

A SISTER'S ALL YOU NEED.

YOMI HIRASAKA

Illustration by Kantoku



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**"I'm
sick of
having a
harem!!"**

A young woman with grey hair tied in a bun and blue eyes is relaxing in a hot spring. She is wearing a light-colored, strapless garment. The scene is set outdoors with a wooden structure and greenery in the background. Steam is rising from the water, and the lighting is warm and golden.

"Ahh, am
I really
allowed
to be this
happy?"

♪ A Very Editorial Christmas

♪ At Comiket

♪ The Start of the New Year

♪ SisterLeaks

♪ Hoshiimo

♪ The Sixty-Seven-Year-Old
Rookie Novelist

♪ The Fateful Encounter

♪ A Novel Is Born

♪ Prince Manwhore II

♪ The Father

♪ The New Manga Artist's
Independence, and the Subsequent Fallout

♪ Roomies

♪ Nayulathotep

♪ Okay, I Regret Possibly Going Overboard with the Dirty Stuff This Time

♪ Workplace Injuries

♪ The Akihabara Date

♪ The Girl



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8



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A Sister's All You Need.

Vol. 8

Yomi Hirasaka

Illustration by KANTOKU

Translation by Kevin Gifford

Cover art by KANTOKU

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IMOTO SAE IREBA II. Vol. 8

by Yomi HIRASAKA

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Illustration by KANTOKU

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A SISTER'S ALL YOU NEED.

ITSUKI HASHIMA

A novelist seeking to devise the ultimate in little-sister characters.

CHIIHIRO HASHIMA

Itsuki's younger brother. The perfect human being.

NAYUTA KANI

A novelist prodigy 100 percent driven by her love for Itsuki.

MIYAKO SHIRAKAWA

A college student the same age as Itsuki.

HARUTO FUWA

A dashing novelist who made his debut alongside Itsuki.

KENJIRO TOKI

Itsuki's editor.

SETSUNA ENA

A genius illustrator. Pen name: Puriketsu.

ASHLEY ONO

A tax accountant.

KAIKO MIKUNIYAMA

A manga artist.

MAKINA KAIZU

A veteran novelist.

SATOSHI GODO

Editor in chief of the GF Bunko publishing label.

KIRARA YAMAGATA

Nayuta's editor.

UI AIOI

Grand-prize winner of the 15th GF Bunko New Writers Contest.

MAKOTO YANAGASE

Runner-up in the 15th GF Bunko New Writers Contest.

AOBA KASAMATSU

Runner-up in the 15th GF Bunko New Writers Contest.

YOSHIHIRO KISO

Honorable mention in the 15th GF Bunko New Writers Contest.

SOMA MISAHA

Honorable mention in the 15th GF Bunko New Writers Contest.

TADASHI KAMO

Special Judges' Selection winner in the 15th GF Bunko New Writers Contest.

MUNENORI TARUI

Director of the *All About My Little Sister* anime.

TSUTOMU OSHIMA

Producer of the *All About My Little Sister* anime.

MASAHIKO HIRUGANO

Screenwriter of the *All About My Little Sister* anime.

KAKERU YAMADA

Production assistant of the *All About My Little Sister* anime.

TAKURO NORIKURA

Audio director of the *All About My Little Sister* anime.

MASAKI ASAKURA

Casting manager of the *All About My Little Sister* anime.

KASUKA SEKIGAHARA

A novelist who debuted alongside Kaizu.

HARUTO'S SISTER

Haruto's sister.

A Very Editorial Christmas

It was Christmas Eve, and while novelists Itsuki Hashima and Nayuta Kani were engaged in an intense lovemaking session, the team at their publisher's GF Bunko label was still hard at work. The time was well past eleven in the evening, but every editor on the team—even those with lovers or families to go home to—was skipping the festivities to stay on the job, all looking gaunt. Christmas never came for editors, because between wrapping up work before the New Year's holiday and preparing for the upcoming winter Comic Market event—better known as Comiket—it was their busiest time of year.

At the desk next to editor Kenjiro Toki, Kirara Yamagata had just spent the past half hour negotiating with the printer for a deadline extension. Meanwhile, behind him, another editor was calling an illustrator every fifteen minutes, begging for completed pages. Several others around them were locked in similar struggles, toeing the line between making the Real Deadline and watching it sail on by. Even their boss, editor in chief Satoshi Godo, looked even more sinister than he usually did as he scowled at them all.

Fortunately for Toki, all the January releases he oversaw as editor had already been submitted, meaning the heat was off him compared with his coworkers. But he still had around seventy or so e-mails to send before the end of tonight, to both writers and people involved with anime and merchandising issues.

“Phew... Well, here we go.”

Chugging his fifth energy drink of the day, Toki focused on the task at hand. But then:

“Mr. Toki, the PR team wanted you to check this. They said they need it by tomorrow.”

Part-time assistant Miyako Shirakawa came along to pass him a large envelope. She had been working as a temp for editorial since mid-December, helping out with their Comiket planning as well.

“Ah, yeah, got it,” Toki replied, looking tired as he took on yet more work.

“You look exhausted. Should I make some coffee?”

“No, I’m fine,” he told the concerned Miyako. “Thanks for all your help today, Ms. Shirakawa. Hmm... Are you sure it’s okay for you to be working this late?”

Miyako’s face froze for a moment, but she quickly recovered her smile. “Oh, it’s just fine!” she quickly assured him. “All my university friends—and my nonuniversity ones, too—they all had plans tonight, so I was the only one free anyway. If anything, the work helps keep me distracted.”

He could’ve told that smile was fake from a mile away. By “nonuniversity friends,” she must have meant Nayuta Kani. Although he had never confirmed it directly, Toki had the vague idea that Miyako had feelings for Itsuki Hashima.

“Ah,” he replied, not pushing the subject any further. “Well, the trains are about to stop running, so you can head home, all right?”

“Oh, um, sure. Good luck with the rest of tonight.”

Miyako sounded a little apologetic. Toki wanted to apologize instead, for making her stay this late. She was serious about her work, had an eye for detail, looked out for others, and never grumbled about the work she was given, no matter how trivial it was. Having Miyako around brought noticeable improvement to the atmosphere throughout the entire editorial office, serving as a breath of fresh air in this hellscape.

Satoshi Godo had already offered her an official job in editorial, and as much as everyone had hoped that would pan out, at least a few worried about whether it was really okay to have a woman like *her* take a permanent position in a place like *this*. The hours were beyond odd (sometimes you would be away from home for days at a time); all sorts of unexpected issues popped up constantly; and dealing with your writers, illustrators, and everyone else involved with your job was stressful, to say the least. Plus, Gift Publishing wasn’t a big name like Shogakukan, so the pay wasn’t that great, either.

Toki didn’t want to freely admit it, but if someone asked whether his company was a good or hostile environment to work in, he’d absolutely have to say the latter. It was work worth doing, and it gave him a real sense of achievement, but the fact that he had to appeal to abstract concepts like “work worth doing” and “sense of achievement” was itself a classic sign of an unhealthy workplace.

It just wasn’t the kind of career he could recommend for other people. He actually couldn’t count the number of times he’d thought, *I’m gonna quit this shitty job!* But somehow, he had stuck with it for nearly five years—over seven,

if you counted his part-time period. It must've reflected on how much he liked his job, the products the company produced, and the creators and other people he worked with. And while his salary and benefits were steadier for him than they were for the writers, the way Toki saw it, this was the classic example of a job you could never survive in if you disliked it.

If Miyako became an editor, would she come to enjoy this work? He wasn't even sure if *he* would continue to enjoy it. There was no way he could look into someone else's future. For now, all he could do was wrap up the work in front of him.

Toki sighed, opened the envelope Miyako had given him, and took out the papers inside.

At Comiket

Toward the end of the year, Haruto Fuwa was over at Tokyo Big Sight in Ariake to attend the winter Comic Market.

Held twice a year in the summer and winter, Comic Market, or “Comiket,” is the world’s largest event for the sale of *doujinshi*, or self-published works. They run the gamut from so-called Akiba-style volumes devoted to manga, anime, and video games to more broad-ranged topics like music, food, travelogues of temple visits, and gardening—a vast variety of topics, all on display and for sale under one roof. The event attracts several hundred thousand people every time, and a huge amount of money changes hands over the duration. A lot of professional manga artists and illustrators earn more of their income from Comiket than from commercial publications or games. In addition to the *doujin* groups producing work for Comiket, a large number of publishers and game companies also put out booths to sell merchandise and announce new titles.

Haruto, as part of the general audience, had to join the long line out front early in the morning, getting into the event hall alongside the rest of the crowd. In his hand was a plastic shopping bag containing drink bottles and snacks meant for his friends running booths; on his back, a rather large backpack with several sturdy paper bags inside. He had come to Comiket every year since high school, purchasing *doujinshi* and goods based on his favorite anime, manga, games, and light novels. That remained a top priority, but for this event, his primary goal was to find *doujinshi* for *Chevalier of the Absolute World*, his novel series.

Not that there are too many, he thought with a self-deprecating smile. He had looked around the Net and perused Comiket’s official catalog to see which groups were producing *Chevalier* -related works; they numbered in the single digits. There were only around twenty *Chevalier doujinshi* available at the last Comiket in August as well—frankly, a paltry number for a franchise whose anime adaptation aired its final episode just a few months ago in July. Still, derivative work for a series that’s not so popular wouldn’t be very lucrative, and he was all the more thankful for the groups that chose to make it anyway.

Going around the booths for each circle, he purchased two of each *doujinshi* devoted to his work; one to read and another for safekeeping. A few of the people in the groups recognized him, which he expected, given all the appearances he had made in magazines and online streams. When they did, he thanked them and chatted for a bit, as long as no one was waiting behind him. At least one refused to have him pay—"I can't accept money from the original creator!"—but Haruto insisted.

Once he had all the *Chevalier doujinshi*, he turned his attention toward works based on other series, making sure to say hello to the illustrators, manga artists, and novelists he knew manning the booths. After he finished his rounds through the main booths on his shopping list, he headed for the adjacent hall that hosted the pavilions for the commercial outfits. GF Bunko was among them, and Kawabe, Haruto's editor, was helping run things. It was mostly devoted to selling posters, wall scrolls, file folders, T-shirts, and more based on illustrations from their main franchises. *Chevalier of the Absolute World* and Nayuta Kani's *Landscape* series were among them; nothing based on Itsuki's work was on sale, but there would definitely be some *All About My Little Sister* merch on offer at the next Comiket.

The commercial booths were all mobbed with people trying to score limited-edition anime and game goods. Haruto had to weave his way through the throngs to reach the GF Bunko booth.

Um, I think it's somewhere around here...

"Oh."

He spotted a tent with a large GF logo on top of it, and he breathed a sigh of relief as he approached. There were quite a few people lined up in front, and Kawabe, wearing a GF Bunko T-shirt, was helping keep the line organized.

"Keep up the good work," Haruto said when his editor had a spare moment.

"Oh, thanks. Did you score everything you wanted?"

"Yeah, pretty much. I have a gift for you—are you able to take it now?"

Haruto lifted up his plastic bag.

"Whoa, thank you!"

Kawabe gave him a warm smile.

"I think Ms. Shirakawa and the others will really appreciate this."

"Huh?"

The sudden name-drop caught Haruto completely off guard.

“You know the part-timer Shirakawa, right, Mr. Fuwa? She’s helping run the booth, too.”

“...Really?”

Haruto, surprised, eyed the booth until he spotted her between a couple of customers. There were three assistants dealing with booth visitors; two of them were editors with GF Bunko tees on, and the third was Miyako Shirakawa. And what was she wearing?

“That’s the uniform of the Avalon Chevalier Corps, isn’t it...?!”

The Chevalier Corps is the most powerful group of knights in the kingdom of Avalon, composed of Lancelot, Gawain, and the other *Chevalier* heroines chosen by the Calibres they pilot in the battlefield. Their uniform was militaristic in design...although the skirt ventured into “mini” territory, the upper arms and shoulders were exposed, and the shirt was a crop top. This was explained as combining the standard knight uniform with the costumes of the dancers making divine offerings to the Calibres, but the backstory was invented only after illustrator OKINA submitted his designs for the uniforms. In his first draft, they were described simply as “lightly hued.”

A pervy military uniform that exposed this much of the wearer’s body could only exist in fiction, and Miyako was sporting it in style.

“Whoa! Wha—? Uh, *why*?! Miyako, what are you—?!”

“We had some extra samples of our cosplay merchandise in the office,” Kawabe explained to the confused Haruto, “so we asked her to put one on.”

He was right. They *did* make official cosplay sets for *Chevalier*, part of the wide range of merch they produced for the anime launch; they’d even sent a set to Haruto’s house. He had no use for a women’s cosplay outfit, so it was currently stuffed deep inside his closet. Honestly, he never thought he’d get to see it again—much less on Miyako, of all people.

...*Oh man. I think I’m gonna cry.*

A girl he loved, wearing an outfit from one of his series. The past year had presented frequent hardships for him, in no small part thanks to that anime, but just getting to see Miyako dressed like this made him feel the effort was worth it.

He was struck by deep, powerful emotions as he kept staring at her. Their eyes finally met, and Miyako made an “oh crap” face when she saw him. Her cheeks reddened a bit in shame as she turned her face away.

“Well, since I’m here, how about I give her these drinks myself?”

“Um, sure! Go ahead!” Haruto briskly nodded.

“Why’re you breathing so fast, Fuwa?” Kawabe asked. “...Ah well. You can

go in right here.”

He followed him through the tent’s rear entrance.

“Mr. Fuwa brought some snacks and drinks! I’ll take over, Ms. Shirakawa, so you can have a break if you like!”

Taking the hint, Miyako stepped inside the tent after a few moments.

“Um. Good seeing you here, Fuwa...”

“Y-yeah... Good work out there, Miyako.”

Miyako made sure her skirt didn’t flap up at all as she greeted him. Haruto was no less red than she was when he returned her greeting.

“This is just... I dunno. I was so surprised. I never thought you’d do cosplay for my own series...”

“The—the editorial team begged me to do it! ...They really wanted me to dress as one of the characters from a more recent anime of ours, but I thought I should at least cosplay from a series I know, so...”

“Oh... I see. Um...”

Haruto’s brain, already overheating, struggled to come up with words.

“It’s super good! I’m shocked! Thank you very much!” he finally shouted, bowing deeply.

“Oh, geez, stop picking on me,” a flustered Miyako replied.

“I’m not picking on you! I’m totally serious! I think this is the absolute best!”

“Ugh...” Miyako looked down at her own outfit, concerned. “I was kind of embarrassed at first... I mean, I’m pretty embarrassed about it *now*, too, but after working out there for a bit, I kinda got used to it. I’d usually never wear something like this, so it’s actually kind of fun.”

“It is...?! Hey, maybe you’d be really into cosplay then, Miyako.”

“Oh, no way! Never!” Miyako was quick to deny it, but after a moment’s thought, she smiled and stammered, “Actually...maybe you’re right. Lord knows Nayu and Kaiko have dressed me up in even *more* embarrassing outfits...”

She shifted her gaze away from the booth.

“But I can’t believe how many people there are. I’ve seen coverage on TV before, but actually being part of it, it’s such a surprise.”

“You’re right... I mean, otaku from all over Japan make the pilgrimage here.”

Even a Comiket regular like Haruto could be overwhelmed by the sheer size of the crowds.

“Did you buy a bunch of stuff, too, Fuwa?” Miyako asked, looking at his paper bags and backpack. There were a lot of amateur pornographic comics in

the bags, so he slipped those behind him.

“Y-yeah, um... Yeah. Manga, and novels, and stuff.”

“Novels? They sell novels here?”

Haruto nodded at Miyako, who seemed surprised at this.

“Yeah, some circles release novels. There are a lot of professional writers who participate in Comiket, too.”

“Wow, neat.”

“Yeah. Sometimes you see them team up to produce books, too, like Kisetsu Morita and Ao Jumonji.”

“Whoa...” Miyako nodded to herself, looking impressed. “Do you ever make any *doujinshi*, Fuwa?”

“I’ve never been part of a circle, but I’ve always wanted to try producing one, yeah. It’d be nice if I could get my other writer friends involved, like Itsuki and Nayu and Mr. Kaizu.”

“Yeah, it’d be neat if you could make that happen. But I bet you’d have trouble getting Itsuki and Nayu to send you pages...”

Miyako laughed to herself as Haruto sighed.

“You’re totally right. With a collaboration like that, my end of it isn’t over once I finish writing. If I did it, I’d probably have to organize it all since I spoke up first, but I’m sure it’s a huge pain in the ass... There was once a *doujinshi* novel called *Mimic!* produced by seventeen different writers from the MF stable. That was organized by Isao Miura, and he said it practically killed him getting the story sections from everyone.”

“Seventeen...? It’s hard enough to collect pages from *one* person...”

Miyako’s lips trembled. She had an up-close view of the pain the editors had to go through.

“And, you know, if I launch a project, I’d like it to be a legend like that one, but I think I’d need Miura’s level of fame to pull it off. I think a team of three or four writers is more realistic. I wanna make a game, too.”

“A game? A board game?”

Haruto nodded with a smile. “Yep, yep. There’s an event called Game-Market, which is basically Comiket for board games. Lots of people release original board games and tabletop RPGs there.”

“Ooh, that sounds fun!”

“Of course, producing a board game is more expensive than *doujinshi*, so you don’t really see many as flashy as the games coming from Germany. But sometimes there are really great ideas behind the more amateur-ish game

components, and some of the games could easily sell a lot in retail. It's real fun to browse around. There's a few novelists like Yu Shimizu who've produced original games; he made this serious samurai war game that is, like, totally different from his writing style. It was funny to see."

"Do you have an idea for a game?"

"I have a few, but nothing concrete yet. No matter what I think of, it just feels like a pale imitation of some other game, you know? But maybe if I actually made a test game, it'd help me move things along a bit. Would you mind helping test it out when I do?"

"Oh, sure. But have you ever thought about writing the story text for a smartphone game, or a regular video game for that matter? I heard a lot of light novel writers are getting into that lately."

"Definitely. If I got an offer, I'd be happy to try it out. I bet it'd be a lot of fun, getting to craft this story with voice and music and great graphics and intense battles and all. Plus, one thing I learned with the anime project is that it's kinda fun creating stuff with a group of people. If I ever get the chance, I'd love to work on an anime again, and I'd like to try writing scripts, too. And music lyrics, and maybe to write for manga...you know..."

The excited Haruto was talking a mile a minute now. He had never discussed what he wanted to do outside of novels before—not even with his editor or Itsuki. Miyako smiled warmly at him, even though there was still a somber look on her face.

"...Oh, sorry I'm rambling."

Miyako shook her head. "No, no, don't worry about it. Having all this stuff you want to do... I think that's a really good thing. Like, I should probably shape myself up along those lines, I guess. I'll have to find a real job soon..."

She sounded earnest about it as she sighed.

Q&A Corner

QUESTION

What do you think about *doujinshi* based on your work?



I'm totally happy about it. I hope people keep making it, whether it's adults-only or not.



I have absolutely no interest.



...I haven't seen any *doujinshi* based on my work, but I *did* read some fan fiction once. I had mixed feelings about it. I didn't know whether I should be happy, or embarrassed, or if I should do an editing run on it to fix it up.



I'm in the same boat as Hashima. I'm generally happy about it, but it creeps me out, too.

The Start of the New Year

The morning of January 1 saw Itsuki Hashima in his apartment, enjoying some classically Japanese *osechi* cuisine to ring in the new year. It was prepared by his stepbrother Chihiro, who had added some extra shrimp dishes to suit his tastes—in addition to the traditional simmered and grilled shrimp, Chihiro threw in some fried shrimp and *ebichiri*, shrimp steeped in chili sauce.

It was all excellent, and Itsuki ate it briskly, but as he did, a pang of guilt struck him. Every year, Chihiro suggested that he come back to their family home to celebrate New Year's Eve and the following day together, and once again, he had turned down the offer.

Compared with when his father Keisuke first married Chihiro's mother, Itsuki's feelings toward his dad had softened considerably—he almost never got angry with him at all now. Still, though, he knew full well how awkward it would get if they were in the same room. Itsuki knew he couldn't keep his family at arm's length forever—he had someone in his life he genuinely intended to marry someday, for one—but he just couldn't drive himself to take that first step forward. He kept thinking *I gotta get it together, I gotta get it together*, but it never quite turned out that way.

I guess this means I'm still a kid, doesn't it?

Shaking off the masochistic thought, he continued working through the *osechi* dishes. Chihiro had made them for him, after all. He needed to banish the negative thoughts and enjoy this feast from the heart.



Nayuta Kani came to Itsuki's place at around ten in the morning. She was a popular author working for the same label as Itsuki, and she was now officially his lover as of about a month ago.

"Happy New Year, Itsuki," she said with a bashful bow.

“Oh, ohhh...uh...,” Itsuki replied, too dazed to craft an intelligible response.

Nayuta was dressed in a kimono, a pink one with a flower motif. It certainly made her stand out. Between her silver hair and blue eyes, she was far from traditionally Japanese in looks, but the kimono was shockingly perfect on her. Itsuki was smitten with the syrupy sweet sight of his lover; he could hardly even speak.

“H-happy New Year to you, too,” he finally managed to blurt out. “Um, here’s hoping it’s a good one.”

Nayuta smiled. “Nya-ha-ha... What do you think of the kimono?”

“...It’s cute,” he said, relaying exactly what he thought. It made Nayuta blush.

“...It’s embarrassing when you say it like that. My whole body’s heating up. I want to strip this off right now!”

“Don’t, you idiot,” Itsuki jabbed back. “Ready to go?”

He was dressed in a jacket and slacks today, a fair bit neater than his usual attire. He wore a coat over this as he left the apartment with her.



The two of them were headed for a shrine practically right in front of Gift Publishing, just a few minutes’ walk from Itsuki’s building. This area was primarily a business district, where many of the residents were out celebrating the holiday at their family homes, and there were larger, more famous shrines nearby, so not that many people were picking this place for their ceremonial first shrine visit of the year. Still, there was a line of visitors that extended from the shrine itself to the edge of the street. The couple meekly took their place at the end of it.

“It’s kind of a pity there’s no stalls selling *takoyaki* or candied apples around here.”

“If we went to a shrine big enough to have food stalls,” Itsuki replied, “it’d be a hundred percent packed to the gills. Better to just head someplace local and more chill, right?”

“True. But I’d like to go on a date where we got to walk around and try out stuff from a bunch of different stalls.”

Seeing Nayuta act so meek made Itsuki blush a bit.

“W-well, we could always do that at the summer festival.”

“Right. And I hope you’ll have a *yukata* on then, Itsuki.”

“S-sure..... I’ll think about it.”

Itsuki imagined the two of them enjoying a summer festival in a pair of matching *yukata*, watching the evening fireworks, and his lips curled into a small smile.

“In that case,” Nayuta whispered to him, “why don’t we wrap up this shrine visit and enjoy our first lay of the New Year?”

“No!”

Now Itsuki’s face was completely red, while Nayuta was giving him a sullen glare.

“Huhhh? I was looking forward to playing around with this kimono a bit, too... It was hard getting this on, you know. I mean, I had my mom help, but...”

“...Then how’re we gonna get it back on if you take it off? At least keep it on until you get back home today.”

“I don’t wanna wait until I get home. This is hard to move around in...but if you praise my kimono some more, I’ll put up with it.”

“That kimono looks absolutely great on you. It’s so cute,” Itsuki quickly deadpanned, although he was still blushing.

“Can you put some more emotion into your praise, please? It feels good to hear either way, though. Hee-hee-hee...”

