- year classes and running back and forth collecting valuable information for the newspaper on the culture clubs, we can’t do it all. Ah- Shimako-san, stop. I’m sorry but, can you go back to the yo-yo stand for thirty seconds so we can take a picture. Ah, Rosa Gigantea in yukata will be absolutely great.”

Her shift over, Shimako-san was pulled back forcibly into the “Fujimatsu Village,” to hold a yo-yo in her hand and have however many (You said you were taking one) pictures taken, after which they, with the air of the Editor in Chief of the “Lillian Kawaraban” and the ace of the Photography Club, left the “Fujimatsu Village.”

“That was so not good.”

“What the heck was with their mood today.”

With an exclamation of relief, that also busy person, Shimako-san, returned to the entrance of the village and passed by in front of their eyes with Noriko-chan. From there, Shimako-san had changed into street clothes, after which the two of them were going to walk around the festival.

“Good work. We’ll see you later.” The two sœur innocently waved their hands in a farewell. Noriko-chan said, “Thank you for the frankfurter,” in thanks.

“You’re welcome.” It seems that Tōko-chan had passed along the food ticket.

“Well then, let’s keep going with a shout.”

The legitimate number of working hours until noon was thirty minutes. But the period of time just before and after noon were expected to be the most crowded, so they dug in feet.

“Oden, sweet sake, frankfurters and sweets are all good.”

“The Fujimatsu Village is right this way.”

Two guys in clothes that seemed to shimmer, their eyes swiveling to take everything in, walked along the path between the school building, drawn in by the calls; they could see them walking this way.

“They seem like some kind of special existence.”

Yumi couldn’t express her thoughts. One was not likely to see people like that working in a municipal office, bank or at a school.

“I’ve never seen such a style so close up.”

Yumi’s shoulders were grabbed from behind. In other words, Yoshino-san, the person who spoken, had moved from her position and was hiding behind Yumi, muttering. Her voice trembled a little.

“Like in that late-night hero movie, when the main skinhead actor twirls a sword around and cuts up the rival gang leader… Don’t you think the other one looks just like a gang leader? Then the gang leader, with all his strength, pulls out a hidden pistol and places on shot in the skinhead’s back. The end.”

“What movie is that?”

“An old historical play, when I mistook the subscription channel. But, I’ve waited to see this for the first time.” Yoshino-san reasoned. ‘It’s frightening, but in some way I’m pleased,’ just so. The two lead actors.

“Oh no, they are coming this way. What should we do, they’ll start firing guns.”

“Wait a second. You’re confusing this with a movie. Yakuza enemies aren’t likely to appear together as companions at a school festival.”

“You don’t understand. This is a raid on our group…”

“That’s a different type of group.”

Yoshino’s response appeared to be very severe. That movie.

There weren’t any others like them here, and they didn’t seem to be aware of the fact that their existence here was frightening the girls, these two who looked just like they were in a movie about honor, and who had finally reached the entrance to “Fujimatsu Village.”

After a fleeting glance into the middle, they came up to Yumi and Yoshino, as if they had come to a compromise, their mouths opening roundly.

"Two frankfurters and—"

"Japanese sword!?" Yoshino-san shouted.

"And then, two plates of oden. Ah, does the oden also have tofu?"

"A gun, too!?"

Again, Yoshino-san. Over-reacting to each response was bad for business and could be seen by the surrounding people who might repeat it.

"Pull yourself together, Yoshino-san. Give him two tickets each for frankfurters and oden already."

Yumi-san reached into whatever different world Yoshino-san had gone to, took her by the shoulder and brought her back, then served the customers too or they would not be free to leave.

"Please excuse our rudeness. Um, the oden does not have tofu in it. Just whatever was in the pack, was what we decided... Um, excuse me?"

The skinhead was staring at Yoshino-san. He was much more interested in her than in the oden.

"You're called Yoshino-san. I mean, you are Shimazu Yoshino-san?" The skinhead said.

"Wah! Since when do you know my name?" This is not good, Yoshino-san looked like she was going to bolt.

"Hahaha, Yoshino-san is a very funny person... I understand. Then, you must be Yumi-san, right."

"Ah, yeah."

At which point Yumi thought, "where have I seen this person before?" Not on TV, she reasoned. She didn't watch that kind of movie.

(Um-mm.)

Not from straight on. Maybe about a month or so ago. At that time, he wasn't wearing the sunglasses or this kind of fashion. But he didn't lose out on that kind of impact.

"Ah." A priest running holding a bag.

"You're Shimako-san's father!"

"So you remember. Thank you for all your kindness towards my daughter."

"It's my pleasure. Actually, she just took off ahead of you…"

"No, really? When we returned home after the Sports festival, I received quite a scolding from Shimako. Because this is a Catholic school, I am supposed to take greater care with my secular appearance when I come. So I've reversed vectors and changed my style."

Too much, Yumi murmured in her heart. If she saw this outfit, Shimako-san would grab her head. She was very fortunate that her shift was over and she wasn't here.

"This is Shimura-san. He takes his coordination hints from television." Shimako-san's father introduced the "gang leader" next to him.

"Shimura-san… You say. No way."

The old guy called Shimura-san said, "Yes." And flashed Yumi a peace sign. "Thank you for your kindness towards my girlfriend Noriko-chan."

"…It's my pleasure."

The imagined Takuya-kun who was Noriko-chan's boyfriend was nothing at all like this Takuya-kun.

Part 5.

“Good job.”

Yumi sort of whispered to her classmates as she snuck out of the Fujimatsu Village. Because it was time for a change of shift, she should have been able to go without hesitation but, because Yoshino-san had said “excepting the play, the plan is that we will be here,” she was more or less slipping away as if she was going to the toilet.

That Yoshino-san.

“Yumi-san, what are you doing afterward? Do you have a promise with Sachiko-sama?”

