

9



Domestic Girlfriend

KEI SASUGA

D O M E X G I R L

Domestic Girlfriend

9

D O M E
G I R L

KEI SASUGA

D O M E G I R L

9

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...YOU USED
TO DATE
FROM THIS
SCHOOL, BY
CHANCE?

SOME-
ONE...

CHAPTER 75: CONTEST



HUH
?!



YOU HAD A
GIRLFRIEND,
NAT-CHAN?!



MORE-
OVER,

SOMEONE
WHO WAS
AT THIS
SCHOOL
...



SORRY.

GIVE
US A
SEC.



WHERE
THE
HELL
...

...DID
YOU
HEAR
THAT
FROM
?



WHERE
?

STRAIGHT
FROM YOUR
MOUTH.



BAM



A TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP, HUH?

THAT'S QUITE A SCANDALOUS SECRET YOU HAVE.

...!



I WAS READING ANTHOLOGIES FROM PAST YEARS WHEN YOU CAME INTO THE ROOM YESTERDAY,

SO I OVERHEARD YOUR CONVERSATION.



WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO GAIN FROM THIS?

... AND?



WHY DON'T WE HAVE A LITTLE CONTEST?



INVOLVING
OUR FORTE,
NOVELS.

YES.

A CON-
TEST?



HOWEVER,
THERE'S
NOTHING
EXCITING
ABOUT JUST
COMPARING
OUR
SCORES.

HMM
...

WE'LL BOTH
ENTER A
PIECE, AND
WHOEVER
RANKS
HIGHER
WINS THE
MATCH.

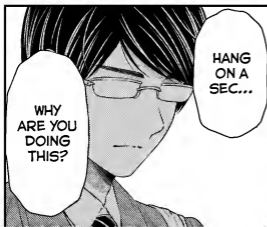
THE AMATEUR
SUBMISSIONS
DEADLINE FOR
THE SPRING
EDITION OF
BUNGEIKATO
IS AT THE END
OF THIS MONTH.



BUT IF
YOU DON'T
ACCEPT MY
CHALLENGE,
I'LL JUST
EXPOSE YOUR
SECRET TO
THE WORLD.

WELL,

IT MAY
SEEM
LIKE I'M
GIVING
YOU AN
OPTION,



WHY
ARE YOU
DOING
THIS?

HANG
ON A
SEC...



LET'S SAY
WHOEVER
LOSES...

...MUST
NEVER
PICK UP
A PEN
AGAIN.



ALL I
COULD
THINK
WAS,

"WHY DID
THIS WIN
FIRST
PRIZE?"

Amateur Division
First Prize

Well, See You.

Natsuo Fujii

I READ
YOUR PIECE
THAT WON
SHINKO-
SHA'S
LITERARY
AWARD...

...IN THE
PUBLISHED
EDITION
OF THE
MAGAZINE.



...

I JUST
COULDN'T
ACCEPT IT.



BY
COMPETING
WITH YOU,
SEMPAI,

I TRIED
TO ASCERTAIN
IF YOUR SKILL
WAS AUTHENTIC
BY READING
THE CLUB
ANTHOLOGY,
BUT YOUR PAST
WORK WAS
SUBSTANDARD
AT BEST.

I COULD
ONLY ASSUME
THERE'D
BEEN SOME
KIND OF
MISTAKE.

SINCE YOU
HADN'T WON
ANY AWARDS
PRIOR,



WHAT'S
GOING ON
HERE?



...



...YOUR
SUCCESS
WAS
NOTHING
BUT A
FLUKE.

I HOPE
TO PROVE
THAT...



IT LOOKED LIKE YOU WERE HAVING A BIT OF A DISPUTE TO ME.

N-
NO REASON ...

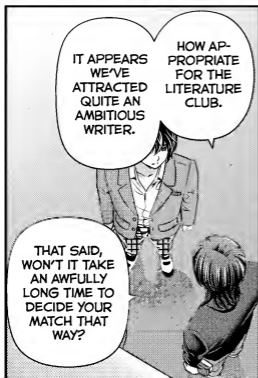


WHY ARE YOU TWO TALKING OUT IN THE HALL?



...IF HE'D LIKE TO SUBMIT FOR AN AWARD WITH ME.

I WAS JUST ASKING SEMPAI ...



IT APPEARS WE'VE ATTRACTED QUITE AN AMBITIOUS WRITER.

HOW APPROPRIATE FOR THE LITERATURE CLUB.

THAT SAID, WON'T IT TAKE AN AWFULLY LONG TIME TO DECIDE YOUR MATCH THAT WAY?



I SEE ...

A SUBMISSIONS CONTEST, HUH?



YOU'LL BOTH WRITE THE SAME GENRE, FORMAT, AND LENGTH.

RATHER THAN SUBMIT FOR AN AWARD, WE'LL HAVE THE LITERATURE CLUB MEMBERS READ BOTH PIECES AND DECIDE WHICH IS SUPERIOR.

WHAT SAY WE DO THIS?

IN ORDER TO PREVENT BIAS, NAMES WILL BE KEPT ANONYMOUS.



SOUND GOOD?

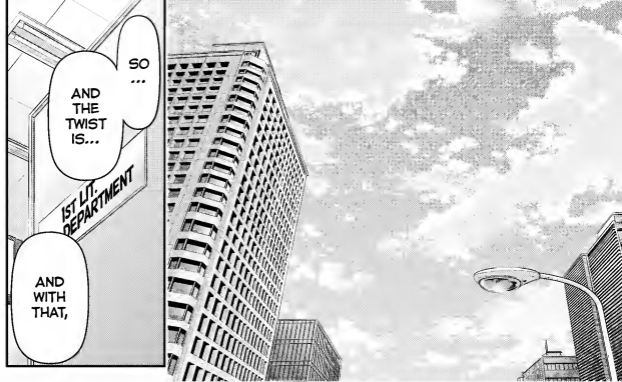
THIS WAY, YOU WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT AMBIGUITY OVER WHO WINS OR LOSES IN THE EVENT YOU BOTH RECEIVE THE SAME AWARD.

WHILE THEY AREN'T PROFESSIONAL JUDGES, OUR MEMBERS ARE ALL AVID READERS AND YOUR SO-CALLED "TARGET AUDIENCE."



WELL ...

AS LONG AS THE CONTEST IS FAIR...



AND THE TWIST IS...

SO ...

AND WITH THAT,



SERIOUSLY ?

ALL REJECT-ED! ♥



WHAT'S UP? TESTS?

OH, RIGHT. ABOUT OUR NEXT MEETING.

IS IT OKAY IF WE POSTPONE IT A LITTLE?

TRY TO WRITE WITH THAT IN MIND NEXT TIME.

YOUR WORK IS CONSISTENT OVERALL, BUT IT DOESN'T REALLY HAVE A SELLING POINT.

OKAY ...

MY FIFTH FAILED SUB-MISSION!



SOUNDS FUN!

OOH!

A LITERARY SHOWDOWN, HUH?!



NO.

BLAH
BLAH
YAYDA
YAYDA

SOME-
THING
JUST
CAME UP
WITH MY
CLUB...



OH, LET
ME READ
THAT PIECE
WHEN YOU
FINISH IT,
OKAY?

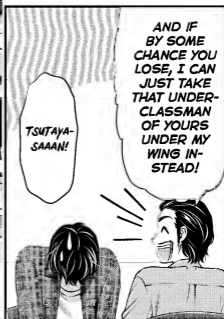
THAT MUCH
PRESSURE
IS JUST WHAT
YOU NEED
TO WRITE
BETTER!
PROBABLY,
ANYWAY.

I'LL HAVE TO
GIVE UP ON
WRITING IF I
LOSE, Y'KNOW.

IT'S
REALLY
NOT...



THIS
SUCKS
...



TSUTAYA-
SAAAAN!

AND IF
BY SOME
CHANCE YOU
LOSE, I CAN
JUST TAKE
THAT UNDER-
CLASSMAN
OF YOURS
UNDER MY
WING IN-
STEAD!



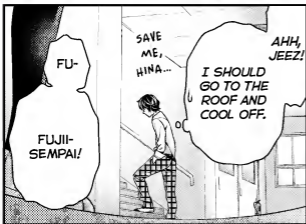
AND EVEN IF I WIN, HE'LL STILL HAVE DIRT ON ME.

SINCE HE HINTED AT MY RELATIONSHIP WITH SENSEI, IT'S KINDA HARD TO SHOW MY FACE AROUND CLUB, TOO.



WELL, ALL I CAN DO IS TRY MY BEST NOT TO LOSE, BUT STILL...

WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT THAT WINNING THAT AWARD WOULD COME BACK TO BITE ME LIKE THIS...



SAVE ME, HINA...

I SHOULD GO TO THE ROOF AND COOL OFF.

AHH, JEEZ!

FUJII-SEMPAI!



KABA-SAWA-SAN, RIGHT?

OH ...

UHH.

YES.

WHAT'S UP? NEED SOMETHING?







HON-ESTLY,

AND I THINK YOU SHOULD.

I THINK YOU'D BE ABLE TO JUST IGNORE THAT PROMISE, SEMPAI.

BUT THE LOSER HAS TO PUT THEIR PEN DOWN FOR GOOD, RIGHT?

YOU DIDN'T TELL THE REST OF US,



SO...

AS THE ONE WHO SUGGESTED IT, HIS PRIDE WILL PROBABLY KEEP HIM FROM WRITING EVER AGAIN.

BUT I DOUBT SHIBASAKI-KUN WILL ...



I WON'T FORCE YOU TO TALK IF YOU DON'T WANT TO.

...




...CLASSMATES WITH SHIBASAKI-KUN IN GRADE SCHOOL.

I WAS ...



YOU SAY THAT, KABASAWA-SAN?

WHAT MAKES ...



UPON ENTERING MIDDLE SCHOOL, HE ENROLLED IN A PRESTIGIOUS PRIVATE SCHOOL.

EVEN MY PARENTS TOLD ME I SHOULD, "AIM TO BE AS SMART AS SUBARU-KUN."



HE WAS POPULAR WITH EVERYONE.

PEOPLE EXPECTED HIM TO BECOME A FAMOUS AUTHOR OR CEO SOMEDAY.

SHIBASAKI-KUN ...

WAS A SMART, CHEERFUL BOY FROM A WELL-OFF FAMILY, AND A GOOD WRITER, TOO.



NOTICE



SHIBASAKI-KUN'S FATHER'S COMPANY WENT BANKRUPT.

BUT IN OUR SECOND YEAR OF MIDDLE SCHOOL,




IT SEEMED PEOPLE HAD TURNED ON HIM PRETTY BADLY AT HIS OLD SCHOOL.

HE KEPT UP HIS HOBBY OF WRITING, BUT...



...BUT IT WAS LIKE HE'D BECOME A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT PERSON.



SHIBASAKI-KUN TRANSFERRED TO THE SAME MIDDLE SCHOOL AS ME IN OUR THIRD YEAR.

ALL OUR OLD CLASSMATES WERE LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING HIM AGAIN...



HE SUBMITTED FOR AWARD AFTER AWARD AS IF CONSUMED BY VENGEANCE.

I'LL SHOW ALL THOSE PEOPLE WHO TREATED ME LIKE A FOOL!

I REFUSE TO END UP LIKE MY DAD!

INCLUDING THE AWARD YOU WON, SEMPAL...

Shinkosha
Literary Award



IT'S THE ONE THING KEEPING HIM TOGETHER.

THAT'S HOW STRONG HIS OBSESSION WITH NOVELS IS.