She laughed her sweet laugh as they stood in line. Before much longer, it would be their turn to enter the shrine. Removing his coat, Itsuki and Nayuta came up to the altar and bowed lightly, while Itsuki tossed a five-yen coin into the offering box. This tradition of his was based on a Japanese pun between the words for “five yen” and “[good] relationships”—not just romantic relationships, but everyone he knew at work and elsewhere as well. He didn’t need any more love help at the moment, but when it came to work contacts, the more the merrier.

Looking to his side, he saw Nayuta with a five-hundred-yen coin in her hand.

“Kanikou, a five-hundred-yen offering isn’t a good idea.”

“Why is that?” Nayuta replied, raising her eyebrows.

“That’s the most valuable coin in Japanese currency, so it suggests that you won’t see anything more valuable than that in the next year.”

Thanks to the research he did for a novel a while back, Itsuki knew assorted trivia related to shrine manners. He wasn’t a particularly religious man, but no harm in being a little superstitious with things like these.

“Oh, I see...”

Nayuta gave him a convinced nod, then tossed the five-hundred-yen coin into the box.

“You ‘see,’ but you did it anyway?!”

She smiled back. “Well, my happiness is already maxed out. This is my way of saying thanks to the gods for giving me more than I could ever hope for.”

“Um, yeah...”

So cute. My girlfriend is way too cute!

Itsuki’s heart couldn’t help but skip a beat at Nayuta’s words. If people weren’t watching them, he’d embrace her right this minute. But instead, he grabbed the rope and rang the shrine’s *suzu* bell, calming himself down a little as he passed the rope over to Nayuta. She gave it a more spirited yank, ringing it loudly.



“Um, what comes next?” she asked him softly.

“We bow twice, clap twice, put our hands together to pray, then bow one more time.”

Itsuki did just this, bowing deeply giving the shrine two loud claps. Then he closed his eyes and, instead of making a wish to the gods, made a promise to them. This dream wasn’t the sort of thing someone could make happen for him. Unless he achieved it himself, it would be meaningless.

...I’ve got to become the ideal protagonist for Nayuta Kani.

...And I’ve got to make her happy.

His resolve strengthened by the vow, he opened his eyes and bowed.

Looking at Nayuta, he found her still fervently praying with her eyes closed. It took twenty or so seconds for her to finish before they left the altar.

“...You were really into it back there,” Itsuki casually mentioned. “What did you wish for?”

Nayuta glanced aside, looking a little bashful.

“Weh-heh-heh... You really wanna know?”

“...Well, yeah, I’m curious, so...”

Nayuta brought her lips up to his ear. “...I wished that I could build a happy family with you, Itsuki.”

“That’s going kind of fast!”

Itsuki instantly went red in the face.



That night, Itsuki was at his computer writing.

The pace of his work wasn’t bad, but it wasn’t good, either. As suggested by his earlier vow, he was highly motivated toward his work. It might be the first time he ever worked on New Year’s Day as a professional writer. But for whatever reason, no matter what he did, he couldn’t give his manuscript complete focus.

It’s finally happening this month...

His fingers stopped as he thought.

Volume 5 of *All About My Little Sister*, the latest in the series, was going on

sale January 18, as both a regular edition and as one with a bonus drama CD—and along with that launch, the anime adaptation would finally be announced. The official website would go up on that day, as well as the first trailer, a short story written by Itsuki to celebrate the anime, a new piece of art from series illustrator Hoshiimo, and a new comic chapter from Kaiko Mikuniyama, the artist behind the manga adaptation. The light novel, anime, and manga sides were all coming together to give *All About My Little Sister*'s anime version a grand welcome.

Itsuki had finished and submitted the Volume 5 text a while back, but he had no doubts that the anime staff, Hoshiimo, and Kaiko were all working hard to make their own deadlines. For a writer, this was a huge moment, something you may never even get to experience your whole career, and the big anime announcement was the clarion call to launch everything else.

What would the readers think? For that matter, what about nonreaders? Other writers? Industry people? His family? His relatives? Would his older acquaintances notice? This anime was just another checkpoint on the way to his dreams, but as the announcement date drew near, he couldn't help feeling nervous. To a writer like him, the big launch was just as major an event as episode 1 getting shown on TV.

"Whew..."

Itsuki let out a light sigh, minimized the word processor window, and opened up a Twitter tab, figuring he'd do a quick search of his own franchise to distract himself. He typed "All About My Little Sister" into the search bar, figuring there wouldn't be much new to read until the next volume came out. But despite not expecting much, Itsuki was immediately greeted with:

"Itsuki Hashima's *All About My Little Sister* anime confirmed!" "Itsuki Hashima's *All About My Little Sister* anime confirmed!" "Itsuki Hashima's *All About My Little Sister* anime confirmed!" "Itsuki Hashima's *All About My Little Sister* anime confirmed!" "Itsuki Hashima's *All About My Little Sister* anime confirmed!" "Itsuki Hashima's *All About My Little Sister* anime confirmed!" "Itsuki Hashima's *All About My Little Sister* anime confirmed!" "Itsuki Hashima's *All About My Little Sister* anime confirmed!" "Itsuki Hashima's *All About My Little Sister* anime confirmed!"

Nearly all of the many tweets in the results had the same text: "Itsuki Hashima's *All About My Little Sister* anime confirmed!"

"Wh...wha...?"

Itsuki's eyes shot open. He sat there lost for a moment, words failing him.
Then:

“What the *hell* happened?!!”

Forgetting it was the middle of the night, he screamed with all his might.

Q&A Corner

QUESTION

What's the moment or place you enjoy the most in your daily lives?



When I'm having a beer and reading a little-sister novel.



When I'm having a beer and playing a porn game—um, I mean, writing novels.



Watching a good B horror film with some sake.



Messing around with my friends, I guess.



The gentlemen's club.



I think maybe having someone enjoy the food I cook for them?



Sex with Itsuki.

SisterLeaks

It was January 4 by the time editor Kenjiro Toki and GF Bunko editor in chief Satoshi Godo came to Itsuki's apartment to apologize.

Word of the *All About My Little Sister* anime leaked out once an image of the special-edition Volume 5 with drama CD was uploaded on the Net, complete with "Anime Coming Soon!" on the front of the box. It turned out, however, that the image came from Gift Publishing's official website. This wasn't unheard of. Other series had their anime plans leaked thanks to an erroneous update on a shopping site, or notices provided to bookstores, or a picture of the new novel volume from someone at a print shop or distributor. Messing up the timing of an announcement had happened many times before, but having the publisher itself be at fault was rare.

Gift Publishing's website was set up such that it updated on the first of each month with images of all the new titles due for release that month. If the obi belt of these publications contained confidential info—for example, an anime announcement—the image uploads were embargoed, or delayed until a certain date. Each editorial department was contacted to ascertain which day new titles could be uploaded—that's what was in the sheaf of papers Miyako asked Toki to check on Christmas Eve. It was the job of a novelist's editor and the EIC to perform these checks, but Toki accidentally checked the "No Embargo" box for the special edition of Volume 5, and Godo didn't notice.

That was why news of the anime came out earlier than expected. It was 100 percent a careless human error.

Once he saw the news on the Net, Itsuki promptly called up Toki. He didn't have any idea why it happened, either, so he tried to get someone from the company on the line, but since it was New Year's Day, the web administrator was offline.

It wasn't until the afternoon of the third that they figured out what had happened, and in the meantime, the image of the box set stayed on the website, proclaiming the news far and wide.

“Goddammit... Can’t you **save your leaking for the bathroom...**?”

Hearing this explanation from Toki and Godo left Itsuki beyond peeved. There were dark shadows under his eyes; he hadn’t slept much in the past three days.

Toki closed his eyes and meekly lowered his head.

“...I truly apologize about this.”

“This was completely our fault,” Godo continued. “My apologies, Mr. Hashima.”

Itsuki greeted the polite apologies with an awkward sigh.

“Haahhh... Well, not much we can do about it now. The readers seem excited about it, at least...”

Itsuki had kept probing the Net after contacting Toki about the leak, but a lot of the initial reaction was positive. “I’m so happy about the *AAMLS* anime!” “I love the novels, so I can’t wait!” “An anime for all that nudity? Awesome!” “Congrats to Hashima!” “I’ve followed Itsuki Hashima since his debut, and seeing him get an anime honestly means so much to me.”

There was, of course, the usual bullshit from people who hadn’t even read the novels—“*Another* stupid light novel anime?”; “I haven’t read it, but I’m sure it’s garbage”; “Little sister tropes are so gross.” Some people voiced concern—“An adaptation of a GF Bunko series? Hopefully this doesn’t turn out like *Chevalier of the Absolute World*”; “I’m looking forward to it, but I hope it doesn’t trigger a bunch of haters online”—while others, like the guy who wrote “Stop making manga and anime that bother me. This is a violation of my privacy,” were on their own wavelength entirely.

“Y-yeah!” shouted Toki, latching on to Itsuki’s observation. “The fans are all really happy for you!”

But Itsuki winced at this. “No kidding. They’re so innocently happy for me, having no idea how I feel about it. It’s so cute of them. Seriously... I love them all. And that’s why...!”

He gritted his teeth, making fists with both hands.

“...That’s why I wanted to relay the news to them the *right* way. The way we prepared with all our hearts. Not in *this* half-assed way!”

“.....”

Toki could do nothing but sit there silently as Itsuki’s countenance darkened once more.



After Toki and Godo left Itsuki's apartment, they marched straight over to the anime production company. There they were guided to a meeting room, where they waited awhile before *All About My Little Sister* director Munenori Tarui and producer Tsutomu Oshima came in. Tarui was his usual easygoing self, but Oshima was clearly disturbed.

"...We're truly sorry about this situation."

They had already explained matters in detail over e-mail, so Godo went straight into an apology, bowing his head low.

"Haahhh..."

Oshima sighed loudly, making sure everyone heard him.

"We *really* didn't want to deal with this... We had a lot of plans in motion that are no good anymore."

"...I understand your anger. I'm very sorry for this."

Oshima snorted at Toki's apology. "...Do you really, though? Do you understand what kind of concrete damage comes from leaks like this?"

"Concrete?" Toki parroted back.

"...Well, obviously, it costs money to create an official anime website. These sites generally get the most attention right after an anime's announced, so if word leaks out before its launch, it's that much harder to guide people to this site we're spending money to produce. With news sites and magazines, too, we have to work with a lot of different companies and spend money getting everything organized, but now that kind of precious information is just gonna be used by affiliate news sites to make a little cash. You have hundreds, if not thousands, of these bots tweeting and retweeting URLs to their own affiliates—the official website doesn't even figure into it. They're attracting potential customers who'd normally be going to either our site or that of a legitimate news source. And there's nothing more frustrating for a producer to deal with."

Oshima calmly laid out the facts, but there was anger between the lines.

News aggregator sites, called *matome* sites in Japanese, are web pages that collate and summarize threads posted on Twitter, 2chan, and other forums and social media, presenting them in an easy-to-read format to readers and making money from web advertising. The most successful sites are said to rake in over twenty million yen in ad revenue a year. However, unlike legit news sites with links to publishers and anime companies, affiliate sites publish pretty much

whatever they want, even fabricated stories and information obtained illegally—as long as the page views keep coming, anything is fair game, leading some sites to craft sensationalist headlines to draw reader attention. The entertainment industry strongly resents them for this, treating them as a cancer infiltrating their business; they’ve experimented as of late with launching court cases against some of the more egregious examples.

“I... I am truly sorry.”

All Toki could do was repeat himself in a scratchy voice. One of a producer’s most important roles was to organize and execute an advertising campaign. Toki’s error not only got in the way of this; it provided material support to what the industry saw as its mortal enemies.

“...Haahhh...”

Oshima let out another long sigh.

“Well,” Tarui interrupted with a gentle smile, “there’s no taking it back now. It’s not like this is the first leak in anime history... You see things go awry thanks to external elements all the time.”

“...If you put it that way,” Oshima said with another awkward sigh, “I can’t really rake them over the coals about this, either.”

Toki looked a bit relieved—but then Tarui fixed his eyes upon him. “But just because it happens all the time, I want to be sure you don’t think we in the front lines aren’t affected by it at all.”

His manner of speech was kind and engaging, but his words had real force—a penetrating coldness.

“...I will keep that in mind,” Toki said, bowing his head again.



Once they were done with the anime people, Toki returned to the editorial office in the evening, draping himself over his chair and sighing to himself before turning on his computer.

It was his first serious mistake in a long time, and he honestly felt sorry for Itsuki and the anime staff. He regretted all of it, and he wanted to make a permanent mental shift so this never happened again in his work. Such were his thoughts as he opened his e-mail, only to find a reply from Hoshiimo, the illustrator for *All About*. He had been part of the morning’s e-mail chain

apologizing for the leak, so he must've replied to that.

Toki opened the message. The full body of it was as follows:

I'm sorry. My heart is broken. I can't draw anymore.

“.....Are you...serious.....?”

At the age of twenty-seven, Kenjiro Toki had just shat the bed—and he'd be cleaning it up for a while to come.

Hoshiimo

Hoshiimo was an illustrator active in the light novel and dating sim fields for the past five years. He was male, age twenty-seven, and lived in Mie Prefecture, a good six-or-so hours by car from Tokyo.

He had a reputation for drawing fully nude girls, with particular praise given to the feel of his hips and rear ends, and that very talent was what drove GK Bunko to pick him to do the illustrations for *All About My Little Sister*. Apart from girls, on the other hand, he had some weaknesses—difficulty drawing adult males; questionable designs for mechs and fantasy elements with no real-life counterpart; monochrome art that wasn't as nice as his color work. In terms of his overall rep and popularity, he was a notch below Puriketsu.

Still, Hoshiimo had two overwhelming advantages over Puriketsu—speed and consistent quality. He always submitted illustrations with the desired quality, and he always made his deadlines. Few things were more appreciated when requesting work from freelancers, and it meant Hoshiimo enjoyed an extremely good reputation within the industry. Someone like him saying “My heart is broken. I can't draw anymore” was completely beyond comprehension.

The moment Toki read the e-mail, he called him. There was no answer. He kept trying every ten minutes, the unease mounting in his mind, and Hoshiimo finally picked up on the sixth call.

“.....Hello?”

“Hoshiimo! I read your e-mail. What's going on?”

“.....It's exactly as I wrote. I learned about the leak as I was working on the commemorative illustration for it, and it... It just broke my heart, you know...?”

“Well, I'm truly sorry about all that. It was completely my fault.”

Toki bowed his head, even though there was no way Hoshiimo could see it.

“...I mean, really, all it is, is...like...I think it's this assignment that gave me the final push off the cliff.”

“...How do you mean?”

Hoshiimo's voice was barely above a whisper as he explained.

As Toki surmised from the fact that the anime-launch commemorative art wasn't done yet, the illustrator's schedule was already pushed up against the wall. Before year's end, he had the artwork for *All About* Volume 5, illustrations for the GF Bunko merchandise at the winter Comiket (along with his own *doujinshi* he was selling there), and art for novel series from other publishers as well. Now, in the New Year, he was committed to drawing back-page art in the *All About* manga volumes, crafting original art for *Comic Gifted* magazine, doing the jacket art for the Blu-ray and opening-song CD release, even contributing designs for the figures slated to go on sale. For *All About* alone he already had several dozen different assignments in the works, and these were all but guaranteed to expand over time.

Even Toki, as his assignment giver, was concerned that he was overloading him, but Hoshiimo was excited about being involved with an anime for the first time, and he simply figured *Well, I'm sure he'll find a way.*

"...I'm thinking about taking this chance to reconsider my schedule. I'm sorry about this."

"...Right. I think that's a good idea."

That was all Toki could offer to the crestfallen illustrator.

They talked for a little while longer and eventually agreed to cancel the commemorative art assignment, which was slated to appear on the official anime website.

"I'll tell the anime side about it, okay?"

"I'm sorry... I'm sorry... I'm sorry..."

"No," Toki said to Hoshiimo, profusely apologizing and sounding close to tears. "I'm the one who should say sorry to you..."



"Phew..."

Off the phone with Hoshiimo, Toki let out a deep sigh.

...It could be hard, as an editor, to hear backlash ("If I can't draw it, I can't draw it, okay?! I can't *do* anything about it!") or a harsh lecture ("This is *your* fault for making such a dumb mistake!"). But having someone apologize over and over to him like that was just as painful, in a way. When work isn't going well with writers or illustrators, the results could unfold in several different

ways, but all of them presented serious challenges.

“Something up, KenKen?” Godo asked as he passed by. When Toki gave him the news, Godo scrunched up his mob-boss face.

“...All right. I understand. Hopefully Hoshiimo can get back on his feet...”

“Yeah.”

“But the more dedicated a person is, normally, the more time it takes for them to recover once things go awry. Keep a close eye on him, okay?”

Toki felt a chill down his spine. “Um, all right. I’ll take some time to visit him and apologize.”

“...Thanks. Providing mental care for our creators is part of an editor’s job.”

Q&A Corner

QUESTION

Hashima declined to work with Puriketsu on three different projects because he'd be a "mismatch" for the series, but isn't that kind of rude to the other illustrators—all but telling them they're B-tier material?



...Yeah, maybe.

To be honest, it *did* feel kind of like "Who do you think you are?" to me. Like, do you think you're in a position where you can pick and choose your illustrators?



You don't have to go *that* far...

But just like there are clear differences among novelists in terms of ability and achievements, the same is true for illustrators, too. You're constantly compared with people better than you in this business, whether it's fair or not, and everyone involved is fully aware of that.



The Sixty-Seven-Year-Old Rookie Novelist

Kenjiro Toki was kept more than busy enough after New Year's Day dealing with SisterLeaks, but that was far from his only job. So, at three PM on January 6, he was in an editorial meeting room, talking a project over with one of his writers.

An elderly man in traditional Japanese dress appeared at the office five minutes before his appointment. This was Yoshihiro Kiso, a rookie writer who won honorable mention at the 15th GF Bunko New Writers Contest with his samurai drama *Sengoku Kenpuden*. "Yoshihiro Kiso" was his real name, and it was the one he planned to debut with. He was sixty-seven, making him both the oldest winner in contest history by far and the oldest author currently in the GF Bunko stable. His eyes were sharp, his posture perfect, and he exuded the atmosphere of a seasoned samurai himself, wholly unaffected by the ravages of time. Just sitting across from him in the meeting room made Toki tense up.

The editor placed a printout of *Sengoku Kenpuden* on the table. It was time to begin their story meeting.

"So, um, Mr. Kiso... Thanks very much for your revisions. I had a look through them all."

"Right," Kiso replied in a low, authoritative voice that made Toki nervous.

"And..... Well, no need to beat around the bush.....I think they were all very good."

Sengoku Kenpuden, as submitted to the New Writers Contest, was a hard-boiled samurai drama starring swordsman Tsukahara Bokuden—a real-life historical figure—as he journeyed around the country and encountered many other samurai. The manuscript had since gone through four major rewrites, however, turning it into something completely different. It still captured the feel of Japan's Sengoku period and featured deep, well-modeled characters, two aspects that earned it praise from the judges. But now the story—originally straightforward and lacking ornamentation—had more variance, thanks to more beef in the fighting scenes. And the depictions of food and other meals in the

story, woven with Kiso's talented powers of expression, could even make the novel pass as "gourmet" historical fiction.

The biggest change, however, was the presence of Tsurugi, a pretty young heroine who wasn't in the submitted novel at all. She was a shrine maiden who served Takemikazuchi, the god of thunder and swords, and she appeared here and there in the plot, alternately helping out Bokuden and attempting to seduce him. Her presence gave the story some much-needed color.

"You think?" the taciturn Kiso replied, expression unchanged.

"Honestly, they surprised me. Tsurugi's become a lot cuter than in the previous revision."

Tsurugi debuted in the draft before this one, but the way she was positioned and described, she was a poor fit for the story. For a moment, Toki thought having Kiso bring a cutesy girl character into this battle chronicle was asking too much. Seeing such a transformation for the better in a single revision... Kiso's growth as an author astonished him.

"**Is this moe?**" Kiso asked, eyes carving into Toki like daggers.

"Yes. Totally moe," he replied with a straight face.

"Ah." This finally made Kiso relax his expression a bit. "Then I must thank you for lending me that material, Mr. Toki."

At their third editorial meeting, Kiso brought up that he wanted to understand the concept of "moe," the feelings of powerful affection otaku often feel for characters in pop culture. Toki walked him through it, lending him a book soberly covering the scene and its core elements, along with several manga, light novels, and anime series with lots of pretty-girl characters. If he was going to continue fighting it out in the light novel market, Toki reasoned, he'd want to get the concept of moe down.

He had no idea Kiso would implement his understanding of it in *Sengoku Kenpuden*. This guidance was just for the future; he assumed that he'd stick with hardcore samurai swordplay for the *Sengoku* publication. A samurai novel with an all-male cast had almost no chance of selling, he admitted to himself, but in terms of his label, the New Writers Contest, and the need for diversity in light novel market itself, he felt publishing this was nonetheless significant. But even with his debut novel, Kiso was already taking a serious look at the light novel battlefield before him. It was actually Kiso who suggested adding a pretty face to the cast.

"I'm glad it came in handy... By the way, can I ask what helped you the most out of what I gave you? Just for my reference."

“...It may be my lack of experience, but the guide I began with failed to resonate emotionally with me, although I understood the logic behind its arguments. I would say the anime provided a better reference. It was like looking at my own grandchildren. I wanted to unconditionally love these girls, and that feeling’s still with me.”

“I see,” Toki said, meekly nodding, while Kiso continued in his austere voice.

“In my understanding of it, moe makes one’s heart leap for joy. What do you think, Mr. Toki?”

“I absolutely agree.”

Toki’s face was serious, but inside, he could feel the joy welling in his heart.

—*This author might be a star in the making.*

Yoshihiro Kiso was sixty-seven, an old man, someone who didn’t even know what a “light novel” was until he was informed he’d won. His submitted novel was close to being disqualified for miscategorization, and Toki didn’t feel he had much future as a light novel writer. But in a flash, Kiso had experienced moe for himself and applied it to his work. The wealth of experiences in his long life gave extra depth to his settings and characters, and he was flexible—and talented—enough to quickly take in unfamiliar concepts and work them into his story. As his editor, Toki wanted to support his growth. It had been too long since he met an author who made him truly feel that way.

“...Something the matter?” Kiso asked, noticing Toki’s nostrils flaring.

“Oh, um, no.” He blushed a bit. “To tell you the truth, since New Year’s Day I’ve had to deal with a serious mistake I made in another project, so I’m just trying to focus on my work more.”

“A serious mistake?”

“Yes. It’s truly embarrassing to me, but...”

Toki gave him a quick rundown of how he inadvertently leaked the *All About* anime reveal.

“So I went to Mr. Hashima and the anime staff to apologize...but I think they’re still both angry at me. What would you do in a situation like this, Mr. Kiso?”

He was asking Kiso not as a rookie novelist, but as a guide on life’s tribulations. Until he hit retirement age, Kiso was apparently a high-ranking executive at a company in the shipbuilding industry. Maybe, Toki thought, he’d have some good advice.

“For a Japanese man, there has only ever been one way to atone,” he replied

in his dignified voice.

“...What’s that?”

“Seppuku.”

“.....”

A bead of cold sweat ran down Toki’s cheek.

“Um, I don’t think I’m capable of disemboweling myself...”

“I am joking, of course,” Kiso replied, face still dead serious.

“I’m sorry, it didn’t sound that way to me...”

“No?” the stern old man said, “...Perhaps I need to brush up on my comedic skills as well. This is obvious, I am sure, but the best way to recover from a work mistake is with work. Of course, if you want to prove your regret in a physical manner, you *could* always sever your little finger, or shave your head...”

