

A PARTIAL TRANSLATION OF TWO NOVELS:
DURARARA!! BY RYOHGO NARITA AND PARADE BY YOSHIDA SHUICHI

By
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Samantha Sharp
Honors Senior Thesis – East Asian Studies: Japanese

Abstract

This project is a translation of the first two chapters of Durarara!!, by Ryohgo Narita, and chapter 2 of Parade, by Yoshida Shuichi.

I wanted to do a translation because I love reading and I want to be a translator. I became interested in the Durarara!! novel after seeing the anime. Since this was right when I was planning my senior thesis, I thought it might be fun to do a translation of the novel. There are official English translations of the Durarara!! anime and manga, but not the original novel.

After discussing the project with my thesis advisor, Dr. Gabriel, we decided that I should translate part of Durarara!! for the first semester and part of Parade, a book with which Dr. Gabriel was already familiar, for the second semester. Dr. Gabriel has already translated Parade, but the translation has not yet been published.

Throughout the translation, I made notes on any issues I had. I also noted the page numbers in the original text. The most challenging and fun aspect was trying to find a balance between keeping the author's style and making the story sound good in English. I think I gained valuable experience from this project.

Durarara!! By Ryohgo Narita

Translated by Samantha Sharp with help from Dr. Philip Gabriel

Prologue

[pg 13] This is a warped¹ story.

“Hey hey hey!² You’re there, right, Seiji-san?³ I came today too! Oh no, you forgot to leave the door unlocked! Now I can’t get inside!”

Alarm, alarm. A stalker is invading my house, and she’s been banging on the door for a while now. Just what is she thinking, not even using the intercom?

“The door is locked! Could it be you’re sleeping? Eek!⁴ This is my first time visiting a guy in his sleep, what’s wrong with me!”⁵

Warning, warning. A warning to the me of last week. I saved a girl who looked fresh out of the sticks from some punk. After talking to her, it turned out we would be going to the same high school starting tomorrow. And somehow it ended up here. Even though the other girl I saved with her was such a very polite girl.

[14] “You know what? The thing is the thing is...I’ve liked you for a long time, Seiji-san! Don’t you remember?!”⁶ At the entrance exam I was sitting next to you, Seiji-san! The boy sitting on my right had this really weird last name like Ryugamine, so I was wondering what sort of name the person on my left had, and when I glanced over I fell in love at first sight! That’s why I remembered your name! But I didn’t speak up because I didn’t have the courage...but then when you saved me earlier it was like, wow, this must be fate! So I got really brave! So that’s why that’s why, Seiji-san, please show me your face please show me your smiling face I’m begging you I’m begging you!”

¹ At first I wanted to write “wandering” story, but I was debating over the change from past tense. After looking up “yuganda” for some more translations, I realized “wander” isn’t actually in the definition, and decided “warped” was the best representation of the style of the story (and also in past tense)

² Writing “hey hey hey” looked odd to me at first, but the original text doesn’t have commas, so eventually I decided that the comma-less version matches the girl’s hyper personality.

³ Most manga translations these days keep honorifics and add an explanatory page. I don’t know about books?

⁴ The equivalent girly squeal to “kyaa!” might be “eek!”?

⁵ I debated over having both “?” and “!” here; the original doesn’t have a question mark but it has “ka.” I think I won’t put the question mark because she isn’t actually asking a question; it’s more rhetorical. Also debated the best translation for “-tara,” which sort of expresses frustration or exasperation.

⁶ This line has “ka” as well as “?!”, so maybe a question mark is not always necessary when it’s just “ka!”

Caution, caution. This chick⁷ sneakily followed me home. After that she's been coming over almost every day. Even when I tell her to go home she doesn't listen. I've heard these words she's yelling two thousand times already.

“Could it be you're not feeling well?! Is that why you can't come out?! This is bad! Please open the door right away! You know, I've looked up some things since the day of the entrance exam! Your birthday and your family –.”

Police, police. I'm calling the police. When I said that she finally withdrew for today.

It's been three weeks since the attack. Thinking that the girl probably went back to her house, I decided to go shopping at the convenience store below my apartment. Even while picking up toothpaste and a weekly magazine, that wackjob girl's face crossed my mind.

My first impression was she was quite pretty. Just a bit mature-looking; maybe the best way to say it would be “a beauty.” But why would a girl like that not already have a boyfriend – I learned that myself the hard way.

[15] No matter how cute a nutjob girl like that is, I'm not interested. Maybe it would be different for someone who really wanted a girlfriend – but the current me has absolutely no interest. Because *I already have a girlfriend*.

But just what should I do about the school entrance ceremony tomorrow? I vaguely wondered about it while climbing the stairs and walking the narrow hallway to my room.

If I'm going to have to see that girl's face every day, I'd rather just not go. Oh yeah, I have my girlfriend. A very quiet and beautiful girlfriend, unlike that girl. If I'm with her, I really don't care if I don't go to school. Maybe I'll try working; I could ask my sister to employ me in a part-time job at her company or something.

Oh yeah, I just remembered. I just remembered why I saved that girl in the first place. When I talked to her she was completely different, but she really looked like her. Like my girlfriend. That's why I saved her. When I think about it now I did something stupid. I saved her just because her face looked the same, but the insides were completely different.⁸

I was thinking about that sort of stuff as I slipped my key into the door to my room.

Huh? That's weird.

⁷ “koitsu” shows less respect, so maybe “chick”

⁸ The tense is a little tricky here. It sounds almost like he's talking more about a “fact of life” than a specific case of this girl (like “they look the same but the insides are different”).

It's open.

Alarm alarm alarm. Official warning announcement of my all-encompassing problem.⁹

[16] Alarm bell alarm bell beep beep beep.¹⁰ When I open the door the girl's shoes are there...¹¹

“Se-Seiji...san...”

When I went into the room, the stalker girl was standing there cowering. Compared to this illegal invader girl, I felt myself becoming awfully calm. It was because I noticed the expression on the girl's face. And the voice I forced out was so cold it surprised even me.¹²

“*So you saw it?*”

“Uh, um, I, that is...” The expression plastered on her face was one filled with fear and anxiety, completely different from usual. ...huh, so she can make this kind of expression too. And I grew more confident.¹³ It's true; *this chick saw something she shouldn't have seen.*

“Uh...um, Seiji-san, I...uh, I won't tell anyone, okay! Even despite this, I, I still like you Seiji-san, uh, uh, it's okay. No matter what your hobbies are, I can adapt to them, uh, so, uh...”¹⁴

[17] Offense and defense have switched. It looks like this time it's my turn to hunt her down.

“It's okay.”

“Seiji-san!” With my words, the stalker girl's voice was filled with hope.

“It's okay.”

“Seiji...san?”

⁹ I ended up with “pinchi” at the end, but it sounds weird to say “my pinch.” That makes it sound like pinching skin. If I can put “pinch” elsewhere, it might sound like the “problem” meaning; or I could find another word for pinch. The problem is “my” pinch. And the adjective, “whole,” doesn't accommodate the “problem” reading of “pinch” either.

¹⁰ “keishyou” can mean alarm or warning, but I already used those for earlier words that were different. Jisho.org says it also means “alarm bell.”

¹¹ He doesn't actually say the girl's shoes “are there,” he just cuts off at “are.” Trying to find a way to make it trail off and sound natural. “The girl's shoes are...” “The girl's shoes...”

¹² “shiboridashita”? shiboru = to wring, squeeze; squeezed out a voice? Like he's forcing himself to speak?

¹³ “kakushin” is “confidence” but maybe he means that was more sure about the fact that she saw it?

¹⁴ She ends with “uh” but there isn't a period, but in English you have to put some kind of punctuation, so maybe an ellipse?

She probably noticed that my eyes were still cold. In an instant that hope was painted over with unease. In order to change her expression into complete despair, I spoke one more time.

“It’s okay.”

“Seiji!”

When my big sister came into the room with two of her underlings, I was sitting Japanese-style in the living room eating cup ramen. The underlings skillfully placed the stalker girl’s body in a bag and carried it away. My sister took one glance around the room, and after she saw the blood-spattered wall, she hugged me tightly.

“It’s okay, it’ll be okay.”

[19] While feeling my sister’s warmth,¹⁵ all I felt was, ‘man, it’s hard to eat like this.’

“Seiji, you have nothing to worry about. Leave it all to your big sister, alright?”

“Sis,¹⁶ it’s not that girl – it’s about *her*.”¹⁷

“So it was you who took her after all, Seiji...it’s okay, leave that girl to me as well, okay? It’s okay; as long as I’m here I’ll never let anything scary happen to you...to say nothing of turning you in to the police, of course I’ll never turn you over to the police, so don’t worry.” Leaving it at that, my sister gave her underlings some various orders and left.

I don’t think I’ll work at my sister’s company after all. It seems like my sister keeps the company of some not very respectable characters who are a secret even from the main office. Like these underlings of hers; even though someone has died they’re just operating without saying anything. They probably weren’t respectable to begin with.

I don’t want to work with these sorts of evil people. I’ll become evil myself. If I became evil and got caught by the police or something, *she* would probably be very sad.¹⁸ I have to avoid that.

¹⁵ “ataakai” and “nukumori” both mean warm, but “warm warmth” sounds weird

¹⁶ He calls her “neesan,” which is more formal than “neechan,” which I think would be “sis,” but calling her “sister” has a different connotation. Maybe “big sister,” but it sounds odd to call her “big sister” every time.

¹⁷ So when Seiji said he “had a girlfriend” earlier I translated that as “girlfriend,” but when he says “it’s about her” to his sister I translated it as “her,” but I wonder if they should both be the same? It just doesn’t seem like he would call her his girlfriend to his sister, especially because of the emphasis in the original, but given the context of his previous discussion I think he probably means girlfriend the first time.

¹⁸ Again, “girlfriend” or “she”? “She” is too ambiguous, but “*she*” could work and make it clear that he’s talking about his girlfriend. The ambiguity may be intentional. This is tricky because I know the truth about her, but the reader doesn’t at this point.

While watching the expressionless underlings wipe blood off the wall, I quietly filled my stomach with stale ramen.

Ugh, this ramen's pretty bad.

[20] This is a warped, warped story.

A story of warped love.

Chapter 1: Shadow

[23] Chat room (holiday/nighttime)¹⁹

<So yeah, I hear that “Dollars” gang is pretty big in Ikebukuro right now!>

[I've never seen them myself, these “Dollars,” although I've heard the rumors a lot]²⁰

<It's 'cause it's like they're hidden underground! But, they're becoming a major rumor on the 'net too, y'know?>

{Is that so? Kanra-san, you're really knowledgeable about Ikebukuro, huh}

<Oh, no, not really~!>

<Oh, so so so, do you know the story of the black bike?>

{black bike?}²¹

[oh yeah]²²

<That thing that's been the talk of Shinjuku and Ikebukuro lately. It was even on the news yesterday!>

♂♀

[24]★Tokyo city – somewhere in Bunkyo ward (weekday/midnight)

¹⁹ I'll use single angle brackets for the double, since I don't think there is a particular reason for them to be doubled. That's also a Japanese keyboard formatting thing. For the thick brackets I'll use curly brackets, because I don't know how to get thick brackets and I don't think an American audience would be as familiar with them anyway.

²⁰ Should I put periods in chatspeak? Usually people don't put them. In Japanese it seems like you don't have to put periods at the ends of speech (that's what it looks like from the prologue). It might help emphasize that it's a chatroom if it doesn't have periods

²¹ I think most people don't bother to capitalize chatspeak for shorter or quickly-typed things

²² The person says “ah-“ which implies “oh yeah I know what you're talking about” but just “oh” or “oh-“ looks weird so I put “oh yeah”

“You...you...damn monsteeerrr!” Along with his distorted scream, the man raised an iron pipe – and fled like a scared rabbit.

In a midnight parking garage, a young man runs. In his right hand, he feels in his grip the iron warmed by human skin. However, even that feeling is gradually soaked with cold sweat and becomes a thing of uncertainty.

His surroundings contain only scattered parked cars waiting for their owners, not even a shadow of a person. All sounds had completely vanished from around the young man; only the sound of his own footsteps and harsh breathing, and his gradually increasing heartbeat,²³ continued to swirl in his ears.

Running between pillars of unfinished concrete, the delinquent-looking young man cursed under his breath.²⁴ “...d...d-d-d-damn! Damn it! Damn it! Y-you, you think I’m gonna let you get me, damn it!” The light from the young man’s eyes emitted the color of rage, but what came out of his mouth were the strained gasps of fear.

The man had a tattoo on the back of his neck meant to inspire fear in his opponents.²⁵ Now it was distorting with the power of the delinquent’s own terror. And the already slight confidence held in that blue-purple pattern – a pair of pitch-black boots had driven it out.

♂♀

[25] <It seems like it’s been kind of an urban legend for a long time, but now they can put cameras in cell phones, right, so lots of people have been taking pictures of it, and it’s like it’s suddenly become famous~>²⁶

[Oh, yeah yeah I know about that. But that’s not really an urban legend or anything. That’s just like an ordinary biker gang or something, oh, but it’s not like that rider goes around in a gang or anything]

<Not having a light on a two-wheel motorcycle is pretty stupid, I’d say>

<If it were a human, that is>

{I don’t really get what you’re saying...}

<Oh, um, see...to put it bluntly, it’s like a monster!>

²³ “gradually pulsing heartbeat” doesn’t make sense; I think the “pulse” indicates an increasing pulse

²⁴ “sakebu youni tubuyaita” he muttered under his breath as if he were yelling?

²⁵ I’m not sure what is meant by the “sono shunkan made,” because it’s not like the tattoo disappears. It just ceases to inspire him.

²⁶ Kanra trails off a lot using the dash, but I think in English chatspeak we would use the ~



*Scrape.*²⁷ A horrible sound rang out, and the delinquent's body made a wobbly arc as he half-turned around. Frozen with his body in profile like that, the delinquent's limbs trembled desperately as his mind wavered. Cold air wrapped around the surrounding area, but it felt like the numbness that enveloped him blocked out the chill of the concrete. [26] It felt just like the man was trapped in a nightmare, trying to run, and turning around to the source of the fear that threatened at his back.

What stood there was a single human shadow. Just as the word says, it was definitely a "shadow." Its entire body was covered in a black riding suit, a plain black outfit without a single unnecessary decoration or emblem; it gave the impression of having been dipped in deep ink. Only the fact that it repelled the fluorescent lights of the parking garage caused one to think that something existed there.

The really strange thing was the part from the neck up. A helmet with a peculiar design was set there. In contrast to the pitch black section below the neck, the helmet's shape and design evoked a kind of artistic sentiment. Still, it didn't give a very different impression than the pitch-black body. The face cover was as black as the mirror glass of an expensive car, and the wavering, winking reflections of the fluorescent lights gave no indication of the figure inside the helmet.

"..." The shadow just effused silence, giving off no feeling of life at all. The man saw that figure and his face distorted with a mixture of fear and hatred.

"I, I d-d-d-don't remember being chased by the Terminator!"²⁸ Ordinarily those words could be taken as a joke, but there was not a fragment of composure in the man's feelings.

[27] "S-s-say something! Wh-what the hell! Just what the hell are you!" From the man's point of view, this being was completely incomprehensible. As usual, the men had gathered in the underground parking garage, planning to do some light "work" and go home. They would send the "product" to the buyers and stock new "product." That's it. Nothing different from usual. Just what mistake had they made? Just what had called up this monster...?

²⁷ michiri – what is that sound? Is it a footstep? I had "crunch" but there is a bigger "crunch" later. If it's a footstep, it could go "scrape."

²⁸ This sounds a little odd to me, but perhaps this is a normal reference to make.

The man and his “colleagues” were supposed to complete their work as usual this night. But that routine, without any forewarning, had crumbled away.

At the entrance to the parking garage, when the men were waiting for one of their number who was late – that being suddenly appeared. A single motorcycle sat ten meters away, having passed through the entrance without a sound.

The man and his comrades, watching this figure, noticed a number of mysterious things surrounding *it*. Firstly – the fact that the bike had literally entered without a sound. Maybe there was a faint sound of the tires grinding, but they couldn’t hear the all-important sound of the engine at all. They thought of the possibility that the rider had cut the engine and relied on momentum, but then they should have heard the engine up until then, and none of the men could say that they had heard that.

More importantly, everything about the bike was pitch-black, including the driver; not only the engine and shaft but even the rims of the tires were dyed pure black. There was no headlight, and in the place where the license plate should have been attached there was only a black iron plate. [28] It was so much that one could only tell that the object there was a motorcycle from the reflections of the moon and the streetlamps.

However, by far the strangest thing was the large mass hanging from the rider’s pitch-black right hand. It equaled the rider in size, and from its thin end it continually dripped an opaque liquid onto the asphalt.

“Koji...?”

The man’s comrades realized the true identity of what appeared to be tattered cloth. At the same time the rider straddling the bike released its hand and threw it – no, *him* – face-up on the asphalt. It was their “colleague” who was supposedly coming late. His face was swelling up as if from a beating, and blood dripped steadily from his nose and mouth.

“Are you serious?”

“What the hell, you bastard.”