“Onee-sama said that she’s working for her class until one o’clock. Therefore I’m just going to walk around the area slowly for thirty minutes. That way I’ll be able to see Sachiko-sama’s class’s display, and we hope that we’ll be able to go see Tōko-chan’s play together, that’s the plan at least.”

“Wakakusa Monogatari” began at 1:30 PM, “Torikaebaya Monogatari” at half past three. In between the two plays was the “Petite Music Festival,” which was a concert program that included the chorus club, the light music club and the mandolin club which would give them enough time to get to the green room after they had seen it.

“I have a date with Rei-chan. We’re meeting at the Sakuratei. Ah, if you’d like, until Sachiko-sama’s shift, why don’t you have some tea with us? Feel free to say no. Because there’s a lot to see from the invention club, the art club or the handicrafts club.

You tell me it’s a date, then want to know if we can go together.

“You and Sachiko-sama are going to look at the Photography Club?”

“Mm. Tsutako-san wants to take ‘a picture in front of the panel’ that she took last year.”

“Good grief. Well, see you later.”

In order for Yoshino-san to go to the Sakuratei, she took the short path to the school buildings and entered the emergency entrance. Yumi, not sure where to go, just walked randomly along the side of the school building, when someone came flying out of one of the side roads.

“B, be careful!”

“Kya-”

It seemed that her shoulder had been knocked, so she was turned this way. Yumi put her hands on their hips to return their feet to the ground and help them regain balance.

“Excuse me, I’m sorry.”

As the momentum passed away, the person looked confusedly at Yumi as she ran into her. It was a girl the same age as her.

Are you unhurt? Because, it’s my fault, I was hurrying.”

“I’m fine. I’m only staggered, but didn’t fall down. More importantly, how about you.”

Yumi looked at the legs that stuck out from the knit skirt. There were many wounds that came from branches.

“Ah, these are just scratches.”

“But, you might start to bleed. I’ll take you to the doctor’s office.”

“That’s okay. Don’t worry.”

The girl grinned, and before Yumi could advise it, wiped the dirt from her skirt. She has sad that she was in a rush, so would leading her or detaining her be more trouble.

She was swiveling her head back and forth looking around.

“Where is the oden?”

“Eh? Oden--? The oden is… There. Ahead.” Even as she answered, she thought, “why oden now?” and inclined her head.

The reason she was in a rush was related to oden? The only thing that would satisfy her hunger was oden, this was an absolute necessity? Or was a person on shift at the oden booth someone she knew? --For a little while, this all rolled around in Yumi’s head.

However, although it was the situation that this person here was in a rush, when she asked more deeply, she had been asked to point out the way to Fujimatsu Village.

“Um… The oden is ahead?”

“Yes.”

“Is that so? …expected.”

As if she were saying to herself, “unexpected” she nodded slightly “Thanks. Well, then” and walked off towards her target.

“Stalls from a village fair …expected.” Because it had been muttered, she wasn’t sure that that’s what had been said but, she thought so as she went running by; more importantly, she went into the school building to wash her dirty hands. It didn’t matter today if she used the normal entrance used by visitors, or not.

As soon as she had entered, from the middle of some people inside came “Yumi-chan” called out.

“Wah, Yōko-sama, Sei-sama!”

It was a set of the previous Rosa Chinensis and Rosa Gigantea. And weren’t they lovely.

“I’m sorry that I’ve neglected to stay in contact. I’m happy that you’ve come.” Rushing over to the two, she hopped up and down excitedly.

“Thank you for the invitation. We’ve made it despite all obstacles.” Why would they say that, as if Red and White were acting as one color.

“What about Eriko-sama?”

The two shared a glance.

“We’ve been asked to tell you that it’s become just the two of us.”

“The impression of the three of us a trio would be stronger, that’s all.”

The two muttered as if they were fed up with something. Since they had arrived, they had probably been asked about “Eriko-sama,” “Eriko-sama.”

“It’s become just the two of you? Then, originally Eriko-sama was going to come?”

“Bzzt. Wrong. We came with Yūko-chan.” Sei-sama said, as if she were the emcee of a quiz show informing her of an incorrect answer.

“Yūko-chan?”

“Mm. She entered ahead of us, but when we took our eyes off her for a moment, she ran off.

“Yūko-chan, you say.”

It looked like Sei-sama has befriended a cat again. And yet, Yūko-chan seemed like a terribly human like name to dump on something she just met.

“Ah.” Yōko-sama, who had been silent as though she was thinking, said, as if the light bulb had gone off.

“I understand. I was thinking that Yūko-chan reminded me of someone but, it was Yumi-chan. Not in her looks, just the general attitude. Ah-, I feel better.”

“…That, doesn’t really make me happy, though.” Her equal was a cat.

But Yōko-sama just said, “Is that right?” She didn’t seem too anxious to put up a fence between living things.

“Yumi-chan, are you going to Sachiko’s class?”

“Ah, I’ll take you there.” This way, she was saying, it was just about time for the shift change, when the thing jumped into Yumi’s view.

“Ah. This…!” The light bulb over her head passed and with a shot a great deal of strength flowed out from it. As Yumi pointed, her knees crumbled.

“That person before wasn’t looking for oden--”

--O-denwa. The phone.

(The phone doesn’t need the “o” added to it.)

The green phones that took cards were set up in front of the office.

Dramatics

Part 1.

“Eh? She’s not here? Isn’t it her shift?”

The two OGs had arrived at Sachiko-sama’s classroom, but Sachiko-sama wasn’t to be seen.

“Earlier, one of the health care staffers came by and lead her away.”

The student from third-year Matsu Class explained to Yumi, then she saw the two former Rosas behind her and bowed her head with an “Ah, welcome.”

“A Heath Care staffer. Then, Sachiko-sama was taken to the Infirmary?”

“Well, I’m not sure. Just then I was running around, so I don’t remember. Ah, no one had a “don’t worry, everything will be fine” face. In fact, Sachiko-san didn’t look like there was anything wrong with her, more like, Eiko-sensei had called for her, that sort of thing?”