I don’t think I’m capable of the finger thing, either..., Toki thought.

The Fateful Encounter

The date: January 7. The place: The fourth-floor elevator lobby at Gift Publishing. Once again, Kenjiro Toki was waiting on someone for an edit meeting, and about ten minutes after the appointed time, the man appeared behind the doors. It was Setsuna Ena, aka Puriketsu, a small-statured young man with his hair dyed a variety of colors.

“Hey-yoo... *Pfftt!* Hey, what happened to you, KenKen?!”

Setsuna immediately cracked up upon seeing Toki’s face...or, to be more exact, his head. He had shaved off all his hair, stopping by a barber shop this morning before work to have the deed done.

“...I’m refocusing on my work,” Toki muttered back, blushing a little.

Yesterday, during his editorial meeting with Kiso, the writer had suggested three methods of taking responsibility: seppuku, chopping off his little finger, or shaving his head. The first two didn’t seem too plausible to Toki, but shaving, at least, was doable. So he did it. He knew it’d serve no purpose to Itsuki and the anime staff, but he wanted to step up and prove he was drawing the line with himself. He hadn’t taken all his hair off since middle school and his editing coworkers all laughed at him, but he really did feel like he had a new outlook on life.

“Huh. Well, it looks good on ya. But aren’t you cold?”

“...Yes,” he meekly replied. Going completely bald in January wasn’t for the faint of heart.

“Hey, y’know, I was over at Hashima’s place just now. You sure screwed the pooch this time, huh, KenKen?”

“Oof...”

Setsuna was as casual about this as he might have been about the weather, but it felt like a knife in Toki’s heart.

“Oh, did you shave your head out of, like, shame or something? Ha-ha-ha! I didn’t know they still did that anymore.”

“Sh-shut up!”

That merciless laughter struck a match with Toki. He coughed, gathering himself.

“...Well, enough about me. The writer’s waiting for you.”

With that, Toki guided Setsuna to the meeting room.



Inside, waiting for them, was a man in a business suit and glasses, looking ready to attend a boardroom meeting.

“Sorry to keep you, Mr. Yanagase.”

Makoto Yanagase was thirty years old and fresh from winning a runner-up prize at the 15th GF Bunko New Writers Contest for his epic yarn *The Goddess Must Be Punished! I’ll Save the World for You, So Just Show Me Your Ass!*

“Nice to meet you. My name’s Yanagase.”

Yanagase walked up to Setsuna, politely greeted him, and presented him with a business card.

“Oh, uh, thanks. Puriketsu here. Sorry, I don’t have a card, so...”

“No need to worry,” Yanagase sincerely replied, not offended by Setsuna’s casual rudeness one bit.

Once they were done, they sat across from each other, Toki taking a seat next to his author. Makoto Yanagase and Puriketsu—novelist and illustrator—were meeting for the first time today.

The Goddess Must Be Punished!, Yanagase’s debut novel, was an adventure set in a fantasy world with strong comedic elements, but its most notable feature was how the hero could gain his fighting powers from his companion, the goddess Cittia, by spanking her ass in *just* the right way. This description, by itself, probably doesn’t provide much context, but that’s really how the book went, so there’s no other way to put it—basically, it was a freewheeling adventure combined with the very niche fetish of spanking.

Ever since he read the first submission, Toki thought, “Puriketsu’s the only possible choice to illustrate this.” Frankly, he wasn’t that enthusiastic about calling for Puriketsu’s services, given how much of a pain he was to work with on Itsuki’s *Genesis Sisters of the New World* and the recently-canceled *SILLIES*. Still, nobody recognized the artist’s abilities more than Toki, and not many people could’ve portrayed the world of *The Goddess Must Be Punished!* better

than he. When he brought him up with Yanagase, the author raved over his work (“I don’t think there’s a more charming ass-drawer in the world”), so he decided to throw caution to the wind and reach out to Puriketsu.

“So, yeah, I read your novel, Yanagase.”

Yanagase grew visibly tense. When Setsuna had been asked to illustrate a new series called *The Goddess Must Be Punished!*, the artist casually replied “Sure thing” to him—but he didn’t know what Setsuna thought of the book yet. The contract still wasn’t signed, and given Setsuna’s quirky personality, there was every chance he’d say “Never mind, it doesn’t work for me.”

But:

“It was soooooooooo good!”

Yanagase’s eyes widened.

Setsuna was all smiles with a twinkle in his eye. “I don’t know much about spanking, so at first, it was like—y’know, why do you have to slap this pretty ass so much? I didn’t really get it. But you aren’t *just* slapping it! It’s the *heart* of it that’s important, right?”

“Right... You’re exactly right...!”

Yanagase’s voice shook out of sheer emotion, excitement written all over his face.

“Something people often misunderstand is that spanking isn’t just slapping someone’s rear end to make them feel good. The sound, the sensation, the path of the hand or whip in the air, the way the butt cheeks jiggle, the way they turn red, the ecstatic panting, the screams infused with pleasure and pain, the beads of sweat flying into the air, the love juices dripping down, the excited breaths, the words exchanged... It’s a total work of art, an act that blends each aspect together into a single composite! True beauty in spanking only happens when the spanker deeply understands his partner, and the spank-ee deeply trusts her companion! Spanking is a heart-to-heart conversation, a clash of love against love!”

“Um, M-Mr. Yanagase, can you relax a little, please?” a restrained Toki asked. Snapping out of it, Yanagase, pushed up his glasses with a finger and returned to his mild-mannered demeanor.

“...Spanking is a major movement in Western countries, with most couples performing it regularly,¹ but it’s hard to say it has attained a solid footing in Japan as of yet. Through this novel, I want to spread the charms of spanking

across the nation—and if I’m going to make that happen, I’ll need your strength, Puriketsu. I need the beautiful reddened rumps of Cittia and the other heroines you’ll draw!”

“It would be an honor, sir!” Setsuna grinned, childlike, as he took two sheets out from his bag. “I did a couple of test runs on the Cittia character, but what do you think?”

He handed the illustrations over, and Yanagase’s eyes nearly popped out of his skull. One was a full-body study of Cittia—a truly divine presence in the way she carried herself, but still with an air of kindness and vulnerability. It was a perfect match for her character in the text.



“This... This is it. This is the goddess, Lady Cittia...!”

There were tears welling in Yanagase’s eyes. Each light novel writer had their own favorite moments in their careers, but if you polled them all, “the moment you see artwork for your characters” would probably be in the top two. For a rookie writer who has never experienced it before, the sheer emotion is even more intense.

But the second sheet was even more amazing. It was a close-up of her rear end, taking up the full dimensions of the paper—realistic, but retaining the art style of the first sample. Raw and vivid, but with a kind of elegance, it was truly an ass beautiful enough to belong to a goddess. It wasn’t decorated or adorned in any way, but to Toki, he could almost see the halo of divine light crowning her hallowed cheeks.

“Ohhhhh...! Lady Cittia... So noble... Noble... Noble, noble, noble noble noble noble *noooooooble*...!”

Now Yanagase was shedding profuse amounts of tears, like a devout worshipper visited by a real goddess. Toki worried he’d start praying to this icon on the spot.

“Puriketsu,” he asked, “have you...gotten better at your art lately?”

The first character design was wonderful, featuring that classic Puriketsu level of quality, but the ass shot was even more astounding. Toki hadn’t seen his art since the final volume of *SILLIES*, released last September, but his work had clearly evolved since then. It was one thing if an amateur learned how to draw decently in three months, but he never heard of a professional of Puriketsu’s level advancing like *this*.

“Heh-heh-heh... Don’cha think?” Setsuna smiled, a bit proud of himself.

“Did you, um, do something? Because this level of improvement is unheard of.”

“Well, actually...I’ve finally managed to bear witness to the Ass of the Millennium.”

“The millennium...?”

As he then explained to the puzzled Toki, Setsuna had run into a beautiful woman with said millennial ass last March. He had spent the rest of the year trying to find her again, and he finally succeeded in October, successfully gaining a glimpse of the top half of her butt. The eye-opening experience awakened Setsuna to the point that the asses he drew shone more brightly than ever before.

“But I only saw half of her ass, so I want her to show me the rest sometime. I

feel like I could become truly *complete* then, y’know?”

“Complete...?” Toki asked, swallowing nervously. Setsuna was wowing him enough already, but there’s even *more* room to grow?

Who the hell are you, Frieza?

Toki had no idea who this mystery woman was, but he wished he could give Setsuna her full ass to view. Maybe the editorial team could offer a reward for anyone who tracks her down—they’d have to seriously discuss that later. Any professional editor, after all, wouldn’t hesitate to pull down a woman’s panties if it resulted in an outstanding book.

“Do you remember who this girl was, Puriketsu?”

“Hmm... Anything unrelated to her ass is a bit fuzzy, but I think I can picture her, yeah.”

“In that case,” Toki said, “why don’t you try sketching her? I could have editorial help you search.”

“You could?! Whoa! Okay, lemme try real quick!”

Setsuna whipped out his sketchbook and a mechanical pencil, and began drawing the sketch while muttering things like “Hmm, I *think* she was kinda like this...” under his breath. After ten or so minutes:

“Okay, done! This is the girl! I’m sure of it!”

“Here, lemme see—*huh ...?!?*”

When he saw the artwork, Toki scrunched his eyebrows. She had short hair, large eyes, and thin eyebrows. She looked a little miffed, but she had handsome, almost androgynous looks, maybe even letting her pass as a boy...

...Um, isn’t this Chihiro?

The girl Setsuna just drew was the spitting image of Chihiro Hashima, Itsuki’s half brother and a kid Toki was familiar with.

“What d’you think?” Setsuna asked.

“Ah... Ahh, yeah, um...” Toki hemmed and hawed for a bit before resolving himself to ask. “Hey, uh, Puriketsu, just to play devil’s advocate... Are you *sure* this was a girl?”

Setsuna gave him an odd look for a moment. Then he relaxed.

“Yeah, dude! No doubt about that, sir! Like, no way would I mistake a *dude*’s ass for a girl’s! She had girl’s panties on and everything!”

“Oh, I see...”

If they were definitely panties, she all but had to be a girl.

—*No, but...seriously, it couldn’t be anyone else...*

Another bead of cold sweat went down Toki’s head. His instincts told him he

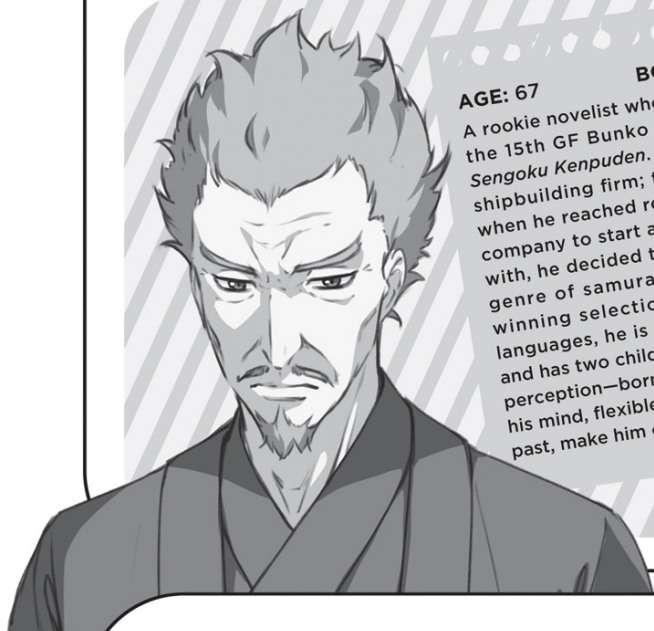
was on the cusp of an *extremely* important discovery. If this were a suspense film, he'd get killed by some assassin as soon as he tried to tell the protagonist about it.

"What's up, KenKen?" Setsuna asked, looking perplexed.

"N-no, nothing! But...hmm, this girl has the Ass of the Millennium, huh? Well, I have no idea where to begin looking, but I'll keep an eye out, too, okay?"

Toki tried his best to hide his agitation. It made him sound terribly unnatural, but Setsuna didn't seem to be concerned. "Great! Thanks a lot!" he replied with a smile.

YOSHIHIRO KISO



AGE: 67

BORN: August 13

A rookie novelist who won honorable mention at the 15th GF Bunko New Writers Contest with *Sengoku Kenpuden*. Previously an executive for a shipbuilding firm; they begged him to stay on when he reached retirement age, but he left the company to start a new chapter in life. To begin with, he decided to write a novel in his favorite genre of samurai drama; the result was this winning selection. Versed in seven different languages, he is married to a Romanian woman and has two children and three grandchildren. His perception—born of a lifetime of experience—and his mind, flexible enough not to be trapped by his past, make him one genius-level grandpa.

MAKOTO YANAGASE



AGE: 30

BORN: May 30

A rookie novelist who won second prize at the 15th GF Bunko New Writers Contest with *The Goddess Must Be Punished! I'll Save the World for You, So Just Show Me Your Ass!* On his fifteenth birthday, a female friend slapped him on the butt as a joke; when he slapped her back to retaliate, his mind awoke to a dormant spanking fetish. He's kept it hidden, as persistent swatting had cost him at least one love interest...but after winning this award, he's been driven by a passion to spread the charms of spanking around the world.

A Novel Is Born

January 18 was the date when GF Bunko's releases for the month went on sale. Bookstores across Japan would welcome six new titles to the shelves, including *All About My Little Sister* Volume 5 and its deluxe edition, drama CD included.

Haruto was in Tokyo's Akihabara neighborhood, world otaku headquarters, to pick up the new GF Bunko books. The bookstore near his family's place in Chiba stocked them as well, but he always went to Akihabara to grab GF titles, seeing it as a chance to engage in a little market research. One could, of course, get a decent grasp of industry trends online, and purchase the more well-known *doujinshi* and self-published games online, but you never knew what kind of treasures you might find among the lesser-known *doujin* releases, and many light novels and comics came with store-exclusive bonuses available only in the shops that catered to nerds.

Even discounting all that, however, Haruto just liked the town of Akihabara. There were otaku stores in every direction, huge signs advertising games and anime, girls dressed like maids passing out ad flyers for their cafés, and crowds of people—*his* people—going up and down the street. It was loud and obnoxious, but he found it endlessly soothing, which he imagined probably made him a hardcore otaku.

Itsuki, his partner in crime, didn't have much interest in store-exclusive bonuses or *doujinshi*. He hated going to Akihabara at all—there were “too many people”—and he bought a lot of his content digitally. He wasn't the sort, Haruto thought, to get attached to material possessions.

—*Here's this total f—k obsessed with little sisters who talks and acts like he's in middle school, and yet he really doesn't act much like an otaku at all. He said he didn't care about Comiket; he has a girlfriend; he's not a virgin...*

A slight sense of inferiority crossed Haruto's mind as he entered an otaku-oriented shop loaded with manga and light novels. An entire floor was devoted to the latter, in fact, and the new-releases section boasted piles of GF Bunko's latest. Volume 5 of *All About My Little Sister* was front and center, and between

the regular book and the deluxe edition, it was clear this shop took in a lot of inventory. That's what scoring an anime adaptation would get you, for sure. There was even a handwritten staff-recommendation card placed next to it, reading "The top pick among our little sister-obsessed staff is finally getting an anime!! If you don't read this, you'll never catch up on the hottest 'sister' light novel of the year!!!!" It even included a little piece of staff-drawn art. Itsuki's work tended to attract a small cadre of die-hard fans, and at least one of them worked here, it seemed.

Itsuki himself had given Haruto one of his comp copies of the new *All About* a few days back, so Haruto turned to the other releases. Out of the other five, four were new volumes in ongoing series and one was a brand-new title; the store bought the same number of copies of each one, it looked like. The new release was *I Woke Up as the Demon Lord of Another World, so I Just Started a Harem* by Ui Aioi, grand-prize winner at the 15th GF Bunko New Writers Contest. As one of the judges on that contest, Haruto already had a sample manuscript from the publisher, but he wanted to purchase a commercial copy anyway—a habit he borrowed from fellow judge and veteran novelist Makina Kaizu.

But when he picked up his copy of *I Woke Up as the Demon Lord*:

"Ah...!"

He thought he heard a squeal of joy from nearby.

"?"

Puzzled, he turned toward the noise. There he spotted a woman hiding in the shadow of the next shelf over. She had a hat and a pair of glasses on, as well as a rather large mask that covered half her face, and it made her look incredibly suspicious. Also, even with her winter coat, you could tell she had big breasts.

When their eyes met, she opened hers wide.

"Haruto...?!"

He suspected it was her, and he was right. This was Ui Aioi, author of the book Haruto had in hand.

"Um, what are you doing, Ms. Aioi?" Haruto asked as he approached her, straining to keep a straight face.

"This is, um... Uh, I was just wondering if my book was selling, so..." She was blushing all the way to her ears as she replied.

"Ah, I see," Haruto said with a smile.

"I-I'm sorry... This is so embarrassing. I'm being weird, aren't I?" Ui hung her head, embarrassed.

“No, not really,” Haruto replied lightly.

“Oh?”

“I don’t think it’s rare at all for authors to stake out bookstores when their new book comes out. I mean, I do it sometimes.”

“You do?”

“Uh-huh.”

Surprise rushed across Ui’s face as Haruto nodded. He was telling the truth. If you ever see someone by the new-releases section of the light novel department, scoping it out for an extended period of time, then nine times out of ten, you can bet it’s an author checking to see how their book’s doing. Books, of course, could sell at wildly varying rates depending on the time period and the bookstore’s clientele. A book that sold no copies one day may sell a ton the next for no discernible reason, so prowling around a single shop for a single day won’t tell you much. But it’s only human for authors to want to go anyway. (So please don’t call the police on them. Thank you.)



“Oh, good... I guess it’s not just me, huh?”

Haruto chuckled at the visibly relieved Ui. “I don’t think a lot of them do it dressed like that, though. Are you in disguise?”

“Y-yeah. I didn’t want people to know I’m an author...”

“...Did you show your face in any online or magazine coverage, Ms. Aioi?”

Haruto doubted it. Some labels published headshots and interviews from their award ceremonies, either online or in print, but he didn’t think GF Bunko did.

“No, I didn’t, but... *Ahh.*”

Ui groaned. If her face wasn’t in the media, she finally realized, there was no need to go incognito. Haruto laughed a bit as she reluctantly took off her mask and glasses. She was surprisingly attractive with reddened cheeks and teary eyes, and it made his heart beat faster.

“So did any customers bite yet?” he asked to take his mind off it.

Ui’s face clouded. “No... I’ve been watching for about half an hour, but you’re the only one who’s picked it up. I got so excited, I guess I kind of shouted out loud...”

“Oh... Well, it’s a weekday and there’s not too many customers right now. The real test begins in the evening, once people get out of school and work.”

He wasn’t trying to soothe her when he said that. Which was a good thing, because he didn’t.

“...I saw people buying *All About My Little Sister* and some of the other new releases...”

Haruto gave Ui a vague smile. “Well, you know, it’s a new series. It’s not like a series that already has a fan base. A lot of people are gonna wait for the reviews first.”

“That’s how it works...?”

Ui sighed lightly. Then a customer, a college-aged man scoping out the new releases, picked up a copy of *I Woke Up as the Demon Lord*.

““!!””

Haruto and Ui looked at each other, then watched the customer. The young man flipped through the book, opening it to the color illustrations. The story’s three heroines, all clothed in a very unladylike manner, were sidled up against the protagonist—pretty sexy stuff. He stared at it for a while. Then, as Ui fervently watched him, his eyes turned over to her. He blushed, hard, and placed the book down, heading away from the light novel floor.

“Ahh... So close...”

“No it wasn’t! That was clearly your fault!”

Haruto couldn't help but speak up. Staring at a piece of sexy comic art, only to notice a pretty girl staring at you, would make anyone feel awkward enough to run away.

"Look, I know this is important to you, but you should probably be a bit more subtle about your people-watching."

"Um, all right... I'll try not to act suspicious," a blushing Ui replied as she took a book from the shelf and started pretending to read it, eyes still fixed on the new-releases corner.

Haruto browsed the area around her, looking at the shelves. They were stuffed with thousands of paperback light novels—and even this was just a small subsection of what had been published. Over a hundred new volumes came out every month, and even a place with a great selection like this one returned whatever didn't sell in a flash. Those series would disappear from the bookstore—and then, the market. More light novels were getting sold in larger sizes as well, and if you looked around the Net, you could find all kinds of engaging novels for free. To Haruto, someone wading through this infinite number of titles and selecting yours for purchase was nothing short of a miracle—and actually getting to see that happen in real life was an even greater one.

And that's why...

Over the next half hour of careful observation, the two of them saw three people pick up a copy of *I Woke Up as the Demon Lord* and put it back down. But not the fourth person. That one—a man in his early twenties—picked up *I Woke Up as the Demon Lord* with a few other light novels and took them all to the register.

"Ah, ah, ahh...!"

Ui yelped as she saw it happen, tears in her eyes. Watching the purchase of your book was a miracle indeed. It was a given that anyone lucky enough to see it happen would be moved to tears.

"Congrats," Haruto said, feeling just as joyful as he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Thanks!" Ui was beaming. That smile was nothing like any other expression he saw from her before, more beautiful than her bountiful breasts—and Haruto felt like he'd been shot through the heart.



Once the customer left the floor, Haruto picked up his own copy of *I Woke Up as the Demon Lord*, along with the other new GF Bunko releases, and exited the store with Ui.

“Thank you for putting up with me, Mr. Fuwa,” she said with a quick bow that embarrassed Haruto a little.

“Nah, you know, I just wanted to see how the grand-prize winner was doing myself. But that was really great, huh? Getting to see someone choose your book.”

Ui gave him a sweet smile. “Yes!”

Haruto’s voice became a bit more serious. “Remember that, okay? Because whenever you feel like your heart is about to break, I’m sure you’ll find some solace in that.”

Ui nodded, face resolute. There was real emotion behind Haruto’s words.

“All right. Thank you. I’ll remember this day for the rest of my life.”

“Yep. Anyway, I better get going...”

Just as he was about to walk off, Ui stopped him, blushing a bit.

“Oh, um, Mr. Fuwa! If you have the time, would you like to get some tea or something...?”

“Sorry, I have plans pretty soon,” Haruto replied, cutting her off. That was the truth. He was attending a party at Itsuki’s apartment later that night to celebrate the new book release and anime announcement.

“Oh...” Ui looked disappointed, but quickly smiled again. “Well, Haruto, thanks again. I look forward to seeing you soon.”

“S-sure. See you.”

And deep in his heart, Haruto was glad he had plans—because if he spent any more time with Ui, he worried he would fall for her.

Q&A Corner

QUESTION

Itsuki said he likes completely nude women, no socks or anything, but what about items besides clothing—for example, headphones or watches?



(taking a moment to picture it)Whoa.
You're a genius. This is great!



Yeah, I'm into the
"nude + machinery" thing, too.



Yes... I can see this working.
This is really inspiring me!



Right, so enjoy a shot of Myaa
listening to music on her headphones
in the nude on the next page!



No, don't!

Prince Manwhore II

Before long, Haruto had completed the journey from Akihabara to Itsuki's apartment. When he rang the doorbell, he was greeted by Itsuki and some delicious aromas inside whetting his appetite.

"Hey," Haruto said.

"Yo," replied Itsuki, acting completely casual. They had last met around ten days ago, not long after SisterLeaks, and Itsuki was clearly depressed. Haruto opted against asking point-blank if things were okay as he went inside. There were a few other pairs of shoes by the door, he noticed; the rest of the gang must have already been there.

Chihiro was in the kitchen, carefully monitoring a simmering pot.

"Happy New Year, Chihiro."

He turned toward Haruto and gave him a smile and a polite bow.