Although they sensed an unusual eerie feeling, at that moment no one felt any fear. At the same time, they felt no anger that their comrade Koji had been done in. This group had only business connections, and not one of them had any sort of group feeling apart from that.

“What whaaaat? You got a problem?”²⁹ A guy in a parka, the dumbest-looking guy in the group, approached the person on the motorcycle. There was only one enemy and five of them. [29] Their supremacy in numbers raised the young man’s arrogant attitude one or two levels. However, the moment he approached the bike it became a one-on-one, equidistant relationship. And the only one who realized that was the black shadow astride the bike.

“...”

*Crunch*³⁰

An unpleasant sound. There was a very, very unpleasant sound. It was the sort of sound that went beyond merely feeling uncomfortable, a sound that triggered an instinctive sense of some kind of danger. At the same time, the parka man fell to his knees with a thud on the spot. And just like that, he fell face-first on the asphalt.

“Wha...”

Naturally, tension raced through the men, like the tension they felt toward their surroundings when in the middle of a job. From this they could confirm that their enemy was in fact this person in front of them on the bike, and there were no other people to be found in the area. And the “shadow” mounted on the bike slowly lowered a boot-encased leg to the ground.

They definitely saw the movement of lowering the leg. But – for the leg to be lowered, that would mean that just a moment ago the leg had been lifted up high. And some of the men with good eyesight noticed something else besides.

They noticed that the parka man’s glasses were caught on the sole of the boot being lowered to the ground.

[30] From this information they immediately understood the situation.

– While remaining seated on the bike, the rider had thrown up a kick that knocked the parka man out in one blow.

Had they been able to see the parka man’s face, they would probably have realized that his nose had been twisted and broken. Basically, the “shadow” had managed a kick in a narrow space without sending the man flying, and his nose had broken by getting caught in the boot’s tread.

²⁹ When the punk guy is going “nansuka” I just put in some generic tough-guy talk, since he’s not literally asking “what” and that doesn’t sound as tough-guy in English

³⁰ Is this the sound of his nose breaking as he’s kicked? But this is a more serious crunch than the previous sound, so the first one shouldn’t be “crunch.”

However, it was unlikely that the men watching understood all that, and half of them wondered why he fell on his face even though he was kicked, while the other half brought out batons and stun guns from around their waists without thinking anything.

“Just now...how’d he keep his balance? Wait, what? I mean...how did...?”

Two of his colleagues broke away from the confused man’s side and approached the biker, raising their voices angrily. “Hey you!”

The “shadow” silently got off the bike in front of the men who had started talking. With the crunch of breaking glasses under its foot, it lightly moved toward them, still without any expression or speech. Its movement really was graceful, giving the impression that this really was some kind of “shadow” that had billowed out into a human shape.

What happened after that became clearly carved in the delinquent’s memory. Maybe it was because the sight was so extremely strange, or the way his sense of personal danger ratcheted upward. [31]

One of his colleagues pressed his stun gun into the “shadow.”

“Wait, does leather conduct electricity or not?” While the man was thinking about that, the “shadow” gave a twitchy shudder across its whole body. Looks like it does conduct electricity then. This will end it.

The man relaxed, still applying the stun gun, but in the next moment that composure quickly crumbled. While still violently trembling all over, the shadow reached out and firmly grabbed the arm of the baton-wielding man next to the man with the stun gun.

“Bwaa-”³¹ Unlike the “shadow,” which continued to tremble twitchily, the baton-man shook violently all over only once, and fell to the ground in a spasm.

“You son of a...” the stun-gun man saw that the “shadow’s” hand threatened him as well, and in a panic he cut the stun gun’s switch. But this didn’t improve the situation, as the “shadow” wrapped its arm around the man’s neck in a chokehold.³² In a panic the man flailed around, but the “shadow” did not loosen its grip one bit. His legs kicked the “shadow” in the shins and groin, but only silence and darkness breathed out from the depths of the helmet.

³¹ I’m not sure how to translate what the guy is saying – does he get cut off? He’s supposed to be shouting but there’s no exclamation point so maybe I shouldn’t put one?

³² “tekubi” means “wrist,” but it doesn’t make sense that it chokes him with its wrist, so I think it means the shadow wraps its arm around his neck (because then it would be pressing on his throat with its wrist)

“Gkk...ugh...” With his eyes rolling back and his throat being squeezed, the stun-gun man crumpled to the ground just like the baton-man.

[32] ‘This is bad, I don’t really get this but this is *bad*. While I did nothing, four out of our group of six, including Koji, were taken out.’³³ More than this miserable comment,³⁴ the unknown nature of the being in front of him made his skin slowly start prickling with fear.

“Is this martial arts or what?” Unlike the delinquent, the man to his right murmured this in a calm tone.

“Ga-san...” Upon hearing that whisper, the delinquent called his name as if clinging to a lifeline. The man who called himself Ga-san, who acted as the leader of their group, was watching the “shadow’s” movements without flinching. There was no strong fear in those eyes, but neither was there any composure to be seen.

Ga-san took out a large knife from his breast pocket, and casually approached the “shadow.” And as he cautiously drew closer, he tossed out a few words at the “shadow.” “I don’t know what your problem is, but...well, if I stab you you’ll probably die.”

He slowly turned the knife over and over in his hand. It wasn’t the size of a fruit knife or a carving knife, but on the other hand it wasn’t huge like something from a comic book. The handle was just the right size to fit in his palm, and the blade, about the same length as the handle, gleamed sharply. “Anyway, you may have some skills, but how much can you do empty-handed...huh?”

The man’s provocative words were suddenly cut off by the “shadow’s” movement. [33] The “shadow” lightly leaned forward and picked up two objects that were rolling around before it. They were the extendable baton and stun gun that the delinquent’s comrades had been carrying just moments before.

“...”

“...”

In its right hand, the stun gun. In its left hand, the extendable baton. It was a very distorted two-sword style. The parking garage, which even under normal circumstances was very quiet, instantly became completely wrapped in silence.

³³ I will put the man’s personal thoughts in ‘apostrophes,’ even though they are not delineated in the Japanese text. I feel like in English they should be delineated.

³⁴ “criticize” or “miserable comment”? what is “un’nen wo kataru”?

What broke the stillness was the leader's questioning whisper. "Whu...no way, what? You're not going with martial arts?" The words alone sounded like a joke, but the tone of voice escaping his lips was clearly tinged with deep unease. It would have been better if all four of them had quickly ganged up on the rider. While thinking that, the man hesitated.

The delinquent watching this from behind was unable to move one step. If this was some gang or the police, he would have helped without any hesitation. No, all four of them probably would have surrounded the rider from the first moment. But this – this *thing* in front of him now was just too alien. Because of that, he couldn't react as usual. What stood before him should just be a person in a riding suit. But the atmosphere it gave off was exceedingly strange, and the delinquent kept feeling a sense of wrongness like his entire surroundings had become lost in some bizarre world.

[34] Whether or not he knew the delinquent's unease, the man who acted as leader ground his teeth and forced his tongue to move. "That's fighting dirty! Hey you, I've only got one knife over here! Ain't³⁵ you ashamed of yourself, you bastard?!"

Remaining silent even in the face of this unreasonable question, the "shadow" quietly turned to face the leader. And in the next instant, *it* appeared as a clear shape in the delinquent's vision.

♂♀

<The one riding the black bike isn't human>

{Then what is it?}

[I'm telling you it's just some idiot]

<Dota-chin says it's some kind of grim reaper>

{Dota-chin?}

<But you know what, I've actually seen it too. I saw the black bike chasing down someone>

{Who's Dota-chin}

[Did you tell the police?]

<Well it was kinda like, a moment like that just isn't normal> [35]

{...are you ignoring me? Who's Dota-chin?!}

<I didn't really get it at first, but coming out of the rider's body there's>

{...}

³⁵ Since he is a punk, I gave him bad grammar.

{?}

{Kanra-san? What happened?}

[Looks like the chat got dropped]

{What?? No way, in the middle of both stories like that! What comes out of the rider's body?!}

{And who is Dota-chin?!!!!}

♂♀

“...?”

Before the delinquent and his boss, the “shadow” exhibited some strange behavior. The “shadow” took the stun gun, which it had gone to all the trouble of picking up, and placed it purposely on the seat of the bike.

‘So it’s too difficult to use both weapons at once after all.’ The delinquent came to that conclusion, but in the next moment the “shadow” gripped the extendable baton in both hands – and with a forceful *twist* bent it out of shape. [36]

“Wha-!” Unsurprisingly, expressions of shock crossed the faces of both men, and they turned to look at each other. Just what sort of trick had this guy used to twist an extendable baton? The “shadow’s” build was rather on the slender side, and one wouldn’t have thought it capable of a show of brute force.

What the heck, the “shadow” had just thrown away its weapons after all that – but the delinquent and his comrade felt a sense of wrongness even more, and their sense of reality slipped a little further away.

Facing the “shadow,” once again empty-handed, the delinquent wrapped his hand around a metal pipe that was standing against the side of the fence. While he confirmed what he had grabbed out of the corner of his eye, the leader once again began to settle his grip on his knife. Cold sweat trickled down both their cheeks. That unpleasant feeling alone fixed their attention on the reality in front of them.

“What’s up with that...you trying to threaten us?” While looking at the twisted nightstick, the leader still tried to joke, but a drop of sweat trickled into his mouth, and he accidentally swallowed it. The delinquent had no chance to see that, and silently gripped the iron pipe, breathing harshly. He realized that his breathing was steadily growing more disorderly, and that

his knees, back, and jaw had started to shake and chatter. It looked like the exaggerated performance just now had served the function of a “threat” very well.

As if trying to confirm their condition up close, the “shadow” turned toward them and silently began walking this way.

[37] “So you’re empty-handed after all. I’ll praise you for your courage at least.” Unlike the frightened delinquent, it seemed like the leader was still ready for this. With his eyes glinting sharply, he held his knife and drew closer to the “shadow.”

3 meters distance. In another two steps he would be within stabbing range.

Ga-san was a person who could stab someone when the time was right for stabbing. Knowing this, the delinquent stayed close behind him with his iron pipe, ready to support him.

The knife-wielder took another step, and his hostility changed fully to a desire to kill. He stabbed the enemy with maximum killing intent. The delinquent could relax and circle around to support him, since he knew that his boss could manage this. No awareness of the crime of assisted murder arose in his mind now, and it could have been that the unreal “shadow” before him didn’t encourage any sense of having killed a person.

The delinquent, feeling their chances of winning increase with the killing instinct of his partner, once again put his strength into gripping the pipe.

But in the next instant, their chances of winning, along with their will to kill, were blown away.

They thought that the “shadow” turned its hand to its back, but in the next moment *a piece of that black body rose up from the whole.*

It was like a spurt of inky smoke from the “shadow,” but it gave the impression of moving with a will of its own. Within the black glove of the black “shadow,” a positively black mass was squirming about like a snake. It produced a creepy, vivid trail through the air, like an ink-dipped brush thrust into a bucket of water. Eventually the movements converged – creating a mass of black with a significant meaning. [38]

The two men taking in this sight, under the streetlights and fluorescents of the parking garage, finally realized the proof that their enemy was not human. They unavoidably realized it.

In the moment that the black mass began to form from the “shadow’s” body, they realized that a liquid-like substance was gushing from its body. It was almost as if the black

leather riding suit was melting into the air, and that was why all the parts except for the helmet looked as though they were blurring and oozing in the light.

In this situation that was completely separate from the reality they knew, the men's brains grew more and more confused. They could no longer run, and their bodies tried to manage by sticking with the directions they had been given up to that point. The knife-wielding leader, with an expression that said he was trapped in a nightmare, raised his knife against the "shadow" before him. He readied himself, aimed at the "shadow's" abdomen and stabbed, uncoiling like a spring –

But the knife did not connect with the "shadow," and the arm holding the knife felt a blunt impact. He didn't drop the knife, but his balance wavered, and this created a definitive opening.

"?!" The sharp black mass that crashed against his knife appeared faintly in the darkness.

That was nothing but black. Darkness deeper than anything. It soaked up all the light from its surroundings, and writhed almost like a living thing. What that black wave produced appeared as a terrifyingly wavering form in this modern Japanese city. [39] But as the "shadow" in the riding suit held it, it and the feeling of strangeness adjusted to the surrounding atmosphere.

What appeared in the "shadow's" hand sank into the darkness of the night,³⁶ and impressed upon the watchers an overwhelming association of *death*.

What the shadow held, almost as large as the shadow was tall, was a giant *double-edged* scythe.³⁷

♂♀ [41]

-Kanra-san has entered the chat room-

<I got cut off~. Actually my connection's kind of bad today so I'm going to sleep soon~>

[‘night~]

{What about your story? And about Dota-chin...}

<I'll tell you next time~. Heh heh, but I will say one last thing>

♂♀

³⁶ Having trouble with "naomokuraku." Does that mean it is darker than the night? What about it "sinking in"?

³⁷ I'm trying to make that appropriately dramatic and keep the "scythe" part at the end. I'm not sure why only the "double-edged" was emphasized.

And so, the delinquent was eventually chased down. In a parking garage, there wasn't any escape to begin with.

He didn't know what happened to their leader after that. He wasn't a daring enough man to be concerned about that after seeing that unreal scene. But, he couldn't see the giant scythe that had been shown before. The thought crossed his mind that it was just an illusion after all, but he realized that the answer to that didn't matter either way to the current situation, and quickly erased it from his mind.

[42] A powerful kick crashed into his neck. Even though it sounded like something had broken, it seemed that his bones had survived unharmed. However, there was a pain like the most extreme case of stiff shoulders all bunched up in one spot, and the base of his neck kept making little creaking sounds. But that was a trivial matter to the delinquent right now.

"Uh, um, please wait a sec wai...wait...w-w-wait, p-please wait." What gushed from his mouth was the polite language of a loser.

Now, he understood what was happening to him. Honestly, he still had the uneasy feeling of being in a dream, but the realism of his fear was very close to awakening his consciousness. But he didn't understand the reason. What was this "shadow," and why did this sort of thing have to happen to him?

The strongest possibility was that it was related to his "job." His job was definitely accompanied by danger, and the possibility of making enemies was high. But, those "enemies" should be the police or gangs, or maybe *the illegal immigrants and runaway kids who were the targets of his job*. They should have been prepared for that, and they should have been exercising caution in their job so that wouldn't happen. But the riding-suit-wearing "shadow" before him was completely outside of his expectations, and he had no idea how to deal with it. [43] Escape, which he had thought was his best option, had been easily cut off, and the delinquent finally ended up trapped on all sides.

The delinquent could not think of any path other than honorable defeat or surrender, but without knowing the enemy's intentions he had no means of choosing either path. Trying to get any kind of clue, the delinquent used the most subservient voice he could think of. Or maybe he thought he would be swallowed up by fear if he didn't speak up.

“Hey...you’ve got the wrong guy, I didn’t do anything please forgive me I’m sorry I’m sorry...”³⁸ It was like he suddenly had a gun pointed at him by a yakuza member, and he just kept frantically apologizing while his skin broke out in goose bumps.

Compared to the delinquent’s unseemly behavior, the “shadow” continued standing without a word. The delinquent thought it seemed to be searching for something – and suddenly it turned its back on him and started to walk confidently towards one particular station wagon³⁹ in the parking garage. It was the sort of car that was often running in front of Ikebukuro’s train station at night, and the black glass in the back windows was such that one couldn’t see inside the car. The “shadow” moved with confidence toward the station wagon, almost as if it could see clearly through the black mirrored glass.

‘Huh? ...wh-what?! Oh crap!’

[44] That was definitely the car the delinquent used in his “job.” He didn’t understand the “shadow’s” intentions, but it had definitely come to target them specifically. And damned if it wasn’t moving straight for their car without wavering or being concerned with any of the other cars around.

‘Hey, wait a sec, oh shit, this is bad!’ The “shadow’s” movements, previously incomprehensible, suddenly made the delinquent’s brain freeze. Until then he was full of fear of the “shadow” before him, but now an underlying fear towards something else entirely rose to the top.

‘Ahh, aahh, aaaaaa, wait a sec wait a sec wait wait *wait wait!* That...if the contents of that station wagon were seen it would be *over* for them. Hey this is bad seriously what do I do what do I do this is bad this is bad oh crap oh crap oh crap oh crap – what the hell, just what the hell was this guy!’

The two fears battled in the delinquent’s mind. The unreal fear in front of him, and the other, horribly realistic fear. – If the contents of that station wagon were seen, he’d rather deal with the police; if things went badly it would be *over* for him. He imagined himself buried as a murder victim in the forests of Mount Fuji, and the delinquent’s legs shook even more.

³⁸ He’s kind of babbling, so trailing off with ellipses seems most reasonable

³⁹ “wagon” I think might be short for “station wagon”

Something, isn't there something, something to kill this guy who's acting like the Kamen Rider superhero – the delinquent, defeated by his quavering fear of the “shadow,” started desperately searching for a plan to get out of this situation.

[45] And the thing that his eyes hit upon was the convertible that he had used to get to the parking garage for the gathering.