“Huh.” Sachiko-sama’s class, third-year Matsu class’s theme was “A Delicious Test of Strength.”

In this, although there was a sense of testing one’s strength, a fun world of sweets opened up in front of you.

For instance.

Like the “Vertical Jump” that was a wall that one jumped up to grab sticks of toffee.

Or, in the “Repetition Sideways Jump” you were given chocolate according to your results.

Or, in the “Upper Body Bend” a person received a pastry the same length as far as they could bend. That kind of thing.

It was counterproductive for the fathers who worried about becoming fat, but for the children it was welcome.

“I wanna try, I wanna try.” That lover of fun things, Sei-sama, bit immediately. She pulled on Yōko-sama’s arm who, with an “Okay,” entered the classroom. As if to say, until Sachiko-sama returned to the room, we might as well.

When the invitation came, “Yumi-chan you compete too,” Yumi rolled up her sleeves.

First of all, the three of them lined up in the Repetition Sideways Jump corner where there was no one waiting.

“Is this okay, then, go…”

When the timer called out “Start!” she began jumping from side to side. Tatatan, tatatan, back and forth over the white tape that had been laid over the floor.

However, just as soon as she started, her own rhythm was interrupted by another sound of steps coming into the “Delicious Test of Strength” classroom.

“Kanako-chan?” She asked thoughtfully, as her own steps stopped.

“Y, Yumi-sama.”

Kanako-chan, who had just come, was surprised to find Yumi there. But, shortly, “Excuse me, please join us.” and with the three wandered randomly around to the Repetition Sideways Jump, where everyone’s feet had already stopped, one more person to begin jumping sideways.

“What’s the matter?”

“I was being chased.” At those words, from behind, the sound of running footsteps could be heard going down the hall.

“Please. Pretend to not know.”

Kanako-chan began to jump sideways desperately. Was she trying to make her tall stature unobtrusive for a little while, because the position is the waist dropped and the head kept down, so the posture for the repeated sideways jump was pretty tight.

“We won’t set a record, but, can I join you?” Sei-sama restarted along with Kanako-chan, so Yumi did, as well. Yōko-sama squeezed in to make it four.

The chaser reduced their speed in front of the classroom, and ran away again after a quick glance inside. Because she had said, “Please pretend to not know” none of them looked up, but as soon as that person had left the entrance, the looked after her to see if they could confirm who it was.

“Oden…” At the same moment Yumi spoke, Yōko-sama saw the person and said, “Yūko…” Sei-sama, who had been seriously doing the Repetition Sideway Jump, seems to have missed the “Yūko.” Instead, Kanako-chan leapt out of the Repetition Sideway Jump to confirm, and after it was over, whispered to Yumi “That girl” in a soft voice “Is a ghost on my back.”

“You saved me.” Kanako-chan thanked them and made to leave the classroom, Yumi called out to stop her.

“What happened?”

“Just a person that I don’t want to meet up with. Then, when I ran off, she chased me.”

“Whu…” Why don’t you want to meet her, were the words she swallowed. That was probably a great kindness.

At that moment, Sachiko-sama returned to the classroom.

“…Kanako-chan, why are you here?”

Sachiko-sama upon looking into the room before she saw Yōko-sama or Sei-sama, much less Yumi, immediately stepped up directly before Kanako-chan.

“Please come with me.”

“Huh? Where?”

“To the Infirmary.”

“Why?”

Just like Kanko-chan, Yumi also had the questions “Why?” “What happened?” popping like soap bubbles around her head.

“We’ll discuss the on the way. Yumi, you come too.”

At which Yōko-sama stepped up from behind in front of Sachiko-sama.

“Onee-sama.”

“Looks like you’re in the middle of something, huh.”

“Excuse me. I’m very pleased that you have come, but I am running around.”

“Please don’t worry. We also have some things to do… We shall meet again afterwards.”

Sei-sama repeated, “We have something to do?” but Yōko-sama only smiled. Taking Sei’s hand, she left the classroom.

Sachiko-sama, Kanako-chan and Yumi; the three headed down the hallway, when they could see Tōko-chan a little in front of them.

“Tou…”

Yumi lifted her hand, about to call out, when Tōko-chan abruptly turned her head to one side and ran off.

(I thought she was looking this way. But I guess she didn’t notice.)

Because that way connected with the gymnasium, maybe she was just rushing off to begin preparing for “Wakakusa Monogatari.” Yumi thought this, watching as Tōko-chan’s form became smaller.

“A little while ago, I was called by Hoshina-sensei.” Sachiko-sama said as they walked.

“She told me that my father came to the Infirmary. Therefore, I was told to go meet him. Those words were transmitted to me from the Health staffer who came to get me. Don’t you think that’s strange?

“Eh? Tooru-ojisama is here?” Yumi asked. If that was so, then was Sayako-obasama here too? But, Sachiko-sama was saying something different.

“My father decided that he had to go to New York suddenly the day before yesterday, I told her, he left from Narita Airport yesterday afternoon.”

From Narita to New York, how long does that take, Yumi wondered. If he turned right around and came back, was there any possibility that he could be here?

“Because I thought that there must be some mistake, I went to the Infirmary to see. As I expected, it was the wrong person. That person was not my father.”

“But, then why did they call you?”

“Hoshina-sensei made a mistaken assumption. That person who wanted to meet his daughter had a ticket with my name on the reverse, which is where the misunderstanding occurred.

“Eh-.”

For every problem answered there was a new puzzle. Why was another student’s father holding one of Sachiko-sama’s tickets? Just so, Sachiko-sama smiled.

“I think that this time, I’m going to have to put the fear of God into Suguru-san.”

“Suguru-san, you say. So the criminal is Kashiwagi-san!?”

“Yes.”

It appears that, with his usual characteristic, he had transferred a ticket without permission. Really, what had he done?