HE JUST COULDN'T ACCEPT THAT HIS EFFORTS WEREN'T REWARDED.

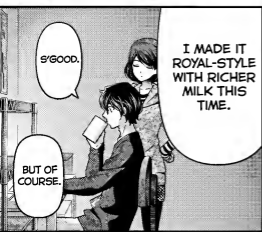
HE MUST HAVE BEEN SO FRUSTRATED TO PICK A FIGHT WITH YOU LIKE THIS.



THEN HE WON'T HAVE ANYTHING LEFT!



IF YOU TAKE AWAY WRITING FROM HIM, TOO,





NAH.

I
WOULDN'T
CALL IT
WRITER'S
BLOCK.

I JUST
HAVE A LOT
ON MY MIND,
I GUESS...



HEAVY.

WH-WHAT
ARE YOU
DOING?

THAT'S
MY LINE!

H-HER
CHEST
IS...

THE
MOOD.



HRGH.

ZOOCH
ZOOCH

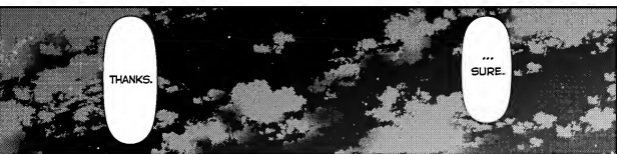


IF THINGS
GET OVER-
WHELMING,

I'LL BE
THERE TO
HELP.



DON'T TRY TO
SHOULDER
EVERYTHING
BY YOURSELF,
OKAY?

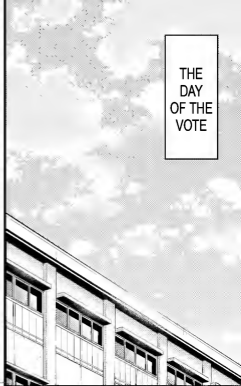
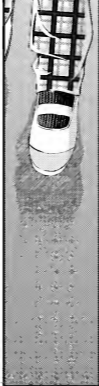


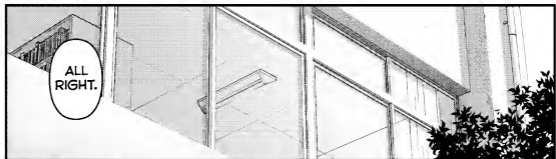
THANKS.


...
SURE.



THE
DAY
OF THE
VOTE







NEEDLESS
TO SAY,
NAMES HAVE
BEEN KEPT
ANONYMOUS,
SO THEY DO
NOT KNOW
WHO WROTE
WHICH PIECE.

WERE GIVEN
COPIES OF
THE WORKS
SUBMITTED
BY OUR TWO
CONTESTANTS
THIS MORNING
TO BE READ
DURING BREAKS
BETWEEN
CLASSES.

THE CLUB
MEMBERS,
ALL OF WHOM
HAVE AGREED
TO ACT AS
JUDGES,



...WILL BE
BASED
PURELY ON
THE CONTENT
OF THE
STORIES.



THE
JUDGING
...



ONCE
YOU'VE
DONE THAT,
PLACE
YOUR
VOTES IN
THIS BOX.

BASED ON YOUR
IMPRESSIONS,
PLEASE WRITE
THE NAME OF
THE STORY YOU
FELT WAS BETTER
ON THE PAPER
PROVIDED.



*THEY
WERE
NEAT!*

THE
GENRE
WAS
SCI-FI,

AND THE
RULES
CALLED
FOR SHORT
STORIES
NO LONGER
THAN 5,000
WORDS.



I FELT
LIKE I WAS
TRANSPORTED
TO THE
FUTURE.



Yes, sir!

MATSUKAWA-KUN,
BRING THE
WHITEBOARD,
PLEASE.

I BELIEVE
THAT'S
EVERYONE.



THESE
ARE...

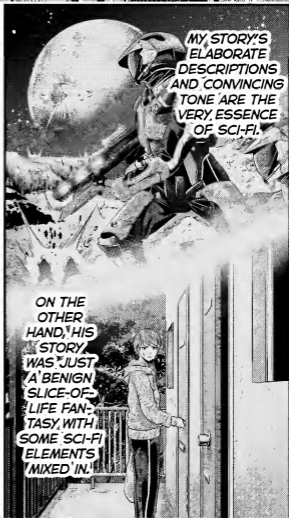
"The Rules
of Interstellar
Warfare"
Subaru Shibasaki

"The Visitor
Next Door"
Natsuo Fujii

...THE
AUTHORS
OF THEIR
RESPECTIVE
WORKS.







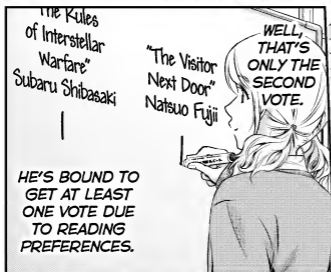


The Visitor
Next Door
Natsuo Fujii

THE
VISITOR
NEXT
DOOR,



TCH



The Rules
of Interstellar
Warfare
Subaru Shibusaki

"The Visitor
Next Door"
Natsuo Fujii

WELL,
THAT'S
ONLY THE
SECOND
VOTE.

HE'S BOUND TO
GET AT LEAST
ONE VOTE DUE
TO READING
PREFERENCES.



THE
VISITOR
NEXT
DOOR,

NATSUO
FUJII.

FROM HERE ON
OUT, HE WON'T
BE ABLE TO
TOUCH ME.

NATSUO
FUJII.





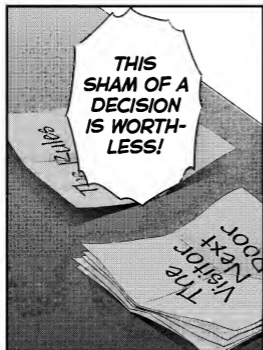
I DIDN'T SEE NAT-CHAN AT ALL TODAY BEFORE COMING HERE.

WE HONESTLY DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING...

7
RSTL#

THE VISITOR NEXT DOOR,
NATSUO FUJII.

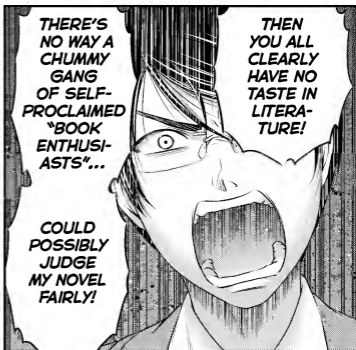
...



THIS SHAM OF A DECISION IS WORTHLESS!

The Rules

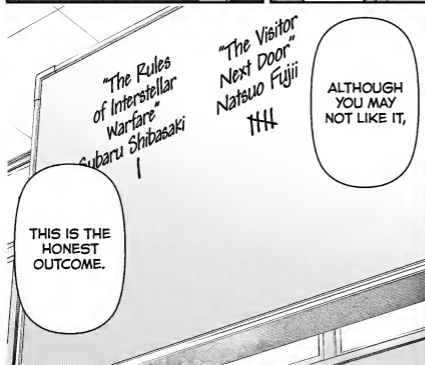
The Visitor Next Door



THERE'S NO WAY A CHUMMY GANG OF SELF-PROCLAIMED "BOOK ENTHUSIASTS"...

THEN YOU ALL CLEARLY HAVE NO TASTE IN LITERATURE!

COULD POSSIBLY JUDGE MY NOVEL FAIRLY!



"The Rules of Interstellar Warfare"
Subaru Shibasaki

"The Visitor Next Door"
Natsuo Fujii


THIS IS THE HONEST OUTCOME.

ALTHOUGH YOU MAY NOT LIKE IT,



ARE YOU FINISHED?

...



IT ALL COMES DOWN TO FLESHING OUT YOUR CHARACTERS.

THOUGH YOU CALLED IT A SHAM,

I CAN'T HELP BUT AGREE WITH THE RESULTS.

THERE WERE NO MESSAGES HIDDEN IN THE MANUSCRIPTS, NOR ANY TAMPERING WITH THE VOTES.

THE CONTEST WAS HELD FAIR AND SQUARE.

WERE I ALSO A CLUB MEMBER, I WOULD HAVE VOTED FOR FUJII-KUN, AS WELL.

STORIES ARE WRITTEN AND READ BY PEOPLE.

HOWEVER, BECAUSE YOU WERE SO FOCUSED ON THE SETTING, YOUR DEPICTION OF THE CHARACTERS ENDED UP FEELING SHALLOW.

YOUR STORY'S MINUTE DETAILS AND ELABORATE WORLD WERE IMPRESSIVE.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT LITERATURE?!

HAH!

BIG TALK, COMING FROM A LOWLY JAPANESE TEACHER.

IN THAT REGARD, WHILE THE SCALE OF FUJII-KUN'S STORY WAS SMALL, HIS CHARACTERIZATION WAS ON POINT.



YOU KNOW I'M RIGHT!

WH-

WHAT?!



SILENCE



KIRIYA-SENSEI WORKS AS A NOVELIST ON THE SIDE.

UM ...

HE'S THE BIGGEST EXPERT HERE.



W H A A A ?!

YEAH, THAT'S THE REACTION YOU'D EXPECT.



...IS YOU HASU-KAWA.



HUH?!

I DON'T KNOW ANY AUTHORS NAMED KIRIYA...

THAT'S BECAUSE HE USES A PSEUDONYM.

HIS PEN NAME ...



OH.

YEAH.

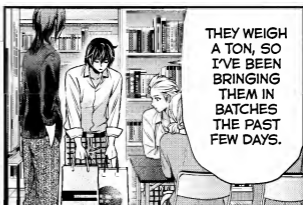
"The Rules
Interstella
Parfare"
ru Shiba

Visitor
door"
Fujii

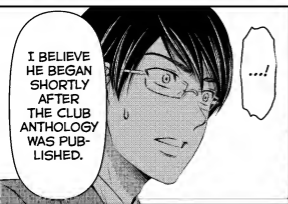
FUJII-KUN,
DID YOU
BRING WHAT
I ASKED
YOU TO?



FUMP



THEY WEIGH
A TON, SO
I'VE BEEN
BRINGING
THEM IN
BATCHES
THE PAST
FEW DAYS.

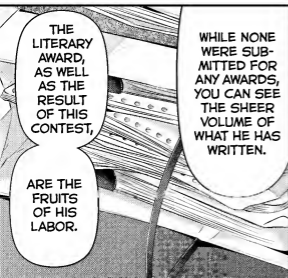


I BELIEVE
HE BEGAN
SHORTLY
AFTER
THE CLUB
ANTHOLOGY
WAS PUBLISHED.

...!



THESE
ARE ALL THE
SHORT STORIES
FUJII-KUN HAS
BEEN WRITING
SINCE FALL OF
LAST YEAR.



THE
LITERARY
AWARD,
AS WELL
AS THE
RESULT
OF THIS
CONTEST,

ARE THE
FRUITS
OF HIS
LABOR.

WHILE NONE
WERE SUB-
MITTED FOR
ANY AWARDS,
YOU CAN SEE
THE SHEER
VOLUME OF
WHAT HE HAS
WRITTEN.



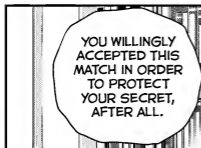
OH, YEAH.

ABOUT THE CONDITION THE LOSER HAS TO FOLLOW ...



ARE YOU PRAISING ME OR INSULTING ME? MAKE UP YOUR MIND...

WELL, WITHOUT MY GUIDANCE, HE'D LIKELY STILL BE A NAIVE BOY CLINGING TO SICKENINGLY SWEET FANTASIES.