When it was about ten meters away from the car it had targeted, the “shadow” quietly stopped. From behind it came the faint sound of a car door opening and closing. At the same time that it realized this and turned around, the violent sound of an engine cut across the parking garage.

“...” The “shadow,” having turned completely around, confirmed the bright red convertible bearing down upon it. The car accelerated unimaginably quickly, and the “shadow” had no time to hide in the shadow of a pillar. After a moment's hesitation, the “shadow” decided to hide behind the station wagon toward which it had been heading.

Until just then the delinquent had planned to pull up alongside the car and jump out the side, but his fear-sharpened focus didn't overlook that moment.⁴⁰ In the instant that the “shadow's” legs were slightly bent, the delinquent suddenly turned the wheel.

The sound of a collision.

[46] The shadow flew crookedly through the air.

With a thump, the “shadow” rolled limply on the concrete.

“Ahhhhhhhhhh! That's riiiiight! That's what you get! Serves you right, it serves you right damnit!” The delinquent felt great pleasure with the shock that ran through the car, and quickly cut the car's speed. Without waiting for the car to come to a complete stop, he jumped from the driver's seat and ran about with the pipe, unable to contain himself, but –

“?!”

He could see a black lump rolling on the ground far away from the “shadow” that lay stretched out there. There was no way he could mistake that characteristic design; it was the full-face helmet that the “shadow” had been wearing until a moment ago.

⁴⁰ The line about him not missing that moment is a little confusing to me.

But what surprised the delinquent wasn't that – it was when he saw the body of the “shadow” that should have been wearing the helmet.

“Th...the head...”

Where there should have been a head on the body, there was nothing at all.

‘It flew off in the collision?! No way that’s crazy murderer I didn’t legitimate self-defense but no why wait a sec wait wait a sec’

The extreme situation continued to attack him. The delinquent’s brain was reaching the limits of confusion. Because of that, there was something he didn’t realize. The body from which the head was supposedly detached was not leaking a single drop of blood.

♂♀

<The man who rides the black bike, right – he has nothing above the neck>

♂♀

The delinquent, terrified, fearfully drew closer to the headless body – and without any warning, the headless “shadow” jumped up.

♂♀

<So the head, right, even though it’s totally gone he can still move around, apparently>

<Well, good night~!>

-Kanra-san has left the chat room-

♂♀

“Whaaaaaeeeeaaugh?!” Confronted with this sudden nightmarish scene, the delinquent felt pure shock rather than fear.

A trick? A costume? A robot? A really good disguise? A hologram?

A dream? Illusion? Delusion? Fraud?

Various words whispered in his mind, but they disappeared like bubbles before he could think about them clearly. What really should have amazed him was the fact that the “shadow” appeared to have no wounds despite being hit by a car, but the delinquent had no time or composure to notice that.

And just as before, the “shadow” began to draw out a black mist from its back, and this finally transformed into the giant scythe. His amazement started to shift to fear. The delinquent tried to raise his voice in a despairing scream. As his first breath leaked out, the attack sliced toward his throat.

[49] The delinquent's senses faded, and the world went dark.

♂♀

Private chat mode {Um, Setton-san. There's something I'd like to confirm}

Private chat mode [Yeah sure]

Private chat mode [What is it? Something it would be bad for strangers to see?]

Private chat mode {Kanra-san is kind of a pain, huh?}⁴¹

Private chat mode [There's no 'kind of' about it, don't you think?]

Private chat mode {Oh no no no lol. But, I came to this chat room because Kanra-san invited me, so}

Private chat mode [Me too. Kanra-san seems like a good person, the sort of person you just can't help but like, you know?]

Private chat mode {And he knows lots of things that we don't know, huh}

Private chat mode [Though we don't know how much of it is true. Oh, but here's one last thing from me as well]

Private chat mode [It's about the black bike that wanders the city]

Private chat mode [It's best not to become too involved with it]

Private chat mode [Well, g'night~]

[50] -Setton-san has left the chat room-

Private chat mode {What}

Private chat mode {Hey, they left. Good night everyone~}

Private chat mode {Well, whatever}

-Tarou Tanaka-san⁴² has left the chat room-

♂♀

The headless rider picked up the helmet and pressed it onto its darkness-shrouded neck. It seemed that a faint shadow oozed from the collar, almost as if it were fusing with the bottom of

⁴¹ All I can find for "aitatata" is "pain." Is it literally saying Kanra is a pain?

⁴² Should I switch first and last names? So far this is the only one to come up so I can decide later. I would prefer to do family name first, Japanese-style, but I don't know if American audiences are used to that enough for it to be clear

the helmet. Finally the headless rider turned around as if nothing had happened, and silently approached the station wagon.⁴³

The entrance to the parking garage. Having finished its business, the headless rider quietly left that place. It seemed that no one had passed by the area, as the men were still scattered on the ground. Or maybe someone had seen and pretended not to see.

The pitch-black motorbike standing in the darkness rumbled its engine, almost as if it had come to meet its owner. The engine that didn't make a sound even when running now reverberated although no key was in it. The headless rider looked at it and stroked the engine tank with the air of one regarding a beloved horse. The engine noise subsided as if satisfied, and the headless rider quietly got in the seat. And this mass of black without a headlight began to run, with its headless master seated upon it. They ran beneath a starless sky.

Without a sound, they ran as if melting into the darkness.

Chapter 2: Headless Rider: Objective Viewpoint⁴⁴

[55] Tokyo city – Toshima ward – Ikebukuro station – East/Eastbound line – in front of the middle ticket counter

“I wanna go home...” a young man muttered.

That was an exceedingly simple utterance compared to the feelings swirling within his heart. But there were no other words that could express his current sentiment as straightforwardly.

What lay before the young man's eyes were people. People, people, people. Also people. Basically, people. People flowed past his view in numbers verging on meaninglessness. It was now past 6 p.m., when the momentum of people returning from work and school increased. While it had not yet reached its peak, the population density was more than enough to give the sense of a *crowd*.

⁴³ There is a page break here, so I'm not sure if there should be an extra space between this and the next line. The scene changes, so it seems like there should maybe be an extra space.

⁴⁴ The title says “object” as in the object of a sentence as opposed to the subject. It sort of means they're viewing the rider from the outside? I don't want to just put “object” because it might look like “to object.”

In this huge underground space painted with the colors of people – the middle of Ikebukuro station – the young man was overwhelmed by the atmosphere of people and was starting to lose track of his reason for being there.

[56] A man in a business suit bumped into his shoulder. Without thinking he started to apologize, but the man kept walking without even acknowledging his existence. The young man hesitated with his head bowed, a mumbled “sorry!” dying in his mouth. He walked to a pillar a short way away from the ticket counter and leaned against it.

The young man, Mikado Ryugamine⁴⁵, felt a strange throbbing in his stomach and decided it was anxiety. Unlike what his fancy-sounding name would suggest, he presented a rather weak, confused appearance.

Invited by his old friend, he had come to Ikebukuro for the first time. To put it more accurately, this was his first experience in his sixteen years of life of coming to Tokyo at all, not just the Ikebukuro district.

He had never left the town he lived in, and he was absent on the day of the school-wide class trip in both elementary and middle school. Just when he himself was starting to think that this couldn't go on, he was accepted into a private high school in Tokyo's Toshima ward. It was newly built a few years ago, and while its T-score rank compared to other schools⁴⁶ was said to be in the upper-middle range, it took pride in its locally-famous, well-equipped school. He had the option of going to a local high school, but he had always wanted to live in a city, and there was the invitation from his best friend who had moved in elementary school to consider.

Even though his friend had moved, Mikado already had an Internet connection in elementary school, and since entering middle school he and his friend had chatted almost every day. Even though they no longer met face-to-face, it didn't feel like that much of an estrangement. Mikado's parents, who were ignorant of the workings of the Internet, couldn't understand this, and being invited by a friend from whom he had separated in elementary school hardly seemed an adequate reason for letting their son go to Tokyo. They also probably would have preferred that he go to a cheaper local public school, through they never said this out loud. [57] For a while they opposed it, but Mikado persuaded them by saying that he would pay any

⁴⁵ Ryugamine/ryugamine - I was taught to romanize long vowels with a repeat, but I guess most people would just put one vowel or maybe an accent over the vowel? My teacher advised me to use one vowel or an accent.

⁴⁶ Going by my teacher's advice, I tried to explain the T-score a little for the reader.

living expenses beyond school fees himself by getting a part-time job. And so, it was decided that when school started in the spring he would set up residence in Shintenchi, but...⁴⁷

“I wonder if I made a mistake...”

Faced with a crowd of people who ignored his very existence, Mikado felt himself being overwhelmed. He knew it was an illusion born of his unnecessary prejudices, but he felt he would be swallowed up by his anxiety over whether he could really get used to this.

He was sighing deeply for about the fifth time when he heard a voice that he didn't recognize. “Hey, Mikado!”

“?!” When he hurriedly raised his head, there was a young man with his hair dyed brown standing there. He still had a youthful look about his face, which made the clash with his dyed hair and piercings⁴⁸ stand out more. Mikado immediately thought this was extortion or some sort of illegal business and trembled all over, but then he realized that the other boy had called him by name and he took a closer look at his face. And Mikado saw traces of his childhood friend in that face.

“Uh, wait...Kida-kun?”

“What, is that a question? Then I shall respond. Choose from these three options: 1) Masaomi Kida, 2) Masaomi Kida, 3) Masaomi Kida!”⁴⁹

[58] At those words, Mikado smiled for the first time since coming to Ikebukuro. “Whoa, Kida-kun! Is that you, Kida-kun?”

“You're ignoring the joke I spent three whole years developing, huh...man, it's been a while, dude!”

“We talked in a chat just yesterday...but anyway, I was surprised because you've changed so much. I didn't think you'd have dyed your hair! And your joke sucked.” While they had chatted almost every day over the 'net, he didn't realize how much his friend's face would have changed. His voice had also gotten a little deeper, and it was no wonder he hadn't recognized it when his friend first called out to him.

Masaomi Kida laughed in embarrassment and came back with a rebuttal to Mikado's words. “Well yeah, it's been four years. And you're completely the same! You haven't changed

⁴⁷ This ends in a dash, but to me the dash implies quick action to follow. I think ellipses better suit the transition out of flashback.

⁴⁸ I am not sure whether this is one or more piercings, but I think in the anime he has both ears pierced.

⁴⁹ I put an exclamation point because it needs punctuation and a period looked too boring for a joke.

at all since elementary school, have you? And don't just casually say my joke sucked!" While saying that, Masaomi reached up to baby-faced Mikado standing a few steps above him and playfully patted him on the head.

"Gah, stop that! Anyway, you're always making lame jokes in chat too..." Mikado, flustered, tried to shake off Masaomi's hand, but he didn't seem to be really upset about it. In elementary school and in the chat room, Mikado was always being led along by Masaomi, and he didn't have any especial problems with that.

Masaomi hurriedly kept up the conversation as he started to walk through the crowd. "Alright, let's go. First let's get outside. Onward into the sunset!⁵⁰ I'm a tricky kind of guide who'll pretend to show you the west entrance while really going towards the western entrance."

[59] "Oh really. So, what's the difference between the west entrance and the western entrance?"⁵¹

"...you fail."

As he walked alongside Masaomi, Mikado's fear of the crowd greatly lessened. Walking with someone who knew the city, especially someone who was a close friend, made the city scene in front of him appear completely different.

"Well, Ikebukuro does have the Eastern Department Store at the west exit and the Western Department Store at the east exit. ...ugh, what the heck am I thinking trying to explain a joke that already failed."

"It's probably because you're an idiot."

"...you've got a pretty sharp tongue, you know that?" Masaomi made a sour face, but then he sighed and muttered as if in resignation. "Well, whatever. I'll ignore that to save face. So, is there anywhere you want to go?"

"Um, well, we talked about it in chat before, but there's the Sunshine building..."

"Right now? ...well, not that I mind, but if you're going there you've gotta have at least one girl along." The Sunshine 60 building used to be famous as the tallest building in Japan. Now with its record broken by places like the Tokyo governmental office and the Landmark

⁵⁰ I'm not sure about this "go west." I think he literally means the English, as in he feels like going west. But saying stuff in English is supposed to make it sound cooler, so I tried to spice up what he says.

⁵¹ I also do not know the difference. I think it just has to do with the names being different, and I think it's just there to show that Mikado is not local, so I don't think it needs to be explained.

Tower, it had become one of many leisure spots where students and families could gather on holidays, with aquariums or amusement parks like Namja Town.⁵²

[60] Mikado felt like a typical tourist⁵³ asking about it, but he couldn't think of any other places. Among places that were famous on TV dramas and such, there was one other he could think of, but...

“Hey, about Ikebukuro West Gate Park...”

“Oh yeah, I've seen that TV drama⁵⁴ too. I've got all of the novels and the *manga* comics too.”

“Oh, no, not the drama, about the actual West Gate Park...”

When he asked that, Masaomi looked blank for a moment, and then realization dawned and he laughed. “No, just call it *Nishi-Guchi Koen* in normal Japanese; you don't use the English words.

“Huh, but...don't all Ikebukurians call it that?”

“What the heck is an Ikebukurian? Oh, wait, you want to go there?” Masaomi stopped walking.

Mikado emphatically shook his head in denial. “S-stop it! You realize it's already nighttime?! We'd get killed by one of those color gangs!”

“Whoa, dude, don't say that stuff with such a serious face. Also, you know it's only 6 o'clock, right? Man, your cowardice hasn't changed either.” Masaomi smiled patronizingly and led Mikado back into the crowd. While there weren't as many people as in front of the ticket counter, Mikado was not used to walking in crowds and had difficulty trying not to bump into people. “The number of color gangs has decreased recently. Last year you'd see them around a lot, but they had a big fight in Saitama and dozens were arrested. [61] Ever since that if even a small group of people wearing the same color start to gather, the police come down on them in an instant. Anyway, now there's nothing noisier than packs of businessmen returning home at night...well, that's different from a really large group like with biker gangs or something. This isn't in Ikebukuro, but sometimes you get news in the magazines of violent groups in Kabuki Town or places like that.”

⁵² Google tells me that this place is romanized this way, not with an 'n'.

⁵³ “miihaa” translates as “poser,” but I don't think we would call someone a poser in this case. Poser is more like trying to be someone you're not

⁵⁴ I am not sure if people call them “TV dramas” in English.

“Biker gangs!”

“No, like I said there wouldn’t be any at this time of night in front of a train station.”

When he heard that, Mikado breathed deeply, feeling relieved. “So, Ikebukuro is safe now?”

“Well, I only know the half of it, so I don’t know if that’s true or not. Besides color gangs and biker gangs, there are plenty of other dangerous things. Also, even among normal people, there are *several people who you absolutely shouldn’t mess with*...but anyway, you aren’t the kind of guy to start fights or fly off the handle, so it’s fine. Let’s see, also be careful of con men⁵⁵ and suspicious business deals, and don’t get close to anyone who looks like they’re in a gang or the mob, and you should be fine.”

“I see.” He was curious about that “people you absolutely shouldn’t mess with” part, but Mikado didn’t press the issue.

[62] The pair entered the area where the underground passageway narrowed, and they headed for the escalator that led to the surface. When Mikado looked around, there were huge posters stretched out along one wall. There were many kinds, advertisements for things like jewelry stores and *manga*, even ones with pictures of young girls drawn in comic-book style. And when they climbed the escalator and arrived at street level, the scenery changed abruptly, though the concentration of people remained the same. Among the usual wave of people, there were people in windbreakers handing out packs of tissues with store advertisements printed on them. There were people who only gave them out to women, and there were those who handed them out without regard to gender. There were also people among those handing the packs out only to men who would clearly pick a target and hand over the tissues (actually,⁵⁶ Mikado was ignored).

There were many people walking around the city, all types from businessmen to young people who looked like freelancers, from female high school students to even foreigners mingling together. That being said, it wasn’t just chaos; it was more like everyone had their own territory while being among people who were similar to them. Sometimes one person would break out of their territory and speak to a different type of person. The wave of people continued endlessly, washing away even those brief scenes.

⁵⁵ I thought that “pon-hiki” might mean Ponzi schemes, “pon” for “Ponzi.” My teacher advised “con men.”

⁵⁶ I’m not sure about this “actually” here. It seems distracting, because it doesn’t seem like there was anything really suggesting that Mikado would be targeted.

Masaomi was used to seeing this, but everything looked new to Mikado. Even his hometown, which was a top-rank commercial town, never had this many people. Now a world that he had only seen on the Internet or in *manga* lay spread out before his eyes.

[64] When he expressed those feelings to Masaomi, he laughed. “Oh, then next time I’ll take you to the Shinjuku or Shibuya districts. Harajuku could be good too, you can have a big culture shock. Akihabara’s good too...if you think crowds are rare, maybe I should take you to a racetrack⁵⁷?”

“No thanks.” As Mikado was politely declining Masaomi’s proposal, before he knew it they were approaching the main street. Cars restlessly traversed the multi-lane street, and a huge road rose into the sky, looking like it would block out the street below.