“I was a little surprised. While Hoshina-sensei was waiting in front of the Infirmary, she said that my real little sister had come to talk. I thought it might be Yumi, but I was told that it was not. If it were a child my father had hidden, I would know at a glance. Don’t you think that that was bad for the heart?”

Kanako-chan, who had listened to the conversation silently, came to a sudden stop. The Infirmary was three meters away.

“What’s the matter, Kanako-chan?” Sachiko-sama asked quietly. But Kanako-chan did not answer.

But she did not have a “nothing’s wrong” face. Her face had a serious expression as if she was brooding over something.

“No way.” Instead Yumi, murmurmed.

“Yes, Yumi. Inside, is Kanako-chan’s father.”

Kanako-chan’s father, she said.

“Eh-!”

That was a seriously unexpected thing that she said. At the time she had returned to the classroom and had seen Kanako-chan, she had looked surprised, but now that she had heard this story, she now understood, “I see.”

Sachiko-sama stood directly in front of Kanako-chan.

“Kanako-chan. It would have been pointless for me to tell you to go meet him. Therefore, I will interfere here. If you feel inclined at all to meet him, then let your will take you inside. If you do not want to meet him, it is fine if you turn and go back. But, such an opportunity is a rare thing, you must remember. Living separately, you don’t know when you might meet again. Perhaps, you might go your whole life without seeing him. At that time, saying that you regret it will be too late.”

That was the meddling here. It would be pointless to tell you to meet him. --As Sachiko-sama said that, she was indirectly saying, “meet him,” That was just enough meddling and not like advice, Yumi thought.

“It’s like putting a futon on the gravestone, that way.”

Sachiko-sama sighed heavily.

Standing there silently, Kanako-chan’s mouth opened. “Why is Father in the Infirmary? Is something wrong?”

“Well. I don’t know. Hoshina-sensei told me that he’s in the Infirmary with a very pale face. Borrowing the bed for a moment.”

Upon hearing that he had a pale face, Kanako-chan flew into the Infirmary.

“Father.”

Watching this with a pleased expression, Sachiko-sama grinned at Yumi and said, “It wasn’t quite a lie.”

Part 2.

“Kanako…?”

Kanako-chan’s father was not sleeping in the bed. When Kanako-chan came flying into the room, he was sitting in a chair pulled out in front of Hoshina Eiko-sensei’s desk, in the middle of a consultation. In other words, he was in the best of health.

However, even sitting in the chair, he was extremely tall. As expected, Yumi thought, of Kanako-chan’s father.

“F, Father, you’re the worst.”

Was she angry because she had been lied to and thought that he was feeling bad and resting, but found him sitting here coolly? Or was it to cover her embarrassment and confusion? Whatever the reason, the first thing that came out of her open mouth was the abusive “you’re the worst” to her father.

“Kanako-chan, we’ll be here.” Though they had both stepped into the Infirmary, at the same time, the Chinensis sisters returned to the hallway outside. As expected from Sachiko-sama, who could not have predicted that this situation would come to this point.

“It’s fine. I’d like both of you to listen, please. What kind of terrible person this Father is.” Kanako-chan said while looking at her father.

“But.”

“Yes.”

Her father was watching her as she spoke, lowering his head, as if he was either preparing for the worst, or saying, “Go ahead and say it.” However, being called “the worst” by the daughter you haven’t seen in a while, what on earth…

“This person,” Kanako-chan said. “I don’t know if you know, but he was with the Japanese national basketball team, and he clings to his long gone glory, living in his dreams. When he lived together with us, while Mother ran around from morning until night, he laid around the house. Once in a while, when a junior of his was promoted, he would act all proud, as if he were the coach, lengthening out his hobby.”

Kanako-chan rattled all this off at once, then took a deep breath while glaring at her father.

“You objected?”

“…Mm. That’s correct.”

Was that really correct? Yumi thought. Whatever you want to call it, Kanako-chan was now just enumerating her father’s faults. This was not the cause of her antipathy towards men.

But. Nowadays, many couples had husbands doing the domestic chores, and women working outside the home. Moreover, if a husband was staying home taking care of the household, could you say that he was lying around; that’s kind of rough to say about only men. Maybe saying that you can see a dream is another way of keeping that dream. Maybe becoming a coach would have saved that person.

“Yes. Every night my mother would escape by drinking, and when I began to grow, if I didn’t say my lines for the play right, all fathers become hateful.”

“Um, Hosokawa-san. Why do you say that all fathers are at fault?”

Eiko-sensei tried to calm her, although it was counterproductive. Kanako-chan walked back and forth, the ratatat of her feet against the wood an expression of her anger.

“All of them, all fathers are hateful.”

In a moment, everything became silent. As if Kanako-chan’s anger robbed everyone of words.

“Mm. Father is hateful.” Kanako-chan’s father said heavily.

“It’s as Kanako said, all fathers are hateful.”

Why would that be? As if that were some kind of magic spell, Kanako-chan’s expression collapsed.

“Kanako-chan?”

“But, I,” Kanako-chan muttered, looking like she would cry. “But, I understand. Mother worked because it was her raison d’etre. She didn’t want to have to retire to take care of children, she said, and she requested that you stay home to do that. Mother threw father out of the house because of stress from work. If you had stayed together, you’d have only hurt each other; you had to put distance between you.

Huh. So, why was it that Kanako-chan was trying to avoid her father?

“I love Father. Tall stature, skillful at basketball. When he was our middle school basketball team temporary coach, it made me happy to be able to seem him every week, even when Mother was spiteful about it. I had so much pride that you were my father.”

That was the kind of thing one expected from a parent and child, Yumi thought then. But Kanako-chan’s eyes suddenly went cold as ice and said “But.”

“But for what Father did to Yūko-sempai, I will never forgive you.”

Yūko. Ah, today that name seems to be going around any number of times.

“Getting her pregnant against her will, forcing her to leave high school. It had been her dream to play professional basketball, but because of Father, she had to let that go.”