"Happy New Year to you, too, Fuwa."

It was polite, but still relaxed. When they first met, Chihiro was just the brother of Haruto's friend; they said hello to each other but didn't try to go beyond that at all. But when they began their RPG campaign last March, Chihiro became part of the party—and he even joined Haruto on the mixer he'd set up the other day. Whether Itsuki was around or not, Haruto firmly considered Chihiro his friend now.

Peeking into the inviting pot, he saw a bright red soup with meat, sausage, carrots, potatoes, and more.

"...Wow. That looks *really* spicy."

Chihiro chuckled. "It's borscht, so it's not at all. It's red because of the beets in it."

"Oh. Borscht, huh...? I don't think I've ever had it. Sounds like fun."

"I hope you brought your appetite," Chihiro confidently replied.



In the living room, Miyako and Nayuta were at the low *kotatsu* table, enjoying a two-player board game.

“Happy New Year, guys,” he said.

“...Oh right. Happy New Year.”

“Happy New Year!”

Both of them were too focused on the game to give their greeting any more thought than that.

"HMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM..... How about this?!"

After some extended agonizing, Miyako gave a cylindrical peg to Nayuta, who placed it on the game board—a four-by-four square grid.

“Okay, Quarto.”

“Wha—?! ...Ah...! Oh noooooo!”

Miyako wailed over something she had missed on the board.

They were playing a game called Quarto, a simple one where the object is to line up four pieces in a row that share the same attribute—height, color, shape, and whether they’re hollow or not. The twist: Players take turns choosing a piece from the lot for the other player to place on the board. There was no random element at all, and since the pieces you give your opponent are what decide the game, you had only yourself to blame if you lost.

“Nya-ha-ha! I win again.”

“That was... I just wasn’t paying attention for a sec, that’s all!”

“Oh? Are you planning to say the same thing if someone cuts your head off on the battlefield, Myaa?”

It was a rather cynical, almost staged reaction to Miyako's frustration.

“So, Myaa, I now get to do whatever I want to your boobs five times.”

“You get to do *what?!*” exclaimed Haruto.

Itsuki explained with a sigh. “They played a few games before Quarto, but Miyako’s so bad at them that Kanikou got bored and said that whoever wins gets to do anything they want to the loser’s breasts. Then Miyako got all frustrated and said yes.”

Miyako had tears in her eyes as she groaned. “Ohhh... Why can’t I win anything...?”

“There’s no way someone who’s lost their cool can win a game with zero randomness,” an exasperated Itsuki told her.

Nayuta flashed her own sinister grin. “Weh-heh-heh! I can’t wait! I’ll taste Myaa’s boobs for the first time in a while tonight. I don’t even need to pretend it’s for research; it’s just for fun this time. Ah, bliss...!”

“What, whatever you want...with Miyako’s boobs...?” Haruto swallowed.
“Um, can I join in?!”

“No, of *course* you can’t,” shouted a blushing Miyako—but Haruto held out hope.

“If *you* win, Miyako, you can do whatever you want with *my* breasts!”

“I don’t want to do *anything* with them! Why are you being so silly, Fuwa?!”

“Hee-hee-hee! If you want free rein over Myaa’s boobs, you’ll have to beat me first.”

“All right. Time to get serious about this...”

Nayuta and Haruto had a fairly even record against the other in board games; Nayuta was the clear favorite in titles involving luck or hunches, and Haruto was better at games that didn’t emphasize those things. If the game was Quarto, Haruto would hold the advantage.

“Okay, Prince Manwhore, here we go.”

“You got it! Miyako’s boobs are all mine...!”

“I’m not giving them to anyone! Knock it off, you two!”

Haruto began to regret acting a little *too* villainous to the tearfully protesting Miyako. He was acting like a perverted male student in a classroom comedy, but in part, that was to remind himself that he loved Miyako, not Ui. He wouldn’t have minded the opportunity, of course, but regardless.

“Sorry, sorry. I’m just kidding. I won’t ask for your boobs if I win.”

“Really...?”

Haruto flashed a brisk smile at the doubtful Miyako. “Really, really. Besides, I want to get the right to do that *legitimately*, not as a prize for a game.”

“.....You can act as cool as you want saying that; it’s *still* sexual harassment.”

“That’s really gross, Prince Manwhore.”

Miyako and Nayuta gave Haruto cold stares.

With everyone’s boobs off the board, Itsuki joined in the Quarto game as well. Haruto wound up in first place, winning all three games he played. Nayuta was second with a 2–1 record, Itsuki third at 1–2, and Miyako lost every time. Nayuta challenged Haruto to another game after that, and he beat her soundly.

“Mm... Not bad... You really *are* Prince Manwhore.”

“Ha-ha! This is just what talent looks like. And can you quit it with that nickname already? It’s been forever.”

Haruto grinned at the frustrated Nayuta—and before long, Chihiro started bringing in plates, kicking off the New Year’s/Volume 5/Anime Announcement

Party.



“Well...I know I had some trouble with that idiot KenKen leaking the news right on New Year’s Day, but today the new volume’s come out and the official anime site is online. I haven’t heard much feedback yet, but people seem to like the voices in the teaser and drama CD. The screenwriting’s going well, too. But I got a lot of work let to do, so here’s to this year being good to all of us! Cheers!”

Itsuki lifted his beer mug up high as he gave the toast.

Steam was coming out of the glasses, so nobody was clinking them, lest any of the hot liquid inside come splashing out. He, Haruto, and Miyako were drinking Liefmans Glühkriek, an almost-black beer that looked like mulled wine at first glance. This was a rare beer, designed to be drunk warm on wintry nights, and while it was a nice bittersweet drink when chilled, heating it up like coffee softened the sourness and emphasized the thick sweetness of the cherries for a gentle, warming effect.

“Huh. This is good. Never had a beer like this,” Miyako said, blowing on it.

“Nyah. It smells pretty good. I wish I could have some.” Next to Itsuki, Nayuta brought her face close to his mug to smell it.

“Hang in there. You need to be a grown-up first.”

Miyako’s observation made Nayuta pout. “I’m *already* grown up. We have all kinds of sex and everything.”

“Brff!”

Itsuki spat out the beer in his mouth. Haruto, Miyako, and Chihiro all blushed. They all assumed as much, of course, but having it spelled out so clearly for them was a first.

“K-Kanikou! You can’t just... *Please* don’t say that,” Itsuki muttered, his face bright red, as Haruto awkwardly looked away from them. Even Nayuta seemed to regret it a bit, giving the group a vague sort of smile.

“W-well, anyway, isn’t this dinner really great?!” Haruto ventured, trying to dispel the awkward atmosphere with a bright smile.

In addition to the borscht, there was a big plate of beef stroganoff, as well as a selection of piroshki stuffed with ground beef, seafood, potatoes, and chili sauce. It paired well with the mulled beer, warming them all to the core.

“Thank you very much, Fuwa. I’ve never really made Russian food before, so I’m glad you like it.” Chihiro gave a bashful smile.

“I know I’m repeating myself, but seriously, this is way better than your average restaurant.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t go that far... That Italian place we went to the other day was really good.”

“Yeah, pretty much everything was great in there, wasn’t it?”

“The other day?” Itsuki said, interrupting Haruto and Chihiro’s conversation. “Oh, that mixer?”

Miyako’s eyebrows rose up. “A mixer? Wait, you and Chihiro went to a mixer together, Fuwa?”

“It—it wasn’t a mixer! It was just dinner with some other novelists to help us get to know each other!”

Miyako gave the panicking Haruto a reproachful look.

“...If it was an industry thing, why did you take Chihiro along?”

“Well, um, just to even out the numbers...”

“Between genders? Doesn’t that make it a mixer?”

“No, it’s not like that! We just went out for drinks; that’s it! I had no ulterior motive at all! Right, Chihiro?!”

“Huh? Um, right,” Chihiro nodded. “...Oh, but Ashley was really keen on scoring with a guy, because it was her last chance before Christmas or something.”

“Ha, ha-ha-ha... Well, she sure had the wrong idea about *that* party, didn’t she?”

Miyako coldly stared at Haruto as he continued trying to talk his way out of this.

“By the way,” she asked Chihiro, “who else was there?”

“Well, for the men, it was Mr. Kaizu, a novelist. On the girls’ side, there was Ms. Aioi and Ms. Kasamatsu. Both authors are making their debut soon.”

“...Okay. So it was basically a mixer, right? Because if you drew that scene as a color spread in a light novel, I think most editors would caption it ‘The Mixer,’ you know?”

Haruto looked frantic as Miyako flatly pleaded her case.

“L-look, I respect Mr. Kaizu a lot, okay? And he asked me to set things up like a mixer for him! I couldn’t turn him down!”



Miyako turned her eyes away, annoyed. "It's not like it matters to me if you go to a mixer or not, Fuwa. It's just that you...saying what you said to me, then going to a mixer? I'm just wondering about that."

"...?! Myaa, are you jealous?!"

Nayuta's eyes were as wide as saucers as Miyako blushed at her.

"N-no I'm not! I just, um, I don't think that's a good thing! As a general rule!"

"You gotta believe me! I'm still all about you, Miyako!"

"Well, don't shout that out loud, please!"

Haruto looked dead serious, while Miyako was now yelling at him, blushing even harder.

"Um, Miyako?" Chihiro timidly stated. "Fuwa really didn't act all lovey-dovey around any of the other girls. He just talked about serious stuff with them, is all. Me and him and Mr. Kaizu talked about building Gundam model kits for a while."

"Chihiro...!" exclaimed Haruto, saved by the young man's backup.

"Oh, *did* you?" Miyako said.

"What kind of sorry mixer did you attend if the guys talked about Gundam kits?" Itsuki jabbed.

"I can't say what happened after I left, though," Chihiro added, making Haruto tense up ever so slightly.

After Chihiro and Aoba headed for the train station, Kaizu and Ashley immediately disappeared together, so he wound up going to the café alone with Ui. Not that they talked about anything exciting in there, however—just industry talk between two writers.

"Ah-ha," interjected Nayuta. "So Prince Manwhore isn't whoring so much after all, huh?"

"*You're* the one who gave me that nickname," lashed Haruto. "You all already *know* I'm a virgin, so can you please stop calling me that?"

"Mm-nngh... If you put it *that* way, you have a point..."

A thoughtful look appeared on Nayuta's face.

"Besides," Miyako said, "why does Nayu call Fuwa, um, that nickname anyway? ...Just from his looks?"

"Oh, you don't know where that came from, Miyako?"

"No."

"Neither do I," Chihiro added.

Haruto grinned at them both. "Well, it comes from a game."

“A game?” Miyako asked.

“This was back when Nayu had just gotten published, I think. We wanted to get to know more writers, so me, Itsuki, Nayu, and two others who debuted alongside her played a board game called Moteneba, or ‘Gotta Be Popular.’”

“Uh-huh.”

“Basically, you win the game by becoming the most popular guy in school among the girls, and I won by a landslide. She’s been calling me Prince Manwhore ever since.”

“That was one fearsome battle,” Itsuki wistfully recalled.

“I’ll never forget the humiliation of Prince Manwhore taking all the girls I had my sights on,” Nayuta added.

“It’s just a game! And it’s super unfair to give me a nickname like *that* because of it.”

“What are you talking about?” Nayuta turned toward the grinning Haruto. “Love is a battlefield, whether it’s a game or not.”

“Well, sure, I’ll admit that I was playing for keeps, but...”

“That sounds like a neat game. I’d like to try it sometime.”

Now Chihiro was getting interested.

“I have Moteneba here..... Why don’t we break it out? It’s been a while,” Itsuki offered.

Haruto and Nayuta put on their game faces.

“...Yeah. It’s a good game. I’m up for it.”

“It’s time to get back at Prince Manwhore for what he did to me...”

“Um... I have a feeling this won’t end well...”

Miyako’s concerns were ignored.



Once they cleared the table, they opened the Moteneba box and prepared to play, Haruto kicking things off by reading the instructions for everyone.

“Um... **‘The prime directive for human beings is to become popular during their three years of high school.’**”

“The prime directive?!”

“‘Human beings’...?”

Miyako and Chihiro both seemed surprised at the intro text.

“Yeah,” Nayuta laughed, “no matter how many times I hear it, it sure leaves an impact.”

“Yeah, it’s our prime directive, after all. It sounds so powerful, you just *have* to accept it,” added Itsuki.

“Approach the women in your school with academics, sports, fashion, conversation, and money to win them over! Grasp popular trends in school, polish your skills, even control the student body itself to become more popular than your rivals. When graduation comes, who’s going to make the girls swoon the most?!”

As the text Haruto read out loud suggested, Moteneba asked players to approach girls in assorted ways to earn hearts (points), with whoever had the most hearts in the end being deemed “most popular” and the winner. Seven girls featured in each game out of a pool of fourteen. Each participant received a certain number of cubes representing their abilities in five stats: academics, sports, fashion, conversation, and money. Placing these cubes by the cards representing the girls could get them to like you more, and players liked enough by the girls could receive hearts from them at the end of each school year. Different girls provided different amounts of hearts; some would give hearts to the three players they liked the most, while others only gave them out to one.

“So it’s up to the player to strategize. You can either focus on approaching girls with lots of points to give out, or you can try approaching multiple girls for insurance.”

“Isn’t it mean to flirt with multiple girls at once?”

“Yeaahhhh,” a sneering Miyako said, unnerving Haruto.

“Hey,” Itsuki countered, “some girls give out hearts to the top *three* players. They’re playing the field, too. It’s the same with both genders.”

“Maybe, but... I dunno. It’s kinda weird.”

“Well, Miyako, if you think so, you can try to approach a single girl instead. But this is just a game, so I don’t think it’s worth empathizing with them *too* much.”

“...Maybe not, no...”

Haruto saw fit to add that warning, but Miyako remained unconvinced. It made him laugh a little.

“By the way,” he continued, “each of the five popularity stats go in and out of style as time goes on. The more trendy the stat at the moment, the stronger you’ll appeal to any girls you approach. On the other hand, stats that are out of style will be harder to grab hearts with.”

Chihiro looked at the area of the game table showing current trends. “So at this school, players good at sports are the most popular, but academics are pretty much worthless?”

The current setup had sports as the hottest trend, followed by conversation, fashion, money, and academics.

“That’s right,” Haruto said. “But players can play their cubes to change the order of these trends, too.”

“Messing with things behind the scenes, huh?”

“Yeah, maybe you’re spreading rumors like ‘oh, it’s way more modern to go after intellectual guys!’ or something. But anyway, the cubes you use to appeal to girls never disappear, so if you were approaching him with a low-value stat, you could become super-popular out of nowhere if the trends change. But the more cubes you use adjusting those trends, the fewer you’ll have to approach girls with—which helps other players with the same kinds of stat cubes, so you need to be careful.”

In a five-player game, each person starts with six cubes picked at random. They take turns placing one cube either by a girl or in a type of stat trend, and once all the cubes are used up (after six turns from each player), that’s the end of a school year. Players popular with girls earn hearts from them, and then everyone draws more cubes for the next year. This continues until the end of the third year, and whoever has the most hearts by then wins.

“Shall we get started?”

With the rules squared away, it was time to begin. Turns were taken clockwise around the table, but:

“The rules say that whoever came to school earliest when they were in high school goes first.”

“Board games love creating weird rules to decide who goes first, huh?” Miyako remarked to Haruto.

“Yeah,” added Itsuki, “you see things like ‘whoever enjoyed school life the most,’ or ‘whoever most recently went on a trip,’ or ‘who can trace their family tree back the furthest,’ or ‘who’s the most hungry right now.’”

“How are you supposed to tell who’s the hungriest?”

“Ah, it’s just the designer having fun,” Haruto said with a chuckle. “So who out of us got to school first?”

“I always made it before the opening bell with seconds to spare.”

“I quit school.”

“I have a lot to do in the morning, so I always show up around ten minutes

before class began.”

“I was usually between ten and fifteen minutes before class, too.”

Itsuki, Nayuta, Chihiro, and Haruto revealed their answers. That just left Miyako.

“Well, I guess I’m first, then. I always had morning practice.”

So Miyako went first in Year One, followed clockwise by Haruto, Nayuta, Itsuki, and Chihiro. Each player took turns drawing cubes, and when they all had six, the game moved on to the action phase.

“So, should I start approaching them, or work on gaming the trends...?” Miyako said as she checked on the girls.

The girls on the table were:

- **Mitsuki**, with braided hair and holding a book—6♥ to her favorite player, 4♥ to the second favorite
- **Koharu**, in her uniform and holding a volleyball—4♥ and an event card (providing special in-game effects) to her favorite player, 4♥ to the second favorite
- **Kaoru**, playing a trumpet—6♥ to her favorite player, 2♥ to the second favorite, 2♥ to the third favorite
- **Reiko**, with long black hair—8♥ to her favorite player
- **Fumi**, carrying lots of snacks and sporting big boobs—5♥ to her favorite player, 3♥ to the second favorite, 2♥ to the third favorite
- **Chizuru**, wearing glasses and holding a cat—5♥ and an event card to her favorite player, 3♥ to the second favorite
- **Saki**, refined and applying lip balm to herself—3♥ and an event card to her favorite player, 3♥ to the second favorite, 2♥ to the third favorite

Seven appeared in the game overall.

“Okay, I’ll go with this girl. She seems a lot more earnest than the others.”

Miyako placed a “sports” cube by Reiko with the long hair, the only girl on the board who gave hearts to her top favorite and no one else.

“You sure about that, Myaa? The aura around her is so...heavy. She sort of looks like Yozora from *Haganai*, too.”

“It’s fine!” she said to Nayuta. “This is the kinda girl I want to be friends with.”

“...You’re just like yourself in the game world, too, Myaa.” Nayuta gave her a gentle smile.

Next up was Haruto.

“Now, who should I aim for...?”

He looked over the seven girls, sizing them up, as Itsuki blurted out:

“...Hey, don’t you think Saki here is kind of like Miyako?”

* * *

“...?!”

The eyes of Haruto and the other three players turned to Saki. Her hair was brightly colored, her skirt short. She had a little stuffed-animal keychain on her backpack, and she was applying lip balm to herself—the picture of refinement.

“You think she looks like her?” a confused Nayuta asked.

Miyako laughed. “Ahh, yeah, I *did* look kind of like this in high school. I had that same kind of teddy-bear keychain, too.”

“Ohhh... Wow, so this is the high-school version of Miyako...!”

Haruto peered intently at Saki, then groaned at Itsuki in frustration.

“Nngh...!”

Thus Haruto’s “sports” cube was placed next to Saki. Honestly, he wanted to carefully gauge the number of hearts at play and his strength over other players before deciding who to aim for. But if one of the characters looked like the girl he was after in *real* life, he had to go with her.

This was a common trend to see in a game with “love” elements like this. If Reiko’s card had a picture of a building or some crops for trade instead, any player could easily make the right choices to maximize their profits. But *this* game was themed around girls—girls without any backstory apart from their name and portrait, but still varied enough that players would cultivate favorites for themselves. Plus, the lack of backstory let players freely think along the lines of “resembling Miyako” or “has a heavy aura.” Making girls the subject matter creates complex issues that gives Moteneba its unique play style.

Next up was Nayuta. “I won’t let Prince Manwhore take you, Myaa!” she shouted as she placed her own “sports” cube next to Saki. Haruto’s face tensed up. It was now accepted fact that Saki looked like Miyako, so he predicted Nayuta would be gunning for her as well.

“Heh-heh-heh... Have fun destroying each other, guys...!”

Itsuki, who had seen this coming from the start, shot the group a devilish grin.

“Right! Who should I am for?”

Cube in hand, Itsuki breezily compared the girls. Then Nayuta cupped a hand over her mouth, whispering to him.

“...‘You’re the main heroine of my story. And any good story needs weight.’”

“~~~~~!!”

Having his own line whispered back to him made Itsuki blush intensely.

“Y-you, that... Kanikou! That’s, like, so unfair...!”

“Hee-hee-hee! All’s fair in love and war...”

But Nayuta was just as red.

“Ugh! You... Nngh...”

“Nya-ha-ha!”

Haruto, Miyako, and Chihiro gave them weird looks, totally unaware of what this conversation meant.

“...Arrgh, all right! I like earnest girls! Heavy or not!”

Resigned to his fate, Itsuki placed his cube by Reiko.

“Itsuki?! Hey! Don’t put your hands on my Reiko!”

“I’m sorry, but Reiko’s mine.”

“Not, not if *I* can help it!”

“Take your hands off her. Can *you* bring Reiko salvation?”

“And *you* shouldn’t touch her unless you really mean it, either.”

This squabbling over Reiko on the card continued for a while longer.

“Itsuki and Myaa are fighting over a girl other than me... Ooooh, this is so depressing...” Nayuta frowned, even though she was the instigator.

“Okay, my turn.”

Chihiro picked up one of his cubes, pondered the situation a little, then placed it by Chizuru, the girl in glasses cradling a cat in both hands.

Itsuki grinned at this. “Oh, you got a thing for glasses, huh?”

“What? No.” Chihiro half-sneered at him. “I was wavering between the two girls who give six hearts, but I figured I ought to score one of those event cards.”



“Ohhh, right...”

It was a perfectly rational strategy. Itsuki felt a tad embarrassed.

“By the way, Chihiro, ignoring any of the game elements, which of these girls do you like?” Nayuta asked.

“Which do I like...?”

Chihiro sized up the illustrations of the girls.

“Hmm... Koharu looks like she’s into sports; maybe I’d like to play some volleyball with her. Fumi, on the other hand, looks like she’d appreciate my food a lot, which is nice. I’d like Mitsuki to teach me whatever’s in her book, too. Oh, and I like Saki’s sense of fashion.”

“Which one would you want to *date*, though?” asked Miyako, looking oddly agitated.

Chihiro scowled “Um... I’m sorry. If that’s the question, I’m not really sure. I think it’d be more fun just to hang out with all of them.”

“Itsuki! Doesn’t Chihiro sound like the protagonist of a harem light novel to you? Surrounded by hot girls all the time, but never so much as getting an erection?”

“Well, maybe he’s just laid-back that way,” Itsuki replied. “One of those ‘herbivorous men’ you hear about.”

Nayuta frowned. “I think the idea of herbivorous men is just a bunch of crap invented by the media, but even saying it’s not—if a herbivore gets hungry enough, it’ll chow down on even more food than the equivalent carnivore, you know? Like, it’ll graze and graze until it eats up the whole forest. In a way, the term’s perfectly fitting.”

“...So you think Chihiro’s gonna turn into a starving elephant or giraffe someday?”

“Oh, come *on*, guys!”

Chihiro blushed, pouting at them, as Haruto stared off into space.

“You know,” he said, “I kind of get that. Like, thinking it’s more fun to just hang out with everyone instead of officially dating someone. That’s really true sometimes, you know? Like, in real life.”

“Wow. For someone who wrecked his college gaming club, those words hold a lot of weight.”

“I didn’t wreck it!” Haruto spat out at Itsuki. During college, he was a member of an RPG club that fell apart thanks to fallout over a woman—the lone woman in the club, in fact, who was dumped by Haruto in part because he was much more interested in gaming than having a romantic relationship at the time.

But even now that there was someone he had his eye on, enjoying time off with everyone like this seemed just as irreplaceable as love.

Regardless, this ended everyone's first turn. Miyako wasted no time using a second cube to approach Reiko. This was followed by Haruto, who resisted the urge to strategically target other girls and put another cube on Saki. Nayuta did the same thing, and Itsuki made a second approach to Reiko as well. Only Chihiro changed his move for turn two, placing a cube next to Koharu on the volleyball team.

Things proceeded apace until everyone had played six turns, marking the end of Year 1—and after a tense battle, it was Haruto who emerged victorious in the scramble for Saki's emotions.