“The road up above is the metropolitan expressway⁵⁸. Oh, and yeah, the road we just crossed is the well-known 60-Kai Street.⁵⁹ There’s also the one called Sunshine Street, not Sunshine 60-Kai Street, but the Sunshine Cinema is on 60-Kai Street so be careful not to mix them up. Oh, since we went to all the trouble of crossing it I should’ve given you the tour.”

“Oh, we can do that next time,” Mikado said. His attention was completely caught by the people passing by, and he was failing to notice the main cityscape around him. There was probably no way he could make it to the Sunshine building from the station by himself at this rate.

While they were waiting for a long traffic light, Masaomi looked back at the street they had walked so far and muttered to himself, “Neither Simon nor Shizuo were here today, huh. Yumasaki-san and Karisawa-san are probably at the arcade.”

“Who?” Mikado asked without thinking. Even though Masaomi was obviously talking to himself, when faced with this sudden list of names Mikado couldn’t help but ask.

[65] “Oh, well, Yumasaki-san and Karisawa-san are acquaintances of mine. Simon and Shizuo – they’re two of those people you don’t want to make enemies out of, like I mentioned earlier. Well, Shizuo Heiwajima is someone you probably won’t talk to if you lead a normal life, so if you see him you should just run.”

From this, Mikado gathered that Masaomi didn’t think too well of this “Shizuo” person. He didn’t seem like he was going to talk more about it, so Mikado didn’t press the issue.

⁵⁷ I’m not sure if I should specify horse racing here. “Horse-race track?”

⁵⁸ I am not quite sure what this sort of road is.

⁵⁹ I am not sure whether to translate “kai.” It means “step” or “floor” and I’m not sure how that relates to this street.

However, there was one other thing that was bothering him, so he went ahead and asked. “So when you say ‘people you don’t want to make into enemies,’ what other sorts of people are there? It sounds like a comic book.”

In response to this innocent question from this young man who still looked like a boy, Masaomi stared up at the sky as if he were deeply considering something. He then responded, with a determined air, “First of all, there’s me!”

“...√3 points.”

“√?! What’s that mean, √?! If you’re going to shoot down my jokes, at least use something easy to understand like ‘minus 20 points’ or something! Good grief...are you saying my sense of humor⁶⁰ is something that can’t be understood by a grade school student who doesn’t know square roots?! Man, I just said that and you’ve gone and made me an enemy already! Since when were you so difficult to understand! Was it your school⁶¹? Did you go to some laid-back, no-pressure school that changed you?!”

“Yeah, it really messed me up,” Mikado responded expressionlessly to Masaomi’s silly banter.

Maybe even he thought it was getting old⁶², because after that Masaomi started to answer his question seriously. “Hmm...there are a bunch of people like that. It’s not like they’re yakuza or gang people exactly...the ones you’re likely to run into, Mikado, would be those two I mentioned before, and one other. There’s this guy called Izaya Orihara, and he’s seriously trouble, so definitely don’t get involved with him. Although, he lives in Shinjuku so you probably won’t meet him in the first place.”

“Izaya Orihara ...what a weird name.”

“You’re one to talk,” Masaomi laughed.

Mikado couldn’t really argue with that. On top of an unusual last name like “Ryugamine,” he had such a fancy-sounding first name as “Mikado.” Apparently his ancestors were in fact a fairly well-known family, but Mikado’s father was just a businessman. Mikado didn’t really know about a possible inheritance, but if there was one then his parents probably wouldn’t have objected so much to his going to a private school.

⁶⁰ I think “sensu” can refer to any sort of sense or taste, so I specified sense of humor.

⁶¹ Apparently “no-pressure” education is an educational style.

⁶² I am puzzled about this first part with “iikagen ni”

The name “Mikado” expressed a hope that he would become distinguished in the future, being written with the character for “emperor,” but Mikado held memories of being teased a lot in elementary school for his name. He managed to grow up without it ever turning into serious bullying, maybe because everyone got used to it. But now, unlike in his hometown where he was in the same class with the same people up through middle school, he was now in a completely new city with people he would be meeting for the first time. He wondered if he would be able to appear unashamed of his name in the face of all that.

Well, in the first place this was all pointless speculation⁶³.

As if he guessed what was in Mikado’s heart, Masaomi followed up his previous words. [67] “Hey, don’t worry about it. It may be showy, but it’s not a bad name or anything. If you just act showy to match your name, no one will say anything bad.”

“...yeah. Thanks.” The traffic light changed as Mikado was expressing his thanks. “Oh yeah, speaking of people you don’t want as enemies...I’ve heard it’s best not to get involved with this group called the ‘Dollars.’”

“...the Dollars.”

“Yeah. ‘Dollars’ like in ‘ten dollars.’”⁶⁴

“That’s a weird example...so what kind of group is that?”

Until now he had been passive in the conversation, but now Mikado continued the discussion with a rare eagerness. “Well, I don’t know all the details either, but it seems like they’re a large group with no hierarchy. They’re like a color gang, but no one knows what color they are. Well, like you said just now, color gangs can’t carelessly gather together these days, so maybe they broke up too without anyone realizing it.”

“I see...”

After that, for some reason an awkward atmosphere settled between the two of them. For a while they walked in silence, next to a fancy-looking building on the other side of the street they had crossed. [68] Stylish cars were displayed inside, showing the building’s style and pleasant balance of form.

While Mikado was absorbed in the building and its cars, without warning, a strange sound reached his ears. In the first instant that he heard it, it felt like the neighing of some wild

⁶³ All it says is “muri” and I’m not sure what is supposed to be “muri” here. Maybe his worries?

⁶⁴ I think “wandora-zu” is supposed to mean “one dollar.” But of course, in English that “dollar” would not be the plural “dollars,” so I just upped the number.

animal. But when he listened carefully, it sounded like the noise was coming from far away on the other side of the main street. And when he heard the sound a second time, Mikado decided it must be the sound of an engine. It did sound like the cry of an animal, but since it was coming from the street it would be normal to see it as the sound of a car or a bike's exhaust.

Mikado had stopped and was looking around questioningly. Seeing this, Masaomi spoke calmly, with a cool expression. "Mikado, you're lucky."

"Huh?"

"You get to see a city legend right before your eyes on the very day you come to Tokyo for the first time." Masaomi's face remained expressionless, but his eyes sparkled as though filled with hope.

-Come to think of it-

Mikado recalled seeing this look in Masaomi's eyes any number of times before. In the middle of class when they spotted a plane flying in the sky above the school, or when a raccoon wandered into the playground. It was the same look as when he caught a glimpse of something out of the ordinary.

While Mikado was hesitating, looking for something to say –

[69] That *being* appeared in front of them.

A "shadow" in the shape of a human astride a pitch-black motorcycle with no headlights. It wove between the cars and passed in front of Mikado *without a sound*.

"?!"

After a brief pause, the sound of the engine rang out again. But in the next instant it fell silent again, and only the faint sound of the tires scraping the asphalt could be heard. That lack of sound seemed like it could only come from the engine shutting off completely, but the bike continued running without any change in speed – in fact, it even seemed to be accelerating.

It was clearly some kind of unearthly being, almost as if the area in which that sound could be heard was alone separated from reality. About half the people on the street stopped and stared at the sight of this "shadow" with looks of puzzlement. And Mikado became aware of a slight tremor running across his whole body. It wasn't fear; his body was trembling with a kind of excitement.

-I saw something incredible.

In a split second, Mikado saw inside the rider's helmet. He couldn't see the helmet's contents clearly, but he definitely felt that there was nothing like a gaze coming from the head area as it smoothly raced by.⁶⁵ [70] It was almost like – it was as if nothing existed within that helmet.

♂♀

Chat room (midnight)

-Tarou Tanaka-san has entered the room-

{Good evening~}

[Evening~]

{Oh, Setton-san. Today, I saw it!}

{That black bike we talked about!}

[? Tanaka Tarou-san, you came to Ikebukuro?]

{Yeah, actually, starting today I'm going to be living in Ikebukuro. Today I'm logging on from a friend's house, but starting tomorrow I'm going to be living in an apartment near the train station. I have a contract with an Internet service provider already, so I should be able to get on the 'net right away.}

[Wow, congrats. You living alone?]

{Yes}

[71] [I see...oh, you mentioned you saw the black bike, was this around 7 at night?]

{Oh, you know about it? I was near Sunshine when I saw it}

[Hmm, yeah. I was there too.]

{?!}

{Really? Wow, so we might have passed by each other without even realizing it!}

[Could be]

{Wow! No way! Now I wish I'd said something sooner!}

[But anyway, welcome to Ikebukuro. If you have any questions just go ahead and ask me any time.]

{Thank you very much!}

⁶⁵ “bidou dani shinai” means “without moving,” so I tried to keep that sense of it seeming still while it is in fact moving.

{Oh, that's right, then I do have one}

[Sure thing]⁶⁶

{Do you know someone called "Izaya Orihara"??}

{I heard about him from a friend, and it seems like it's best not to go near him or something}

{Is he a scary person? But then, you probably don't know him. Sorry}

[...]

[Tarou Tanaka-san, does your friend know him really well?⁶⁷]

{Oh, no, he's just a normal person}

[72] [Oh, I see. Sorry. It's best not to get involved with Izaya Orihara. He's seriously bad news]

<Oh! Tanaka-san, good evening!>

{?! Kanra-san, you were here?}

<I was just on the phone. Oh, I read the chat log just now, you came to Tokyo? Congratulations!

Should we all meet up in person next time?>

{Oh, no no, don't worry about it. Oh, though I would like to meet in person sometime}

<I know, right?>

<Oh, so yeah, speaking of meeting people offline, there're those times when people meet up to commit suicide together, right?>

[Oh]

[That was really popular last year. You meet online and then decide to commit suicide together.]

{Pretty unpleasant topic}

{Although, recently it hasn't been in the news much}

[Maybe they're ending in failure, or maybe they've become so common that it no longer makes the news]

<Yeah, or maybe lots of them happen but it's just that no one realizes it!>

{Huh?}

<Like, maybe they haven't found the bodies yet>

{Ack}

[73] [You're shameless]

<On that note, there have been lots of disappearances lately>

⁶⁶ Setton says "yes yes," but in English that sounds impatient, so I made it more of a general response.

⁶⁷ Not quite sure about "suji." I found "information source" and "well-informed person" in the dictionary, so I think maybe Setton is asking how much Mikado's friend knows about the subject.

{? Was there news like that?}

<Umm, like foreigners who have illegally stayed in the country, or children who run away from home. It seems like there are lots in the area from Ikebukuro to Shibuya. There are even rumors that the “Dollars” gang might be taking them and eating them, lol>

{Oh, so the Dollars are famous after all}

<The Dollars are awesome! I heard they spoke with the Chinese mafia recently, and I heard that this incident where a yakuza member got stabbed recently was also the work of one of the Dollars’ underlings!>

[Where do you get that sort of information from, Kanra-san?]

<I know some people who know things, so I get it from them~>

{Man, I want to ask for details, but I have to get up early tomorrow so I’m going to leave it here for today~}

<Oh, then talk to you later!>⁶⁸

[Tanaka Tarou-san, goodnight]

[Oh, I also have some stuff to do, so I’ll stop here for tonight~]

{Sorry...oh, and tell me about that Dota-chin person next time too, please}

{Well then, later}

[74] <Oh, then let’s break up here for today~. No one else comes here anyway.>

<Good ni~ght ☆>

-Tanaka Tarou-san has logged off-

-Setton-san has logged off-

-Kanra-san has logged off-

⁶⁸ “otsukaresama” more literally means “thanks for your hard work,” which sounds too formal.

Parade by Yoshida Shuichi

Translated by Samantha Sharp with help from Dr. Philip Gabriel

[pg 68] Kotomi Oenchi¹ (23 years old), unemployed

Chapter 2:1

I think the TV show “It’s Okay to Laugh!” is really pretty amazing. Even after watching it for an hour, the second I turn off the TV I absolutely cannot remember who was saying or doing what. This must be what people mean by “things that don’t enter real life.”

While I was sitting with the TV turned off and thinking about what to have for lunch, Ryosuke-kun² came out of the boys’ bedroom. His face was sleepy, he had one hand thrust down his underpants, and on top of that³ he had a serious case of bed-head. It seems Ryosuke-kun is a really restless sleeper. Naohi-kun, who sleeps in the same room, said that if there were no walls around the room Ryosuke-kun would roll as far as the train station in a single night and not notice a thing.

“Ryosuke-kun, what d’you⁴ want for lunch?” I asked him. He had just taken a carton of milk out of the fridge and, after giving it a sniff, started drinking it. [69] He signaled ‘wait’ to me with one hand while glugging down the milk.

“What do you want, Koto-chan?”⁵ he burped.⁶

After gazing at Ryosuke-kun’s milk moustache for a moment, I came back with “Should we go to KFC?”

“Hmm, KFC...oh yeah. Did you know there’s a new *soba* noodle⁷ restaurant in front of the beauty salon⁸ you go to, Koto-chan? Why don’t we try there?” So saying, Ryosuke-kun once again stuck his right hand down his pants and disappeared into the bathroom, scratching his nether regions.⁹

¹ Dictionary shows “Oogachi,” “Oogaichi,” or “Oogaito,” but it says those are place names. “Oenchi” sounds like a reasonable name to me; “Ooenchi” looks a little too difficult to say.

² Again doing names Japanese-style with honorifics. Also, it is probably easier to read as “Ryosuke” rather than “Ryōsuke” or “Ryousuke,” and it makes no difference to the pronunciation.

³ I think this is the “koredemoka”

⁴ I use a contraction here to express her leaving out particles

⁵ I was going to say ‘how about you?’ but that makes it sound like he’s proposing to eat her

⁶ I think it makes sense to use burp as the verb here, and it sounds cleaner than “asked with a burp”

⁷ I think many people know *soba*, but just in case I specified *soba* noodles.

⁸ Beauty salon, beauty parlor?

⁹ Maybe break up into two sentences?

Supposedly he currently had¹⁰ a crush on the girlfriend of some upperclassman named Umezaki,¹¹ but he hadn't talked about it at all these past few days. Recently he had stayed out overnight somewhere, a rare thing for him.¹² When I asked him where he had stayed, he replied "at my girlfriend's place,"¹³ but considering it was his first time staying over there he didn't look too happy. It could be he already got rejected. Either way, I really have no interest in the transient love¹⁴ of a student like him. Or it could be that he's struggling with the conflict between friendship and love. Either way, if he can sleep soundly enough to only end up with that level of bed-head, it's probably nothing to worry about.

I've felt this ever since I met him when I first came to live here five months ago, but for some reason Ryosuke-kun really resembles the *hiragana* phonetic character "fu." It's not like he physically resembles the character¹⁵ or has the character "fu" written on his face. [70] It's just, for some reason, when I look at Ryosuke-kun I picture the character "fu."¹⁶ Is it the "fu" of "fuantei," "uncertain?" The "fu" from "fukigen," "bad-tempered?" The "unusual" "fu" from "fushigi"? That's not quite right. Fu, fu, fu...the fu from "funuke," "fool"? That feels like it's getting closer.

Ryosuke-kun came out of the bathroom, so I tried asking him, "Hey, what *kanji* character do you use to write the 'fu' from 'funuke'?"

Ryosuke-kun grabbed a cookie off the table without having washed his hands. "The 'fu' in 'funuke'? Isn't the same one you use to write 'guts' or 'organs'?" he said, taking a big mouthful of cookie. I tried imagining Ryosuke-kun's transparent body. The crunched-up cookie falls gently inside his body like dancing snow.

¹⁰ Should this be 'had' or 'has'? I know stories are usually written in past tense, but it is talking about a continuing current event.

¹¹ Umesaki/Umezaki? Is it the girlfriend of an upperclassman or the upperclassman herself? But if she is his girlfriend, would you need to say he has a "crush" on her?

¹² This sounds a little awkward to me, but maybe it's okay?

¹³ Is he calling her his girlfriend, in which case it would seem that the earlier "Umezaki" was the girlfriend's name? Or is he saying "kanojo" just to mean "her"?

¹⁴ The original has this in quotations, but I am not sure that is needed in English.

¹⁵ I think when it says 'sloping shoulders' it means he looks like the character 'fu'

¹⁶ Here I wonder whether to change "fu" to "un-" and put the words in English rather than risk losing the audience with a bunch of translated words and explaining that each one starts with "fu." I can almost get all the words: fuantei = unstable/uncertain, fukigen could be unhappy, fushigi could be unusual, but I can't get funuke. Maybe funuke could be "unwise"?

Apparently Ryosuke-kun had no plans until his part-time night job. While messily munching on the cookie, he turned on the TV that I had finally turned off in despair¹⁷ (I had watched from the morning's "Wide Show" through various other programs and finally up to "It's Okay to Laugh!"). The afternoon "Wide Show" had already started, and for an instant Baku Owada's expressionless face appeared on screen. But lately, whenever Ryosuke-kun turns on the TV, it immediately goes fuzzy.

Ryosuke-kun, muttering "not again," made to hit the TV's left side, so I hurriedly interjected with "Oh, not that side, it's three knocks on the right side."¹⁸ Ryosuke-kun hit the right side three times as instructed. However, there was no change in the fractured image.