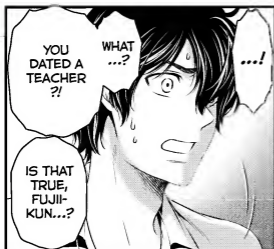


YOU WILLINGLY ACCEPTED THIS MATCH IN ORDER TO PROTECT YOUR SECRET, AFTER ALL.



"THE LOSER MUST NEVER PICK UP A PEN AGAIN."

DON'T WORRY, I'LL KEEP MY WORD.



YOU DATED A TEACHER?!

WHAT ...?

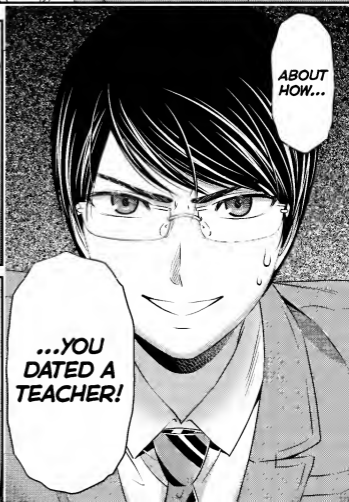
...!

IS THAT TRUE, FUJII-KUN...?



I ASSUME YOU'RE REFERRING TO WHAT EVERYONE WAS GOSSIPING ABOUT BEFORE?

AHH ...



ABOUT HOW...

...YOU DATED A TEACHER!



HUH?
A GAME?

A
DAT-
ING
SIM?



...DO
YOU
MEAN
THIS?

BY ANY
CHANCE
...

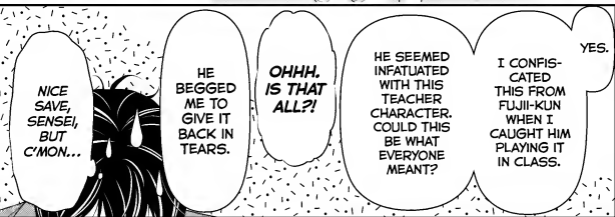
1 Cool beauties.

2 Kind and honest girls.

3 Someone like you.



What sort of girls do you like?



NICE
SAVE,
SENSEI,
BUT
C'MON...

HE
BEGGED
ME TO
GIVE IT
BACK IN
TEARS.

OHhh.
IS THAT
ALL?!

HE SEEMED
INFATUATED
WITH THIS
TEACHER
CHARACTER.
COULD THIS
BE WHAT
EVERYONE
MEANT?

I CONFIS-
CATED
THIS FROM
FUJII-KUN
WHEN I
CAUGHT HIM
PLAYING IT
IN CLASS.

YES.



ハクツ...!
SLUMP

N-NO
WAY...

...TO THIS
HAPPY-
GO-LUCKY
LOSER.

I CAN'T
BELIEVE
I LOST...



INSIDE THE GAME ← DATED

GOT
CONFISCATED ← TRANSFERRED

FOR IT TO BE
RETURNED ← WAITING
FOREVER

SHAKE
SHAKE
SHAKE



NOW THAT I'VE WON AND HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR ANYMORE, I'LL DECIDE YOUR FATE.

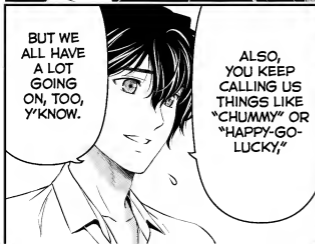
THE CONDITION WAS THAT THE LOSER HAS TO GIVE UP WRITING,

BUT THAT WAS TOO ONE-SIDED.



YOUR PUNISHMENT...

...IS TO JOIN THE LITERATURE CLUB.



BUT WE ALL HAVE A LOT GOING ON, TOO, Y'KNOW.

ALSO, YOU KEEP CALLING US THINGS LIKE "CHUMMY" OR "HAPPY-GO-LUCKY!"



I'M SURE IT'LL SPICE THINGS UP AROUND HERE IF A SKILLED WRITER LIKE YOU JOINS.

HUH ?



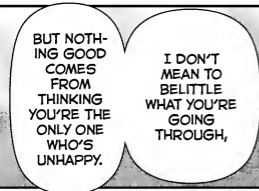
OR FRUSTRATION FROM NEVER HAVING YOUR HARD WORK REWARDED.



REGRET FROM FAILED LOVE ENDEAVORS,



WHETHER IT'S LONELINESS FROM LIVING IN AN EMPTY HOME,



BUT NOTHING GOOD COMES FROM THINKING YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO'S UNHAPPY.

I DON'T MEAN TO BELITTLE WHAT YOU'RE GOING THROUGH,



BUT EVERYONE HAS PROBLEMS.

WE MIGHT SEEM CARE-FREE,



...



IF YOU SPEND MORE TIME WITH PEOPLE INSTEAD OF ISOLATING YOURSELF,

I THINK YOU'LL BE ABLE TO WRITE EVEN BETTER STORIES, TOO.





BY THE WAY, SENSEI.

DID YOU ...

WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT SOMETHING I CONFISCATED FROM ANOTHER STUDENT WOULD COME IN HANDY LIKE THIS?

NO PROBLEM.

THANKS FOR THE HELP.

IT'S ACTUALLY PRETTY FUN.

YOU PLAYED IT?

...KNOW ABOUT US?



SO I THOUGHT I'D COME UP WITH SOME SORT OF COUNTER-MEASURE.

TRUTH BE TOLD, I OVERHEARD YOU AND SHIBASAKI-KUN ARGUING THAT DAY,

I WAS CONCERNED HOW YOU'D FARE FOLLOWING TACHIBANA-SENSEI'S TRANSFER.

MORE OR LESS.



I...SEE.

IN THAT CASE, YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO WORK HARDER AND MAKE YOUR DREAM COME TRUE THAT MUCH QUICKER.

LEFT WITH-OUT TELLING ANYONE TO PROTECT MY DREAM OF BECOMING A NOVELIST.

HINA... TACHIBANA-SENSEI...

THAT'S WHY, I DON'T THINK I SHOULD SEE HER AS I AM NOW...

ANY WORD ON HER WHERE-ABOUTS SINCE?



TAKE CARE.

BYE.

BYE,
SENSEI!



YES.



HER HAIR.

WHAT DOES
?

IT ALMOST
FEELS LIKE
A WASTE,
HUH?



I LIKE IT.
I THINK
IT'S A RE-
FRESHING
LOOK FOR
HER.

YEAH
?



CHAPTER 77: REUNION







WOO-HOO!

CLACK



MURATA'S OFF TO A GOOD START THIS SEASON.

GO, GO, GO!



I SHOULD APOLOGIZE FOR INCONVENIENCING YOU.

NO... I'M THE ONE WHO SHOWED UP OUT OF THE BLUE.



BUT THE SASHIMI IS REALLY GOOD.

SORRY. THIS IS THE ONLY PLACE AROUND HERE OPEN THIS LATE.



EVERYWHERE FOR YOU.

I LOOKED ...



I FRANTICALLY CALLED AROUND TO EVERY SCHOOL IN THE CITY,

SINCE I KNEW YOU WERE PROBABLY ALL ALONE.

CONSIDERING THE WEIRD TIMING AND THE FACT THAT NOBODY WAS TOLD WHERE YOU WENT, I FIGURED SOMETHING HAD TO HAVE HAPPENED.

KIRIYA-SEMPAI TOLD ME YOU WERE TRANSFERRED RIGHT BEFORE WINTER BREAK.

YES.

IT'S EXACTLY AS YOU THINK.

...



DOES IT HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH HIM?

WITH NATSUOKUN?

WHAT HAPPENED?

THIS TRANSFER IS MY PUNISHMENT.

FRANKLY, I WAS PREPARED TO BE FIRED.

THE CONDITIONS FOR KEEPING OUR RELATIONSHIP CONFIDENTIAL WERE BREAKING IT OFF AND ACCEPTING A RELOCATION.

...AND I ENDED UP GETTING HIM INVOLVED.

MY IMMATURETY GOT THE BETTER OF ME...



...IT'S OKAY.

YOU DON'T ...

HAVE TO FORCE YOURSELF TO SMILE.



I'M ACTUALLY DOING WELL, ALL THINGS CONSIDERED.

NO NEED TO WORRY ABOUT ME.

WHAT, DID YOU THINK I DIED?

AND I CHANGED MY NUMBER, SO NO ONE CAN REACH ME.



I NEED TO THANK YOU.

SHUU-SAN.

...



I'M REALLY GRATEFUL.

IF...

IF WE'D ENDED UP DATING AT THE TIME, I PROBABLY WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO RESTRAIN MYSELF,

BUT BECAUSE YOU MATURELY HANDLED THE SITUATION AS "HAGIWARA-SENSEI," I'M ABLE TO WORK AS A TEACHER TODAY.

YOU FELT THE SAME AS I DID BACK THEN, DIDN'T YOU?

WHEN I WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL,

YOU KEPT OUR RELATIONSHIP THAT OF A TEACHER AND STUDENT.







I WANT
TO HELP
YOU IN
ANY WAY
I CAN!

IT'S
OKAY TO
RELY ON
OTHERS
WHEN
THINGS
GET
ROUGH!

WHY
DO YOU
ALWAYS
TRY TO
BEAR
EVERY-
THING BY
YOUR-
SELF?!



GRIP

...



NATSUO-KUN...

BUT,

IS STILL
IN MY
HEART.

IT WAS
REALLY
PAINFUL
BREAKING
UP AND
CUTTING
ALL
CONTACT
WITH HIM.

I CRIED
NEARLY
EVERY
NIGHT.



THANK
YOU,
SHUU-
SAN.

I APPRECI-
ATE YOUR
CONCERN.

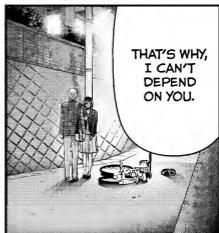


HE MIGHT
FALL IN LOVE
WITH SOME-
ONE ELSE.

HE'S
STILL
YOUNG,
YOU
KNOW.

YOU'RE
GOING TO
HOLD ON
TO HIM
FOREVER
?

EVEN
THEN
?



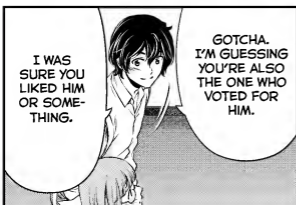
THAT'S WHY,
I CAN'T
DEPEND
ON YOU.





SO, SHIBASAKI'S
DAD'S COMPANY
WAS ONE OF YOUR
DAD'S CLIENTS?

HUH
...



I WAS
SURE YOU
LIKED HIM
OR SOME-
THING.

GOTCHA.
I'M GUESSING
YOU'RE ALSO
THE ONE WHO
VOTED FOR
HIM.



YES.

MY FATHER IS A
CHIEF CLERK AT
A BANK AND DID
EVERYTHING HE
COULD TO SAVE
THE SHIBASAKI
PLANT, BUT...



OH, YEAH?
WHY ARE YOU
BLUSHING,
THEN?

**N-NO,
IT'S NOT
LIKE THAT
AT ALL!**

EVEN IF IT
WASN'T HIS
FAULT THE
COMPANY
FOLDED, I
COULDN'T
HELP BUT FEEL
A LITTLE RE-
SPONSIBLE.





CAN I HAVE YOUR AUTOGRAPH?