“All riiiiight!”

The victory caused Haruto to whoop out loud before he could stop himself. He sheepishly picked up three hearts and an event card.

“Hmph... But I'm only getting started,” a sullen Nayuta said as she grabbed three hearts of her own.

“So Haruto's her main squeeze and Kanikou's her safety pick?”

Nayuta nodded at Itsuki. “...I suppose so.” She turned to Miyako and sighed. “Ah, so fickle.”

“Wh-why're you looking at *me* when you say that?! She's not even my girl!”

Miyako blushed, but she had reason to be happy after winning the fight with Itsuki for Reiko's love. Itsuki didn't have as many “sports” cubes as Miyako did at first, so he tried to adjust the popularity trends to boost the value of his own cubes, but the single cube this cost wound up making all the difference. He failed to catch up to Miyako, so all eight hearts were hers—and Itsuki, as the loser, got nothing.

“*Dammit!* After everything I've given to her, she gives me nothing back...!”

Itsuki stared at her card, crestfallen, mulling over all the wasted effort as Nayuta gave him a gentle smile.

“Aw, don't worry, Itsuki. If you don't give up and stay on the attack with her, I'm sure she'll look your way eventually. Just like how I got *your* heart. I stuck it out no matter how many times you brushed me off.”

“S-stop saying embarrassing stuff like that!” Itsuki shouted, blushing, as Miyako watched their banter with mixed feelings.

But as the four of them engaged in this close-quarters combat, where real romance was intermingling freely with the lovers on the cards, Chihiro was the lone player actually making an attempt to win the game.

“Hmm... So I got five hearts and an event card from Chizuru, four hearts and an event from Koharu, six hearts from Mitsuki, six from Kaoru, and six from Fumi, for a total of twenty-seven points and two event cards.”

He had placed a cube next to every girl besides Saki and Reiko (both subject to an intense bidding war). It earned him the maximum number of points with the least amount of effort.

““““ ”””””

The other four players stared at the small mountain of heart chips and cards in front of him, looking disgusted.

“He’s a harem master. There’s a true-blue harem master among us...,” Itsuki muttered.

“You sure are popular, Chihiro.” Haruto laughed.

“N-no, I’m not! These girls are just my friends!”

Chihiro was stammering, like a man whose wife just found him at a club with his mistress.

“Wow, Chihiro was the *real* Prince Manwhore the whole time.”

Nayuta’s analysis made Chihiro blush.

“I-I’m **not a man**...whore or anything close to that, okay?!”

He had to quickly scramble to cover for the lethal confession he almost made.



Either way, Chihiro’s gigolo-style gameplay shocked the other four enough to realize that there was no time to let their real-life obsessions affect their performance. For Year 2, the wasteful, inefficient bidding wars were abandoned, and the players shifted their focus to making themselves more popular first.

“I like volleyball a lot, too, you know. Maybe I should join the team.”

Miyako placed a cube next to Koharu.

“What was that?” Haruto said. “You want to be a writer, Mitsuki? Well, I made my pro debut in high school, so how ’bout I give you some advice?”

This was all in Haruto’s imagination, of course; nothing like that was written on Mitsuki’s card or in the rules.

“Is it all right if I tell Aioi what you just said, Fuwa?” Chihiro teased.

“No, please, *no*!” Haruto begged.

“Kaoru’s good at playing the trumpet, isn’t she? Maybe she’d like to put her

mouth on the one in my pants, geh-heh-heh...”

Nayuta didn’t exactly keep it high-brow as she placed a cube on Kaoru.

“Look, girls aren’t into musclemen who are only good at sports! This year, it’s all about money, money, money!”

Itsuki, who had drawn a large number of “money” cubes this year, decided to use one to boost the value of the “money” trend.

“Ha-ha-ha! Look out, girls! Prepare to fall to your knees when you see how rich my anime made me!”

The results turned Reiko’s heart (and her hearts) from Miyako toward Itsuki.

“What?! You’re going to trick my Reiko into loving you for money?!”

“Ha-ha-ha! That’s the power of makin’ it rain, baby!”

His laughter rang loud across the living room. But:

“Oh, that’s good! I have a lot of ‘money’ cubes, too.” Chihiro smiled and placed one of them next to Chizuru.

“Huh?! Oh crap...!”

“Now he’s using the power of money to conquer them all... He’s acting even *more* like the true Prince Manwhore...”

Itsuki grew forlorn as Nayuta became concerned. But even as the other four players fought and schemed to catch up to Chihiro, Year 2 ended without anyone coming close. Even when Haruto managed to put some pressure on him in Year 3, Chihiro broke ahead once more with some well-played event cards—letting him trade a cube with another player and control popularity trends. The game ended with him well ahead of the pack.

Frustrated, Haruto looked at Miyako and Itsuki. “I can’t believe this! We could’ve had a chance if we all worked together to take Chihiro down, at least...”

“Wh-what could I do? I just wanted to keep Reiko under my protection...”

“All I did was follow my heart. I regret nothing!”

In Year 3, when it was clear to them Chihiro couldn’t be beat, the two of them waged war over Reiko, refusing Haruto’s offer to form a team. Victory in Moteneba required a knack for knowing when to cut your losses if your investment wasn’t paying off, but since the stakes were for “love” instead of stocks or bonds, it could prove difficult to work strictly off gains and losses.

“Chihiro truly *is* the only one worthy of the name Prince Manwhore...”
Nayuta was impressed.

Haruto nodded with her. “Congratulations, Chihiro. I hereby pass my title on to you.”

“Thanks, but no thanks!” a blushing Chihiro protested.

“That’s the rule,” replied Itsuki. “Whoever wins gets to be called Prince Manwhore. But if you *really* don’t want to...”

“If I don’t want to...?”

“Then you need to pose like the protagonist of a romantic comedy anime and shout ‘I’m *sick* of having a harem!!’ Then you can forfeit that title.”

“Um, that’s the rule?”

“Yep,” a serious-looking Itsuki replied.

“Really...?”

Chihiro gave Haruto an anxious look. “Uh-huh.” Haruto nodded back.

“Oh... Well, okay then...”

He stood up and bashfully lifted both arms high in the air.

“I... I’m sick of having a harem...”

“Louder!” Itsuki shouted.

“I’m sick of having a harem!!”

“Good, good.”

Chihiro’s red-faced, desperate scream was greeted with warm applause from the rest of the room.

“Not that that rule really exists,” Haruto revealed with a smile.

“Oh, you guys...! I *knew* it!”

Chihiro sat back down, pouting, as Itsuki laughed at him.



The five of them put the Moteneba box away and were enjoying some cake for dessert when the doorbell rang.

“Who’s that...?”

Itsuki stood up and opened the door, and found a familiar-looking man with a very unfamiliar-looking head.

“Eeep?!”

Itsuki let out a shocked yelp at the newly bald Kenjiro Toki.

“Uh, what happened to your head...?”

This was the first time Toki had revealed it to him.

“I shaved my hair off, out of shame for the anime leak.”

“Um, oh... Oh.”

Itsuki stared blankly at him first. Then he winced, looking peeved.

“...Shaving your head isn’t gonna make that leak go away, you know,” Itsuki mumbled.

Toki nodded meekly. “I know. This is just something for my sake.”

“...Well, as long as you’re aware. So what’s up tonight?”

“This.” Toki presented Itsuki with a paper bag.

What, did he get a box of apology chocolates? Itsuki wondered. But when he looked inside, he found it contained a file folder with a single sheet of paper in it. He took it out. On the sheet was an illustration of the main cast of *All About My Little Sister*, hands in the air in a “yippee” pose. The words “Congrats! Anime Project Kicks Off!” were written above them.

“Is this...from Hoshiimo?” Itsuki asked as he stared intently at it.

“Yeah. This is the art we were gonna release with the launch of the anime website.”

“I thought you called that off...”

Itsuki was confused. Toki had told him a few days back that Hoshiimo was so mortified by the leak, they wound up calling off the commemorative art piece they had planned. This sheet of paper here didn’t look like it came from someone all heartbroken. In fact, it was one of the greatest *All About* visuals he had ever seen from him.

“Well, I managed to get Hoshiimo back on track. This image will be released on the website tomorrow.”

“You got him ‘back on track’? What’d you do?”

“I invited him over to Tokyo and gave him the best possible time I could think of,” Toki replied, looking oddly sorrowful about it.

“The best possible time...?”

“.....I took him to a brothel.”

“Wha—?”

“There’s this first-class girl that not even I can call on all that often, and I begged and pleaded with her to entertain him. If I wasn’t a platinum member of that club, it never would’ve happened, lemme tell you.”

“.....”

The cold disbelief was plain in Itsuki’s eyes, and Toki withered before it.

“D-don’t look at me like that! The company won’t cover that sort of thing, so I paid for it myself! ...Well, okay, my boss paid for half of it, but... Oh, but let me tell you what this girl looks like—”

“I don’t care!” Itsuki sighed, cutting him off before he could go into further

detail. “Well... If that’s what it took to make Hoshiimo feel better, then great, but...”

He looked back at the illustration. It was the best work Hoshiimo had ever done; the female characters were even more attractive than in any previous piece. Thinking about how he had Japan’s sex industry to thank for this left Itsuki with mixed feelings.

But hey, an illustrator he was worried about had gotten his groove back, and while this artwork came a little late, it was now fully complete. Itsuki’s heart, heretofore clouded by SisterLeaks, was finally basking in the sun once more.

“Right! Time to start celebrating this anime for real! Let’s finish up all the booze we have left! Join us, KenKen!”

Toki smirked a bit at Itsuki’s bright smile. “I only came to give this to you, but...all right.”

He entered, promptly shocking everyone.

“Ah...?! Mr. Toki?!”

“What happened to your hair?!”

“That looks cold...but it works for you, actually.”

“Yes,” Toki said with a sheepish grin, “well, I’ve still got a lot to learn in my job, so...”

“Would you like something to snack on, Mr. Toki?”

“...!”

The sound of Chihiro’s voice made Toki shiver from head to toe.

“.....”

He nervously looked at Chihiro’s face, then his chest, then his hips, failing to find somewhere to park his eyes as Chihiro stared at him.

“Um, Mr. Toki?”

“N-no, uh, yeah, that’d be great if you had something!”

“...?”

The overexcited reply puzzled Chihiro as he went to the kitchen. Toki inspected him further—his ass in particular—and broke out in a cold sweat.



—Ah, another fun day...

After leaving the rest of the gang at around nine that night, Chihiro replayed

the day's events in her head during her bus ride and smiled. Toki's odd behavior stuck out in her mind, but today really was a blast.

She had first hung out with Haruto, Miyako, and Nayuta during an RPG meetup last March, and ever since, she had gotten to join in their game sessions. They even crowned her "Prince Manwhore" tonight. All of them being so unreserved around her—merciless, some would call it—made her happy. It felt like she was a full-fledged member of the friend group, not just Itsuki's younger sibling.

That was true with Haruto in particular. They had gone to a mixer together without Itsuki, and they were now talking about building robot kits. None of Chihiro's school friends were into that sort of thing, so it was a lot of fun chatting with Haruto about it.

Her smile deepened as she thought about it... She was so happy, she even forgot about the massive secret she was still keeping from them all.

Q&A Corner

QUESTION

I'd like to play some board games, but I don't have a big tabletop like the one in Itsuki's room. What should I do?



Yeah, procuring enough space to play on can be a serious issue for board gamers in Japan. A lot of the bigger games from overseas can take up a ton of real estate, too... If you're playing in someone's bedroom, I think it's better to forget about a table and just play on a mat spread out on the floor. Personally, I'd recommend maybe finding a meeting space or other room you can rent, or maybe borrowing a room at your local community center. You could always try a private karaoke box as well. Board game cafés and bars are becoming a thing, too, so if there's one nearby, you should check it out. But I'd avoid going to regular cafés or diners, since you run the risk of annoying the staff or other customers.

The Father

While Itsuki was celebrating the anime launch with his friends, a man was visiting a bookstore on the way home from the office.

He came here around once a week, browsing through the business and new-releases sections and occasionally picking up something that captured his interest—and nowadays, he took at least a passing glance at the GF Bunko section of the light novel department, identifiable by the reddish-brown color of the book spines, before walking to the checkout line.

Today was January 18, the date new releases came out, and GF Bunko's January lineup was placed front and center in the main light novel display. There were six in all, and the one boasting the largest number of copies was Volume 5 of *All About My Little Sister*. The man looked at the name "Itsuki Hashima" on the cover, a range of emotions on his face. Then he noticed the "TV Anime Premiere Coming Soon!" ad copy on the obi. It made his eyes go wide.

"...TV...anime...?"

He picked it up, eyes fixated on the sentence. It surprised him enough that he couldn't help whispering it out loud.

The man was Keisuke Hashima, a forty-seven-year-old office worker and the father of Itsuki Hashima, whose latest volume of *All About My Little Sister* he held in his hand. He stood there with it for a while, motionless, and then he took Volume 5 over to the register. It was the second book of his son's that Keisuke ever bought—the first one since *Sister of the Apocalypse*, his professional debut.



Back at home, Keisuke changed out of his suit and ate dinner. Tonight, his wife had cooked a variety of dishes in the style of his favorite Japanese cuisine—*kinpira gobo* (stir-fried burdock root), *buri daikon* (simmered yellowtail with radish), and hot tofu. She used to be a nonstarter in the kitchen, but ever since

she married Keisuke and became a stay-at-home mom, her daughter had been teaching her how to cook. She wasn't quite as good as said daughter, who had an honest talent for it, but she was now pretty decent.

His wife was in the living room watching TV.

"Hello!"

As Keisuke ate, their daughter came home. This was Chihiro, his wife's child from her previous marriage—and since the day they met, she had always been cheerful and friendly toward him, even though he was admittedly not too outgoing toward others. The two hit it off quickly, a fact that further convinced Keisuke it was time to remarry. She was gentle, thoughtful toward others; a gifted student, and handy both in the kitchen and with a vacuum cleaner. You didn't have to be her parent to see that she was the perfect daughter.

".....Um, Chihiro?"

Keisuke called for her, a little reluctantly at first.

"Yeah, Dad?"

"....."

He thought about how to phrase it, but couldn't find the right words. Instead he just took the book out of the paper bag in the seat next to him and showed it to Chihiro.

".....About this..."

The sight of Volume 5 of *All About My Little Sister* surprised Chihiro.

"Oh? Did you buy Itsuki's book, Dad?"

".....I did," he replied, nodding sourly, while Chihiro smiled. "But I wanted to talk about this." Keisuke pointed at the obi with his finger.

"That?"

"This. It says it's going to be a TV anime."

"Yeah."

"...But... It is? Itsuki's books?"

"Uh-huh," Chihiro said with a soft smile.

Keisuke furrowed his brow. "So it'll be a cartoon show you can watch on TV? Like *Sazae-san*?"

"Um, yeah. I think *All About*'s probably gonna air late at night, but..."

Chihiro's father tilted his head, a stern look on his face. "...So Itsuki's books are gonna be like *Sazae-san*? Mmm..."

"Yeah, pretty neat, huh? Not exactly *Sazae-san*, but..."

".....You sure this isn't some kind of prank on him?" Keisuke was serious.

“No, not at all!” Chihiro hurriedly replied. “He’s been going over the scripts for each week’s episode with the animation staff. He’s writing new story material for the show, too. It’s a lot of work for him.”

“Mmm... But...” He was still dubious. “...I mean, something like this has to be pretty popular to even get a manga version, right?”

“Right. And, you know, his books *are* popular.”

“They are, huh...?”

“It’s true!”

Chihiro felt it appropriate to harden her tone against her still-doubtful stepfather. “I mean, the anime’s not out yet, but it’s already been manga-fied—in other words, serialized in a magazine like *Shonen Jump*. And they’re releasing a drama CD, too, which is, like, an audio theater where voice actors play the roles of his characters.”

These were unfamiliar terms to Keisuke. Being raised in a poor household, he never had any manga to read as a kid, and the only “cartoons” he knew were *Sazae-san* and Studio Ghibli’s films. Now, though, it was dawning on him. Itsuki’s work really was popular. And being popular meant:

“...So the world’s accepting his books...?”

For Keisuke, that was the greatest wonder of all.

He had read one of Itsuki’s novels before, *Sister of the Apocalypse*, and it shocked him to the core. A whirlpool of negative emotions swallowed up his mind—“this makes no sense”; “I can’t understand how any of the characters think”; “the story’s too hard to keep up with”; “I can’t decipher his sentence structures”; “this is gross”; “I hate this”; “this is scaring me”; “it’s disgusting”; “I get that he has special feelings for little sisters, at least...but the fact that he does fills me with this intense disgust, fear, and repulsion”; “the writer of this novel is sick, distasteful, incomprehensible, terrifying, and disgusting.” The fact that this novelist was his own son made him feel like he was going to black out.

Sister of the Apocalypse was praised by Kasuka Sekigahara, genius novelist and a judge for GF Bunko that year—“there’s an inscrutable, powerful force here,” and the author’s “either a genius or a total f—k.” Four out of five readers rejected it wholesale, but to the remaining 20 percent who were on the same wavelength, it was a masterpiece. Without a doubt, it was one of the most unconventional novels to earn a prize in the GF Bunko New Writers Contest.

Keisuke Hashima, meanwhile, had almost no exposure to manga, light novels, or popular forms of entertainment in general since childhood. To someone like him, with no antibodies against something of this nature, the book

was simply too much to comprehend. It was enough to cause him to believe there was no way his son could be exposed to a new family—and, especially, a new younger sister.

Recalling all too well how hard it was to be denied the freedom of entertainment from his own parents, Keisuke wanted to avoid that with own son. As long as Itsuki kept his grades up, he purchased whatever books he wanted. (His parents—Itsuki’s grandparents—still put up enough of a fight that he drew the line at manga and video games.) He would come to regret that intensely. Those bizarre novels, with the weird manga-like illustrations in them, were something he never should’ve let near his son. He knew for a fact that he had raised his child wrong, and it pained him.

The traumatic shock his debut novel delivered to his own family proved, in its own way, just how rare and extraordinary a talent Itsuki was. But it also turned the gap between Itsuki and his father into a yawning abyss—and thanks to that, Chihiro was forced to shoulder one of the craziest “white lies” anyone could have imagined.

Now, however, Itsuki’s work was being made into a cartoon. The kind they show on TV. That was how much support he’d received, from so many people. When he read *Sister of the Apocalypse*, he’d assumed the prize it won was some kind of mistake, and there was no way Itsuki would continue his novelist career. Keisuke wasn’t exactly the only critic of that book, in fact; its sales were beyond negligible.

—Sooner or later, he’ll have to face reality. Then he’ll find a real job when he graduates college.

That was what Keisuke had assumed. Instead, Itsuki dropped out without telling his parents and spent the ensuing four-plus years writing dozens of books as a professional. The trauma of *Sister of the Apocalypse* still hadn’t fully faded away...but, maybe, it was finally time to admit that Itsuki had made a name for himself.

“.....Is Itsuki doing okay?”

Keisuke noticed Chihiro’s face brighten. She would occasionally tell him about Itsuki, but this was the first time Keisuke had demonstrated any interest in his well-being since he’d raged at him for quitting college.

“Oh yeah! He’s working *super* hard right now. Plus, he’s found a girlfriend recently—”

Just as she said it, Chihiro cut herself off. Her joy at this show of kindness from her father had loosened her lips. But Keisuke’s ears picked it up.

“...A girlfriend? Him?”

Itsuki was engaged in a completely respectable romance. Itsuki, who sang the praises of little-sister love in a book that was incomprehensible and repulsive to Keisuke. Judging by the title of his latest release, the themes of his work hadn't changed much...but it proved that Itsuki's actual feelings about romance differed quite a bit from the deviant sister-love in his novels.

“Wow...”

Whether he realized it or not, a sigh of relief crossed Keisuke's lips. Itsuki was recognized by society as a novelist, and he had a lover. He wasn't a closeted sex offender longing for the chance to commit incest after all.

And in that case:

“Chihiro...maybe it's time we tell Itsuki the truth.”

And when Chihiro answered...

BOOK INTRODUCTION
SISTER OF THE APOCALYPSE
BY: ITSUKI HASHIMA ART BY: KUMA NO PUUSAN
VOLUME I

SYNOPSIS

Nozomu Hiyokudori is a perfectly normal-looking teen in his second year of high school. But there's a girl he secretly loves, a first-year student who's beautiful, smart, gifted in sports, and perfect in virtually every way. Her name: Kagero Hiyokudori, Nozomu's own little sister.

One day, Kagero reveals her feelings for him, too, and they become a loving couple. They keep their relationship a secret as they enjoy their days together—but they're threatened by a string of bizarre events rocking the world. Nozomu learns that the emotions of Kagero's heart are linked to these catastrophic changes.

"The happier Kagero is, the closer the world edges toward its doom. But I don't care! I'll never stop loving my little sister!"

A forbidden love threatens the world in this new generation of romantic comedies, one with a decadent yet uniquely lovable atmosphere and a cathartic ending that'll blow everything else away.

CHARACTERS

JUDGES' REVIEW

It's packed with originality—the cast and story developments are both completely off their rocker, making for a good contrast with our other honorable mentions. It's unrefined and riddled with issues, and I'm honestly not sure this is something we should commercially release, but there's an inscrutable sort of power here. It's definitely something only this author could have written, and I'm seriously interested to see where he goes in the future. I may be the only judge to say it, but I truly think discovering this writer is one of the greatest benefits of this year's New Writers Contest. I've got someone new to look forward to now. (Kasuka Sekigahara)

The New Manga Artist's Independence, and the Subsequent Fallout

Manga artist Kaiko Mikuniyama woke up on January 25 with an acute sense of dread.

Volume 5 of *All About My Little Sister* had been on sale for a week, and today, the collected Volume 1 of her comic adaptation of *All About*—printed monthly in *Comic Gifted* magazine—was hitting the shelves. This was the first professional release of Kaiko's life, and while she was overjoyed to see her manga being published in a professional magazine, having her name printed on a paperback volume version hit even harder.

This was common knowledge to some extent, but the amount of money manga artists made from magazine publications was woefully insignificant. When you factored in the cost of hiring assistants and purchasing art tools, you could even wind up in the red. Only when they produced enough chapters to get a collected volume on the market could an artist earn a decent living from their work, in the form of book royalties.

Kaiko had already received some sample copies in the mail a few days back. She couldn't help but warmly hug one of them. This book was in stores across the country, available to readers, and that meant—in a tangible way—she felt like a professional manga artist.

Drawing the chapters, crafting an extra manga for the anime website, and studying for her junior college finals all kept her so busy that she thought her head would explode. But she had done everything she could for this book. She was confident the cover art was the best her talent could produce at the moment; she had drawn over twenty extra pages of bonus manga for it, and there were hundreds of changes, large and small, that were made to the original magazine-published chapters. She even gave her all to the extra illustrations provided to the otaku-goods store chains, never compromising on any of them. In short, this book personified her, containing everything that defined her life right now.

Since it was being released alongside the anime announcement, there was an

ad campaign for both the books and the manga, and Gift Publishing had ordered a pretty large print run by debut-artist standards. Everything had been done right. Now she just had to pray for karma to go her way.

“Whewwwwwww...”

Kaiko placed the book on her desk, solemnly strapping her preferred pair of panties on her head. She had a mission—to produce a chapter for next month’s issue of *Comic Gifted*—and Kaiko Mikuniyama was ready to press forward. She was willing to do anything to become the best panties-oriented manga artist in the land.

It was a week later when Kohei Tokuyama, her editor, called to inform her that Gift Publishing had ordered an emergency second printing.