Wah, suddenly rushing into such a dreadfully serious conversation. As expected, next to Yumi, Sachiko stiffened.

“Wait a second.”

As Kanako-chan abused her father, that enemy of girls, in the school infirmary, a voice called out for her to stop.

“All fathers are hateful but, let me correct the by force part.”

“Liar. Yūko-sempai totally hated men. When she was in middle school she was always saying “I don’t need a man.” Half a year after we graduated, nothing could have changed, so you must have done something.”

In other words, put the doubt of it being against her will aside. Kanako-chan's father did something to Kanako-chan's middle school sempai, that sempai had had a child and had to leave school, that she couldn't do basketball at the same time, was what was being said. And that her name is Yūko.

"Ask Yūko." Kanako-chan's father said.

"I did ask. When you wanted to be divorced from Mother, I couldn't believe it so I went to the source. When I went to meet Yūko-sempai, she was crying. Not because she was embarrassed, but because you had caused her life to become unbearable. Isn't that true?"

"You're wrong."

A voice suddenly called out from behind them. Yumi and Sachiko, concentrating on the quarrel between parent and child in front of them, no one had noticed that another person had entered the Infirmary.

"Kanako. I'm sorry. This was all a misunderstanding."

Turning around, there stood the girl who had been looking for the "odenwa" previously. How did she end up being accompanied by Yōko-sama and Sei-sama? I see, Yūko was this girl. --So, not a cat.

Oden(wa)-san aka Yūko the cat aka Yūko-san smiled at Kanako-chan with a "It's been a while," then spoke to Kanako-chan's father.

"I'm sorry. I wanted to tell you that I had gotten into the school, but I couldn't find a pay phone."

"Wah, as I guessed." Yumi looked down.

"You say I'm wrong, but where was I wrong?" Kanako-chan looked at Yūko-san coldly.

"I wonder if it's okay to tell you from where."

Slowly moving in front of Kanako-chan, Yūko-san began to talk heavily.

“Right after I entered High School, my leg was injured in a traffic accident. I had a complete recovery but, the doctor told me that it would be better if I stopped basketball.”

Yūko-san consulted with the team advisor and was offered the opportunity “how about becoming the manager?”

“Even without the injury, it would have been difficult to become a regular I was told. That hurt a fair bit. But, that was the way it was. Even if I left behind no more than middle school results, when I got to High School, I would become a skillful person. But I didn’t grow tall. Maybe there would be an opportunity, but I wasn’t being objective. But, I was chasing after the ball. I don’t know why he understood, but the one person who worried about me at the time was. You know, Coach Hosokawa …Kanako, remember your father. In the past, when a player’s body was broken, they’d become a coach, but he understood my feelings. He noticed, and he called--”

And from there, the two of them would meet. --That was Yūko-san’s explanation.

They all understood the proffered information. With the exception of the person concerned, that is, Kanako-chan. In other words, Yumi and Sachiko-sama and Yōko-sama and Sei-sama and Eiko-sensei, if this conversation about another family’s concerns had come to their ears, would have looked at the situation at “what to do” with frankness. But upon coming here, they could do nothing but watch the situation develop. Thought they might be able to leave the Infirmary quietly, the contents of this story were too serious; they hesitated to make any noise.

Yūko-san continued.

“You weren’t wrong, you could say, about me getting pregnant and having to leave High School. That was painful for you, Kanako-chan. It has the same taste as my past, that Kanako-chan is made to taste suffering when her father is taken away by another woman. That kind of thing makes a person sob in lament. I think that two years younger than me Kanako-chan is very cute. Cute like a real little sister to me. But, idiot that I am, more than I can express, I fell in love with your father.”

“Fell in love?” Kanako-chan repeated these words, as if they were in a mysterious language.

“Yes. Fell in love. Therefore, Please forgive your father, since this is my fault.” Yūko-san took one deep breath.

“At that time, it was necessary to run away without saying anything. Kanako-chan’s father was so wonderful, I fell in love. Even if you don’t forgive me, even if you hate me, I can’t not tell you anymore.”

And then she embraced Kanako-chan. “I’m sorry, Kanako-chan.”

“Yūko-sempai, Yūko-sempai.” The tall Kanako-chan held the short Yūko-san and cried.

Sob, sob, sniffle sniffle. While the two held each other, the other five women quietly wiped tears from their cheeks.

“Wahhh---” Suddenly, the sound came pouring out, as if from the depths, ringing in the Infirmary. Watching this, Kanako’s father stood up to his full height, tears flowing.

Wow. A full-grown man crying like a child. A little surprised, Yumi found tears being pulled from her.

“Father, stop, it’s unbecoming.”

“Mm, mm. You’re right.” Kanako-chan’s father agreed, trying desperately to smile.

But them his tearful voice continued. “Uwaaaaah”

But, why? Kanako-chan’s father was barely crying. So---.

Everyone looked at each other.

“This is no good, I forgot.” Kanako-chan’s father rushed over to the screen. And the other women around clearly seemed by the looks on their faces to have some understanding.

“Is there someone in the bed?”

Yumi, who didn’t have any understanding, asked the question of no one in particular, but soon had the answer in front of her eyes, when it came out to the side of the screen. Kanako-chan’s father appeared with a not quite one-year-old baby in his arms.

“We came here earlier to change her diaper but, it made her feel pleasant, so she fell asleep. Really, you scared Father, waking up crying.”

Now that Father held the baby, it calmed down, and with tears still streaming down its cheeks, it smiled brightly. It somehow resembled Kanako-chan.

“Chikako. Spelled like ‘next child’.”

“Chikako.” As she said the name, Kanako-chan hesitantly touched the face of her own sister.

“Go on and hold her.” Yūko-san took Chikako from her father, holding her out to Kanko-chan.

“Impossible.”

“It’s all right. Her neck is soft, so she can’t hold herself up. You understand, just support her with your hand.”