BESIDES, IT ISN'T FAIR THAT YOU HAD YOU HASUKAWA-SENSEI'S GUIDANCE ALL ALONG! I'M DEFINITELY BETTER IN TERMS OF RAW TALENT!

WHAT'S SO FUNNY?!

PICK AN ATTITUDE AND STICK WITH IT!



WERE YOU JUST NERVOUS?!

WHAT THE HELL?! I THOUGHT YOU WERE GONNA JUMP HIM!



SO MAKE SURE THIS DOESN'T LEAVE THE CLUBROOM, ALL RIGHT?

FOR THE RECORD, I KEEP THAT A SECRET AT SCHOOL!



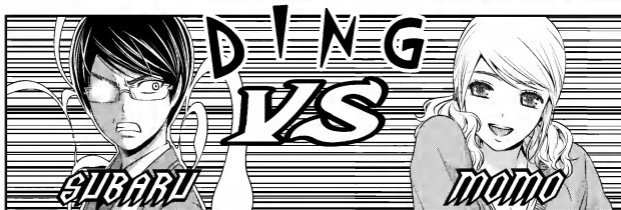
WHAT'S WITH YOU PEOPLE?! THIS IS YOU HASUKAWA IN THE FLESH, YOU KNOW!



I SAID I DON'T WANT A NICKNAME! I SWEAR, WHAT A CRUDE GROUP.

BARU-CHAN. ♡

THEN WHAT ABOUT BARU-CHAN?



Subaru

Momo



...SO WE CAN GET TO KNOW YOU BETTER, SUBARU-KUN. ♡

WE JUST WANNA GIVE YOU A NICK-NAME...



AWW ...

DON'T BE LIKE THAT.



SURE THEY DOOO.



TH-THAT'S JUST YOUR IMAGINATION!

NICK-NAMES DON'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE!



I MEAN, NICKNAMES MAKE YOU FEEL WAY CLOSER ...

...THAN JUST CALLING EACH OTHER BY YOUR REGULAR NAME, RIGHT?



CALL IT A BATTLE OF NICKNAMES.

WHAT'S GOING ON?



WHAT? I'M NOT DOING ANYTHING.

C-CUT THAT OUT!



"MOMOTAN" IS FINE, TOO. ♥

YOU DON'T HAVE TO CALL ME "SEMPAI."

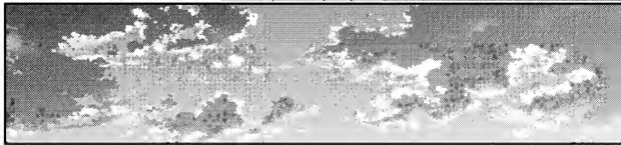
OKAY?

BA ♥ RU ♥



C'MOON.

YOU CAN CALL ME WHATEVER YOU WANT, TOO. ♥



OH, YEAH. I'M GONNA STOP BY THE BOOKSTORE. WANNA COME?

I'M GOOD. I HAVE TO GET DINNER READY.

OKAY.



GOOD THING KIRIYASENSEI WASN'T THERE THIS TIME.

NO KIDDING.

MOMO WILL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES, HUH?





CHAPTER 78: WAVERING DETERMINATION







CAN WE
CHAT FOR
A BIT?



IF IT'S
OKAY WITH
YOU,



TODAY'S
RECOMMEN-
DATION...

...IS A
KILIMAN-
JARO-
BASED
SPECIAL
BLEND.





HEY, NOW.

I'M JUST HERE TO MAKE SURE YOU DON'T START TROUBLE IN MY SHOP AGAIN.

WE'LL BE FINE.



AH!

IT HAS A VERY REFRESHING FLAVOR.

HOW IS IT?

WHY ARE YOU SITTING DOWN LIKE YOU BELONG HERE?



I WON'T!

QUIT IMITATING ME!

...AND SHOUTS SOMETHING LIKE, "DON'T MAKE SENSE! UNHAPPY!?"

WHAT IF HE GRABS YOU BY THE COLLAR ...

YOU NEVER KNOW.




I'M NOT THE SAME PERSON I WAS BACK THEN.



EVEN I THINK I ACTED PRETTY IMMATURE AT THE TIME.





THEN AGAIN,
I SUPPOSE I
HAVE DON'T
HAVE TO RE-
ASSURE YOU,

SEEING
AS YOU'VE
ALREADY
BROKEN UP.

OH, DON'T
WORRY.
WE'RE NOT
IN TOUCH
OR ANY-
THING.

I ONLY
SEARCHED
HER OUT
BECAUSE
I WAS
CONCERNED.



...HINA
DOING
WELL?

IS
...



AS THINGS
STAND,

HOW DO
YOU FEEL
ABOUT
HINA-CHAN
NOW?



TELL ME,
NATSUO-
KUN.



...

CLINK



NOT A SINGLE DAY PASSES WHEN I DON'T THINK ABOUT HER.

MY FEELINGS FOR HER HAVEN'T CHANGED, OF COURSE.

AND YET YOU HAVEN'T TRIED LOOKING FOR HER?

"NOW?"



I...

UM...

AND HOW LONG WILL THAT TAKE?

HOW MANY YEARS?



I'M WORKING HARD TO DEBUT AS A WRITER AS SOON AS-

WELL,

I DID A RECEIVE A PRETTY BIG AWARD.



HINA LEFT IN ORDER TO PROTECT MY DREAM OF BECOMING A NOVELIST.

THAT'S WHY, I CAN'T IMAGINE SHE'D BE HAPPY IF I TRIED TO TRACK HER DOWN AS I AM NOW.

I THINK IF WE MEET AGAIN, IT SHOULD BE AFTER I MAKE MY DREAM COME TRUE.



AND
WHAT IF
YOUR
HARD
WORK
NEVER
PAYS
OFF?



...HAVE
TO KEEP
WAITING
FOR YOU
FOREVER?

SHOULD
HINA-
CHAN
REALLY
...



OH,
RIGHT.

TO ANSWER
YOUR
QUESTION
ABOUT
HOW SHE'S
DOING.

SHE'S
DOING
FINE.

HOW-
EVER,



...



SORRY,
SORRY.

I JUST
WANTED
TO HEAR
HOW YOU
FELT.

I DON'T
MEAN TO
PUT YOU
ON THE
SPOT.



...SHE'S
ALREADY
OVER
YOU.

IT
SEEMS
THAT
...



SHE'S
SETTLED
DOWN
AND IS
ENJOYING
HER NEW
LIFE.

WELL,
IT SOUNDED
LIKE SHE
WAS TORN
APART IN THE
BEGINNING,

BUT TIME
HEALS ALL
WOUNDS.



SHE HARDLY
EVEN THINKS
ABOUT YOU
THESE DAYS.

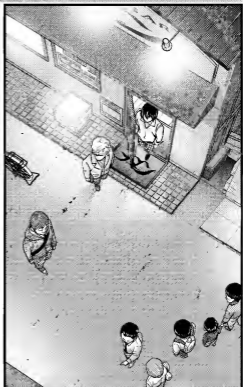
SHE SAID
SHE'S
BEEN
SO BUSY
THAT...

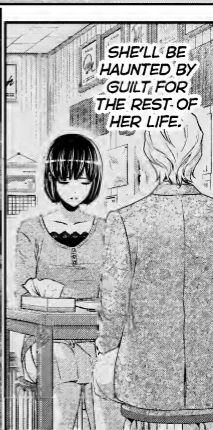
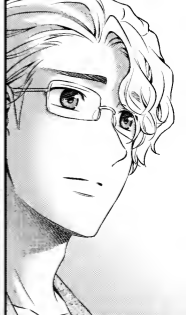
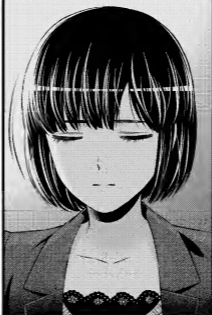


HUH
...?

...THAT
RIGHT?

IS...







I'M HOME.



OH...
I RAN INTO
SOMEONE
I KNOW AND
WE ENDED
UP CHATTING
FOR A WHILE.

WEL-
COME
BACK.
WHAT
TOOK
YOU SO
LONG?



NAH, IT'S
NOTHING.

I'M JUST
A LITTLE
TALKED
OUT.

HUH
?

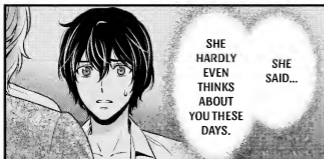
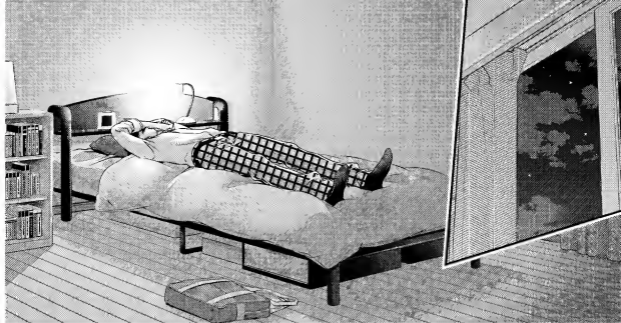
WHAT'S
UP? DID
SOME-
THING
HAPPEN?



SORRY,
BUT I
DON'T
NEED
DINNER
...

I'M PRETTY
TIRED, SO
I'M JUST
GONNA
GO TO
BED.

WRAP IT
UP AND
I'LL EAT IT
TOMORROW.

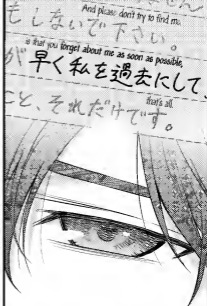


BUT WHAT IF
HINA DOESN'T
FEEL THE
SAME WAY?

WHAT IF SHE
REALLY HAS
MOVED ON?



ALL THIS
TIME, I'VE
BEEN
WORKING
WITH THE
HOPES OF
BEING WITH
HINA AGAIN
SOMEDAY.





WHEN DID YOU SNEAK IN HERE?!



YOU SCARED THE SHIT OUTTA ME!

HUH ?!
WHA-



I TOLD YOU, I'LL EAT TOMORROW ...

I'M NOT HUNGRY RIGHT NOW.



WELL, THE SWEET AND SOUR PORK CAME OUT REALLY GOOD.

TRY IT.



YOU WON'T FEEL BETTER UNLESS YOU EAT!

NO BUTS.

FWUP

!



YUM ...

EVEN IF YOU DON'T HAVE AN APPETITE, GOING HUNGRY WILL ONLY MAKE YOU FEEL WORSE.



THIS IS KINDA FUN.

I CARRIED IT UP HERE, ANYWAY.



ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT. I'LL GO EAT...

IT'S FINE. YOU CAN LIE THERE.



YEAH.

GOOD, RIGHT?

IT'D BE A SHAME NOT TO EAT IT FRESH, RIGHT?

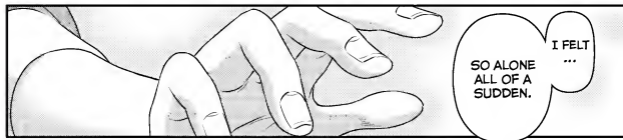
YES, MA'AM.





I RAN
INTO
HAGIWARA-
SAN
EARLIER.

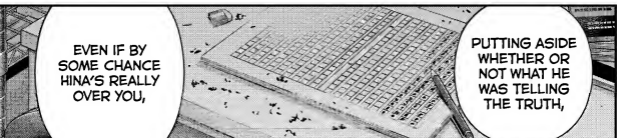
HE
TOLD
ME
ABOUT
HINA.





SURE

...