Ever since chapter 1 was published in *Comic Gifted*, it had been known among a subset of manga fans that the comic version of *All About* was extremely high-quality—but now that the full volume was out, the news was spreading far and wide. People unfamiliar with the original novels were buying it, and (as Tokuyama put it) if this kept up, the manga could even outsell the main series.

“So congratulations, Ms. Mikuniyama...! The manga’s a big hit!” Tokuyama sounded a bit nasal over the phone, as if he was holding back tears.

“Thank you very much. I really appreciate this...!”

Kaiko teared up as well, bowing to her editor despite being on the phone. When she hung up, her eyes were filled with the flames of resolve. It was time to go through with something she had been thinking about for a while now.

“Mother, Father, I need to talk about something.”

After dinner that night, Kaiko struck up a conversation with her parents, who were watching TV in the living room. Her father had a stern face and was set in his ways as many craftsmen are, while her mother, with her gentle smile, looked like an older version of Kaiko in Japanese garb.

When Kaiko first told them she wanted to enter manga, they were dead-set against it; she secretly brought her manga to publishers anyway, eventually scoring a regular gig. But then they sent a free copy of *Comic Gifted* to her house—addressed to her pen name of Kaiko Mikuniyama, a combination of the word for “silkworm” and her mother’s maiden name. This drove her mother to open the envelope, of course, and that’s how they found out. Her father then flew into a rage at the publisher, attempting to force Kaiko out of the manga business; he relented only when Kaiko gave him an emotional, motivating view into her personal dreams.

Her mother had come to accept it as well, and now they were two of her biggest supporters—cooking dinner, giving her a lift when she was late for a meeting, even passing out copies of *Comic Gifted* to the neighbors and asking them to hype up Kaiko in the reader feedback cards.

She truly appreciated everything her parents did for her. But:

“...Mother, Father...”

She drummed up her willpower.

“I’m thinking about going to Tokyo.”

“Oh? When? I could take you to the station tomorrow.”

“Try not to come back too late, okay?”

Her parents seemed completely unfazed.

“Huh? ...Oh.” Kaiko realized she hadn’t gotten her point across. She hesitated. “N-no, I don’t mean like that! I want to rent a place to live in Tokyo!”

That startled her parents.

...She had been considering it for a while. Going from her place in Gunma Prefecture to Gift Publishing HQ in Tokyo took two hours one way, plus an extra half hour or so getting to the station and waiting to transfer trains. She and her editor could use Skype or the telephone for simple discussions, but they still had to meet face-to-face and go over pages together on a regular basis, and that meant spending five hours out of the day in transit—a physically and mentally draining experience.

Besides, being in Tokyo would make finding assistants a lot easier. Kaiko was currently producing all her work solo—she worked fast, as manga artists go, and she only produced one chapter a month (and nothing extra for Comiket or other *doujin* events), so she was managing the workload well enough. But someday, she wanted to launch her own panty-oriented manga to run alongside the *All About* adaptation. That would definitely require some help. Plus, she also wanted to do assistant work at other manga artists’ studios as a learning experience. Tokuyama had linked her to an artist who needed assistance once, but because they lived so far away from each other, she was forced her to turn it down.

If she wanted to spread her wings as an artist and become a first-class panty manga author—a **panty manga sensei**, if you will—she had to move to Tokyo. And this second printing just when she was about to graduate seemed suspiciously like fate pushing her forward.

But...

“No! I refuse to let you live alone in Tokyo!”

Kaiko earnestly explained the need to move, passionately describing how now was the time to do it, but her parents shot her down.

“Besides, how can a sheltered child like you live by herself?” her father countered.

“I’ve been preparing for this! I can cook and clean for myself well enough!”

“Oh, so *that’s* why you’ve been so eager to help with chores lately?” Her mother seemed surprised.

“But everything’s so expensive in Tokyo!” her father exclaimed.

“I’ve saved most of the money I made so far. If you factor in the royalties I’m entitled to, I could live for the next year with zero income.”

“It’s not about the money!!”

“But Father, you just said everything’s so expensive...”

Kaiko scowled at her father’s unfair logic, and he reared back a moment.

“I... Well, it’s dangerous in Tokyo! There are punks prowling around at night! Molesters!”

“Well, if I find a place close to the office building, I won’t have to walk around late at night or be on trains by myself as much. Besides, we’ve got biker gangs to worry about up here; there are dropouts hanging out in front of the convenience stores... If anything, things are *more* lawless around here, aren’t they? Plus, sometimes we get wild boars coming down from the mountains.”

“That just shows how close we are to nature here! Those delinquents and biker gangs are like wild monkeys, all right?!”

“I think that’s a bit of a stretch, dear...”

It was Kaiko’s mother who brought him back down to earth—she was starting to see the other side of the story.

“...I’m just worried about our precious daughter leaving home to live by herself somewhere far away. Can’t you understand how I feel?”

Now she was making an appeal to her emotions. Kaiko found that unfair. She knew perfectly well how much they truly loved her, and they were just as precious to her. If they held her feelings hostage like that, Kaiko would have nothing to counter with.

Tears began to form in her eyes, but she held them back. If she cried right now, it would make her parents think *See? We could never let you live alone.* Now was not the time. She had to think, and think hard, about what she could do for her dreams...

“.....Well, if I *don’t* live alone, will that work?”

“Pardon me?” her puzzled mother asked.

“If I share an apartment with someone I can trust instead of living alone, will you let me move to Tokyo?”

“Mmmh...”

Kaiko’s parents both hemmed and hawed.

“That’ll cut the number of chores to do by half. We’d be able to live in a better neighborhood, in a building with security and stuff. I’ll stay in contact with you, of course, and I can come back home once a month. What do you think?”

“Mmmmmmh...”

Her father was still in murmuring mode.

“That *would* cut my worries down a lot,” her mother admitted. “But, Kinue, do you have a friend you can trust enough to live with? I can’t let you live with a total stranger, and I *certainly* won’t allow a man in your apartment.”

“W-well...”

Kaiko paused for a moment. All her junior college friends had already found jobs at local firms or government agencies; none of them were planning a Tokyo move.

But:

“I—I do! Someone I can really trust!”

“...Well, if you can contact her and she agrees to be roommates with you, we can discuss it then.”

“All right!”

With that, Kaiko went back to her room and called the girl she had in mind.

“Hello, Myaa? I want you to live with me, please!”

The first words out of her mouth over the phone only confused Miyako Shirakawa. “Huh?”



“That’s hard to answer out of nowhere,” a bewildered Miyako replied, but after about three minutes of Kaiko pleading with her, claiming she had no one else to turn to:

“...Well, let me ask my parents.”

Half an hour later, Miyako called Kaiko back.

“They said okay.”

“Oh, that’s great! Your parents are so understanding, Myaa!”

...So understanding that it honestly worried Kaiko, in fact, despite her doing the asking.

“Um, but wow, they sure said yes fast, didn’t they?”

“Well, I’ve been working a lot of late nights in the editorial department, so it was like, why don’t I find someplace closer to come home to? It’d kind of be training for when I’m out of college and living on my own.”

“.....”

Miyako’s description made Kaiko wonder in awe about how parents could think in so many different ways. In any case, Miyako was up for it. Kaiko left her room and went back to her parents.

“.....Oh, *that* girl?” her father muttered when she brought up Miyako. He had met her before; Miyako was the one who came to Kaiko’s rescue when he had stormed the editorial office, arguing with him on her behalf. The experience helped Kaiko steel her resolve and express her true feelings to her father.

“What kind of woman is she?” her mother asked.

“Well, she’s got moxie. The kind you don’t see much of these days. She has the courage to stand up for her friends, that’s for sure. If she was interested in raising silkworms at all, I’d love to hire her and teach her the trade. She could even inherit the business someday.”

Her father’s voice was still stern, but he only had words of praise for Miyako.

“My!” Her mother smiled slightly. “It’s not too often I hear you compliment someone like that.”

“...If it’s her, Kinue, I’ll allow you to go to Tokyo.”

“Father...! And yes, you’re right, Miyako’s a wonderful person!”

Kaiko’s face brightened with glee as she turned to her sighing mother.

“Well, if you and Kinue say so, then I’ll believe in her, too. But Kinue, if you’re leaving home for your dream, make sure you stick with it, all right? Because if you give up after suffering a setback and come home, I’ll never let you hear the end of it.”

Kaiko teared up at her mother’s firm, yet kind words. “Yes, Mother!” she said, looking her straight in the eye.



The next day, Kaiko was at a café near the GF Bunko office to talk about rooming with Miyako. Both of them were there together, and for whatever reason, Nayuta Kani was joining them. “I told her I’d be sharing a room with you,” she explained, looking a bit distressed, “and she just kind of came along.”

“Oh,” a confused Kaiko replied.

“Miku, I want to live with you as well!”

“Huhhh?!”

Kaiko looked positively bewildered.

“I want to live near Itsuki’s place,” Nayuta explained, “but after my little hospital trip, my mom and dad refuse to let me hole up in a hotel room or live by myself anymore.”

“Yes, I can imagine...”

Nayuta had been living by herself in a nearby hotel room for much of the last year, but an excessive workload and lack of steady food and sleep had landed her in a hospital bed. Kaiko was in the editorial office when the news of Nayuta’s collapse arrived, and even she could barely stand the suspense. She couldn’t blame Nayuta’s parents for wanting her out of there.

“But Nayu, why don’t you just live with Mr. Hashima, then? You’re his girlfriend, aren’t you?”

“Live with him... Ah-ha...ah-ha-ha...”

Nayuta was staring glassy-eyed into space.

“Nayu...?”

“...I’ve made the offer to Itsuki a million times. But he always adamantly refuses.”

“He does?”

That surprised Kaiko. She knew just how much Itsuki cared for Nayuta—enough to ditch his drama CD recording session to visit her in the hospital.

“I suppose it wasn’t a good idea to indulge in his cock so much during our first bedroom session that he literally started crying. He’s even wary of being alone with me in his apartment now... I’ve been able to hold back a little better lately, but if I don’t remain vigilant around him, I feel like I’ll push him right into bed.”

The raw confession made Kaiko and Miyako blush.

“...Yes, it sounds like you should maybe wait a little while. It’s a vital time for Mr. Hashima. If he’s living with a beast like you, he might not survive.”

“Sorry I’m such a sex monster...”

Nayuta hung her head at Kaiko’s rather harsh judgment.

“You know,” Miyako observed, “I think three people sharing an apartment might not be such a bad idea. If we can find a place around here, near both my college and the editorial office, that’d be perfect...but when I looked on the Net, I realized the neighborhood’s more expensive than I thought.”

“Yeah, it’s right in the heart of the city...,” Kaiko agreed.

“Right. Itsuki’s place is pretty big and low-rent for his area, but there are no auto-locks, and the toilet’s in the same room as the bath, you know? If it’s gonna be just women living together, I’d be anxious without some more security features.”

“That’s true... I’d at least want auto-locking and something on the second floor or higher, or I don’t think my parents will allow it.”

“Okay. And if you’re hiring an assistant, you’ll probably want a room big enough to serve as a workspace in addition to your bedroom, right? Trying to cover the rent on that with only two people...I’m not sure how doable that is around here.”

“If we can live together, I can cover the whole rent if you like.”

“No.”

“No thank you.”

Kaiko and Miyako immediately shot Nayuta down.

“I don’t want one person to take on all the burden for this place. We should all pitch in—on the rent, and with cooking and chores and taking out the trash, too.”

“Myaa’s right.”

“Nyahhh... That’s asking a lot of a former shut-in...”

Nayuta looked nervous about it. But Miyako flashed her a slightly forlorn smile.

“Well, Nayu, why don’t you take this opportunity to learn some cooking yourself? You know, for...um, when you marry Itsuki later.”

Nayuta’s eyes burst open, the gleam returning to her face.

“You’re right! Myaa, I’m gonna try my best!”

“Good. Keep that up, okay? So let’s talk about exactly what we want. We need to nail that down before we contact a rental office.”

“Certainly.”

“All right... You sure are helpful with this stuff, Myaa.”

With that, Kaiko, Miyako, and Nayuta began searching for an apartment.

Roomies

After talking it over, the three of them decided on the following conditions:

- Must allow roommates
- Rent: Under 210,000 yen a month (maintenance fees included, if possible)
- Workroom for Kaiko (at least 130 square feet)
- Bedrooms for Miyako and Nayuta (separate if possible; shared room also okay)
- Auto-locking front door
- Walkable to Gift Publishing (which also makes it walkable to Itsuki's place and Miyako's school)
- 2nd floor or higher
- No bad neighborhoods
- Separate bathroom and toilet room
- Washing machine in unit

It was now early February, a time when many Tokyo residents start looking around for an April move-in—and what with all the students and new hires, it was the busiest time of the year for a rental firm. The good places would be going fast, so it'd likely be hard to find exactly what they wanted. They would likely have to compromise...

...or so Kaiko feared, but they actually lucked out pretty quickly.

It was on the fifth floor of a ten-floor building, almost equidistant from Gift Publishing and Miyako's school.

The rent was 200,000 yen a month, maintenance fees included. The setup, in Japanese real estate parlance, was “3LDK”—one 210-square-foot room that served as a combination living room and dine-in kitchen—and three bedrooms: one 140 square feet, and two 105 square feet. Each one had central air and heat.

It had a balcony as well, and since the next building over was a two-floor private home, it received ample amounts of sunshine.

It came with a post box for packages, a twenty-four-hour trash drop-off, and a decent amount of storage space. The neighborhood around it was quiet, but a short walk brought you to a large street lined with shops, and there was a pretty big grocery store a couple blocks away. There was no deposit nor agency fee required upfront, and the first month of the lease was free.

The building was your standard reinforced-concrete design, with tiling on the outer walls. The apartment they were looking at had a clean history, and all the scuffs or damage from the previous tenant had been fixed.

...It met all their criteria, to say the least. In fact, it was a steal for the neighborhood.

Three days after their café chat, the three of them visited the rental office and checked the place out.

“Nya-ha-ha! So this is our new castle?”

“This would be great to work in...!”

“Is it really okay for us to live here...?”

As they looked around the rooms, Nayuta and Kaiko were overjoyed, while Miyako looked like she wasn’t sure she belonged.

“So,” the agent said, “should I take that to mean you’d like to continue with the paperwork?”

“Y-yes! Thank you very much!” Miyako reflexively replied.



Three days earlier, before she’d started hitting up agencies and checking out apartment websites, Miyako contacted Kirara Yamagata from GF Bunko editorial. Given how she lived right by the publisher, Miyako figured she could offer some advice.

“Oh, um, can you wait one second, Shirakawa? Just stay where you are for a little bit.”

Once she heard that Miyako, Nayuta, and Kaiko were looking for a place near the office, Yamagata hurriedly relayed the news to editor in chief Satoshi Godo. Nayuta Kani was GF Bunko’s number-one writer, and among the recent

manga debuts, Kaiko Mikuniyama was a red-hot rising star. Gift Publishing wanted to do whatever it took to hold on to that pair, and now they were willingly moving close to the office. That'd make it easier to have meetings and build relationships over meals more frequently—and even better, if deadlines started to loom, they wouldn't be able to slip through their editors' grasp as easily. A publisher couldn't ask for more.

“Miyako Shirakawa... I swear, she's our editorial guardian angel...”

An evil smile reached Godo's sinister face as he picked up the phone.

He was calling someone inside the building—the office of *Process*, another part of Gift Publishing's line. As a community journal for central Tokyo, it had a vast informational database to tap, and it boasted deep connections to the real estate business. Taking full advantage of that, Godo compiled a list of the apartments fulfilling the girls' requirements that he felt stood out. These were “special” places, not listed online and not available to the general public; generally they were used by the owners' relatives or business contacts. And one of them was the place Miyako and her friends were looking at right now.

It was hard, really, to put any one of them above the other. Following the *Process* editor's advice, the trio ultimately decided to make their final pick based on the name of the apartment complex. This is actually kind of an important factor—you want something easily understood when spoken and not prone to misspellings when written down. Names with lots of fancy, seldom-used kanji for words like “Phoenix” or foreign words like “Celestial Breeze” or “Avenir” that were unfamiliar to Japanese ears would mean you'd have trouble getting pizza delivered over the phone. If someone asked for your address, you'd pretty much have to show them on your phone screen.

Whether you're naming a book or an apartment building, it's important to think like a customer, instead of naming it for your own selfish reasons, Miyako mused.

And in this case, while the landlord told Godo that the building “isn't really the kind of place for three women living as roommates,” Godo personally threatened—er, convinced him otherwise, but that was his little secret.



All the contracts were signed without a hitch, and a week after the initial tour,

they had their keys and could move in at any time.

Kaiko had already collected her things from her parents' house; today was her move-in day. Miyako and Nayuta had shorter commutes and didn't own their own furniture yet, so they'd get everything together on a more gradual basis—but out of nowhere, the GF Bunko editorial department offered free beds for Miyako and Nayuta and a table set for the living room, calling it a move-in gift.

“That—that’s really going too far for us...!”

Miyako felt awful about accepting the offer when Godo gave it, but he insisted. “Don’t worry about it,” he said in his deep, authoritative voice. “These are necessary expenses in our business. I hope you live here for a *very* long time to come.”

“A very long time...? Um, I haven’t made any plans or anything, but if I get a job with a company elsewhere after I graduate, I’m gonna move out, you know.”

Godo gave her a pointed look. “Well, if you work for us, that won’t be a problem. Like I said, you’re completely welcome here.”

“...I appreciate the sentiment, but I’m still gonna need to think about that.”

Just like when he invited her before, Miyako stalled for time.

“All right. But please accept the gifts, at least. You already count as one of our greatest assets in editorial, right up there with Ms. Kani. It’s important for us to make sure you’re in a healthy, stable living environment.”

“...Okay. In that case, thank you very much.”

So GF Bunko had a living room table set and a pair of beds (linens included) delivered for Miyako and Nayuta. They were all a grade up from what Miyako had at home, which made her feel all the stranger about it.

“Nya-ha-ha! A new bed!”

Nayuta was far less hesitant, jumping right into the shiny new bed in her room and rolling around on it like a cat.

“My future love nest with Itsuki...weh-heh-heh...”

Miyako was terrified. “Um, Nayu, are you gonna bring Itsuki in here?!”

“Oh, can I not?” Nayuta, on the other hand, looked mystified.

“Um, if you’re just hanging out, it’s fine, but...uh, bedroom stuff...”

Being separated by a single wall from Itsuki and Nayuta’s “bedroom stuff” was too much for Miyako to imagine. It didn’t make her blush—it made her chest hurt. She winced.

“That, uh...um... Hmm... I mean... It’s not *not* okay...but...”

“...I understand.” Nayuta smiled at her, a little apologetically. “No sexy time

with Itsuki in here! I promise!”

Miyako smiled back, feeling a bit apologetic. “Um, okay. I appreciate that... Sorry, Nayuta.”

“No worries!”

Nayuta made an effort to sound cheerful, not digging further into what Miyako meant by “sorry.”

Then...

“Oh, hey, Myaa and Nayuta! You were in here, huh?”

Kaiko entered the room.

She had come before Miyako and Nayuta, overseeing the movers carting her stuff up and unpacking the boxes. Of course, apart from her desk, shelves, and other big furniture, her possessions fit into just six boxes—one for pens and art supplies, two for reference materials and books about her hobbies, and three for lingerie.

“Oh, Kaiko! Are you done unpacking?”

“Uh-huh. I finished up just now.” She wiped her brow, satisfied with herself.

“Great,” Miyako said with a chuckle. She thought she’d help Kaiko unpack after the table and beds arrived, but Kaiko turned her down as she carefully arranged her panties in the closet.

“No, I need to arrange my children into friend groups myself,” Kaiko explained.

That made no sense to Miyako, but she was too scared to ask for details. “Well, it’s still early, but how about we go out for dinner? And since we’re moving in today, soba noodles are the traditional commemorative meal.”

“I’m sorry,” Kaiko told Miyako, “can I have some time to take a shower first?”

“Oh yeah, you’re all sweaty. Do you have soap and towel?”

“Ah! Actually, I forgot to bring them. Better go out and buy those...”

“Oh, don’t worry. You can use mine this time.”

“Thank you! You’re so well prepared, Myaa.”

Kaiko looked at her with respect.

“Well,” Nayuta interjected, “since we’re here, how about we all take a bath together?”

“That’s a great idea!” said Kaiko.

“Together...? It’s a pretty big bath, but I don’t think it can hold three, can it?”

“It’ll be our first time using the bath, though. I’d hate to hog the first time all

to myself.”

“Oh, don’t worry about *that*.”

“No, let’s all go in at once! I’ll scrub your back, Myaa!”

“Nice! And I’ll wash her front!”

“Sounds like a plan!”

“You guys...”

Kaiko and Nayuta were giving Miyako the hard sell. Miyako just sighed back at them—and, in the end, the two of them pushed her into having a three-woman shower to kick off the evening.



“What do you think, Myaa? Feel good?”

“Myaa, if you feel itchy anywhere, just let me know, okay?”

Nayuta and Kaiko, fully lathered up in bubbles, were rubbing Miyako’s naked body on both sides.

And the sensation of their soft breasts pushed against her arms *did* feel good, but:

“...Um, why are you washing me like this? Can’t you just use a washcloth like normal?”

This was like something the women at one of Toki’s favorite clubs would do for a fee. Granted, Miyako didn’t know *exactly* what they did, but she could picture something like this.

“It’s best to gently wash your skin with someone else’s skin,” Kaiko stated.

“Right,” Nayuta said. “This way, I can wash you at the same time as myself. It’s killing two birds with one stone.”



“You think...?”

Miyako didn't buy it, but she let the two girls do what they wanted as the impromptu bubble bath continued. It was occasionally ticklish, and she might have moaned once or twice when Nayuta or Kaiko started kneading her breasts.

What am I even doing...?

This particular situation raised some red flags, yes. But she had her thoughts about the whole roommate thing as well. She was now living in this fancy apartment after accepting Kaiko's request and just sort of letting things happen—but unlike her roommates, Miyako was getting help with rent from her parents. She'd initially planned to pay—she personally had enough money saved to cover it until she graduated, and being closer to GF Bunko made it easier to work there—but her parents convinced her to save that money for her own future, so she accepted their charity. Even Godo and the rest of the Gift Publishing staff were spoiling her.

She didn't move here to go independent as a manga artist like Kaiko. She wasn't like Nayuta, who was so loaded that she didn't care at all how much the rent was.

...Just because I'm living with them doesn't mean we're equals.

She was still a student, and it was pretty uncommon for girls Miyako's age to be completely financially independent in Japan. No matter what, she just couldn't help but feel inferior to her roommates.

Despite the trust she had earned from Godo, Toki, and everyone at Gift Publishing; despite Nayuta and Kaiko's adoration for her as their big sister; despite Haruto Fuwa's romantic interest in her; despite the potential the president of an artisanal silk company had seen in her (although she didn't know about that)—Miyako still had a low opinion of herself. It would be just a little while longer before she came to realize her true value and find a path for herself.

Q&A Corner

QUESTION

When Miyako and Itsuki met in college, Itsuki said something like “If a hundred thousand people understand a book and you’re all ‘Oh, gee, I don’t understaaand it,’ you should be ashamed.” But all hundred thousand readers didn’t necessarily get that book, did they?



Well, no, of course not.



Oh, you admit it?!



I mean, I was just saying that to shut you down after you started dissing my work. I knew it was a hollow excuse, but I wanted you to shut up.



...You know, you can be really sly like that sometimes. Also, I asked Mr. Toki the other day, and he said Volume 1 of *Genesis Sisters of the New World* has only sold around sixty thousand copies!



I rounded up, okay? It was just an estimate! I wasn't lying!