As Kanako-chan timidly presented her hands, Yumi felt a tap on her shoulder. Looking up, Sachiko-sama’s eyes signaled, “Let’s go.” Yōko-sama, Sei-sama and Eiko-sempai had already left the Infirmary. Those who were not part of the family wanted to give those four some room.

Mm, that’s nice. Thinking that, Yumi left the Infirmary behind her.

Holding the door, she turned toward a completely different world. In the hallway, students and guests were, naturally, going this way and coming that way. Right. Today was the school festival.

#“Okay then. Where are we headed?” Sei-sama gave an extended nod.

“It’s still about an hour and a half before—” Yōko-sama muttered, trying to pull herself together.

“Oh no. ‘Wakakusa Monogatari’!”

Um, from the Infirmary it was easy to get to the gymnasium. In the middle of her small fit of panic, Sachiko-sama pointed directly ahead down the hall, which they faced, as she said, “Go ahead of us. We’ll follow after you.”

Onee-sama looked like a statue of an administrator she thought fondly, as she answered “Yes.”

“Ah, Eiko-sensei. Please tell Kanako-chan not to be late for the “Torikaebaya Monogatari.” Well then.”

Ahead of the teachers and the Student Council President, Yumi ran down the hall. Which is to say, that because of the large amount of people, she really couldn’t go with speed.

“Why is Yumi-chan is such a rush?” From behind, she could hear Yōko-sama’s voice.

“One of the first-years who assisted the Yamayurikai is acting in the Drama Club’s play.” Sachiko-sama’s answer was a little softer. Because she was leaving them behind, of course, but, she could clearly hear the next line.

“Ah, that electric drill, huh?”

-- Calling her an electric drill. That was mean, Sei-sama.

Part 3.

Tōko-chan's Amy was magnificent.

The Drama Club's "Wakakusa Monogatari" was a huge success, and they were called for many encores. However, it wasn't just her, there were many people involved who were asked to come out, so why did it seem as if the huge applause was thanking her.

"Stop making that "we're done" face. We still have our play to do." Sachiko-sama said, when they met up again at the entrance of the gymnasium, when the curtain had gone down.

"Yes. We'll work hard so we won't lose." When it was noticed that she was saluting, Onee-sama smiled as if to say, "That's enough."

"Now that the play is over, let's walk around the school festival. When the incident with Kanako-chan occurred, I had wanted to take a peek at the Photography Club's exhibit."

Wah, a date.

"I'd like to go to Sakuratei."

"That sounds good."

"Onee-sama, please allow me to buy you some coffee and cake."

"No."

"Eh-"

"Because I was told that we should go ahead and use these tickets."

In thanks for sampling the food the other day, she said, a number of tickets were left with her. Sachiko-sama smiled, fluttering two tickets.

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"What the heck."

Arm in arm, they rushed towards the green room now. However, although there were several of the cast of "Wakakusa Monogatari" remaining inside, two people were being bathed in attention.

"Ah, excuse me." Amazed, Yumi moved towards a corner, looking around the green room. Although there wasn't much time

until the next play, neither Yoshino-san nor Shimako-san was there. Then her eye fixed upon a point.

In the back was Tōko-chan.

Everyone was wearing similar costumes, but only there did the atmosphere have a palpable electric tingle. More than that, in the middle of this noise and fuss, when they entered, only one person turned around to look at them. When that person turned, it was absolutely then, that she could see it.

“Onee-sama.” Yumi spoke to Sachiko-sama, who stood next to her, in a soft voice. “Is it all right if I come to the green room thirty minutes from now?”

Sachiko-sama was slightly surprised at the request, but shortly nodded silently. “…That’s fine.”

“Thank you very much.”

With a quick bow of gratitude, Tōko-chan stood in the back. She could not have heard what was said, but seeing what passed between Sachiko-sama and Yumi, she somehow had understood.

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“Tōko-chan. Well done.”

“You were late.” Ah, coming in from the hallway, she looked at her rudely.

“Huh? You noticed? But, I made it before Tōko-chan’s Amy said her last line.”

As Yumi looked at her from all angles, Tōko-chan escaped by walking around her.

“I need to change my clothes, please get out of my way.”

Sheesh Tōko-chan, trying to find the fastener on you back can’t be easy when you’re walking away. But when she stretched out her hand to help, she turned away with a “Don’t touch me.”

“Hey Tōko-chan, when you get out of those clothes are you changing into the costume for ‘Torikaebaya Monogatari’?”

“Of course… But?”

“I was just thinking that getting out of those clothes into your street clothes, then out of your street clothes into the ‘Torikaebaya’ costume would be a pain.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Well. Don’t you want to take a walk for a moment?”

“Huh?” For a second, Tōko-chan’s face went blank.

“Hey. You promised. You said you were going to guide me around the first-year Tsubaki class.”

“N, now?”

“Yes. Sorry, but, this is the only time I have. In other words, I’m in your hands.” Waiting for an answer, she took the zipper in her hand. Thankfully, it came down easily.

“Sachiko-oneesama.” Pulling back her hand, Tōko-chan cast a “save me” glance.

But Sachiko-sama said, “It’s a shame, but, I guess you’ll be coming back in twenty-five minutes. However, if you come one minute later, I won’t forgive you.”

“We have permission. Come on, hurry up.”

“Where did that permission come from?” Tōko-chan protested while being dragged out. She didn’t understand. Sachiko-sama had given them genuine permission.

Upon leaving the changing room, Tōko-chan stopped resisting at last. Maybe it was resignation, or maybe it was that she didn’t want to be noticed raging about, because it was unbecoming.

“Hey, Yumi? Where are you going?”

About halfway down the hallway they ran into Yūki, who was running in the opposite direction, calling out to his sister to stop.

“Yumi-san? Eh, Tōko-chan too?”

Noriko-chan came walking up together with Shimako-san, their eyes large and round.

“We don’t have time, later.” She said to both, and without lessening her speed headed out to the school buildings.

Because Tōko-chan was wearing an old doll-style dress, everywhere they went they drew people's eyes. What kind of performance is this, the people thought.