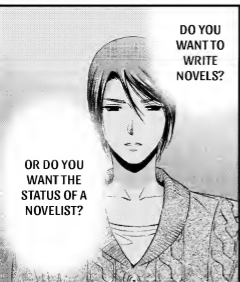
EVEN IF BY
SOME CHANCE
HINA'S REALLY
OVER YOU,

PUTTING ASIDE
WHETHER OR
NOT WHAT HE
WAS TELLING
THE TRUTH,



I RATHER
LIKE YOUR
STORIES.

...



DO YOU
WANT TO
WRITE
NOVELS?

OR DO YOU
WANT THE
STATUS OF A
NOVELIST?



WOULD
THAT STOP
YOU...

...FROM
BECOMING
A NOVELIST
?



...TO MAKE
YOU LOSE
YOUR MOTI-
VATION,

IF THAT'S
ENOUGH...



THEN
FROM
NOW
ON,

YOU CAN
JUST KEEP
WRITING
FOR MY
SAKE.

CHAPTER 79: BUDDING FEELINGS?





YE-

YEAH
...



I'M HOME!



I-

I'M ONE
OF YOUR
READERS,
TOO,
RIGHT?

AND
NOVELISTS
WRITE
FOR AN
AUDIENCE,
RIGHT?

SO, LIKE,
I'M SAYING
YOU SHOULD
FOCUS ON
MORE THAN
JUST MAKING
YOUR OWN
DREAM COME
TRUE. KNOW
WHAT I
MEAN?



ER...

NO,
WAIT.

I
MEAN
...



BUT
MAKE
SURE
YOU AT
LEAST
TAKE A
BATH,
OKAY?!

A-ANY-
WAY!

YOU'RE
FREE TO
MOPE
AROUND
ALL YOU
WANT,



I WON'T...

...HOLD
BACK FOR
HINA-NEE
ANYMORE.



WHAT
TIME
IS IT?

AH
...

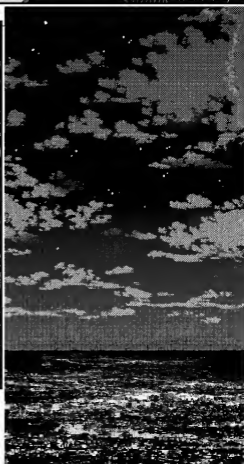
CRAP...
DID I DOZE
OFF?

I BETTER
TAKE A
BATH...



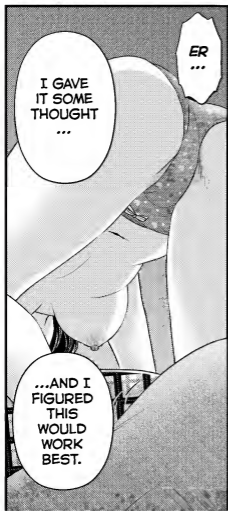
CLACK,
CLACK?

...OR
RUI'S
GONNA-





W H O A !



I GAVE
IT SOME
THOUGHT
...

ER
...

...AND I
FIGURED
THIS
WOULD
WORK
BEST.



OUR
PARENTS
ARE
ASLEEP.

I WANTED
TO DO
SOME-
THING TO
CHEER
YOU UP.

HUH
?!

WHA-



SO THEY MIGHT BE A LITTLE UNDERWHELMING, BUT...

I KNOW ...

MY BOOBS AREN'T AS BIG AS HINA'S,



IT'S BEEN SO LONG, I'M GONNA BLOW ANY-

AHH ...



OH, SHIT...

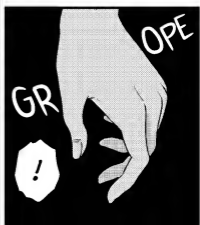
HOLD UP.

DON'T TOUCH ME LIKE THAT.



HNN ...

MMF ...

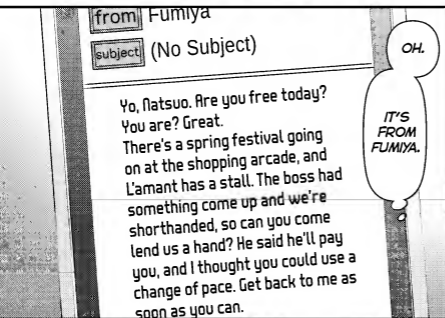


OPE

GR

!







OH!

HEY,
RUI-
CHAN!
YOU
CAME,
TOO?



HUH
...

I USED
TO COME
ALL THE
TIME UNTIL
MIDDLE
SCHOOL.

I DIDN'T
KNOW
ABOUT
THIS
FESTIVAL.



NAT-
SUO!

I DIDN'T
KNOW
L'AMANT
WAS
RUNNING
A STALL,
THOUGH.



YOU CAN
CHANGE IN
THE BACK
OF THE
SHOP.

WHERE
DID THE
OWNER
RUN OFF
TO?

HERE
ARE YOUR
SHIRTS AND
APRONS.



I WAS FREE,
SO I THOUGHT
I'D COME
HELP, TOO.

SUP.

YOU'RE
A LIFE-
SAVER.

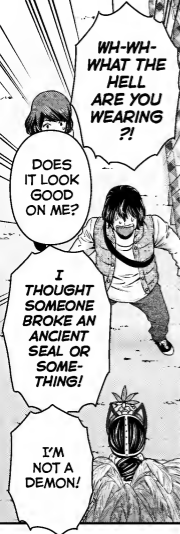


OH,
MY.

HEY
NATSUO-
CHAN,
RUI-RUI.

UHH
...

WELL,
TECHNICALLY
HE'S HERE,
BUT...





IT
CAN'T
BE...

ERIKA
?!

WHO
?!



MY, OH, MY.
I THOUGHT
I KNEW THAT
UNCOUTH
LAUGH.
IF IT ISN'T
MARY!

LONG
TIME NO
SEE.

FLOOF



WHAT,
YOU
ASK?

TO ENTER THE
MISTER LADY
CONTEST, OF
COURSE. I
FIGURED YOU'D
BE PARTICIPAT-
ING, AS WELL,
SEEING AS IT'S
YOUR TURF.

WHAT
ARE YOU
DOING
HERE?



ONLY
THE "E"
MADE IT
OVER...

HE'S
ERIKA,
REAL
NAME
ETSUO
KIKUCHI.



...AND SHOW
YOU WHICH
OF US IS
THE BETTER
WOMAN!

THIS TIME,
I SWEAR
I'LL WIN...

BACK WHEN
I WORKED AT
A GAY BAR,
HE SAW ME
AS A RIVAL
FOR SOME
REASON.

YOU CAN'T
BLAME ME
FOR BEING
MORE
RIPPED
THAN YOU.

YOU
SIMPLY
DIDN'T
TRAIN HARD
ENOUGH.
THAT'S ALL
THERE IS
TO IT.

...CHOSE
MY BICEPS
OVER
YOURS?

ARE YOU STILL
HOLDING A
GRUDGE OVER
THAT TIME YOUR
FAVORITE
CUSTOMER...

ERIKA
...

TWITCH

ト

ト

ト

ト

ト

ト

OHH?
YOU THINK
THEY CAN
BEAT MY
PECS?!

FEAST
YOUR
EYES ON
THESE
LATS!

QUIET,
YOU!

I'M
TWICE
THE
WOMAN
I USED
TO BE!

YEAH

...
WELL, I'M
AWAKE...

THAT WAS A...
HIGH OCTANE
MOMENT,
HUH?

YOU'RE
ON!

GRRRR!
LET'S
SETTLE
THIS ON
STAGE!



2
SHWIP

HAND
ME THAT
RUBBER
BAND,
WILL YOU?

RUBBER
BAND?

THANKS
FOR WAITING.
HERE ARE
YOUR CARAMEL
LATTES.

IT'S
NOTHING...

UH
...

OH.

HM?

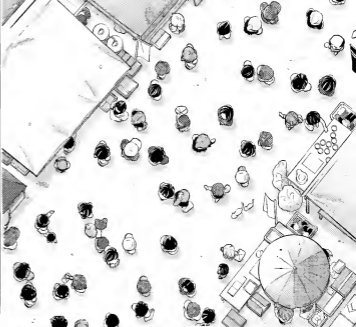




PHEW ...

LET'S RESTOCK WHILE WE HAVE THE CHANCE.

I THINK THE CROWD'S STARTING TO THIN OUT.



OH ...

BUST-ED?

YOU'RE EASY TO READ.

BOSS WAS THE ONE WHO TOLD ME TO CALL YOU OUT HERE TODAY. HE WAS PRETTY WORRIED ABOUT YOU.

HE SAID A LITTLE EXERCISE MIGHT TAKE YOUR MIND OFF THINGS.



HUH?

YOU LEFT THE STORE PRETTY DOWN AFTER TALKING TO SENSEI'S EX.



WERE YOU ALL RIGHT LAST NIGHT?

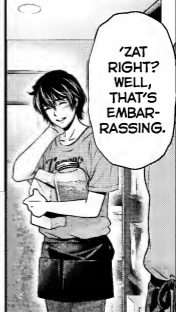


WHEN I ASKED HOW SHE WAS DOING,

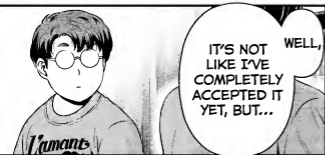
HE SAID SHE'D ALREADY MOVED ON.

IT'S JUST,

APPARENTLY, HAGIWARA-SAN TRACKED DOWN HINA.



'ZAT RIGHT? WELL, THAT'S EMBARRASSING.



IT'S NOT WELL, LIKE I'VE COMPLETELY ACCEPTED IT YET, BUT...



Y'KNOW,

SHE WORRIES ABOUT YOU LIKE IT'S HER OWN PROBLEM.

RUI-CHAN'S ALWAYS THE ONE WHO PICKS YOU UP WHEN YOU FALL.



YOU BETTER SHOW HER SOME APPRECIATION, OKAY?

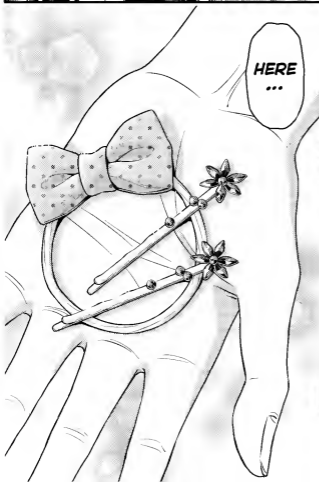


HEARING THAT MADE ME FEEL LIKE SHIT.

I STARTED TO DOUBT WHY I'M WORKING MY ASS OFF TO BECOME A NOVELIST.

BUT THEN RUI TOLD ME TO TRY WRITING WITH THE READERS IN MIND, NOT JUST FOR MY OWN DREAM.

SO, I'VE DECIDED TO KEEP IT UP FOR NOW.





SORRY IF
IT'S NOT
REALLY
YOUR
THING...



IT'S
JUST A
LITTLE
SOME-
THING
...

...TO
THANK
YOU FOR
ALWAYS
LOOKING
OUT FOR
ME.



**T
H
A
N
K
S
!**



Y-YOU
OKAY?

OW,
OW
...

I'LL
TRY IT
ON.





LOOKS CUTE
...



It...

WHO WOULD EVER IMAGINE HE'S NOT A GIRL?!

MIDDLE SCHOOL SECOND-YEAR, TSUBASA TANEDA!

AND THE WINNER IS...

OF COURSE THEY DO!

DO GIRLS HAVE A SEX DRIVE?

DOMEX GIRL

SERIOUS?!