[71] "S'not working."

"You're hitting it too softly. Harder, harder, softer. You have to hit it with more hatred."

"I don't really hate the TV. Hey Koto-chan, you do it instead."

"No way. After I specifically turned it off!"¹⁹

While we were talking back and forth, the TV image naturally returned to normal.²⁰ Ryosuke-kun changed channels using the nearby remote and asked "Who's the guest on today's 'Tetsuko's Room'?"

"Hey, what are you doing until evening?" I asked Ryosuke-kun, who was apparently about to return to the boys' room after just having turned on the TV.

"I'm taking Momoko to the car wash," he answered happily. I'm envious of boys who can be happy about washing a car. It's like they really have nothing to worry about; in fact, they have so little that they go looking around themselves for things to do. On the TV, Kaminuma Emiko was making some delicious-looking spiced chicken.

I'm keeping it a secret from my parents that the boys (Ryosuke-kun and Naohi-kun) are living in this apartment. There's nothing really embarrassing about it, but there's also no reason to force the truth on them. They take such pride in the daughter that they raised to have common sense. In fact, it's embarrassing just how little there is to be embarrassed about with Ryosuke-kun and Naohi-kun. Of course, when I first started living here, there were times when I could

¹⁷ "danchyou no omoi" means heartbroken thoughts, grief, sorrow? Does it mean that she was depressed about her boyfriend, maybe, rather than the TV itself?

¹⁸ I put this on a different line because of the dialogue. I know different people's dialogue usually goes on separate lines, but Ryosuke's is less dialogue than aside.

¹⁹ I think the exclamation point gives it more of the feel of a casual comment; a period makes it sound like a fragment.

²⁰ Or maybe "returned to normal on its own"?

feel Ryosuke-kun's casual gaze on my chest as sharp as a flaming arrow. [72] But when an arrow misses its mark, one should learn from the manager of the archery range who quickly draws the arrow out and immediately returns it to the customer. The customer is no idiot; when he sees the arrow quickly returned to him, he will understand that he missed the target. Despite that, there are many women in this world who leave the arrow stuck where it is. So then the customer ends up waiting for the prize to come, and misunderstandings arise. There are too many careless archery range managers²¹ in this world. Women like that who have innumerable arrows stuck in their chests and complain, "I can never make male friends," are the kind who take money from tipsy male guests at hot springs²².

I think that it's because Mirai, with whom I share a room, is not that sort of woman that I can live here like this. Of course, the fact that Ryosuke-kun and Naohi-kun are not the types to let loose at a hot springs feast like police or government workers is also part of it.

My starting to live here was sudden...yes, like being suddenly hit by lightning...no, like suddenly being bitten on the bottom by a dog...no...anyway, one night five months ago, on the dance floor at the club where I always go dancing, suddenly the music stopped and the lights went up. When I glanced up the boy who had been dancing in front of me who was all sweaty, and I was sweaty too, and I heard a flustered voice from the DJ booth saying, "Sorry, there's a problem with the speakers. Please wait a moment." All around people starting laughing and complaining, and everyone started tottering over to the bar, and the sweaty boy in front of me asked, "Want a drink?" [73] That moment was really very sudden, but it was because I realized that maybe I didn't have any interest in anything in particular.²³

It wasn't really about the sweaty boy, or that I didn't want anything to drink, or anything right in front of me like that. It was like,²⁴ I realized that, unlike my father with his job teaching math at a girls' college in our hometown, or my mother with her everyday housework, or my sister with her ballet practice, or my other sister with Katori Shingo from the band SMAP,²⁵ I didn't have any interests that completely absorbed me. Honestly, I think I was surprised, left suddenly standing alone on the dance floor. I hadn't wished to live that sort of empty lifestyle,

²¹ Maybe I should make this feminine?

²² Really not sure what this is trying to say

²³ I broke this up into a few sentences so that it wouldn't be run-on, but I tried to keep each sentence long in keeping with her train-of-thought, sort of rambling style.

²⁴ Trying to fit her rambling style

²⁵ Just in case readers don't know SMAP; I didn't know it.

and suddenly being made to realize it in a place like this really made me emotional and gave me a heartfelt shock.

Since I graduated from junior college and found work at a medical supply maker's office as a junior worker²⁶, I'd been getting a paycheck regularly at the end of the month. I probably felt something of this uselessness and loneliness somewhere in my heart, but when my salary came I would do things like going to great French restaurants with my friends, or buying rings at Tiffany's. Of course, petty joys like that didn't really satisfy me, but occasionally I would go to a bookstore and see piles of books saying "It's okay. Enjoy the now." and I would think 'oh, it really is okay.'

[74] Suddenly realizing that I had no interest in anything was a pretty tough occurrence for me, but on the other hand I couldn't think of anything in which I could take an interest. When I hurriedly thought about it, all I could think of were things like learning a foreign language, or rather studying abroad somewhere near Rome, or more realistically finding a convenient guy and marrying him abroad; things that didn't seem like they would actually interest me, but if they did they would probably make the people around me jealous. And another thing I thought of was in high school, how I would always get first place in the beauty contest the male students would sponsor each year. But on the other hand I wasn't the type to be hated by the girls, and I had female friends who would say sort of embarrassing things like "You're lucky, Kotomi. You're beautiful and you have a nice personality," before they got drunk. I would reply with something like "C'mon, I don't know what to say to that!",²⁷ but I was satisfied with that as it was.

All of a sudden, on the dance floor with the speaker broken and the lights turned up, it was like I heard something, maybe an angel or maybe a demon, but a voice from somewhere saying 'You have no suffering. In exchange, you have no true happiness either.'

When the sweaty boy standing in front of me asked, "What's wrong?" I shouted "No way!" without even thinking. Of course that was in answer to the voice saying 'You have no suffering or happiness,' not to the "What's wrong?" [75] The boy stared at me with a look on his face like 'did I say something wrong?'

²⁶ Secretary? I don't think we say "office lady"

²⁷ Maybe 'I don't know how to thank you'? That sounds a little formal

At that point I suddenly thought of something.²⁸ I immediately asked the boy, who had been flirting with me earlier, “Hey, you said your older brother is going to Tokyo by truck tomorrow, right?”

“Uh, yeah, I said something like that...”

“So, do you think he could give me a ride?”

“To Tokyo?”

“Yes. To Tokyo.”

“What’re you gonna do there?”²⁹

“I’ll suffer.”

“Huh? Suffer?”

“Yes. I’m going to suffer.”

The boy tilted his head curiously, but he contacted his brother for me. Although after that he never approached me again even once.

I had decided to go to Tokyo. The point of this was that³⁰ the only suffering I had ever experienced in my life was my love for Tomohiko Maruyama.

[76] I met Maruyama-kun at a party right after I entered junior college. It was a meeting fraught with embarrassments. Among our group of five, all girls, of course everyone desired him the most. It’s indecent for me to say this (but to think it and not say it would be more indecent, so I’ll say it), but I think probably some of the boys (okay, I’ll say it. Probably all of the boys) were interested in me. As the most popular female³¹ there, I couldn’t feign innocence and then pull a sneak attack³², nor could I play the prim and proper girl, so I went after Maruyama-kun aggressively from the beginning (so much so that the other boys were pulled in a bit). We were all splitting the bill anyway, and as the most popular girl, I had the right to make an open appeal.

The day after the party I got a phone call from Maruyama-kun. The party, which had equal numbers of men and women, casually moved on to a second meeting place and broke up, but after that the women went out for a third drink, and eventually things progressed to a fourth drink at a karaoke place. I drank Bombay Sapphire until my stomach hurt and sang Chisato

²⁸ Not sure how to incorporate her actual thought. I thought of something like ‘aha!’? Had an ‘aha!’ moment?

²⁹ This is pretty casual, and he uses a contracted form of ‘suru’

³⁰ Not sure how to phrase this. ‘the point of this was’

³¹ Female celebrity?

³² Not sure about ‘nukegake’

Moritaka³³ until my throat hurt, and returned home drunk at five in the morning. Maruyama-kun's phone call came four hours later, still before 9 a.m.

On the way to the second meeting place everyone stopped at a convenience store to buy cameras and gum and stuff, and while we were waiting for them I found myself alone outside with Maruyama-kun.

“So, you're interested in people's teeth and stuff?” I asked casually. [77] The reason the other girls' curfews weren't coming early that one night was because all the boys there were future dentists, though everyone's favorite Maruyama-kun looked pretty emotionless.³⁴

In response to my casual question, Maruyama-kun looked like he was taking a moment to choose his words. Then he said, “Uh, sorry. I'm different. I work at a home improvement center.”³⁵

It's always times like these that I'm really grateful that I've been watching romantic dramas since middle school. The reason for that is I was able to casually reply, “You don't have to apologize. I'm just a junior college student, after all,” just like a TV line. A full moon in the night sky, and me and him standing on the road at night. It seemed like the opening song of a bestselling sweet drama could start playing any moment.

“Oh, but the rest of them are the real deal. They're the real future of dentistry,” Maruyama-kun added hurriedly. “I mean, I declined,³⁶ but that Kengo, Kengo's the one with the glasses, he's an old friend of mine, and he said ‘it's fine, just come,’ and forced me to come with him.”

“But during the introductions, that guy who said ‘everyone here is my college classmate,’ that was this Kengo-kun?”

“I know, right? If we got caught it would be embarrassing for me. Anyway, sorry.”

[78] Even though he was making a face like ‘we're just eternally innocent youths,’ I think boys actually can be pretty jealous.

When Maruyama-kun called the next day, I was so hung over I don't remember what we talked about. But it seems that he cleverly made plans for us to meet again, since I was tightly

³³ Google leads me to believe the name is split there

³⁴ I'm not sure what this is trying to say. Also, ‘myakunashi’ means ‘without a pulse?’ Does it mean he is calm?

³⁵ I think ‘home center’ is a home improvement center

³⁶ “refused” sounds a bit strong, “declined” sounds a bit formal, maybe “said no”

holding onto a memo that said ‘Saturday - 7 ‘o-clock - in front of town hall’ while sprawled out on the bed.

While walking through town with Maruyama-kun, I realized that girls appraise passing boys really openly. First they look at Maruyama-kun, then at me holding his arm, and then they return their gaze to him. Thanks to my going out with Maruyama-kun, for the first time in my life I saw a McDonald’s employee so charmed by a boy’s face that her hand started shaking. Sure, Maruyama-kun said “I’ll take that to go,” but I kind of wanted to tell her “It’s the vanilla shake he wants to take home, not you.”³⁷

“Maruyama-kun, you’re pretty popular, huh?” I said without thinking when we left the restaurant.

Maruyama-kun replied, “You’re pretty popular yourself, Koto-chan,” which made me really happy. I was aware that we were gradually becoming a pretty ironic couple, but at the same time the vanilla shake we occasionally sipped was delicious.³⁸

[79] Around lunch, Ryosuke-kun (who had just woken up and was still sleepy) and I went to the new soba restaurant in front of the station. In commemoration of the restaurant’s opening, everyone was 20% off, so the place was packed. Just as we were about to give up and leave, a four-person table opened up. The restaurant owner³⁹ looked a bit put out, but Ryosuke-kun and I sat down without worrying about it. The lady who came to bring us water said, “I’m sorry, but you might have to share the table later.” I stood up from where I had been sitting across from Ryosuke-kun and moved into the seat next to him in advance.

As we were both eating some not-very-good *katsudon* pork rice bowls,⁴⁰ just as the shop lady had predicted, someone requested the seat across from us. When I looked up, somehow it was the middle-aged man who lives in apartment 402 standing there. Just like when I had met him in the hallway at the apartment before, he had his hair slicked back with scented hair lotion, and thick stubble sprouted from the hard-looking skin around his thick, purplish lips. I elbowed Ryosuke-kun, who was steadily eating his *katsudon* without looking up, in the ribs. Ryosuke-kun, being suddenly elbowed, uttered a short shout and grumbled “What?!” while pouting with rice-speckled lips. He was looking at the man from apartment 402 who was standing by the table.

³⁷ I’m not sure if there is a better way to make it sound like he could be talking about the employee?

³⁸ I am guessing that they are both drinking from one shake, as that is a typical couple thing to do.

³⁹ Employees? Owner? Other people in the restaurant?

⁴⁰ Not sure how much to explain what the dish is.

Ryosuke-kun's face tensed up for a moment, and then, maybe trying to cover up his nervousness, he pointlessly called out "Excuse me!" to the waitress.⁴¹

"Yes, yes?"⁴² the lady said, coming over right away.

Ryosuke-kun, confronted with her sudden appearance, quickly chugged his still-full water and held out the glass, saying "Um, more water, please."

[80] The man from apartment 402 was already sitting across from us. We'd met any number of times in the hallway, so he should have known that we were neighbors, but he just squinted at the menu tacked to the wall as if he had no idea who we were. Even the Adam's apple standing out on his extended neck was gross. The man ordered a "five-color soba" with an innocent face. When I thought about the fact that this man in front of me set up meetings between perverted⁴³ men and young girls every night, I completely lost my appetite. I could see the bulge of the leftover egg in the rice bowl looking like a wart on a pervert's forehead, and the drops of water on the bowl looking like a pervert's sweat, and I felt like throwing up.

I couldn't stand it, so I grabbed Ryosuke-kun's arm and made to leave the store. Ryosuke-kun's body got up to leave, but the piece of pork he had left in his bowl for later seemed just too good to pass up, and even as I pulled on his arm his chopsticks wouldn't let go of the pork. The man from apartment 402, with the *Weekly True Stories* paper⁴⁴ spread out on the table, was watching us with upturned eyes and sneering.

As we slapped the money down next to the register and left the shop, I accidentally shouted "Did you see that? That man's face? Unbelievable!"⁴⁵ ignoring the looks of the people around me.

Ryosuke-kun, still chewing on a piece of pork, calmly asked, "I wonder if that guy realized we were his neighbors?"

"Of course he realized that! He knew and just casually ordered that 'five-color soba' or whatever! Ugh, it pisses me off! I mean, five colors, what's up with that?!" I snapped back, still shouting. [81] In the face of my irritation, Ryosuke-kun just walked calmly along. "Hey! You're fine with this?" I grabbed at his shoulder.

⁴¹ Is she more than just a waitress? Not sure what to call her. 'restaurant lady'

⁴² Sounds impatient to say 'yes, yes,' but maybe that's right? They are busy

⁴³ I can't find a definition for 'erodako'

⁴⁴ Not sure if this is a newspaper or a magazine.

⁴⁵ It sounds odd to me to say 'I can't believe it,' when it is more an expression of disgust than her specifically disbelieving something about the man.

“Well it’s not like there’s anything we can do about it. There are lots of different people in this world. Like, there are people who tend fields, and people who sing in front of train stations, and people who sell cigarettes,⁴⁶ and people who drive bullet trains...anyway I’m saying there are lots of people. It’s not so strange that there are people who make a living arranging prostitution.

“What’s with that...aren’t you all full of wisdom all of a sudden?”

“Well I mean, Naohi-san and Mirai have said, like, there are women in this world who are happy to sell their bodies...and anyway, the relationship between neighbors in a big city is a delicate thing.”

“But I mean, you saw that girl who was crying on the emergency stairs, right?”

“Well, I saw that, but...well, there are also lots of women in this world who’ll cry over nothing. Mirai said so.”

“But basically, this means our neighbor is running a prostitution ring?”⁴⁷

“Well, I mean you can’t really say that...”

“Ugh! So irritating. If that’s what he’s doing, let’s expose him.”

[82] “How?”

“Well...oh, got it. Ryosuke-kun, you’ll be a customer.”

“M-me? No way!”

“Why not?”

“Why not... just no way.”

“If you’re worried about money I’ll pay it. And once we prove that that’s really what he’s doing, we can report it anonymously or something.”

“You’ll really give me the money? ...Er, no, I still don’t wanna.”

“Could it be you’ve never been to that sort of place before?”

“Of course not!”

“Why not?”

“What do you mean why not?!”

In the end, the conversation turned from the fact that Ryosuke-kun had never gone to one of those places, to wondering whether Naohi-kun, who doesn’t currently have a girlfriend, might

⁴⁶ I think ‘tabaco’ means cigarettes, not just tobacco.

⁴⁷ saying ‘doing prostitution’ makes it sound like he’s the prostitute

be going to a place like that. Then, continuing our line of reasoning, we reached the conclusion that even though he doesn't have a formal girlfriend, he still sees his former girlfriend Misaki-san frequently, so he might be dealing with those matters in that way. In the end the conversation about room 402 died out completely.

[83] When we arrived in front of the apartment, Ryosuke-kun said, "I'm going to go wash Momoko now, do you want to come?"

"Washing a car? Will you pay me?"

"I'll bet you'll pay me instead to let you come next time."

He told me to trust him and come along, so I decided to just take his word for it. I wouldn't have anything to do if I returned to my room anyway. Ryosuke-kun gave me a ride on the back of his bicycle to Momoko's parking garage.