Mr. Toki told me only a truly rare megahit release could get away with rounding up from the nearest ten thousand.



...Ugh... Look, I didn't think we were ever gonna talk again, so I figured I could afford to pad the numbers a little... I didn't think that (A) we'd be friends this long, and (B) you'd make connections with the editorial team...

Nayulathotep

Itsuki learned that the girls were all sharing an apartment the day after they moved in. Nayuta was at his place that night, having dinner together and playing a few two-player board games, but even when the final trains for the night were about to depart, she showed no sign of leaving.

“Hey, don’t you need to catch a train?”

She chose that moment to reveal yesterday’s move to him.

“Wha...?!”

It was a bolt from the blue.

“I can’t believe your parents let you live by yourself again...”

“I’m not by myself.”

“Huh?”

...Then she revealed the rest of the story, the move-in with Miyako and Kaiko. Itsuki was feeling a bit lonely after not seeing Nayuta for the past ten or so days, but he had no idea this was what was going on.

“Are you surprised?” Nayuta asked with a mischievous smile.

“...Well, of course I am.”

“Nya-ha-ha! Now I can see you whenever I want, even if we aren’t living together, Itsuki! ♥”

“...Yeah.”

His face implied he didn’t know what to make of this.

Of course, having Nayuta so close by—like she was back at the hotel—didn’t make him unhappy. He had stubbornly refused to live with her, since her habit of mostly going nude indoors would take a toll on his physical and mental health. He just didn’t expect that she’d try to close the distance like this.

“Every time I think I’ve got you figured out, you manage to surprise me, you know that...? There’s something about that that just... Well... I like it, I guess.”

Itsuki’s gentle smile made Nayuta blush. “Right!” she said brightly, trying to hide her embarrassment. “Now, Itsuki! No need to worry about trains! Let’s make love ’til morning! It’s been too long!”

In the blink of an eye, Nayuta's clothes were off.

"If you're gonna whip off all your clothes, you don't have to act all bashful!"

But even as Itsuki protested, the carnivore was crawling up to him.

"Nya-ha-ha! Time to eat!"

And, once again, Itsuki was consumed that night—when she was finished, not a crumb was left.

Okay, I Regret Possibly Going Overboard with the Dirty Stuff This Time

It was a Saturday in mid-February, and Chihiro was cleaning the living room at Ono Tax Accounting when she spotted something unusual under the TV stand. It was a long rectangular plastic box, about the size of a remote control, with a switch and a twist knob on it. Attached by a flexible cable was another plastic object, this one shaped vaguely like an egg.

“Hey, Ashley, what’s this?”

Chihiro picked it up and brought it over to Ashley, who was working in her office.

“Huh?” Ashley turned around. “———?!”

The sight of it in Chihiro’s hand made her eyebrows shoot straight up.

“Um, Chihiro, where did you find that...?”

“It was under the far end of the TV stand.”

“Oh... I was *wondering* where it went,” she whispered, sweating a bit.

Chihiro gave her a funny look. “What is it?” she asked, casually pointing it at her.

Ashley tried to avoid looking at it. It was an adult toy that rubbed against a certain sensitive part of a woman’s body for pleasant times—in other words, a bullet vibrator.

“That’s.....um.....a **massager**.”

“Oh really? It’s shaped kind of weird.” Chihiro examined the massager... okay, let’s be honest, the vibrator. She seemed willing to swallow Ashley’s description well enough. “Can I try it out?”

“T-try it out?! *You*, Chihiro?!”

Chihiro gave the panicking Ashley another funny look.

“Is that a no?”

“You—you *can*, but...I, I think you might be a little young for it, still... Better not get *too* used to toys early on, I don’t think...”

“?”

Ashley's muttering was too soft for the puzzled Chihiro to make out. She decided to give the vibrator's switch a push. With a low vvvvvvvvvv, the egg started to vibrate—and then she applied it, this implement that provided relief for Ashley virtually every evening, to her own shoulder.

"I use this knob to adjust the intensity, right?"

She turned it all the way up to maximum, holding the egg against her shoulder for a bit.

"Hmm... It's kind of weak..."

"...That's because you can feel it plenty where you're supposed to use it."

"Huh? What was that?"

"N-nothing."

"Oh." Chihiro looked a tad perplexed. "...You know, my dad has a massager he uses at home, but it's way more powerful than this one."

"Yeah, I'll bet," groaned Ashley. "I, um, I'm still young and all, so that level of stimulation's effective enough for me."

"Oh, I see." Cheerfully accepting this, Chihiro turned the vibrator off. "By the way, where should I put this?"

"Um.....how about the garbage, please?"

Chihiro looked back at her. "Huh? Why is that? It works fine."

"Because I thought I lost it, so I bought a new one."

This "new one" was a great deal more to Ashley's liking than the little bullet vibe, offering more fine-tuned power levels and quieter operation. There would be no going back.



“Ohhh,” Chihiro said, looking at it. “Well, can I have it, then?”

“Huhhh?! Um, would you use it, Chihiro...?”

“Yeah. You know, on days when I have gym class, sometimes my muscles get just a little sore, so this could be perfect.”

“Ahh... Well, you can have it, but I’d recommend you keep it somewhere your parents won’t find it.”

“...? Why is that?”

“Huh? Uhhh.....I mean, you’re still young. If they knew you were using a massager, they might worry that you’re tiring yourself out, wouldn’t they?”

“Ah, yes, you may be right.”

Ashley’s cringeworthy explanation made sense to Chihiro. Ashley was stunned. Here was this sweet, gentle child, and she had just given her an adult toy. It filled her with pangs of guilt and a rush of immoral excitement.

Workplace Injuries

In a Gift Publishing office room in late February, a month after the *All About My Little Sister* anime announcement:

“Okay, that’ll do it for our regular read-through for today. Thanks a lot, everyone.”

With his usual calm manner of speaking, anime director Munenori Tarui finished things up. The rest of the people in the room—original creator Itsuki Hashima, GF Bunko editors Toki and Godo, scriptwriter Masahiko Hirugano, producer Tsutomu Oshima, and production assistant Kakeru Yamada—all said “thank you” in return.

For the past several months, they had been holding these script conferences for the *All About My Little Sister* anime here—and today, finally, they had a (tentative) final draft worked out for episode 12, the series finale. There’d be little fixes and adjustments to make going forward, but this was the last regular meeting, and thus the last time Itsuki as original author would be in up to his elbows in production responsibilities.

“Um... Do your best, okay?”

Tarui calmly fielded Itsuki’s request. “I’ll do what I can to live up to your expectations.”

There was a fierce resolve in his words.



Near ten o’clock that evening, after hanging with the anime staff at the *izakaya* near the editorial office, Itsuki returned to his apartment.

“Phewww...”

Leaning back into his chair, he heaved a sigh. The first stage of his anime-related work was complete. Now he’d just have to trust in Tarui and the rest of the group as he kept writing his novels.

Booting up his PC, he tackled his work in progress: Volume 6 of *All About*, due for release just before the anime premiere...but before he got down to business, he got up and went to the bathroom. Perhaps because of all the food he ate at the *izakaya*, he needed to go number two. Sitting down on the seat, he pushed...and with what sounded in his mind like a comic-book *rrrrp!* sound effect, he felt a sharp pain in his anus.

“~~~~~?!”

Resisting the urge to cry out, he looked into the toilet, trying to figure out what was up. He saw red—a bright shade of red, mixed into the edge of the bowel movement he just plopped in there. It was now starting to stain the rest of the water.

“Ahh...?!”

The sight of it made him yelp out loud. Intellectually, he understood what a “bloody stool” was, but this was his first experience with one, and the shock of seeing blood come out of his rear end was monumental. Gingerly, he used a wad of toilet paper to wipe between his cheeks. There was fresh blood on it.

Is this some kind of bad disease...?

He had been busy ever since the anime project kicked off, making it hard to keep much of a regular schedule. If sickness had chosen this moment to strike him, he couldn’t blame it. The names of several creators who died young from illness—including Kasuka Sekigahara, who had his deepest respect—flashed across his mind, draining the life from his face.

...You have got to be kidding me...! I still have so much I need to do. I have a drive to surpass Nayuta Kani. I have a dream to create the ultimate little sister, far into the future. And I have to make Nayuta Kani, my beloved, happy. If something happens to me, what’ll happen to her? Just imagining that scares me. I can’t let myself fall apart right now...!

Exiting the bathroom, he launched his web browser, breaking into a cold sweat and shaking from fear as he Googled “bloody stool cause.” The search led him to a site with a list of causes divided by stool and blood color, pain location, and other symptoms. Based on Itsuki’s experience, the most likely conclusion was a case of bleeding hemorrhoids.

“Oh... It’s just hemorrhoids...?”

There was slight relief in his hushed voice. But he couldn’t be fully sure just yet. He decided to stop working while seated that night and arranged to have the doctor check him out in the morning, just in case.

Still not fully consoled, he took a shower and quickly went to bed, but had

trouble sleeping between the nightmares.



“Yes, you have a bleeding hemorrhoid.”

First thing the next day, the doctor at the proctology clinic gave Itsuki the diagnosis. There was no need for surgery; the problem would likely fix itself in a few days, but he was advised to refrain from sitting down for hours at a time.

Relieved that it was nothing too serious, he received a topical cream and some pills and headed home. There, he felt the urge once more, headed to the toilet, pushed, and had that same *rrrp* of pain and blood in his toilet bowl.

“Aaah...!”

He knew it wasn’t serious but having to deal with this pain during every trip to the bathroom was rough. The visuals were bad for his heart, too.

Hoping it’d heal sooner than later, he used the handheld showerhead to wash his rear end. For hemorrhoids, it was apparently good to not just wipe, but use the shower to thoroughly clean everything down there, although you didn’t want to use the high-pressure function, of course. He wound up extending the shower to the rest of his body, just to feel a little better.

Out of the bath and toweled off, he applied the hemorrhoid cream to his rear and had just finished changing when his lover came in. She quickly noticed that his hair was wet.

“Did you take a shower, Itsuki?”

“Yeah.”

“Weh-heh-heh! I’m glad you were so keenly preparing. If that’s what you were waiting for, then let’s get—”

He stopped her before she could begin disrobing. “Wait! No! Not for that!”

“Oh, don’t be shy! There’s no need for that anymore, you know.”

“I *mean* it! Just listen to me, you sex-crazed Deathmask! Yesterday...”

Itsuki hesitated to continue out of embarrassment, but Nayuta wouldn’t keep her clothes on for much longer if he didn’t, so he pressed on.

“I have hemorrhoids!”

“...? Hemorrhoids?”

“...I had blood come out when I took a crap yesterday, so I went to the doctor this morning and they said it was a bleeding hemorrhoid.”

This seemed to boggle Nayuta's mind, strangely enough.

"I... Itsuki... Did—did Prince Manwhore pop your butt cherry...?!"

"No, you dumbass! Hemorrhoids are kind of like a workplace injury for writers. This was bound to happen sooner or later."

"Yeah, you *are* pretty much sitting down all day..."

It made sense to Nayuta. One primary cause of hemorrhoids is a lack of proper blood circulation; staying in the same position for hours on end can cause congestion in the veins around the anus, leading to symptoms. Other causes are a lack of exercise, overwork, stress, smoking, and drinking—and looking back at Itsuki's lifestyle as of late, smoking was the only box he *didn't* check.

"What do I say...? Get well soon, I guess?"

"Yeah," Itsuki said, nodding with a sigh. "I wrapped up my last script meeting yesterday and I'm pretty good deadline-wise, so I think I'll take off work until I get better..."

This made Nayuta's ears twitch.

"Then why don't you go to a hot spring?" she asked, cheeks flushed and looking ever-so-slightly excited.

"A hot spring, huh? Yeah, they say that's good for this. Guess I could head to Hakone again..."

He had gone there with Haruto and Setsuna last September. It was both one of Japan's main hot-spring towns and a mere ninety minutes or so from central Tokyo, so it was an easy trip to make.

"Hakone! That's good! Let's reserve a hotel right now!"

Itsuki frowned at the giddy Nayuta.

"Wait. Were *you* intending to go with me?"

"Of course I am! Nya-ha-ha... My first hot-spring trip with you, just the two of us!"

"....."

He did want to take her on a trip sometime. But this was going much too fast. He wasn't mentally prepared.

"...Are you okay with work?" he tried asking.

"Just fine!" she replied with a smile. "I can work at the hotel!"

"....."

"No, really! I'll bring my Pomera and everything."

"Hmmm..."

He kept staring at Nayuta doubtfully, and she kept smiling, unfazed. He couldn't outlast her.

“...All right. Let’s do it. Hakone it is. Just the two of us.”

Nayuta’s cheeks were blushing just a little bit as she beamed at him with heartfelt joy.



The hot springs in and around Hakone were classified into twenty or so different types, each with their own mineral compositions and purported medical effects. All of them, generally speaking, were apparently effective against hemorrhoids. This meant any hotel with a hot spring would work fine, really, but they picked one with an exclusive hot-spring bath in the room, at Nayuta’s request.

Itsuki’s last trip was a simple overnight affair, but he wanted to bathe several times to heal up, so they went for two nights this time.

Once the reservations were in place, Nayuta went back to her apartment to pack. They then met up at the rail station, taking the train to Shinjuku and staying long enough to pick up box lunches before grabbing a couple of first-class Romancecar seats to Hakone-Yumoto Station. From there it was a ten-minute cab ride to their hotel.

The Japanese-style room with bath they were led to was larger (and more expensive) than the one he’d shared with Haruto last time, featuring a bigger TV and a mini-fridge packed with goodies.

Opening the sliding doors, they looked out at the balcony to find a cypress bathtub filled with hot water. It wasn’t that big, but still more than enough for two people. The mountains of Hakone were spread out in front of it, and there was a pretty river at the base. They could hear the sound of running water.

“Ahhhhh...” The sight of the bath made Nayuta melt. She turned to Itsuki. “This is such a nice bath, isn’t it? Let’s go in, Itsuki!”

Her nose was twitching with excitement, and Itsuki blushed.

“Uh, let’s start with the big public bath first!”

“Aww,” Nayuta griped. “...But all right. We can have our own fun later, hee-hee-hee...”

She had been suitably placated. Before long, they had both changed into *yukatas* and headed for the gender-segregated public baths.



The baths had two large tubs set at different temperatures, a sauna, a cold bath, and a shallower tub for lying down in. Outside were baths exposed to the elements, as well as one in a large cauldron, a wooden box with heavy steam pouring out of it, and other unusual variants.

After washing off, Itsuki soaked in the regular bath for a while, then decided to take the wood-box steam bath, a novelty to him. The box was reminiscent of a coffin that you sat down in, keeping only your head above water. If you shut the lid down over it, the effect was kind of like having your decapitated head on public display. It felt bizarre as he sat there, staying still, but he could feel the steam gradually warm his body.

Hey...this feels pretty good...

It was like a mist sauna for one, and while Itsuki couldn't stand saunas, he felt he could stay in here for a good while.

After about ten minutes, he got out and walked over to an outdoor bath, followed by the cauldron and a lie-down tub. It may've just been his imagination, but he felt like his butt was doing better now. The larger baths could be used anytime between two PM and ten AM the following morning, and he wanted to use them at least a few more times.

Changing back into his *yukata* in the locker room, he could feel the steam wisping off of him as he left. There he saw Nayuta in her *yukata*, taking advantage of a massage chair in the front lobby.

"Nyaaa-a-a-a-a-ah, I-i-i-i-i-tsuki-i-i-i..."

When she noticed him, she called for him as the chair kneaded and loosened her entire body.

"Hey. Sorry to keep you."

"No-o-o-o, I just got out myself-l-l-l-l-l-lf."

"Oh? Felt good, huh?"

"Yeah-h-h-h-h. How's your butt fe-e-e-e-e-e-eling?"

"I dunno yet, but I think it feels better."

"That's go-o-o-o-o-o-od."

She closed her eyes, mouth half open in ecstasy as the chair tossed her around.

"Does the massage feel that good?"

"Nya-a-a-a-a-a-ah, I think my muscles were really ti-i-i-i-i-ight."

“Oh.”

He bought some fruit-flavored milk from the vending machine, enjoying it as he waited for Nayuta’s massage to end.

Once they went back to their room, they chilled out for a bit. The front desk let them check out game consoles for free, so they borrowed a Wii and played each other in *Mario Kart* for a while. At six PM they went to the hotel restaurant, smacking their lips at the sumptuous display for dinner. Itsuki wanted to have a drink, but refrained for the sake of his hemorrhoids.

After dinner, they found the staff had laid out their futons for the night, pushed right next to each other to create a perfect square of bedding.

“Well, Itsuki, do you want to hit the bath together?” Nayuta asked, anticipation in her eyes.

There was no way to delay this any further, so Itsuki just went with it. “... Yeah,” he said, nodding slightly.

Loosening their belt and removing their *yukata* and underwear, the two of them went out on the balcony, naked as the day they were born.

“Nya-ha-ha... Being naked outside like this seems so *wrong*, doesn’t it?”

Her hair was wrapped up in a towel as she bashfully spoke, her face reddening ever so slightly.

“Yeah,” Itsuki said, blushing a bit as well as they both stepped into the tub. They sat there, naked and just facing each other silently for a bit. The bath in Itsuki’s apartment was so tiny that he’d never used it with Nayuta before. He was familiar with her nude form by now, but his heart was racing faster than usual nonetheless. The everyday act of bathing seemed so incredibly special when Nayuta was with him.

“Um, you don’t have to stare at me *that* hard...” Nayuta looked a tad embarrassed.

“Y-you’re the one who said we should go in here.”

“I know, but...” She ducked down, putting half of her head into the water and blowing some bubbles before coming back up. “It’s funny... This seems more embarrassing to me than when we’re having sex.”

“...Me too. What a coincidence.”

“I guess taking a bath is one of the most private things you do in your everyday life. The only thing *more* private would be the toilet, I guess.”

“...I guess so.”

“Sharing it like this, I think, means that your partner’s accepted one of the most personal aspects of your life. That’s why I’m so embarrassed about it, and

nervous, but I'm really happy, too..."

"...Yeah, I think I know what you mean."

Itsuki agreed with Nayuta, as bright red as her face was.

"Ahh, am I really allowed to be this happy?" she whispered, almost to herself, a rapturous smile on her face.

Itsuki was so charmed by her in that moment that he had to keep from blurting out "Will you marry me?" as he turned his face away.



Once they were out of the tub, they had a ribald, high-volume slam-bang in the futons, then fell asleep.

Itsuki was up at five the next morning, so he decided to go for a morning bath. His bowel movement after breakfast was somewhat painful, but not bloody.

"Whoa...! Hot springs really work...!"

Whether it was just the proctologist's medication doing the trick or not, this was a meaningful experience for him.

He took another bath after that, and then they went out and visited the Hakone Venetian Glass Museum. After lunch, they went to the town of Hakone-Yumoto and munched on local specialties like hot-spring steamed buns, fried onion sticks, and *shiokara* croquettes.

They were back at the hotel by two PM, where they went back into their private tub, played games, hit the larger bath before dinner, hit it again afterward, hopped into their private one, and flirted with each other in assorted ways at length.

It was the first time in a while Itsuki and Nayuta had spent an entire day at total leisure like this. It was thus with a pleasant sense of exhaustion that Itsuki finally went to sleep—but apparently his brain was still overexcited, because he woke up in the middle of the night. Checking his phone, he saw that it was half past two.

He got up, figuring he'd take advantage of this and enjoy an early-morning outdoor bath—but then he realized Nayuta wasn't next to him.

"...?"

Looking around, he saw a faint light coming from the balcony, past the

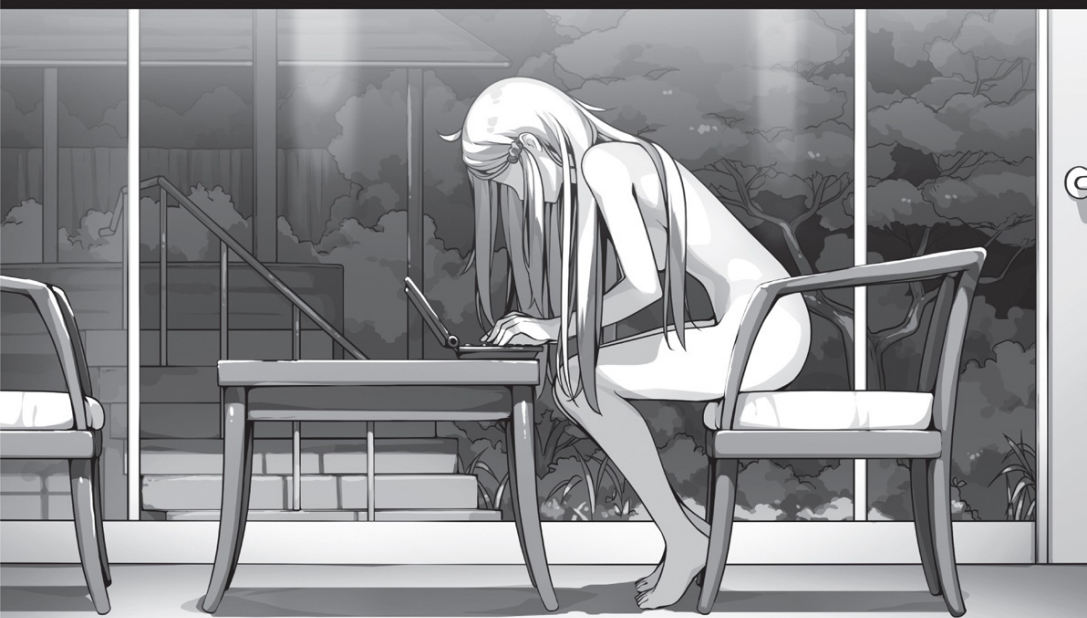
sliding door. *Maybe she's in the tub out there*, he thought. But when he focused his ears, he could hear the *taka-taka-taka* sound he was intimately familiar with—fingers against keyboard.

...*Kanikou*...?

Dubious, he stood up and took a peek out from behind the sliding door. There, with her silver hair and pale skin, dimly lit by a single light bulb, was a naked Nayuta Kani, seated on a chair and rhythmically typing on her Pomera compact computer at a steady rate.

As expressive as she usually was, there was no emotion on her face now. Her blue eyes stared straight at the screen and nothing else as she tapped away.

Nayuta had told him before that she couldn't write novels unless she was nude. She had composed a bit on her smartphone while she was in the hospital, but didn't make much progress—she couldn't focus, she said. This, right now, was Nayuta Kani's preferred work environment, Itsuki presumed. For the first time, he saw her as a novelist.



But this...

“Focus” doesn’t even begin to describe this...!

Every hair on Itsuki’s body stood on end. A cold sweat ran down his face.

Several times, he had experiences where he’d make unbeatably rapid progress on a scene, or he was so focused on his prose that he tuned out everything else. Most writers had, he thought. But that was nothing like Nayuta right now. Her face was blank, robotic, and she kept the exact same typing tempo going for what seemed like forever. She wasn’t on a hot streak; she wasn’t focused. It was more like a sci-fi version of a Ouija board—words were being beamed into her head, and she was outputting them into a text file. Like an oracle going into a trance and reciting the words of the gods, some divine overseer of novels had taken over Nayuta’s body, using it to make her write out a story.

No wonder her books were so good. They were literally divine revelations.

The sight was so beautiful, so mystifying—but to someone in Itsuki’s occupation, incredibly frightful.

—A novelist like this... Someone who’s channeling the words of the gods... How am I supposed to compete against that?

His body began to tremble, an unconscious smile forming—the smile of someone about to admit defeat, realizing he could never beat this writer.

Grrrrrr...!

But Itsuki banished the smile, biting down hard on his lip. He could taste blood in his mouth.