YOU

ARE

JAPANESE GIRLS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN BROUGHT UP TO BE MODEST. THEY JUST DON'T TALK ABOUT IT.

HE'S RIGHT!

WHERE'S YOUR PROOF?!

WE'VE BROUGHT THIS UP COUNTLESS TIMES SINCE GRADE SCHOOL, YET WE NEVER SEEM TO COME TO A FIRM CONCLUSION!

WHO-OA!

IT'S SAID BIRTH-RATES SKY-ROCKET THEN, TOO.

BY THE WAY, THEIR SEX DRIVE IS SUPPOSEDLY AT ITS PEAK DURING A FULL MOON.

YOU GUYS... IF GIRLS HAD NO SEX DRIVE WHATSOEVER, THEN HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THE FEMALE PERVERTS THAT POP UP IN THE NEWS NOW AND THEN?



ISN'T THAT JUST A TESTAMENT TO HOW MUCH HE KNOWS?

AIBA WENT TO THE SAME MIDDLE SCHOOL AS NEGISHI AND CALLED HIM "ERO ZHUGE LIANG."

I'M ALWAYS BLOWN AWAY BY NEGISHI'S WELL OF KNOWLEDGE.

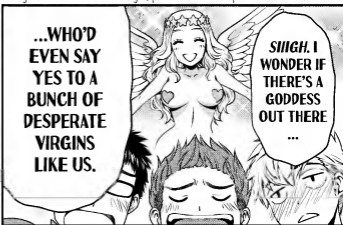
MAN ...

©/ *Ero Zhuge Liang: Someone who flaunts their extensive knowledge of sexual matters to other virgins, yet has no first-hand experience of their own.



AREN'T YOU IN THE LITERATURE CLUB?

OH ...
HEY, OSAKA.



...WHO'D EVEN SAY YES TO A BUNCH OF DESPERATE VIRGINS LIKE US.

SHIGH. I WONDER IF THERE'S A GODDESS OUT THERE ...



FROM WHAT HE TELLS ME,



WHAT IS? HUH? WHAT'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!

SO, LIKE,

MY BROTHER'S A THIRD-YEAR, RIGHT?



ISN'T MOMO KASHIWABARA IN THE SAME CLUB?

YEAH.

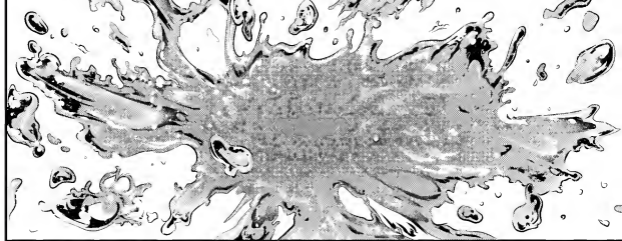
HUH?
YEAH, SO?

SERIOUSLY? NO, WAY, DUDE! THAT'S AWESOME!



**SHE'LL
SLEEP
WITH ANY-
ONE WHO
ASKS!**

**SHE'S
FAMOUS
AROUND
HERE
FOR IT!**



OOPS.
SORRRYYY.



YEAH, WELL,
SHE PISSES
ME OFF.

AH-
あはは
HA-
あはは
HA-
あはは

YOU'RE
SO BAD.

THAT WAS
MEAN,
MIKA.

YOU'RE JUST
MAD BECAUSE
YOU HEARD
SOMEONE SAY
SHE SCREWED
TAKU, AREN'T
YOU?



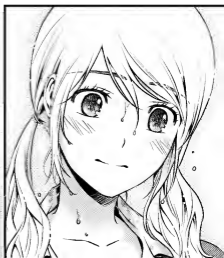
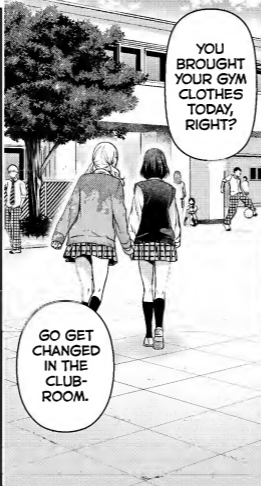
GIGGLE
ケス

I DIDN'T
SEE YOU
THERE.

GIGGLE
ケス

GIGGLE
ケス



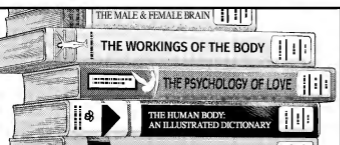
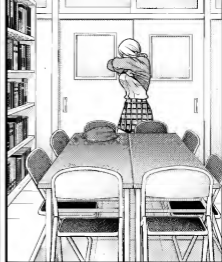




EVEN MY PANTIES ARE WET.

UGH ...

THEY DUMPED THE WHOLE BOTTLE ON ME.



UHH.

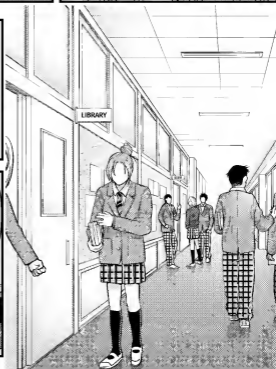
HUH?!

NOTHING!

FWIP

READING SOMETHING BESIDES LIGHT NOVELS FOR A CHANGE, OSAKA? WHAT'RE YOU READING?

WHAT'S THIS?



GOOD THING I JOINED THE LIT CLUB!

SLIDE



DAMN IT. THERE'S NO WAY I CAN READ THESE IN THE CLASSROOM.

I JUST WANT TO SATISFY MY CURIOSITY, MAN...

WAIT, I KNOW!



WHY ARE YOU HIDING THEM? DID YOU BRING A PORN MAG TO SCHOOL OR SOMETHING?

SH-SHUT UP!

AS IF!

DASH











REAL-
LY?

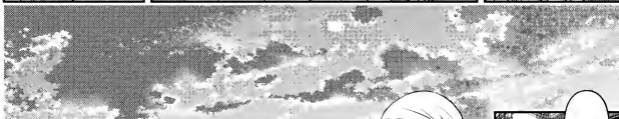
I'M
GLAD!



YES!

IT'S,
UHH,

CUTE.



AH!

YOU
ALREADY
PUT IT
ON YOUR
BAG!

HUH? OH,
Y-YEAH...



ALLIE DIDN'T
COME TODAY,
SO IT LOOKS
LIKE IT'S JUST
US TWO.



BYE-
BYE!

SEE
YA.



I SHOULD TREAT YOU TO ICE CREAM AS THANKS.

YOU'RE SO NICE, RIKKUN.

THANKS. ♥

WHY DON'T YOU TRY ASKING HER?

DUDE,

ERO

GIRLS WANNA BANG, TOO.

YOU HEARD NEGISHI.

ZHUGE LIANG

YOU MIGHT HAVE A SHOT IF YOU TIME IT RIGHT!

YOU SOUND LIKE A CHICK.

REALITY CHECK, THAT KINDA LOVEY-DOVEY STUFF ONLY HAPPENS IN LIGHT NOVELS.

W-WELL, I WANT MY FIRST TIME...

TO BE WITH SOMEONE I LOVE.

HUH?! ARE YOU NUTS? SHE'S OUR SENIOR!

C'MON, WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO LOSE?

YOU CAN JUST PLAY IT OFF AS A JOKE IF SHE SAYS NO.



UMM ...

HEY ...



IF YOU WANT TO CALL YOURSELF A MAN, YOU SHOULD AT LEAST ASK.

YOU GUYS ARE IN THE SAME CLUB, AFTER ALL.









CHAPTER 81: MOMO AND RITSU (PART TWO)



THEY SAY THE REAL THING ISN'T ANYTHING LIKE PORN. WHAT SHOULD I DO?!

MY PALMS WON'T STOP SWEATING!

OHH, SHIT. I' HONESTLY DIDN'T THINK THIS FAR AHEAD.



WITH SEMPAI, NO LESS?!!

AM I FINALLY GOING TO LOSE MY VIRGINITY?!



AM...



HERE!
IT'S THE ICE
CREAM I
PROMISED
FOR PICK-
ING UP MY
PANTIES.

NO
PROB-
LEM.

MY HAIR WAS
ALL STIFF, SO
I WAS DYING
TO WASH IT.

SORRY
FOR THE
WAIT!

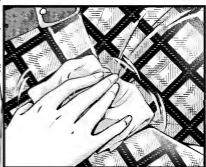
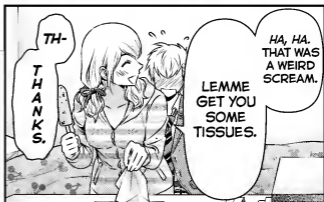


I REMEM-
BERED I
HAD SOME
IN THE
FREEZER.

THIS ICE
CREAM
IS SOOO
GOOD!



HM
...

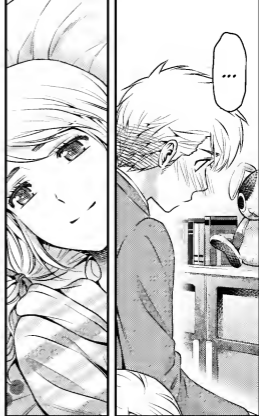






HEY,
RIK-
KUN.

DO YOU
HAVE ANY
ONE YOU
LIKE?



...



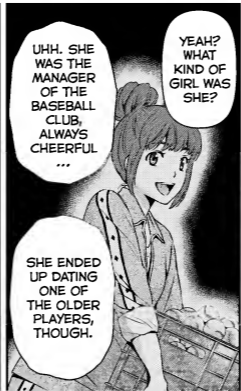
NO...

...



OKAY,
NOW TRY
THINKING
ABOUT
HER...

...AND
LOOK
AT ME.



UHH. SHE
WAS THE
MANAGER
OF THE
BASEBALL
CLUB,
ALWAYS
CHEERFUL
...

SHE ENDED
UP DATING
ONE OF
THE OLDER
PLAYERS,
THOUGH.

YEAH?
WHAT
KIND OF
GIRL WAS
SHE?



HAVE
YOU
EVER?

LIKE IN
ELEMENTARY
OR
MIDDLE
SCHOOL.

OH...
I DID IN
MIDDLE
SCHOOL.
IT WAS
JUST A
CRUSH,
THOUGH.



...YOU CAN
IMAGINE
THAT I'M
HER?

IS
THERE
ANY
WAY
...



...
NO
...

I
CAN'T...



...!



IS IT FUJII-SEMPAI?

HUH? HOW DID YOU KNOW?! OH, GOD!

WELL, YOU'RE ALWAYS ALL OVER HIM...



I HAVE SOMEONE I LIKE, TOO,

BUT I CAN'T PRETEND YOU'RE HIM.



ME, NEITHER.



THE ONE I WANT TO DO ALL SORTS OF THINGS FOR IS NATSUO-KUN.

THE ONE I WANT RIGHT NOW,

THAT'S RIGHT. IT'S NATSUO-KUN.

HEE, HEE.

OH, YEAH? WELL, THAT'S EMBARRASSING.



SO I'M NOT SURPRISED RUMORS LIKE THAT SPREAD.

IT'S TRUE THAT ...

I'VE PROBABLY DATED MORE PEOPLE THAN AVERAGE,



SO,

ALL THAT ABOUT ME SLEEPING WITH JUST ANYONE...

IS A LIE.



PEOPLE MIGHT HAVE ALL SORTS OF OPINIONS ABOUT SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS,

BUT EVERY GUY I'VE DATED WAS SOMEONE I WAS IN LOVE WITH AT THE TIME.