Right, where else had Yumi seen this kind of scene? Yumi thought about it as she ran. An old movie in which the lead ran away from the church with his bride. Although she couldn't see the scene properly, it was famous, she knew.

"Something about a promise."

And, although she wore a sulky expression, Amy didn't let go, and returned the grip on her hand with a squeeze.

Part 4.

The “Yamayurikai edition of ‘Torikaebaya Monogatari’” came to a close with great chaos and loud laughter.

There was the comic performance by the Yakushiji brothers. Who repeatedly committed errors in where they were supposed to stand on the actual day. But those two were even more laugh inducing when, staff and actors went to open the curtains with all their might before anyone might notice, Sachiko-sama cleverly had them switch all their lines to fit the situation, and the skillful portrayal by the Fukuzawa siblings became unskillful as they had to launch themselves across the stage to make adjustments.

Because of that, as their appearance on stage drew near, the two lead actors went on stage at something resembling a dash, after which, the scene diverged considerably from what they had practiced and kept on doing so.

In that case, the origin of the mayhem, the Yakushijis, to the very end were unable to be told apart.

“In your appearance scene, why did you two hurry so much?”

“Now that you mention it, Yūkichi seemed out of breath.”

“…”

What was with that envious personality? Excepting the Yakushiji brothers, everyone there thought so. But, people laughed at them more than anyone else, just for being in existence. It can’t be helped, please forgive them.

After that, Prime Minister Yoshino-san trampled Princess Yūki’s skirt heavily, causing him to drop to the floor on his hands and knees.

And somewhere in the middle of the movement, something was thrown with a noise, so that Mikado Shimako-san, who was divided from them by a screen, finally stood up to see what was happening.

The Minister of the Right's mother, Takada-kun, kept saying "Mama is" for all his lines instead of "Mother," (since that was what was probably said in his family,) so the Minister of the Right's father, Tōko-chan, couldn't really help it when she began to misrepresent "Papa" for "Father" in an adlib --that kind of thing.

Well, although many things happened, and overall it was cluttered, and the audience didn't know whether it was a gag or was supposed to be happening, they watched it laughing. The parents who had come to see their sons and daughters on the stage said so, so there was no mistake.

Kanako-chan, in accordance with the rest of 'Torikaebaya Monogatari' didn't say her line "What beautiful children" well at all, but her expression looked to be a little bit brighter than any time previously. But it might just have been Yumi's wishful thinking, perhaps.

Afterwards, she did not ask about what the three of them had talked about. But, when they were making up in the changing room, Kanako-chan went to Noriko-chan and "I handed over the ticket properly" there was a nice feeling about it, even if she was interpreting this without permission.

"Hey, there's a call for encore." Rei-sama's voice drew everyone back out to the stage.

Kanako-chan's father and Yūko-san and Chikako-chan were watching this play from somewhere, which was nice, she thought, and as she did so, in response to the applause that rang out, Yumi took her place in the spotlight and took a deep bow.

Part 5.

While the sound of crackling was in front of them, the flames reached up towards the heavens.

For something that was so long in the planning, the day of the school festival would soon be over and become another yesterday. Now that you mention it.

Looking back, it had been a very dense day or, you might say, a full day.

The contents of the day had been tightly packed, the sun had grown dark, one reaches all at once for a reaction, and although the words might be difficult, it was something like loneliness, or severed, something serious, one had to think.

In the middle of the grounds was the annual traditional bonfire.

She searched for the accordion she could hear. Someone singing with a guitar. A sorrowful mandolin.

In the area around the fire, girls danced in a circle. There, the festival wasn't over yet. Therefore, definitely, Yumi wanted to be inside that ring.

She was sitting on the embankment outside the track, absent-mindedly watching the flames of the bonfire swaying, from a distance.

What am I doing? What I want to do, she thought, even thought she wasn't, now.

"There you are, alone every year for the evening after festival." Tapping her on the shoulder so that she looked back, stood Sachiko-sama.

"...Every year, you say. Unexpectedly, both last year and this year were heavy."

"That's true. Then, what on earth are you doing?"

"It's fading into twilight." She was chewing well on that feeling of after-festival loneliness.

“But the time for twilight has already passed.” Sachiko-sama said calmly, smoothing her skirt pleats over her knees. Apparently, she was accompanying her.

“Then, every year Onee-sama has to locate me.”

“Am I interrupting?”

“No.” Yumi shook her head. If it’s Sachiko-sama, then fine. If it were not Sachiko-sama, then it would be no good.

The festival was over, the two of them watching the fire together, without a word. Although that was all, her heart was pounding hard.

At the festival, they had had tea at Sakuratei, had a memorial picture taken by the photography club, played in the “Fujimatsu Village, “ walked around and looked at many classes and clubs, until they felt full. It was a kind of bliss.

It was like she wanted to be this way for a long time. However, she knew that that wasn’t a wish that could be fulfilled.

As the night deepened, people started heading home. This moment was being cut off, and that could not be stopped.

Sachiko-sama broke the silence. “Yumi.”

“Y, yes.” Her heart leapt, and her shoulders moved up and down.

“What was that? Did I startle you?”

“No.”

“I was thinking that I’d like to know how the first-year Tsubaki class was. Tōko-chan was your tour guide, wasn’t she?”

“Ah, that was really wonderful.”

Taking a hint from first-year Tsubaki’s class’s Noriko-chan’s Buddha statue mania, “Different religions similar sky” the exhibit was called, with the publishing of a report on the commonalities of Buddhism and Christianity.

“But, Tōko-chan told me, more than Noriko-chan, it was their other classmates who became passionate about it. Afterwards, the discussion got so heated that an argument broke out, but in the end, it was really nice. The families and the teachers were all talking about it.

“I see. I wonder if I should have gone and seen it.”

“Eh, you didn’t go?” When they were walking around the festival, the absolutely could have gone to the first-year Tsubaki class, she thought.