I won’t let this break me. I swore I’d stand alongside Nayuta Kani. I’ve decided to become the protagonist. And what kind of protagonist can’t slay a god? I can’t think of any other real way to do it apart from building and growing my experience, but as long as I don’t give up, I’ll never lose.

His eyes brimmed with tears as he watched his greatest love, his most powerful enemy—but he smiled brazenly all the same.

Q&A Corner

QUESTION

The afterword to *Sister of the Apocalypse*, as read by Nayuta in Volume 1, said “I’m not that gifted physically or academically, and I don’t have too many friends, but I had this habit of continually daydreaming during class, and eventually it led me to write a novel.” Wasn’t he in high school? But the extra chapter of Volume 3 says that Itsuki started writing between graduating middle school and starting high school.

Which is it?



Gulp... Um, well, writing about my lost love in that afterword would’ve been super embarrassing, and my dad might’ve been reading it for all I knew, so I fudged some of the dates a little bit...

...I fell in love with you when I read that.
I can’t believe it wasn’t the truth...



D–don’t worry about it, Kanikou! Even without that afterword, I think we would’ve met somehow anyway.

Oh, Itsuki. ///



The Akihabara Date

On a Sunday in late February, Chihiro was waiting for Haruto at the Showa-dori exit of JR Akihabara Station.

A few days back, Haruto sent a text inviting Chihiro to join him at Yodobashi Akiba, and she immediately said yes. Yodobashi Akiba—officially called “Yodobashi Camera Multimedia Akiba”—was a large integrated shopping center dealing in appliances, sports gear, magazines, games and CDs, books, plastic model kits, and much more. This was Chihiro’s first time in Akihabara; the sight of all the ads for anime and games in the rail station, as well as the electric sign touting light novels right by the turnstile, surprised her.

“Hey, Chihiro.”

“Good morning, Fuwa!”

About five minutes after Chihiro arrived (and ten minutes before they were supposed to meet up), Haruto walked through the turnstile.

“I heard about all this, but wow, Akihabara Station is amazing.”

“Huh? Is this your first time in Akiba?”

“It is,” she said with a nod.

Haruto looked a bit pensive. “Oh... Well, I was planning to look at some electronics, check out the models, have lunch, and go back home, but did you want me to take you anywhere else?”

“Would you mind?”

“Of course not. Akihabara’s like my personal garden,” he joked.



For starters, they entered Yodobashi Akiba right by the turnstile and took the escalators up to the fifth-floor electronics section.

“What are you buying today, Fuwa?”

“Um, well, I actually haven’t decided yet.”

“You haven’t?”

Chihiro wasn’t following.

“I wanted to buy a move-in gift for Miyako and the other girls. They’ve already got a fridge, microwave, rice cooker, washer, and TV, but she said they don’t have anything else, so I thought I’d get something.”

“Oh, that makes sense.”

“What kind of thing do you think they’d like, Chihiro?”

“Electronics-wise...?”

Chihiro gave this some serious thought for a moment.

“How about a robotic vacuum?”

Itsuki had won the latest model of one at a raffle last year, and (much to Chihiro’s chagrin) it was a real workhorse, greatly reducing the amount of cleaning she had to do. The girls’ new apartment had a pretty big living room, she’d heard, so a robo-vac could probably come in even more handy there than at Itsuki’s.

“A vacuum...?” Haruto smiled. “I like that!”

So they headed over to the vacuum section, but...

“...Wow, it’s that expensive...?”

Finding the model Itsuki owned, Chihiro was shocked.

“Over a hundred thousand yen, huh...? That’s a lot more than I thought...”

Haruto seemed distressed.

“They have cheaper ones, too,” Chihiro said, pointing at the other robots.

Haruto shook his head. “No, let’s go with the newest one. I’ve seen how good a job it does on Itsuki’s place—they’ll be able to use it for a long time to come. And if it’ll help out Miyako, a hundred thousand yen is nothing!”

As Chihiro gave a sympathetic smile, Haruto got a nearby staffer’s attention and worked out the purchase and delivery details.



After taking care of that, they went up one floor to the game and toy department. The model corner was lined with Gundam kits and had completed samples (apparently built by the staff) on display behind glass cases.

“Wow...!”

Chihiro’s eyes sparkled as she pored over the cases. It was nothing like a

small neighborhood model shop or the toy section of a department store. The whole section was huge, the selection out of this world.

“You like the mass-produced robots, don’t you?” Haruto asked as Chihiro marveled at the box for an MG GM Type C.

“Oh, um, yeah.”

During their talk about their favorite mobile suits at the mixer the other day, Chihiro had started raving about the Zaku, the GM, the GINN, the Tieren, the Genoace, and the other mass-produced mechs that appeared in the *Gundam* universe. She liked those sorts of “sidekick” robots dotted around the story, and she also appreciated how their designs were relatively restrained compared with the flashier special craft the protagonists piloted. A lot of them also had special configurations for land, space, or desert operations, which attracted her.

“But my brother would always buy Gundams or whatever the rival protagonists piloted, so I haven’t put too many of them together.”

The only Gundam models Chihiro had made up to now were the ones Itsuki left in the family home when he’d gotten his own place, as well as the kits he’d purchased after that and just ignored. Chihiro had never actually purchased one herself; even at the local model shop, she only bought paints and decals and such, never model kits. Buying a new one when she hadn’t made all the ones at home yet seemed wasteful to her.

“Well, why don’t you buy something *you* want to make for a change?”

“Maybe...” Chihiro scoped out all the kit boxes lined up. “Mmm, but I really want to build everything I have now before I buy something new.”

“You’ve got more willpower than I do. I could stand to learn from that,” Haruto laughed.

Like Itsuki—or, really, like most Gundam model builders—Haruto tended to buy more model kits than he actually built, resulting in an ever-growing to-do pile in his room.

“Ah, but I *do* have something I want to buy.”

Pleased with herself, Chihiro had a pair of nippers in his hand—and not just any nippers, but ones with superthin, highly sharpened blades specially developed to keep discolored plastic nub marks to a minimum.

“Oh, you gonna buy that? I have a pair, too, and they *really* cut.”

“Yeah, this kind had great reviews,” Chihiro excitedly replied. “I’ve wanted a pair for a while, and Ashley paid me yesterday. I’m gonna go through with it.”

These nippers cost over four thousand yen—far pricier than a normal pair, but much more useful.

Haruto thought it over a bit. “Actually—let me buy those nippers for you.”

“Huh?! N-no, no, I couldn’t!”

Haruto smiled and waved him off. “Hey, you helped me find a move-in present. Besides, the member points I got for purchasing the robo-vac would easily cover for that. It’s like a bonus freebie, so don’t worry about it.”

“I’m not so sure I follow your logic...”



Haruto took his hand and placed it on top of the flustered Chihiro's head, lightly patting her.

"Hyeahh!"

"Plus, you're always cooking such good food for me. I gotta return the favor somehow."

Chihiro blushed. "All—all right... Thank you very much."

The two of them headed for the register, nippers in hand. After paying, Haruto handed Chihiro the bag.

"Thank you. I'll take good care of these."

"Don't just take care of them. *Use* them. Make a bunch more kits, okay?"

Haruto smiled as Chihiro bashfully accepted the gift.



After browsing around the game and book sections, they went to a conveyor belt sushi place on the eighth-floor food court.

Haruto started grabbing plates at random. "So, I heard Itsuki got hemorrhoids?"

"Hey, I'm trying to eat," admonished Chihiro.

"Huh? Oh. Sorry."

Realizing this was an inappropriate topic to casually throw out over lunch, he quickly apologized. He was never the sort to shy away from dirty or delicate topics when talking with other men.

"So how's Itsuki doing?"

"He's completely fine now. I think he's working again."

"Ah. Well, I'll go pay him a visit soon. Thanks in advance for cooking for me when I do."

"Sure," Chihiro said with a smile. "But you should be careful, too, Fuwa."

Haruto grinned. "Yeah, hemorrhoids come with the territory... He has a really good chair, but I guess even that won't stop the inevitable."

"Right..."

The work chair in Itsuki's apartment was a luxury item, built with sophisticated ergonomics and clocking in at around two hundred thousand yen.

"Though...in *my* case, I'm worried more about my back than hemorrhoids."

"Your back?"

“Yeah. I do a lot of work on hard seats in diners and cafés, so. A writer friend of mine said he strained his back recently, but he’s only twenty-five years old, so it’s not an old-man thing at all. And once it happens to you, it’s easy to strain it again, so...”

“Well, I hope you’re careful about that,” Chihiro said, giving him a worried look. “Oh, actually, I have a massager in my bag here.”

“Huh?! Why?!”

Haruto’s voice almost cracked with surprise.

“Ashley gave it to me recently, and it’s been in my bag this whole time.”

He fumbled around his bag a bit...

“Ah, here it is.”

...and with that, he casually whipped out his vibrator and showed it to Haruto.

“*Bp hh?!* ”

Haruto did a spit take on the spot.

“You can have this in exchange for the nippers, if you’d like,” he said, 100 percent sincere as he held out the adult toy.

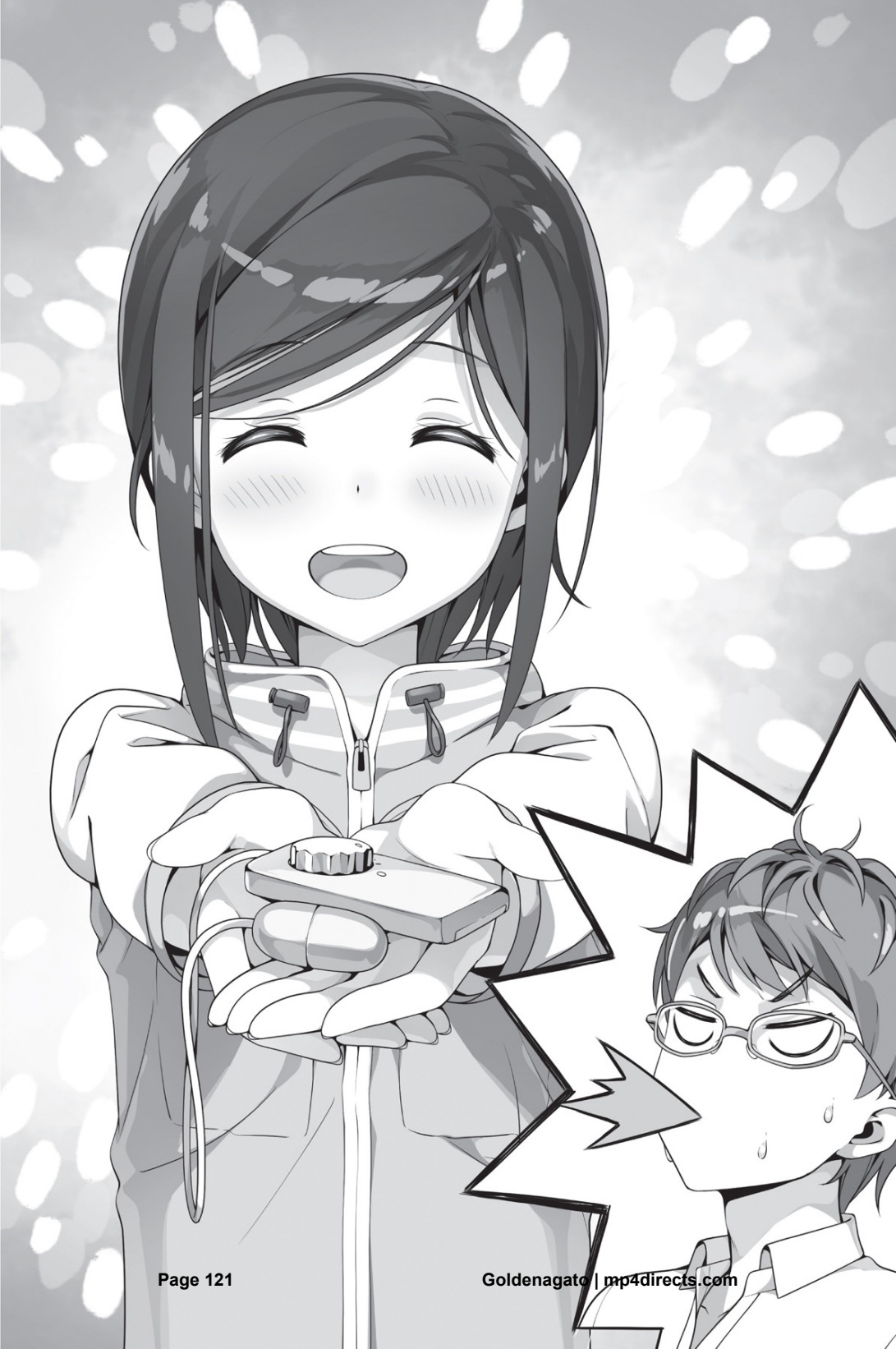
Haruto took a furtive look around the area, making sure nobody was looking. The restaurant was divided into booths, so the coast was fortunately clear.

“Whew...”

Thanking his lucky stars he had chosen this place for lunch, he turned back toward Chihiro.

“Um, Chihiro, do you know what that is...?”

“...? It’s a massager.”



He believed it. Haruto could feel a headache coming on.

“...And you said Ashley gave it to you?”

“Yeah.”

“...What the hell was that crazy lady thinking?” he muttered to himself. After a moment’s thought, he took out his phone, typed “vibrator how to use” into the search bar, opened the resulting page, and handed it to Chihiro.

“...Okay, Chihiro, this page shows how you *really* use that.”

“How you really use it?” he asked, curious, as he started to read the website...then gradually began to grow redder and redder in the face.

“Huh? Uh...wha...?! Like *that*...?! You, you can just put it right in...?! No way...! That...that’s...um...! ~~~~~!!”

Haruto could almost see the steam rising from Chihiro’s face as he lowered his head, placing it on the table. He retrieved his phone and took the vibrator from him, hurriedly putting the latter in his own bag.

“I’ll, uh, I’ll toss this out somewhere...”

“Okay... Thank you very much...”

There were tears in Chihiro’s eyes, but Haruto couldn’t help but smile at him. Itsuki and Nayuta had told him as much, but Chihiro really had no knowledge of this kind of thing whatsoever, did he? He was more impressed than exasperated. Anyone with Net access could find porn in two seconds regardless of how old they were—and even before the Internet era, boys his age would borrow porn mags or games from their classmates, or just talk dirty with each other. Either way, you’d normally know about this kind of thing at his age.

But Chihiro wasn’t an ignorant kid. He was expressive, helpful, a great cook, and—judging by his skill in board games—a talented strategist. What kind of environment did this boy grow up in to be so...unbalanced? Haruto honestly wanted to know.



After the Chihiro Hashima Vibrator incident, the pair left Yodobashi Akiba and decided to put it behind them by walking around Akihabara a bit. They covered all the famous must-visit sites like Toranoana, Animate, Gamers, Gachapon Kaikan, and Hobby Tengoku, as well as a computer parts shop Haruto took advantage of when he built his desktop PC.

Chihiro acted so amazed everywhere he took him, which made the trip extra fun for his guide. His particular favorite was Chabara, a line of shops located underneath a railroad bridge, and in particular the store Nippon Hyakkaten Shokuhinkan, which featured famous regional and rare foods from all across Japan. The beverage section was impressive as well; Haruto stopped in to purchase Japanese craft beer sometimes.

“I can’t believe there’s a shop so amazing here...”

Chihiro seemed honestly mesmerized as he explored every inch of the store, ultimately purchasing five jars of rare seasonings after extended deliberation.



The sun was already nearly down by the time they left Chabara. The station was nearby, so they headed over.

“Thanks a lot for today,” Chihiro said as they walked, happily swinging his bags of seasonings and nippers around.

“Hey, it was fun for me, too. Showing you around was really worth it for me. Whenever I go with Itsuki, he always loses steam and complains about wanting to go home.”

“Yeah, he was never very good with crowds.” Chihiro laughed.

“Want me to show you around again sometime?”

“Oh, yes, of course!”

Haruto was glad to see how happily Chihiro agreed. “Aww,” he half-jokingly said, “it would’ve been great if *you* were my little brother. Then we could build Gundam kits at my place. I wish I could trade *my* little sister for you.”

“Ah...ah-ha-ha...”

Chihiro’s face tensed up, smiling insincerely.

“Man, it’s so much better having a brother than a sister, isn’t it?”

“...!”

Haruto’s easygoing observation was like a knife in Chihiro’s chest. She tried to keep the pain from showing as she gave a vague half smile.

Q&A Corner

QUESTION

What are you looking forward to in the 2017 fall anime season?



Umaru-chan Season 2!



Gin Tama, I guess.



Kino's Journey.



I'd say my number one is the second half of *Fate/Apocrypha*.



I don't watch much anime, but I can't wait for *March Comes in Like a Lion* to start back up.



Hey, guys, uh, aren't you all forgetting something?



I know what you're hinting at, but how can I look forward to an anime where we're all working and agonizing over our personal lives and stripping naked? What kind of masochistic game is this?!

The Girl

“Chihiro...maybe it’s time we tell Itsuki the truth.”

On January 18, the night the *All About My Little Sister* anime was (officially) announced, Keisuke Hashima broached the topic to his daughter.

And as soon as he did, Chihiro blurted out:

“Oh, um, don’t you think it’s a little too soon?!”

“...You think so?”

Her father was confused, but she tried to keep her cool.

“Yeah. Itsuki is really busy with anime work and writing his novels right now, I think. If we tell him the truth, I think it’s really going to make his life really chaotic, so...”

“Ah,” Keisuke replied. “...If you say so, Chihiro, you’re probably right. I’ll let you decide when the time is right, then.”

“O-okay,” she nodded, even as her own words unnerved her.

She thought she wanted to tell him the truth right now. That she was really a girl, really his little sister, and then they could have a real family without any more pretending. She’d dreamed of this for so long—Dad, Mom, Itsuki, and her, four people around the same dinner table like everyone else’s family.

But as she commuted to his apartment and played games and stuff with his friends—Haruto, Miyako, Nayuta—the time Chihiro spent with these people besides Itsuki had grown just as important to her. If they knew she was a girl, it wouldn’t just throw Itsuki. Haruto and the others wouldn’t be able to interact with her like before, either. The thought pained her deeply.

A family’s all you need. Or so she thought. So why did it turn out like this?

—*What is a brother...or a sister...like me supposed to do?*

Chihiro Hashima, age seventeen. Beautiful, intelligent, sporty, a master chef, perfect with chores, empathetic, cheerful, talkative, the perfect human being...

*...but still a young **girl** who had never been in love, the least experienced person out of this story's whole cast.*

But not even Chihiro knew that sort of secret was just too heavy for a girl like her to bear...

(The End)

Afterword

On April 13, 2017, as he listlessly searched for his name online, Yomi Hirasaka was greeted with a tweet reading “*A Sister’s All You Need* anime in the works!”, complete with an image of the special-edition release of novel Volume 7...

I think many readers are already aware of this, but nearly a month before the *Sister* anime’s official announcement, the news got spoiled for tons of people when Shogakukan erroneously uploaded a picture of the special edition to their website. It didn’t break the heart of the author or illustrator or anything like that, but the cause of the leak is pretty much exactly as described in this volume.

I actually was planning to throw some other anime-related obstacles in Itsuki’s way for this volume, but with the publisher providing such a great idea with impeccable timing, I just had to take advantage of it, and that’s how Volume 8 happened. So thanks very much to the GAGAGA Bunko editorial department at Shogakukan, and thanks to Iwaasa, my editor. But you guys *won’t* get a “next time”...

Apart from SisterLeaks, this volume finally shows Chihiro acting like a full-fledged protagonist character. With so many bombshells locked and loaded, I wonder which one I’ll detonate first [evil grin].

By the way, the anime series will finally launch on TV in Japan on October 2017. As previously announced, I personally handled story editing and scriptwriting for the series. I think at least a few people were worried about it affecting my novel-writing pace, but the script work proceeded extremely smoothly, and I had them all wrapped up in February of this year—so, apart from any of the *other* anime work, I can confidently say that the writing had no direct effect on the novels.

In order to keep the anime in a neat little package, there are a lot of places where I reworked the timelines of scenes and changed assorted aspects of them. I don’t think this damages the story’s atmosphere and themes, so I hope that readers will take heart as they enjoy the series on a clean slate.

As far as differences between the novels and anime go:

- At the start of the series (episode 1), Miyako, Nayuta, Haruto, and Chihiro have all already met one another.
- At the start of the series, Nayuta is already set up with a hotel room by her publisher.
- Itsuki is working on two series at once in the novels (*All About My Little Sister* and *Sisterly Combat*), but in the anime, these two titles are merged into a single one, *Mahou Academy*. This is because after rearranging some scenes, having Itsuki juggle two series got too confusing and created some timeline paradoxes.
- Instead of cutting out scenes that're too "mature" for TV broadcast, I tried my best to replace them with even worse material. For example, I knew even before we launched an anime project that the *Once Upon a Time* scene could never be broadcast as is, so I replaced it with another awful story. People's dicks do make an appearance, however.
- Due to reasons, we can't use any overseas beer brand names in the anime, so they were all replaced with Japanese brands. Each one is up there with the beers seen in the novels, however, so I hope you'll keep an eye out for them.

* * *

...To sum it all up, I suppose, the more carefully you've been reading the novels, the more confused you might be in spots.

The show is packed with a lot of charm that you'd only see in a big project like an anime, complete with front-line light novel illustrators producing the covers for all the cast's fictional novels. Just like in the originals, there are a *lot* of nude scenes, too. Everyone on the production side is giving their all to make this a "good anime," so if you watch it and like it, please recommend it to friends, buy the disks and merchandise, and help us make it into a "happy anime." We'd all really appreciate it. I worked hard on the original content written for the disk releases, so stay tuned for more details on that.

In addition, we've got a team-up campaign going between the novels and the manga adaptation, a real-life board game version of *The Life of a Light Novelist* (?!), and all kinds of other things I can't write about here in the works, so check

out the official sites and Twitter feeds for the anime and GAGAGA Bunko.

I only made it this far thanks to the support from all our readers. Let's enjoy this festival together.

■ Q&A Corner

Q: Kasuka Sekigahara's *A Sister's All You Need!* ended at Volume 13. Is this foreshadowing meant to indicate *this* series is going to run thirteen volumes too?

A: Nothing like that, no. It may last longer than thirteen, and it might end sooner than that.

Q: Where do you draw the line between censoring references to real-life things and leaving them as is?

A: If it's the name of a series or character, it's based on an assessment of the context, situation, relevant laws, and lots of other elements, figuring out whether it's likely to cause a problem or not. For other things, like f—k, it's based on Shogakukan regulations.

By the way, I was pretty surprised to see Kasuka Sekigahara rank number two in the “favorite character” survey results.

Hope we'll see you in Volume 9 and the anime!

Yomi Hirasaka
Ravishing Silver-Haired Nude Female Novelist
Mid-August 2017

Afterword

Thanks for reading to the end. This is Kantoku, the series illustrator.

We had a character design meeting for the anime and one of the people there told me “Haruto looks like he’s gonna go bald in the future.” That wasn’t in his character profile at all, but now I think so, too. If you need styling tips to hide your hairline, I’m your go-to guy. (Just lay off the airstrip I got going up there.)

Speaking of balding, Toki’s certainly undergone an advanced sort of fashion revamp, hasn’t he? I’ve never seriously drawn a shaved-head character before, so it’s hard to remember who he is!

I’m really happy with how many cute scenes Chihiro gets in this volume. It was worth waiting for. The future’s gonna be really exciting. I’m wondering where that vibrator’s gonna wind up. Will its travels continue?

あまがき



¹ Not true.

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