BUT I ONLY FEEL THAT WAY ABOUT PEOPLE I TRULY LOVE.

THEY WEREN'T JUST "ANYONE."



WHAT I CAN DO TO MAKE THEM HAPPY.

WHAT THEY LOOK AND SOUND LIKE WHEN THEY FEEL GOOD,

I THINK ABOUT WHAT THEY'RE DOING RIGHT NOW,



THE PEOPLE WHO TAKE THE RUMORS SERIOUSLY OR THE PEOPLE WHO SPREAD THEM...

...MIGHT DO SO BECAUSE THEY'RE HOLDING OUT HOPE FOR SOMETHING, BUT...

BUT FINDING OUT THAT WAS HOW PEOPLE TALKED ABOUT ME BEHIND MY BACK MADE ME SO UPSET THAT I BROKE DOWN AND CRIED.

I SOMEHOW MANAGED TO RUN AWAY AT THE TIME,

IT FELT LIKE PEOPLE WERE DENYING THE LOVE I'D FELT UNTIL THEN.

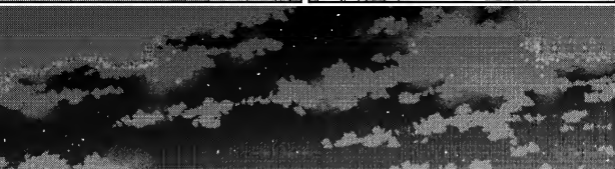
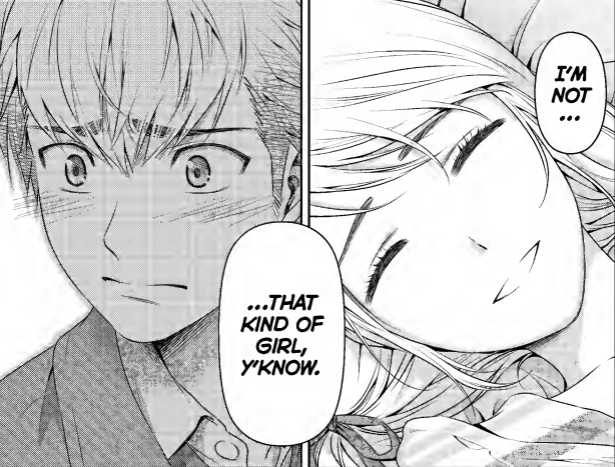


I HAD A PRETTY DANGEROUS RUN-IN WITH A GUY WHO BELIEVED THOSE RUMORS BEFORE.

C'MON. YOU'LL DO IT WITH ANYONE, RIGHT?

...THAT'S WHAT HE SAID.







...HURT
HER.

RIKKUN'S
NOT HERE
TODAY,
EITHER?

HUH?

HUH.

WONDER
IF HE'S
GOT SOME-
THING
PLANNED.

I RAN INTO
HIM ON THE
WAY HERE,

BUT HE
SAID HE
WASN'T
COMING
TODAY.

I WANTED
TO GIVE
BACK THE
MANGA HE
LENT ME.



DON'T YOU START CALLING ME THAT, TOO! IT'S IRRITATING!

BA-

BARU-SU!



IF YOU REALLY WANT TO QUIT, THEN I'LL LET SENSEI KNOW,

BUT TAKE THIS.

ACK!

I TOLD HER TO JUST GIVE IT TO YOU HERSELF,

...!

HUH?

WHY'RE YOU GIVING ME A LETTER? CREEPY...

I DON'T WANT PEOPLE ...

...TO START GIVING HIM WEIRD LOOKS IF I DELIVER IT IN PERSON.

RSTL

#

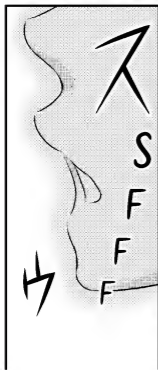
BUT SHE ASKED ME TO DELIVER IT BECAUSE OF SOME RUMOR GOING AROUND THE FIRST-YEARS.

Don't worry about what happened the other day. I just miss seeing you at club, Rikkun.

Momo



NOT ME!
IT'S FROM KASHIWA-BARA-SEMPAI!



**MOMO-
SEMPAI!**

**ARE YOU
THERE?!**



**MOMO
KASHI-
WABARA-
SEMPAI!**

**IT'S
ME,
OSA-
KA!**

CHATTER

**MOMO-
SEM-
PAAAA!**

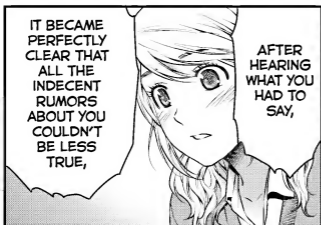


**MOMO-
SEMPAI!**

**RIK-
KUN
?!**

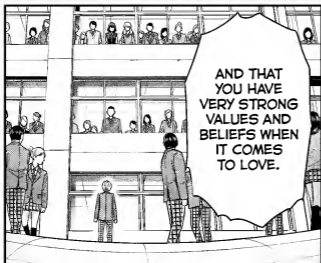


**HE'S
CALLING
YOU,
MOMO.**



**IT BECAME
PERFECTLY
CLEAR THAT
ALL THE
INDECENT
RUMORS
ABOUT YOU
COULDN'T
BE LESS
TRUE,**

**AFTER
HEARING
WHAT YOU
HAD TO
SAY,**



**AND THAT
YOU HAVE
VERY STRONG
VALUES AND
BELIEFS WHEN
IT COMES
TO LOVE.**



**I'M
REALLY
SORRY
...**

**...FOR
HOW
RUDE I
WAS THE
OTHER
DAY!**



...YOU'RE STRONGER AND KINDER THAN THEY COULD EVER HOPE TO BE.

I REALIZED...

NO MATTER WHAT PEOPLE SAY BEHIND YOUR BACK,



...THERE ISN'T ANYONE AROUND...

AND THAT ...

...WHOSE LOVE IS PURER THAN YOURS.



I KNOW I CAN'T TAKE BACK ALL THE HURTFUL THINGS I SAID, BUT...



COME
BACK TO
CLUB,
OKAY?

IT'S
OKAY,
RIKKUN!



SURE!



GUESS
IT'S
POINT-
LESS
TELLING
YOU TO
TAKE A
HINT.

AL,
YOU'LL
MAKE
HIM RUN
AWAY
AGAIN...

WELL...
UMM...

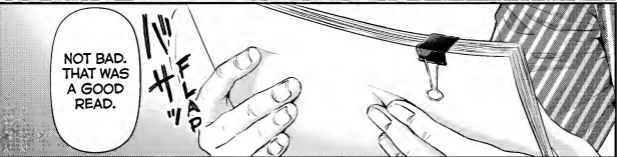
FIDG
FIDG

WHAT
HURTFUL
THINGS DID
YOU SAY?
WHAT RU-
MORS?

I HEARD
YOUR
LITTLE
SPEECH
DURING
LUNCH,
BUT...

SO,
AFTER
SCHOOL

CHAPTER 82: WHAT'S IMPORTANT



NOT BAD.
THAT WAS
A GOOD
READ.

FLAD



I THINK
IT'S UP
TO PAR
FOR SALE
AS A
STAND-
ALONE
STORY,

THE
PROTAGO-
NIST'S
PERSON-
ALITY IS
WELL-
DEVEL-
OPED,
TOO.

BUT
...



YEAH. THE
ALIEN NEGOTI-
ATION SCENE
WAS REALLY
WELL DONE.

REALLY
?!

THE
PACING'S
GOOD, AND
IT'S EASY
TO GET
INTO.



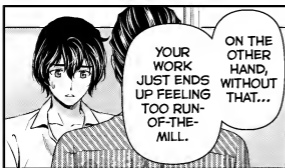
...IT DOESN'T COME CLOSE TO YOUR AWARD PIECE.



...!

HOWEVER, IT FEELS LIKE THOSE SAME SKILLS ARE MAKING YOUR WORK A LITTLE CONTRIVED AND TOOTH-LESS.

YOUR RANGE OF EXPRESSION AND TECHNICAL WRITING SKILLS ARE DEFINITELY IMPROVING.



YOUR WORK JUST ENDS UP FEELING TOO RUN-OF-THE-MILL.

ON THE OTHER HAND, WITHOUT THAT...



LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR JUNIOR'S PIECE. SHIBASAKI-KUN, WAS IT?

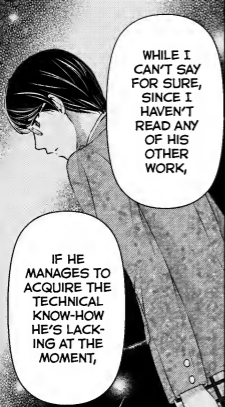
IN TERMS OF WRITER PERSONALITY,



THE PAINFULLY REALISTIC PHRASING AND EXPRESSION THAT SHINED IN YOUR AWARD PIECE...

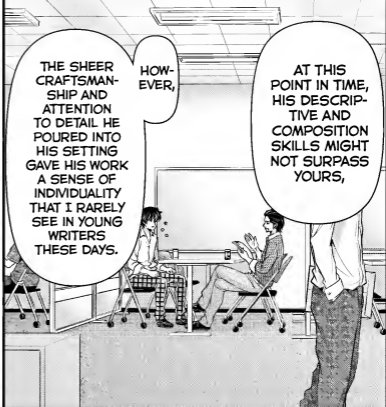
MADE IT FEEL MORE LIKE A REFLECTION OF YOUR SOUL.

I THINK THAT'S WHERE YOUR APPEAL AS A WRITER LIES.



WHILE I CAN'T SAY FOR SURE, SINCE I HAVEN'T READ ANY OF HIS OTHER WORK,

IF HE MANAGES TO ACQUIRE THE TECHNICAL KNOW-HOW HE'S LACKING AT THE MOMENT,



THE SHEER CRAFTSMANSHIP AND ATTENTION TO DETAIL HE Poured INTO HIS SETTING GAVE HIS WORK A SENSE OF INDIVIDUALITY THAT I RARELY SEE IN YOUNG WRITERS THESE DAYS.

HOWEVER,

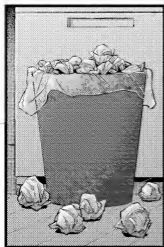
AT THIS POINT IN TIME, HIS DESCRIPTIVE AND COMPOSITION SKILLS MIGHT NOT SURPASS YOURS,



...HE COULD END UP GIVING YOU A RUN FOR YOUR MONEY.



THERE'S A CHANCE ...





I
HAVEN'T
SHOWN
HIM
YET...

I SEE.
HONESTLY,
I DON'T
THINK IT'S
UP TO PAR.

THE
PACING IS
PRETTY
FLAT.

WHAT DID
TSUTAYA-
SAN HAVE
TO SAY?



HMM.



FRANKLY,
THE WEEKLY
SHORT
STORIES
YOU DID
WERE
BETTER
WRITTEN.

HAVING READ
FROM START
TO FINISH,
I'M STILL NOT
SURE WHAT
YOU WERE
TRYING TO
EXPRESS WITH
THIS PIECE.





STILL WORKING?

YEAH.

I FIGURE I'LL KEEP AT IT UNTIL I MAKE SOME PROGRESS SINCE TOMORROW'S SATURDAY.



OH... I'M GOOD. I'LL JUST TAKE A SHOWER IN THE MORNING.

THE BATH'S FREE.

OKAY.