In the end, it turned out just as Ryosuke-kun said. I even asked him to definitely tell me the next he goes to a coin-operated car wash. I learned for the first time that car washes have time limits. First the rinse is three minutes, then you add the soap and wash the body, and if you rest your hands for even a second, there's a chime warning you that there are only thirty seconds left until the end. With Ryosuke-kun directing me, "Look, Koto-chan, over there, now over there,"⁴⁸ we somehow finished washing the whole car, and then it was time for the final rinse. Of course this had a time limit too, and as we ran back and forth in the spraying water, shouting "Ack, gah!" and getting our hair and faces soaking wet, the car wash came to an end. If car washing is this fun, I wish I had been invited to come earlier, and I even said so.

In the cleaned-up Momoko, we drove a 9 km route twice around, and by the time we returned home it was just before 5 p.m. [84] After Ryosuke-kun went out to his part-time job, I went back to idly thinking about Maruyama-kun. Really, a whole day passed doing that sort of thing.

Now that I think about it, five months ago when I left in the middle of the night from a construction site⁴⁹ in the large truck belonging to the big brother of the guy who was flirting with me at the club, the one who came to pick me up was Ryosuke-kun in Momoko. The truck driver was far removed from the flirtatious boy in age. He was a good-natured man family man of

⁴⁸ Is he switching directions on her or telling her to go farther in one direction?

⁴⁹ The dictionary says 'tsukiji' means 'reclaimed land,' but I am not sure what that implies about where they are

around forty, and he said jokingly, “It’s a good thing you got me. If you tried getting a ride with other guys, about now you’d be having a tough time of it in the backseat!”

On the trip, I called home from a parking area in Shizuoka. For my mother to get a call from her daughter, who left home saying she was going dancing, to say that she was suddenly going to Tokyo in a truck to meet some boy from long ago, may have been too fantastic to process. She just said, “Oh. Tokyo, huh,” and became quiet.

“Tell the company that I’m sick or something, okay?” I said.

“So, when will you be coming back?” my mother asked.

For now, all I could say was, “I don’t know yet.”

“What should I tell your father?”

“I’m sorry, but can I leave that area up to you, Mom?”

“What’s that supposed to mean! ...hey, are you really going in a truck? Not an airplane or a car?”

“I really am. I’m really going in a truck.”

[85] “Wow, in a truck...”

When I got off at another construction site, of course I immediately called Maruyama-kun. However, no one answered the phone, and even when I let it ring ten, twenty times, it didn’t even go to an answering machine. When that happened, for the first time in my life I suddenly got really lonely and started crying. And while I was crying, I called up my only friend in Tokyo, Souma Mirai.

“When you snivel into the receiver like that, I can’t tell what the heck you’re saying!” Mirai’s familiar voice rang out at me. I cheered up and raised my tearful voice a level. “Huh? What? All I got just now was, ‘a nice trucker treated me to *kitsune udon* in a parking area.’”

It took about ten minutes to explain. Mirai, finally grasping the situation, kept berating me for being “such an idiot!”, but she still said, “There’re no more trains now, so I’ll send this guy called Ryosuke who lives with me to pick you up.”

I finally managed to contact Maruyama-kun on the fifth day after I had arrived at this apartment and calmed down. He was really sociable about it, and was happy that I had come to Tokyo. When he asked, “What?! Why did you come to Tokyo all of a sudden?” in the same cheerful voice as in the past, and I replied honestly, “I came to see you,” he started laughing raucously.

Once in the past, I went to the home improvement center in the suburbs where Maruyama-kun worked to watch him work. [86] He was in the gardening section, wearing a green apron and work gloves, carrying a Benjamin plant in a pot to a customer's car. I think that was the first time I got emotional from watching a boy work. As he was returning to the store from the parking lot, I waved my hand at him from the entrance, and for a second he looked a little bit put-upon. Despite that, he came running over to me and said, "Sheesh, how long have you been here?", and he looked happy, even if it seemed a little forced.

In the end Maruyama-kun and I were going out for a year and seven months. The home improvement center where Maruyama-kun worked was open year-round, and I as a student was really busy except for the times when I got a long break like summer or winter vacation, and normally I couldn't even take time off for successive holidays. Despite all that, if we ever did have time we were together.

I knew that Maruyama-kun lived alone with his mother. And I came to vaguely sense that his mother might not be in the best of health. This was because I caught him calling his house or his landlord any number of times during our dates, and no matter how sweetly I asked him, he would never stay overnight with me at a hotel.

Only once, in our one year and seven months of going out, only once did we go to stay out overnight. [87] We stayed at a cheap bed-and-breakfast⁵⁰ at the beach without any air-conditioning, and we could hear the owner's baby crying from the first floor all night long, but it's probably because of the night I spent at that hotel that I can be thinking of Maruyama-kun like this now.

I had been under the impression since I was a child that one shouldn't ask another person about things that they don't say themselves, so I had been refraining from bringing up any questions myself about his mother. Despite that, that night when he took me along to light fireworks on the beach, I told him, "Hey, if there's anything I can do to help you, I want you to tell me."

At first, he looked like he didn't know what I was talking about. "Huh? What?" he asked, still holding a firework up to the sky.

"...Like, with your mother," I muttered. The moment I said that, a purple firework burst from the end of the tube Maruyama-kun was holding.

⁵⁰ Dictionary says 'minshuku' is a private home that provides lodging, which I think would be a bed-and-breakfast

After we had run out of fireworks and as we were walking hand-in-hand⁵¹ up the hill back to the hotel, Maruyama-kun finally answered me, in his own way. “The president of the home improvement center where I work has a son the same age as me. He’s only 19, but he drives a BMW. That guy sometimes comes with his father to inspect all the stores, like if his college has a break. And our store president and floor manager, they’re fully grown men, but they’re all bowing and scraping to the son. [88] I mean, I guess that’s to be expected, I guess you’d find employees groveling to the second generation president just about anywhere, but I mean, it just got me thinking. Like, is that sort of thing really just to be expected? I mean, I’m not really smart, so I can’t explain this too well, but I understand that the president is to be respected. But like, for the president’s son, just from the fact that he’s his son, is he really so special? And like, I asked the floor manager about that during a break. And he said, ‘he’s the next president, so of course he’s important!’ And I mean, that’s true, but...”⁵²

I didn’t understand what Maruyama-kun was trying to say. Amid the smell of the tide, I just kept tightly holding on to his arm.

“I mean, in North Korea, right, I read in some newspaper about the son of that Kim or whatever guy, he apparently goes to this Swiss boarding school. I think he started there in elementary school; so anyway, in order to take care of the son of that Kim or whatever guy, another boy of the same age was enrolled in the school with him. In a boarding school! As his retainer!⁵³ When I read that article I was like, seriously, what the heck, you know? This was around lunch time, and I totally lost my appetite. Maybe I overreacted, but y’know, I still feel that way. I feel like, it’s really not so normal to be groveling to the son of the company president. I feel like, there are lots of things in this world that are thought of as normal, but they really aren’t so normal at all.”

[89] As we slowly walked back to the hotel, I imagined a boy in an elementary school classroom who, when another boy drops his eraser, immediately kneels down without expression and picks it up for him.

When we got back to the hotel, we took turns in the bath. When Maruyama-kun went outside, he tried to surprise me by going to peek in through the window that looks into the bath,

⁵¹ Or is she holding his arm?

⁵² For a trailing thought, an ellipse is better than a period

⁵³ I think exclamation points might be better for these two lines, to emphasize his feelings on the matter. On the other hand, periods give his words more weight, making it sound like a really serious thing.

and the hotel manager hit him with a stick. “No really! That’s my girlfriend in there!” Maruyama-kun kept screaming, so to help him I stuck my head out through the window and said, “Sir, it’s true.” I think the reason my face was bright red with embarrassment then wasn’t because of the bath being too hot, but was rather because he was yelling ‘that’s my girlfriend in there!’ in a voice loud enough to carry to the beach.

“My mother did housekeeping for a long time. You know, right, Koto-chan? That Kengo guy who was there when we first met. My mother was a housekeeper at his house.”

I heard from someone else that Maruyama-kun had quit his job at the home improvement center and was going to Tokyo. It was right after I had graduated from junior college. I had already broken up with Maruyama-kun. In the end I think I ran from him. Though saying ‘from him’ is a bit misleading; rather, I think I ran from the circumstances surrounding him.

The shock of the first time I saw his mother still makes my skin crawl to this day. His mother was sitting on the stairs of their apartment, completely naked from the waist down.

[90] When Maruyama-kun saw her like that, he nearly sent me flying with how quickly he ran to her side. He covered her lower half with his coat and helped her stand; all the while she was gazing vacantly at the moon in the night sky. He put his arm over her shoulder and slowly walked her step by step up the stairs to their apartment.

Left standing on the spot, I was torn between wondering if I should go after him or if I should turn around right then and go home. There was a part of me that was telling me to go after him. There was also a part of me that was scared and wanted to go home right away. Being pulled strongly back and forth by both parts of myself, I fell into a panic and wondered, “Which one? That time, that night on the beach, when I said ‘if there’s anything I can do to help I want you to tell me,’ which me was that?” But that time, inexcusably, the one that really inexcusably raised its hand was the scared part of me that said ‘let’s go home.’

The next day I got a call early in the morning. “I’m sorry about yesterday,” Maruyama-kun apologized.

“No, you don’t need to apologize,” I answered. However, I could no longer hear the opening song of a bestselling drama.

From that point on, whenever I went bowling with him, or when we were drinking a vanilla shake, or even when my sister would call out “Maruyama-kun’s on the phone,” I briefly thought of his mother. Going out with him meant going out with his mother. [91] He was the one

who said he wanted to break up, and I was the one who got dumped. Back then I was still a girls' college student who had just turned 20, meeting people for laughs and living to have fun. I think I was casually flinging around the good and the bad parts of myself, innocently asking "What should I do to have fun next? What next? Then what?"

At the earliest, Naohi-kun returns around 9 o'clock, and Mirai returns around 10 o'clock. Naohi-kun works for a small movie distribution company. Once I asked him about the particulars of his business, but it was really complicated and I don't think I properly understood it. On the other hand, Mirai's job is easy to understand. She collects product for an imported goods store, and sometimes she goes overseas to buy goods. However, if you ask her, she says that's only a job she has to make a living, and her real occupation is artist. I don't know how many times she's brought me along with her to sell her hand-printed fabric to the people passing by on the road to Omotesandou, or at the entrance of Yoyogi Park, or even on the bank of a pond in a local park.

Unlike Ryosuke-kun, who comes straight home after his job, it's impossible to predict when Naohi-kun and Mirai will come home. This isn't just because of their jobs. They're both the type to drown themselves in alcohol, though the varieties are different, and there isn't a road in Ginza, Akasaka, or Roppongi, or maybe even as far as Shinjuku or Kabukimachi, that they haven't ended up fall-down drunk on! That's what they boast, anyway. But when they do come home drunk, Naohi-kun is much easier to deal with. [92] After a while the agonized sounds of him in the bathroom going "Hbleah! Gehh!" will stop, and he'll just lie down and start sleeping soundly wherever he is. However, he says unusual things in his sleep. One night, as I was going to the kitchen for a drink of water, Naohi-kun was lying on the floor in a suit and suddenly shouted "Hey, watch where you step!"⁵⁴ I figured he was probably mistakenly thinking that he would get stepped on, so I said gently, "Don't worry. I won't step on you." When I said that, Naohi-kun sat up abruptly and said, "'Cuz there are these guys, these guys are like this big," raising his thumb and forefinger.

"Huh? What?"

"Like I said, there are these guys over there who're like this big, so don't step on them," Naohi-kun said, looking all around the area by my feet. Having said that, he once again fell on

⁵⁴ I put this instead of 'don't step on ~,' where the object would make it clear he didn't mean himself

the floor and closed his eyes. I was really startled, standing alone in the dark kitchen thinking ‘what’s in here that’s only ten centimeters tall?! Where?! Where are they?!’ I ended up carefully hopping out of the kitchen.

The next day, according to what Ryosuke-kun told me, it seems like those creatures were the little dwarf-like fairies that appear in Naohi-kun’s dreams. It seems Ryosuke-kun had even asked him about the spell used to summon the fairies.

However, compared to Mirai, Naohi-kun’s drunkenness is downright cute. In Mirai’s case, you’ve got a long way to go after she comes home drunk. [93] She doesn’t throw up in the bathroom or fall asleep on the floor; instead, she takes all the art that she was displaying at various stores that night and drunkenly tries to display them again for us. Of course, when she comes home Ryosuke-kun and I immediately take shelter in our respective rooms.

Despite that, Mirai, left alone in the living room, seemingly somehow unsatisfied with Sera Masanori’s song “Homeless,” will practice it until morning.⁵⁵ I don’t know exactly what about it dissatisfies her, but anyway I don’t think there are any people these days who know that sort of song.

Anyway, I definitely like living here. Living here is really casual, and though there is some of the normal tension of living with strangers, more than anything, the fact that I can leave any time I want if the situation changes is a key feature. If I said ‘I’m leaving tomorrow,’ it’s likely that no one would complain, and even if, for example, Mirai were to leave, I feel like at this point I could stay here on my own.

I’m terrible with machines myself so I try to stay away from the Internet, but from listening to a friend of mine in college who does that sort of thing, I think that our lifestyle here might be a little like those chat rooms or forum⁵⁶ things. The reason I don’t get involved with the Internet is, of course, mainly because I’m terrible with machines, but that isn’t the only reason. When people tell me “individuals can talk about anything anonymously,” I can’t help but think ‘That’s horrible, that means people can say all the insults and complaints that they couldn’t say before now.’ [94] Of course, that’s based on reasoning that ‘if I think that, everyone else must think that too,’ which leads to ‘Ew, there’s no way I would spend all my time trading gossip with people.’ But according to my friend, it isn’t all negative sites like that; there are also sites where

⁵⁵ Does the ‘shiteiru’ indicate that it is a habitual thing, or that she does it continuously until morning?

⁵⁶ Dictionary says ‘BBS’ stands for ‘bulletin board system,’ which sounds to me like a forum.

you can enjoy a fairly friendly and serious conversation. Those are apparently “places full of goodwill.”⁵⁷ You can share your worries with others, and cheer on your fellows from the bottom of your heart. Sometimes people will show up and leave harassing messages, like in the middle of a conversation with people saying “I’ve had some tough times too, but let’s both keep trying!” “Thank you, we really should,” someone will suddenly pop up saying “Heh heh, you wanna suck my dick?” or something, but of course they just completely ignore those sorts of people. That in itself is a free space where one can insert some goodwill. I think that the apartment where we live is also that sort of place. If you don’t like it you just have to leave. If you’re here then you just have to smile. Of course, as humans we all have both good and evil within us. I think that Mirai, and even Naohi-kun and Ryosuke-kun, are probably putting on an act of being good people. I’m sure we are what you’d call “just a surface relationship.”⁵⁸ But for me, this is perfect. Of course, I don’t think this sort of lifestyle can continue for one’s whole life. It probably only works well because it is a temporary restriction, and I think it might even have some meaning to it. Calling each other names when we turn on the TV, or fighting over who gets to read the newspaper first, or trying to pick up boys when talking to your friends...honestly, I am completely tired of people’s, or maybe this world’s, negative feelings. Of course, whether I’m sick of it or not, negativity exists in this world, and people might laugh and say that trying to get by with my eyes closed is too optimistic. However, I’m just sick of trying to laugh like that, just as much as I’m sick of the negativity.

⁵⁷ I am not sure why this is in quotations

⁵⁸ I am not sure if quotations are needed here

Chapter 2:2

[95] I was awakened from a peaceful sleep by the advertising car of the official Democratic Party candidate Toyoko Fuchino. I haven't changed my official residence, so I can't vote here, but if I could I would definitely cast my vote for "anyone other than Toyoko Fuchino." It seems like I'm unwittingly burying myself dull days where I even end up taking an interest in things like the election.

As I went out into the living room in my pajamas, the door to the bathroom opened and a boy I didn't know stepped out, wearing a bath towel wrapped around his waist. For a second I froze, but then I figured he had to be a classmate of Ryosuke-kun's. I said "good morning" and he replied "ah, good morning," seeming embarrassed.

[96] It was already almost 10 o'clock. I had a memory of Mirai coming in after 4 in the morning, in pretty high spirits as usual. She noisily entered our room, shouting "No more! I can't drink anymore! I can't dance anymore!" and stepped over me to collapse in her own bed. Despite undoubtedly having a considerable hangover, it seemed that she had gotten up and gone off to work on time.

The boy was standing there dopyly with his hair still dripping wet, so I told him, "There's a hair dryer over there," and pointed to the shelf. I tried opening the door to the boys' room; it looked like the two of them had already left.

I turned around and asked the boy, "Where's Ryosuke-kun? At school?"

The boy, taking down the hair dryer, said, "Oh, yeah. He left about an hour ago."

"So, you don't have class today?"

"Class? Me? Nope."⁵⁹

"Well, sorry if I'm being forward,⁶⁰ but do you have any sort of plans for the day?"

"Plans? Not really..."

"Well then, if you're going to be here until Ryosuke-kun gets back..." [97] I realized the boy was slightly on his guard, like he thought I was going to bite him or something. "No good? You want to go home?"

"...don't really care."

"Really?"