“But, there was no way I had time to see everything. I think that it’s fine that Yumi was able to see it.” Sachiko-sama said whole-heartedly.

“Eh” Wah, this was bad. Something as trifling as this conversation was threatening to bring on tears. Yumi searched for words, confusedly. “Which reminds me, at the entrance there was a place to make a “jyuzurio” from beads, you’ll be able to tell that Tōko-chan made it right away. Look.”

Dropping her wrist so the bracelet came out, she held it out to Onee-sama. One could not have gotten into the first-year Tsubaki class without passing the entrance, where you could get these souvenirs. They looked like doll rosaries, but it didn’t have a cross, and was long or short. The bracelet was the companion of the jyuzu or the rosary.

“Jyuzurio? Ah, I see.”

There in a ring were large beads of red, white and yellow all lined up. In the part where there should be a cross on the real thing, were small beads making a red, white and yellow rose, tied together with green ribbon.

“It’s incredibly fine… No, colorful, isn’t it? That’s it, it really stands out. Another person would have used beads of the same color, or maybe a gradation, but in the end, this is more of a shocking thing.”

“Which reminds me, Shimako-san made one. It was very white and simple.”

“Of course, Noriko-chan didn’t make one, did she?”

“Something like that.”

Laughing, Sachiko-sama returned the bracelet.”Was Tōko-chan pleased? That Yumi chose something she made herself.”

“How would I know?”

Really, how would she know, from her attitude, she couldn’t tell. When she took a bracelet that Tōko-chan had made, she looked like she was angry. Then, when she took a different bracelet, her expression became corroded. It was cute, and it wasn’t cute. How would she know, seriously.

“Yumi.” Sachiko-sama stood.

“Yes” Suddenly, she was on guard.

“Can we walk, a little?”

“Y… Yes.”

After she answered, she followed. Although she would have liked to walk side by side, for some reason, she walked a half step behind.

A half step became a step, a step became two steps. Onee-sama, where on earth are you planning on going. Because she didn’t know, somehow taking each step became harder.

As the hustle and bustle of the grounds moved farther away, the scenery changed to more and more trees.

“Yumi.” Sachiko-sama looked back suddenly.

“Y, yes.” She leapt forward again.

Sachiko-sama said, “You are being cautious about being my companion.”

“Cautious, is that what it looks like I’m doing?”

Yumi didn’t know herself, why she was being cautious. Just that, there was something in the air that onee-sama projected. That was what she thought.

“Either that, or you’re frightened. What do you think I am going to do?”

“What, are you planning to do something?”

“Please don’t answer my question with a question. I was just thinking that I wanted to walk together with you.” Heaving a heavy sigh, Sachiko-sama walked ahead once more.

Wondering if she was just shocked, Yumi followed after. Onee-sama had said, “I wanted to walk together with you.” She had never said that before.

When they came in front of the statue of Maria-sama, Sachiko-sama stopped, as if she was thinking about something, then asked Yumi. “Last year after the festival, we became sœur, it’s been exactly one year, hasn’t it? Perhaps, that’s related to it?”

Only after it was pointed out, did Yumi sense the significance. Silently, as if she was judging Yumi, she placed her hands upon Yumi’s shoulders.

“You are a strange girl. If I was going to do something, shouldn’t you expect it to be something good?”

A whole shortcake floated into Yumi’s mind.

“No way, you couldn’t possibly be thinking that I was going to ask you for the rosary back, can you?”

“Yes. Something like that.”

Probably, she had become scared of the day of the festival memory becoming something like her birthday memory, Yumi thought. The past year had been nice. But, if they celebrated this year, the memory of this fun year would be a fun thing as well, and next year’s festival day might become painful. Therefore--

But, that wasn’t what Onee-sama was saying. When she graduated, she would be unhappy. Even if she said that, it would only embarrass Onee-sama.

“Yumi, I...”

“Yes.”

“Tonight, especially, I didn’t intend to do anything.” Sachiko-sama admitted slowly, like a child who has been admonished. “It’s not that I forgot. Like your birthday, or White Day, when I had thought about doing something, but somehow never managed to do anything, I mean to say that this is different. Do you understand?”

Yumi shook her head back and forth.

“I mean that, for me, today isn’t the only special day.”

Today isn’t the only special day. --Why did those words glitter so?

“But, tomorrow and the day after, nothing will change that Yumi is my little sister, until now and from now on. Why, should we limit it to only one year? For me, today isn’t a special day; nothing has changed since yesterday, in one day.”

“Ah…”

Sachiko-sama’s words fell sparkling into Yumi’s heart. Since she first accepted it, from then until now, she had known what she wanted most.

“I wonder if you can understand the meaning of what I say.”

Yumi nodded hugely this time. “The scales have peeled off my eyes, and tears are coming out.”

“Silly.”

What should she do, the tears wouldn’t stop.

Happiness, sadness, remoteness, thankfulness, love, loneliness, many, many feelings mixed together, and which of these the tears were she didn’t know, but they came one after the other.

Yumi clung to Sachiko-sama.

Because Sachiko had begun to cry, there was no way she could hold back. Not to say that it was Onee-sama’s fault. She didn’t mind.

Yumi was Sachiko-sama’s only little sister. Therefore, it was fine. She monopolized her. Keeping her distance from everyone else.

After holding her for a little while, Sachiko-sama separated their bodies, and looked Yumi straight in the face.

“Yumi.” She said. “Take a sœur.”

“Eh…”

Sachiko-sama lied.

She had said that today wasn’t special, just another day, another day with the sœur she had taken a year ago, but had passed over a problem that was by no means simple to Yumi.

Afterword

Konno Oyuki tells us a little story about a day when both Yumi and Sachiko are sitting on the school roof, skipping class a bit, on a bright clear day in the spring. Sachiko comments that it's peaceful and Yumi watches a plane fly by. The wind rustles their skirts.

That was the image she had for the title of the novel.