⁵⁹ Seems pretty casual, maybe just 'no' or 'I don't'?

⁶⁰ It's like she's apologizing for asking, or technically sort of warning or informing him that she's going to ask something?

“Uh, yeah.”

“Great! You know, I’ll bluff and say I’m not really bored or anything, but the truth is it’s pretty stressful being here alone all day, you know?” I suddenly burst out like I was possessed. The boy was looking at me like ‘if it’s a problem then go out somewhere.’ I guess he hadn’t yet asked Ryosuke-kun how I was passing the days here at present.

At any rate, I decided to put in some more coffee for myself and the boy. Some dishes, like the cup from the banana protein shake Naohi-kun had apparently drunk before leaving for work, had been left in the sink, so I went ahead and hurriedly⁶¹ finished up washing the dishes. I then made a light breakfast of toast and sunny-side up eggs. While I was doing that, the boy put on some clothes. He asked me what to do with the wet bath towel, so I told⁶² him to mix it in with Ryosuke-kun’s already full laundry basket.

I think that the whirlwind of events that happened in this living room this morning must have been really unusual for the boy. [98] As he sipped at the coffee I had brewed for him, he started talking, sounding like a boy who had just caught a rhinoceros beetle⁶³ in his bare hands for the first time in his life.⁶⁴

“So like, I was sleeping on the sofa, and around I think seven, that door suddenly opened and a man came out. He was like, ‘Who’re you?’, so I said, ‘Oh, my name is Satoru,’ and he asked ‘Anyone in the can?’⁶⁵ and then just went into the bathroom without waiting for an answer. When he came out⁶⁶ he was saying stuff like ‘What day is today again?’ ‘This tie doesn’t match this shirt, does it?’ ‘Oh! Fuji TV, turn on Fuji TV! The fortune-telling corner is gonna start’ and being all noisy, even though people were still sleeping. I was completely awake by then, even though I had a horrible headache from being hungover, but I just gave up and woke up⁶⁷. Then he said, ‘Hangover, huh? Banana juice, you should drink some banana juice’ and even made some for me on the blender over there, see? But they say if you drink banana juice when you have a hangover you’ll throw up.⁶⁸”

“You hadn’t asked about Naohi-kun being here?” I asked, refilling the coffee.

⁶¹ ‘chyachya’ is ‘disruption’? So does it mean she is quickly knocking dishes around?

⁶² ‘told’ or ‘directed’? ‘sashizu’ seems a little formal

⁶³ Is this unusual because they are hard to catch? Is more explanation needed here for the reader?

⁶⁴ I think because of the way she uses descriptors, it sounds better to break this up into two sentences

⁶⁵ Do people still say ‘can’? Maybe ‘john’? I think ‘benjyo’ is a pretty crude, male way of saying it?

⁶⁶ I am not sure what the ‘kitara-kita’ construction means

⁶⁷ Maybe ‘stayed awake’ or ‘decided to wake up.’

⁶⁸ Is he saying this like it’s a saying, or is it just something he thinks?

“I didn’t ask. I totally didn’t think anyone else lived here.⁶⁹ So then, after he forced me to drink banana juice, that other one came out.⁷⁰”

“Mirai?”

“Yeah. Mirai-san. So like, that was the worst. She had a way worse hangover than me; actually, it was more like she was still totally drunk. [99] She pointed at me and grumbled, ‘Who’re you?’, so I answered ‘I’m Satoru!’, and even though she was the one who asked me, she got mad and said ‘What’s that supposed to mean?! Why are you saying that so shamelessly?!’”⁷¹

“So then, the two of them went off to work?”

“Yeah. They left. First Naohi-san left, saying ‘Today Aries is super lucky.’ Then Mirai-san soaked in the bath for almost thirty minutes, and occasionally I heard her scream ‘Wraahh!’, so I was startled and called from outside the door over there ‘A-are you all right?!’, but she just calmly replied ‘if you do this then the alcohol will come out.’ So while that was happening,⁷² Ryosuke-kun came out, and I think he’d had a really bad dream or something. He came out of his room, and the moment our eyes met he said ‘I’m just a useless man, after all,’ with a really serious look on his face, and I was like, ‘well you say after all, but...’ and I ended up looking away.⁷³ So Mirai-san came out of the bath and said to Ryosuke-kun, ‘Take me to Shinjuku,’ and Ryosuke-kun said, ‘If you’ll put gas in Momoko-chan next time,⁷⁴’ and he seemed satisfied with such insecure conditions⁷⁵. The two of them left together around after nine this morning, even though it seems it was still too early for Ryosuke-kun’s class.”

Satoru-kun’s story was nothing unusual to me. It was a common scene that played out in this living room every morning.

[100] “So after the two of them had left, I thought I might be able to get a little more sleep, but it didn’t seem like I would be able to sleep at all, so I just gave up and took a bath to sober up. When I came out, you came out from over there, Kotomi-san, and said the first ‘good morning’ I’d gotten all morning. Hey, how many people live here anyway? Is someone else going to come out after this?”

⁶⁹ Trying to keep it gender-neutral, since Kotomi thinks Ryosuke let him in but Mirai did it

⁷⁰ ‘That person’? How does Kotomi know whom he’s talking about?

⁷¹ I am not sure what Mirai is saying

⁷² Not completely sure what ‘soukou’ means

⁷³ Should I maybe say something like Satoru doesn’t know what to say?

⁷⁴ Not sure if he is saying that she needs gas, or asking Mirai to pay for the gas; if he is asking Mirai to pay, then Satoru’s next line about terms makes sense

⁷⁵ I think Satoru is talking about Mirai agreeing to buy gas

“No, no one else is going to come out,” I laughed, stacking up the dishes that were dirty with egg yolk.⁷⁶

After taking a shower, I took Satoru-kun to the pachinko game parlor⁷⁷ in front of the station. Lately, I’ve been following the unfounded belief that ‘if I can win at pachinko, I’ll get a call from Maruyama-kun,’ but Satoru-kun was the one who won.⁷⁸

On the way home, Satoru-kun and I were eating some 31 brand chocolate mints⁷⁹. I stopped at a convenience store to check and see if some of the magazines that occasionally featured an article about Maruyama-kun (like “anan” or “JUNON”) had new issues out, and Satoru-kun said, “I’m probably gonna go soon...”⁸⁰ Thinking that if I let him get away now I would end up alone again until nighttime, I said, “Hey, let’s play ‘Biohazard 2’ at the apartment,” and dragged him back there.

That was when I got my first call from Maruyama-kun in eight days. For me, this was an even bigger victory than winning at pachinko. When I got the call saying “Let’s meet up in a little bit,” without even thinking I turned to Satoru-kun standing behind me and hugged him. When I hugged him, I smelled a strange scent. [101] It was probably coming from the area around his neck; it wasn’t sweet, and not quite like citrus, but sort of like sweat, or like dried earth; some kind of strange smell like that.

At first Satoru-kun froze up at being suddenly hugged, but when I happily exclaimed, “I’m going to see my boyfriend after this! He said his schedule suddenly opened up!” Satoru-kun just smiled and said, “Th-that’s great.”

After I quickly changed clothes and carefully put on makeup, I came out of the girls’ room and said, “Let’s go to the station together.” Satoru-kun stood up from the sofa. It was pretty horrible of me, but even though I was the one who invited him to come play “Biohazard 2,”⁸¹ I had forgotten that he was even in the living room. “Ryosuke-kun should be home soon, so do you want to wait here?” I asked, half apologizing.

He looked a little confused, but answered, “That’s okay. I’ll come with you.”

⁷⁶ It sounds strange to specify ‘sunny-side up eggs’ again. Also not sure whether or not to include the part about them being dirty from the yolk, or just call them dirty dishes.

⁷⁷ Do I need to explain pachinko?

⁷⁸ Jisho.org says that ‘fuiba’ means ‘fever,’ so I am guessing that is a pachinko term. In the context I think it means that Satoru did well.

⁷⁹ I think this is a brand name

⁸⁰ Trailing off because it is an incomplete thought

⁸¹ It sounds more normal to me to say it as part of the sentence than to repeat her statement in quotations

Satoru-kun was looking me up and down pretty closely, so I said, “What?”

“You should definitely be dressed up like that, not wearing sweats,” he said, making me happy.

I got off the Keiou line from Chitosekarasuyama at Shinjuku and parted ways with Satoru-kun. When I said, “Come back some time,” he said, “Really?” and looked really happy. I said, “Really. Next time we’ll definitely play ‘Biohazard 2,’” and parted ways with a smile.

[102] I usually meet Maruyama-kun in a room in a small hotel in Ebisu. The dorm where he lives is in the third district⁸² of Shibutani ward, less than five minutes’ walk away. What am I trying to say...no, if I try to say it my words will get all mixed up with needless excuses and unease and end up being inaccurate, so instead I’ll use Mirai’s words. She says, “If only you got money from him, you’d totally seem like a call girl.” It’s true that Maruyama-kun is busy and I can only see him briefly at a hotel, and we don’t do anything apart from *that*,⁸³ and the limited time we have until his next job is divided up into so many minutes for a shower, so many minutes for foreplay, so many minutes for...so, when I add it up, it would be a lie to say that I don’t get an image of the “call girl” Mirai has suggested. Mirai keeps saying, “I mean, popular actors usually call their old girlfriends out to love hotels,⁸⁴ right? And that’s whenever they suddenly have time free.”

While all that is true, I’m different from a call girl. No matter how much Mirai denounces me by saying, “Even if you’re not getting money and you say that ‘love is the only payment I need,’ that just sounds like a naive new call girl,” I can confidently say to her, “That’s not true!”

First of all, no man would introduce a call girl to his colleagues or superiors at work. With Maruyama-kun, that would probably equate to his manager and the husband-and-wife team of directors⁸⁵ at his office, and I have been invited over to eat at the directors’ house three times up to now. [103] The director and his wife look exactly like Tony Tani and Chikage Ogi. Of course, Maruyama-kun introduced me as his ‘lover’. The manager and his wife purposely avoided asking about it, but when I was helping wash plates in the kitchen after dinner, the wife who looked like Chikage Ogi cautioned me, “You have to be careful with things like that!⁸⁶” But

⁸² Or is ‘Sanchoume’ a place name by itself?

⁸³ Maybe ‘that sort of thing’?

⁸⁴ Should I specify what a love hotel is? The name seems pretty clear.

⁸⁵ Husband and wife team? Or is the husband the director and his wife is just mentioned because Kotomi has met her too?

⁸⁶ I cannot find a translation for ‘uejjiuddo’

then she told me, “We’ve heard a lot about you. Maruyama-kun is always saying things like, ‘I have someone I love very much.’” I wonder if there are any men who would treat their true love like a call girl.⁸⁷

The reason why he calls me out to a hotel instead of to his dorm is because his mother is at his dorm. I call it a dorm, but it’s a normal apartment in 3DK. It seems like there was another prospective actor living there until six months ago, but Maruyama-kun made a splashy debut before him, and he got all huffy like a girl and returned home to Kishiwada. Because of that, right now Maruyama-kun and his mother are living there together. I think if I hadn’t met the director and his wife, I would wonder that Maruyama-kun brought his sickly mother to live with him in an acting production company dorm. But since I know the personalities of the director and his wife, I feel like I can understand the reason why Maruyama-kun could trust them and work hard in Tokyo.

It seems like the director and his wife had their eyes on Maruyama-kun from the time he was still going to a boys’ high school. [104] I guess it’s not unusual that rumors from female high school students that ‘there’s a really hot guy at that school’ would catch the ears of an acting production company manager, no matter how much of a small town he’s in; after all, he has the sort of charm that could make a McDonald’s employee freeze up from just a smile.

Unfortunately, Maruyama-kun’s mother’s illness had gotten worse than it was a few years ago. It seems the hospital had diagnosed her with a serious manic-depressive illness that came from a menopausal disorder.

“When her condition is good, I think she’s the best mother in the world. There’s really no better mother anywhere. But, when her condition is bad...how to say this; I guess I have to become the world’s best son.”

Thanks to the kindness of the manager and his wife, Maruyama-kun’s mother goes to the hospital once a week, and receives counseling and as much treatment as possible from a specialist. Of course, when Maruyama-kun has work, a fellow employee stays over at his dorm and cares for his mother, and will even take her to and pick her up from the hospital.

Maruyama-kun jokes and says, “With all of this, if I don’t manage to sell anything, I’ll have to spend the rest of my life paying back the director and his wife.” But for me, it’s like, I’m

⁸⁷ Should I perhaps phrase this as a question, since it seems she is asking rhetorically?

a little envious that he has already found people with whom he can share the good times and the bad, people for whom he can say, 'I could bet my life for these people.'

No matter how much I ask, Maruyama-kun won't take me to the dorm where his mother is. Of course, I no longer feel like thoughtlessly saying insensitive things like 'if there's anything I can do to help just tell me,' and the me from several years ago who casually acknowledged only the happy times already ran away like a coward; but now, instead of having some lofty feelings of wanting to help him, I just wonder if we can honestly share things with each other. [105] When I ask Maruyama-kun to let me meet his mother, he jokes, "If you dumped me again, we wouldn't be able to fix it anymore," which makes me feel just about like killing myself. However, I won't say 'I'm really sorry for what happened back then.'⁸⁸ If I apologized, Maruyama-kun would have to forgive my stupidity that time.

On our second date after our reunion in Tokyo, I summoned my courage and asked, "Hey, why did you go out with me again?"

"Why...because I still liked you. Besides, when I suddenly got a call from you saying 'I'm in Tokyo,' I was seriously really happy," Maruyama-kun said.

"Even though we broke up like that?"

"Like what?"

"You know..."

"You mean how you saw my mom and ran off?"

"..."

[106] "Ever since I was a kid, I decided not to believe anyone who puts on a good face from the beginning. Seems like that also comes in handy in the acting world." Maruyama-kun laughs about himself being a handsome idol like he's really embarrassed about it.

After parting ways with Satoru-kun at the Shinjuku station, I arrived at the hotel in Ebisu exactly two hours after I had gotten the call from Maruyama-kun. I asked for the room number at the front desk and headed to the room, getting antsy in the slow-moving elevator. However, no matter how many times I knocked on the door, there was no answer. I returned to the front desk and had them call the room for me.

⁸⁸ It seems somewhat unnecessary to use quotations here, but I'm not sure

This was the first time I had seen Maruyama-kun in seventeen days, and he seemed really tired. He had probably been fast asleep on the bed, completely unaware of the knocks on the door; the lace pattern from the pillowcase was imprinted on his cheek. I had asked him about work a little the last time we met, and he said he had started recording his debut song “Mud”⁸⁹ (I can’t imagine it will sell very well). It seems that with the filming for the CD jacket and promotion video, magazine interviews, late-night radio appearances, and preparations for the next drama in which it had been decided he would have a semi-lead role, he was working every minute of every day.

In the midst of that busy schedule, he called me to say he had suddenly gotten half a day off. No matter what Mirai and Naohi-kun and Ryosuke-kun say, Maruyama-kun isn’t getting intimate with any female TV announcers or getting involved with any of his suddenly increasing fans. [107] Unfortunately, my confidence comes not from the love between us, but from the schedule sheet that he showed me. No matter what page I opened in his schedule, packed with his mother’s hospital visits and his work, it was like it had been written just to say that there was no time for an affair or even to watch an adult video.

After the two of us hugged and kissed, we flew straight into bed. Even though we hadn’t even taken our clothes off yet, Maruyama-kun’s genitals⁹⁰ were kind of really full of energy⁹¹, so I half-jokingly teased him, “You’re raring to go, aren’t you?”

“It’s ‘cuz I’m tired,” he laughed, seeming embarrassed.⁹² I don’t mind that he was honest, but I think it would have been nice if he had said something like, ‘it’s because I wanted to see you.’

As I got undressed among the sheets, I asked, “What kind of role do you have in your next drama?”

“It’s the part of a sports announcer who gave up on being a pro baseball player because of an elbow injury,” he replied as he also got undressed. Maybe it was because he had recently been sleeping, but his shoulder, when I occasionally touched it, was slightly warm.

“Who else is going to be in it?”

“Uhhhhm, Nanako Matsushima will be in it.”

⁸⁹ Is this the actual name?

⁹⁰ Is ‘genitals’ too formal?

⁹¹ I can’t think of a way to say this that doesn’t sound awkward and slightly anthropomorphic

⁹² Why would being tired mean that? Am I misunderstanding something?

“That famous actress?⁹³ Have you met her yet?”

[108] “Yeah, I met her.”

“What was she like? Is she cute?”

“She’s not just cute, she’s so cute my stomach hurts just being next to her.”

Maruyama-kun gave me a really long kiss. I like kissing, and I don’t like being held from behind. If there is such a thing as compatibility when it comes to sex, the two of us might be able to get full points in it. I wouldn’t say it’s something we would want to show to people, but it’s not something that would be embarrassing if people saw it. Lately he’s been obsessed with the somewhat questionable practice of seeing how long it takes before he can put on a condom.⁹⁴ Of course he doesn’t give me a stopwatch and ask me to time him, but after he puts it on, I see him glance at his watch, and if I see him grin I can tell he’s broken his personal record.

After we took turns in the shower, we decided to spend the time until he had to return to his job in bed. His body was still slightly damp, and his hair smelled of the cheap hotel shampoo.

While I was stroking his fingers and lazily staring at the clothes we had flung over a chair, he suddenly said, “Oh yeah, the other day, after I finished work, I got back to my dorm in the middle of the night and there was some girl I didn’t know asleep in my bed.”

“No way!”⁹⁵ [109] I sat up in surprise and my head smacked him straight in the chin.

“Ow ow ow...my tongue, I bit my tongue,” Maruyama-kun said, sticking out a bright red tongue.

While I held on to his tongue, I asked him, “Was it one of your fans?”

“Prolaly...’cuz she wahn’t wearing anything.” Since he was trying to talk with his tongue still being held, Maruyama-kun looked like he was about to throw up.

“So, what did you do?”

“Huh? Obviously I slept with her,” Maruyama-kun said, rolling his tongue around in his mouth.⁹⁶

“That’s a lie, right?” I stared at him.

“It’s true. I mean, she was a fan.”

⁹³ I think this is sort of what she means by repeating her name. Should I also repeat it, maybe say ‘the famous matsushima’?

⁹⁴ Is he seeing how long before he can put one on, or seeing how long he can keep one on before it breaks? Is the ‘shina’ talking about the condoms’ quality, or about his habit of timing himself?

⁹⁵ It sounds a bit strong to me to say ‘that’s a lie!’

⁹⁶ I am not sure what the ‘waku’ is doing here. Is it just saying she noticed him rolling his tongue?

“It doesn’t matter that she’s a fan, she just showed up unannounced in your room and was sleeping naked in your bed!”

“It’s great that she saved me the trouble of undressing her.” As he said that he let out a laugh, so I knew he was lying. I thought he may as well just bite his tongue again, so I tried to hit his chin from below, but he skillfully turned his head away.

[110] It seems that in order not to wake up his mother, who was sleeping in the next room, Maruyama-kun had to plead in a whisper with the naked fangirl sleeping in his bed for two whole hours. Luckily, she was the type of girl to do something completely crazy in a logical way⁹⁷, so Maruyama-kun told her, “You’re too innocent. You have to become a more calculating woman. For instance, do stuff like stringing along the guy you like by purposely ignoring him.” In response to his words, the girl said, “I don’t like scheming when it comes to love,” but after two hours she finally agreed to leave his room.⁹⁸

To relieve my worries, Maruyama-kun laughed and said, “I’m sure that right about now she’s sitting at home in front of the TV and ignoring me.” On top of that⁹⁹ he bragged, “I know all there is to know about my girlfriend. Her favorite food. Her favorite color. Her favorite movie...”, so I asked him, “What was my favorite movie again?”

Maruyama-kun scrunched up his face a little, then mumbled, “It’s ‘Bambi.’” It was really easy to counter by answering that it was ‘Misery.’¹⁰⁰ He laughed a lot, but I think he was actually quite scared.

As it was reaching the time when we would have to leave, Maruyama-kun’s genitals became excited again. “I have to return to the Shibutani studio in twenty minutes, so what should I leave out?” he laughed, so I answered, “Don’t leave out the first and last kiss.”

In the end, he used the time we had left to give me the first and last kiss only. “Aren’t you being a bit too smug¹⁰¹?” I teased him.

[111] “That’s what I’m being paid for,” he said, flaring his nostrils and making me laugh.

After we left the room, as we were in the elevator going to the first floor, he suddenly made a meek face and said, “I’ve said this before, but this situation will continue for a while.

⁹⁷ I am not entirely sure how this description of the girl is supposed to go

⁹⁸ I say agreed because of kureru

⁹⁹ How is this related to the previous?

¹⁰⁰ I am not sure about the case of this sentence or what she is trying to say. Is she saying that is how she answered him, or how he might have answered? If it says he was scared, then it sounds like she said her favorite movie is ‘Misery,’ but I don’t know what ‘taisyo’ is for.

¹⁰¹ I am not sure what ‘kiza’ means

Since I'm just starting out, I want to give it all I've got, and right now, I can't make any promises for the future. Are you okay with that?" Just like last time, I definitively answered, "I'm okay with that."

"What do you do all day at home?" he continued. I almost wanted to say 'I wait for the phone to ring,' but that would bring up the response, 'You have a cell phone, so you can at least go out, right?' which would inevitably lead to, 'The thing is, there's nowhere I want to go out to,' and that would definitely make him feel bad. Thinking about that, I lied, "I mentioned that the friend I'm living with is an illustrator, right? I help her with that."

"What do you do about living expenses?"

"I was an office worker, so I have quite a lot of savings."

"Yeah but, that won't last forever, right?"

"If it runs out, I'll work."

When we exited the hotel, there were two available taxis conveniently parked there. Acting like we didn't know each other, we got into different taxis. [112] The driver, staring at Maruyama-kun getting into the taxi in front of us, said, "Hey, isn't that guy on TV?"

"I dunno," I said, tilting my head.

"No, he definitely is. It's the guy who was on 'Ekura Ryou'¹⁰² before," the driver said, finally turning the wheel and starting the car going. Maruyama-kun is slowly becoming an actor who is recognized by taxi drivers too, not just young girls. For some reason, Maruyama-kun's more-energetic-than-normal genitals suddenly made me uneasy.

In the taxi, I was thinking about how Maruyama-kun said that I couldn't continue like this forever.¹⁰³ Speaking of which, I've already used up my savings. What really couldn't continue forever was the allowance being sent by my parents, who were being fooled by their daughter saying, "I have something I want to do no matter what. Please just trust me." My mother knew that I left home to chase after an old boyfriend, so sometimes on the phone she would say things like, "You know, when people are chased they run away." Despite that, she regularly persuaded my father to send me money at the end of the month, probably because she had her eyes set on the common¹⁰⁴ goal of 'if it goes well they'll probably get married.' That's why I can never tell them that my boyfriend is an up-and-coming actor, no matter what. The

¹⁰² I think the name of the show is just a person's name?

¹⁰³ I think it's more normal like this than in a direct quotation

¹⁰⁴ 'Ordinary, normal'?

allowance would stop, or maybe they would even send someone from the countryside tomorrow to pick me up.

Honestly, even I don't know what I want to do. [113] Just being called out to a hotel whenever he suddenly has time isn't the same as living together, and of course I don't think that we'll be able to tie the knot at a church any time soon.¹⁰⁵ Because of that, the one thing I really don't want right now is to be asked, 'So, what do you want to do?' If I were asked that, I'd have no choice but to play dead. Naohi-kun says, "You have no future." Mirai says, "It's a waste of time." Only Ryosuke-kun is nice enough to say, "I understand. Somehow, I totally understand what you're feeling." However, I'm sorry, but that doesn't make me too happy. I'd even say I don't really want a carefree college student like him to be the only one who understands me.

When I returned to the apartment in Chitosekarasuyama, it was after 8 o'clock at night. When I went into the living room, everyone was there for a change, and they all looked at me as I entered. "Hey, were you the one who brought home that boy?" Mirai questioned me with a stern look.

"That boy? What boy do you mean?" I answered casually. Meanwhile, I was basking in Maruyama-kun's warmth, left over somewhere in the pit of my stomach, feeling like it was going to come bubbling up. I don't know when I'll be able to see him again. If possible, I want to hold on to that warmth until then.

"See, Koto didn't see him," Mirai said.

"So that means by the time Koto-chan woke up, he was no longer here, huh," Ryosuke-kun said.

"Man, I even gave him a banana protein shake."

[114] The three of them ignored me basking in my sexual glow and returned to their conversation with serious looks on their faces.

"Hey, I thought for sure he was some classmate or something of Ryosuke's..." Naohi-kun said.

"I thought so too," Mirai said, and they both turned to Ryosuke-kun.

"I told you I don't know him. I've never even seen him before. I mean, I totally thought that Mirai got drunk and brought someone home again..." Ryosuke-kun said, flustered, trying to

¹⁰⁵ I don't think they use red carpets in America, so I left that out

turn the blame to Mirai. However, Mirai and Naohi-kun had already moved the conversation along. “Hey, are we sure nothing was taken?”

Even while basking in my sexual glow, I could tell that the three of them were arguing about Satoru-kun. “Hey, hang on, are you guys talking about Satoru-kun?”

The three of them turned to me at the same time as I burst in. Everyone’s faces had expressions like, ‘okay, join in’ and ‘what are you going to say?’¹⁰⁶

“You’re talking about Satoru-kun, right?” I said once again without thinking.

“You brought him here?”

“Sheesh, so he was Koto-chan’s friend.”

“That’s kind of unexpected for you, Koto-chan, isn’t he kind of young?”

It seemed like the three of them were going to misunderstand things, so I hurriedly said, “Wait a minute. I don’t know him.”

“But, didn’t you call him ‘Satoru-kun’ by name just now?” Mirai said.

“Y-yeah, the kid who was here this morning, right?” I answered.

“That’s right, that kid.”

“He, he’s Ryosuke-kun’s classmate, right?” I looked to Ryosuke-kun to save me, but he said, “I already said he’s not!” and looked away.

“H-hang on, so what does that mean? So then, who was that boy? I made him breakfast, and I even took him to pachinko with me.”

“Pachinko?!” they chimed in surprise.

I squeezed in between Naohi-kun and Ryosuke-kun, facing the collection of serious expressions over the top of the table that had been separating me from the others, and abruptly added myself to the conversation.

The conversation walked the edge of turning into an unpleasant blame game of asking who the last one to return home last night was and who forgot to lock the door? Then it expanded to a discussion of daily crime prevention awareness and even resigning ourselves to the fact that we live in Tokyo city, crime central. [116] During this, there were any number of times when someone would say “Are we sure nothing was stolen?”¹⁰⁷ and everyone would hurriedly return to their own rooms, then slowly return to their seats with mutters of “Looks like nothing was stolen

¹⁰⁶ I am not sure what their expressions are supposed to be saying. Is it like they’re looking for a chance to move the blame to her?

¹⁰⁷ I am unsure about comma placement around this quotation

after all” and “Even the 500-yen coins are here.” Meanwhile, we decided that in case he came back later to steal things and we had to report it to the police, we should draw a picture of what he looked like. Since I had been with him the longest (and was practically being treated like a criminal because of it), I described to Mirai, the professional illustrator, the particulars of his face. When we looked at the final picture, Naohi-kun said, “I thought this when I saw him here earlier, but he definitely looks like someone.” So we ended up spending some time talking about whom he might look like.

Mirai was the first to say, “Hey, doesn’t he look like the guy from the movie ‘Melody’¹⁰⁸?” Certainly, when someone says it, it isn’t like he doesn’t look like him. However, he wasn’t the age of the guy from the movie. That was the only point on which we all agreed. Come to think of it, just how old was that boy? After we discussed it for a while, we reached the conclusion that Satoru-kun was a seventeen-year-old high school junior.

Having decided his age, we once again brought up the question of why he was here. In the middle of this, Naohi-kun and Mirai started to open up some wine, but Ryosuke-kun and I swiped it from them.

“Normally, wouldn’t he have run while I was in the toilet?” Naohi-kun said.

“Yeah, why would a thief purposely go back to sleep and wait until Koto-chan woke up?” [117] Ryosuke-kun had a point.

“Hey, are you sure Mirai didn’t just get drunk and bring him home?” I brought up the oft-repeated opinion once again.

“I said that’s not true!” she denied, but also said, “Besides, why would a seventeen-year-old boy come along with me?” and lifted her chin a little with pride.

“Yesterday evening, where were you drinking?”

Mirai, looking as if she were tracing out the distant past, slowly started talking about what she did last night. “Last night I had the night shift, so I was at the store until closing time, and it was probably 9 o’clock when I left. My boss said ‘Let’s go get food,’ so we went to an Okinawan-style restaurant in Akasaka, you know, I went there before with you, Naohi-kun?”

“That place where the bitter melon wasn’t bitter?”

“There’s such a thing as bitter melon that isn’t bitter?”

“Ugh! Forget about that, so next, after the Okinawan-style place, what did you do next?”

¹⁰⁸ Wikipedia tells me that this is the movie’s English name

“After that...oh, that’s right, I ended up drinking a lot there, a lot of rice brandy. It was pretty strong stuff.¹⁰⁹ So then, my boss and I went to a bar in Shimokita, you know, Ryosuke-kun’s friend works there part-time...”

“‘Blocky’?”¹¹⁰

“Yeah yeah. So there, I drank some vodka¹¹¹. And then, Marine Mama¹¹² happened to come in, and she said, ‘Oh my, what are you doing here, it’s been ever so long’ and we went straight to her shop in Shinjuku district 2.”

[118] “And?”

“So, after that is a little vague...or should I say I don’t remember...”

“See, you definitely met that boy there and brought him home with you.”

“I told you that didn’t happen. I even called Marine Mama earlier and asked, and she said, ‘There wasn’t any boy like that. After 2 o’clock you left, being held up by Laura and Silver.’”

“Is Laura the one who looks like that Mudou Oda guy¹¹³?” Ryosuke-kun asked.

“That’s terrible, you shouldn’t say that! She’s pretty self-conscious about that,” Mirai scolded him.

“So basically, I went to play pachinko with some thief?” I slowly started to feel fear. I said ‘come back some time’ to a thief?

The conversation had gone around in circles again, and finally even reached the point of bringing up the legend of brownie fairies.¹¹⁴ It felt like everyone had sort of given up on this conversation and would settle for such a doubtful theory. At any rate, dawn was breaking, so we ended up deciding on taking turns in the bath. That was when the front door bell suddenly rang.

[119] Everyone abruptly sat back down, and we all looked at each other.

“You don’t think he could have come back?”

“No way.”

¹⁰⁹ I am not sure what ‘yokore’ means

¹¹⁰ Not sure about this name

¹¹¹ Am not sure about ‘gabu’

¹¹² The only thing I can find for ‘marine’ is marinade; is she some kind of cook?

¹¹³ I say ‘guy’ to make it clear that Oda Mudou is a man, so someone named ‘Laura’ probably shouldn’t resemble him

¹¹⁴ Do most people know what brownies are? I think brownies could be considered similar to zashiki warashi, since they are helpful household spirits

It's moments like this especially that I can feel very grateful for living with boys. Even as we confirmed, "Th-the door is locked, right?", the brave Naohi-kun took the lead to the door, with Ryosuke-kun following, and Mirai and me close behind with our arms tightly linked.

Naohi-kun peered through the peephole, then turned to us and whispered, "He, he's there, he's standing there." Ryosuke-kun grabbed a nearby umbrella, and as Mirai and I didn't have anything to grab, we just held our hands in karate chop position.

"Should I leap out and grab him?" Naohi-kun whispered. Ryosuke-kun signaled, 'go.' That was when it happened. From the other side of the door, we heard Satoru-kun's voice clearly¹¹⁵ calling, "Mirai-sa~n!"

"Huh? Me?" Mirai said without thinking, standing ready with her karate-posed hands.

Satoru-kun continued, "Kotomi-sa~n! Ryosuke-ku~n! Naohi-sa~n!" and repeatedly called out everyone's names.

Naohi-kun was the first to move. He opened the door with the chain still on, and asked directly, "I'm just going to ask straight out; yesterday morning, how did you get in here? Was the door unlocked?" [120]

From the other side of the door, Satoru-kun said hesitantly, "How? Mirai-san opened the door." On our side of the door, we all glared at Mirai. Of course I let go of Mirai's arm.

"That's a lie! A lie!" Mirai began a brand-new kind of acting. When I think about it, this is something that has happened any number of times. Mirai will get drunk and bring home someone who was drinking at the bar with her.

Naohi-kun had already unlocked the chain and opened the door. Mirai, not knowing when to quit, said, "Show me some proof! I want proof!", keeping up her terrible acting.

"I'm not sure what you want as proof..." Satoru-kun said, standing in the entranceway. "Oh, a person named Laura was also with us." When Ryosuke-kun asked, "What kind of person is Laura?", Satoru-kun replied, "She wore makeup and looked like Mudou Oda."

"Wh-where did we meet?!" It seemed that Mirai was determined to continue her awkward performance.

"Where? You remember, last night, I was standing in the park, and suddenly you said 'I fou~nd you!' and grabbed me, Mirai-san. I was desperately saying 'who are you? Please let me go,' but you dragged me along to a bar, remember?"

¹¹⁵ Is that what *aida no nukeru* means?

[121] "Laura was with us?"

"Until partway."

"So, I brought you all the way here?"

"Yes."

"Against your will?"

"You said if I didn't get in the taxi with you, you would scream. In the middle of the street in Yasukuni."

We had returned to the living room, feeling foolish. So in the end, after Mirai left Marine Mama's restaurant, she caught Satoru in the park, and after they went drinking together she forcibly brought him back here.

"So then, who wants the bath first?" Ryosuke-kun asked.

"It's Satoru-kun, right? All right, you come along," Naohi-kun beckoned, leaving me with Mirai (who was still feigning innocence). "It seems like she's going to keep practicing her act out here for a while. Just leave her alone," he said, taking Satoru-kun back to the living room.