KNOCK
KNOCK
KNOCK

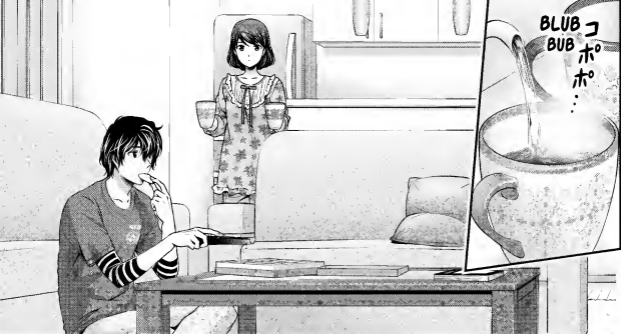


IN THAT CASE,

WHY DON'T YOU TAKE A BREAK?

MOM BROUGHT HOME SNACKS.







BUT I WAS ALWAYS READING IN ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL.

I DON'T REMEMBER WHEN EXACTLY I DECIDED TO,



...
WHAT,
HUH?



...WAS MY MOM'S DEATH, MAYBE.



I GUESS WHAT STARTED IT...



YOU CAN HOP IN IF YOU WANT.

LOOK, THERE'S A BALL PIT!

YOU LIKE THOSE, DON'T YOU, NATSUO?



EVEN THOUGH I VOWED NOT TO CRY BACK THEN, I'D START TEARING UP OVER THE LITTLEST THINGS.



LOOK, MOMMY!



LOOK AT ALL THE YELLOW ONES I GOT!

MOMMY!





I STOPPED DWELLING ON THE FACT THAT SHE WAS GONE AND THAT I WAS LONELY.

WHEN I WAS READING, I WAS COMPLETELY ABSORBED BY THE WORLD INSIDE THE BOOK.

WHEN I HAD MY NOSE IN A BOOK, THOSE THOUGHTS JUST VANISHED.

EVEN THOUGH ALL I COULD THINK ABOUT MOST OF THE TIME WAS HOW MY MOM WAS DEAD,



JUST HOW BOOKS SAVED ME WHEN I WAS LITTLE,

EVENTUALLY, I STARTED DREAMING ABOUT CREATING WORLDS LIKE THE ONES I'D READ.



I WAS HOOKED ON BOOKS EVER SINCE.



I HOPED THAT...

...I COULD PASS ON THAT JOY TO SOMEONE ELSE SOMEDAY, TOO.



I LOVED HOW THEY COULD SURPRISE ME ONE MOMENT, THEN GRAB ME BY THE HEART ANOTHER.

I WAS SO IMMERSSED IN BOOKS THAT I THOUGHT WORDS MIGHT START LEAKING OUT OF MY EARS.





**HUH
?!**

**WHAT'RE
YOU
TALKING
ABOUT?
I WENT
TO BED
LATE,**

**AND I
HAVE TO
WRITE
TODAY...**

**AND I
DON'T
CARE.**

**YOU DRANK
THE COFFEE
I MADE
LAST NIGHT,
RIGHT?**



C'MON.

**GET READY.
WE'RE GOING
OUT.**



**HUUH?!
WHAT THE
HELL IS
THAT?!**

**MOVE
IT!**



**I SAW SOME
SHAVED ICE
ON TV THIS
MORNING
THAT LOOKED
REALLY
GOOD.**

**WE'RE
GOING TO
GET
SOME.**



**SO,
HANG OUT
WITH ME
FOR THE
DAY AS
THANKS.**

SO?

**LETTING
YOU DRAG
ME AROUND
ALL DAY'S
A PRETTY
STEEP
PRICE FOR
A CUP OF
COFFEE!**

**WHAT'RE
YOU PLAN-
NING?!**



YOUR
OBSERVATION
SKILLS MUST
BE PRETTY
BAD IF YOU
COULDN'T
TELL WHERE
WE WERE
GOING FROM
MY CLOTHES.

HANG
ON A
SEC...

WHEN YOU
ASKED ME TO
GO WITH YOU,
I FIGURED
YOU MEANT
SOMEWHERE
CLOSE, LIKE
A LOCAL
CAFÉ...

WHO'D
EXPECT TO
HIKE UP A
MOUNTAIN
JUST FOR
DESSERT?!



HEY
...



IF I'M
RIGHT,
THEN
SHUT
UP AND
WALK!



PRETTY
SURE ALL
THOSE
PAGES
YOU WERE
WRITING
WERE
GOING
STRAIGHT
INTO THE
TRASH.



MAAAN...
HOW MANY
PAGES
COULD
I HAVE
GOTTEN
DONE BY
NOW?



OH.



IS STRAWBERRY FINE WITH YOU?

AHH. FINALLY!

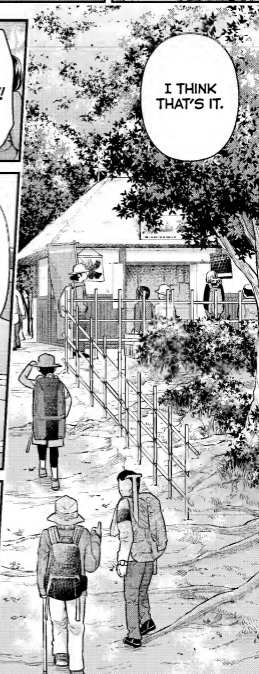


THANKS FOR WAITING!



I DUNNO IF IT WAS WORTH CLIMBING ALL THE WAY UP HERE FOR...

UHH. LOOKS PRETTY AVERAGE TO ME.

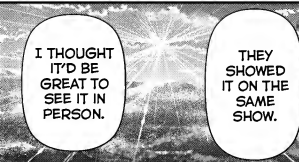


I THINK THAT'S IT.





I WANTED
YOU TO
SEE THIS
VIEW.



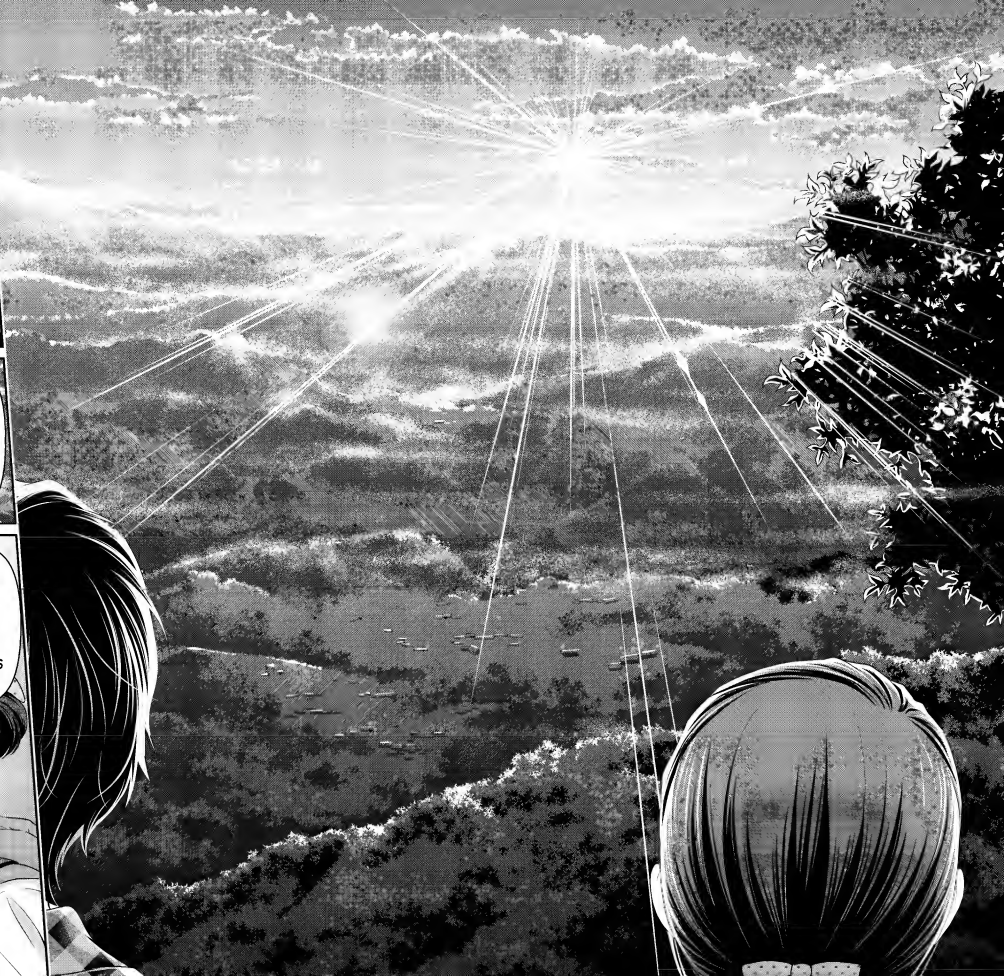
I THOUGHT
IT'D BE
GREAT TO
SEE IT IN
PERSON.

THEY
SHOWED
IT ON THE
SAME
SHOW.



NO MATTER
WHAT KIND OF
CONTENT A
NOVEL HAS,
WHAT'S MOST
IMPORTANT IS
THAT IT MOVES
YOU, RIGHT?

ISN'T THAT
WHAT MADE
YOU FALL IN
LOVE WITH
BOOKS?





YOU'LL NEVER PULL YOURSELF OUT OF A RUT IF YOU STAY HUNCHED OVER YOUR DESK ALL THE TIME.

YOU HAVE TO FIND WHAT MOVES YOU...

IF YOU WANT TO INSTILL THE SAME FEELING IN OTHERS.



RUI-CHAN'S ALWAYS THE ONE WHO PICKS YOU UP WHEN YOU FALL.

Y'KNOW.

SHE REALLY IS.

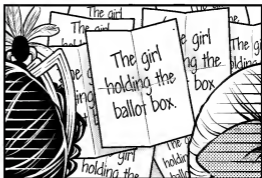


YEAH...



CHAPTER 83: UNCOVERED FEELINGS

DOMEGIRL 4-PANEL THEATER





...REALLY DRIVES HOME THE FACT THAT WE'LL BE TAKING ENTRANCE EXAMS SOON, HUH?

Post-Graduation Prospects

Preference	Year — Class — Name		Department	Subject
	Name of School			
FIRST				
SECOND				
THIRD				

GETTING THIS FORM...

NOT QUITE.

MY DAD'S TELLING ME TO GO TO COLLEGE, AND THERE ARE SOME FIELDS I WANT TO STUDY, SO I PLAN ON APPLYING.

HUH ...

LIKE AT A UNIVERSITY WITH A STRONG LIBERAL ARTS PROGRAM?

NOOO THANKS.

REPEAT A YEAR, THEN!

I WANNA GOOF OFF AS A HIGH-SCHOOLER FOR ANOTHER TWO YEARS.

UUUGH. PRES-SURE...

YOU DON'T REALLY HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT ENTRANCE EXAMS, SINCE YOU'RE GONNA BECOME A NOVELIST, HUH, NAT-CHAN?



BUT I THINK...

YEAH. I'VE LOOKED INTO A BUNCH OF PLACES,

I'LL GIVE UP ON BECOMING A NOVELIST.



YOU'RE GOING THE NOVELIST ROUTE, TOO, RIGHT, ASHIHARA-SAN? GOT ANY SCHOOLS IN MIND?

I GUESS SO, BUT I HAVEN'T NARROWED DOWN WHERE EXACTLY YET.



WHY?! YOU ALREADY WROTE SO MUCH!

HUH?



YOU MEAN LIKE AN EDITOR?

SUPPORT?

YEAH.

THAT'S A GREAT IDEA!



I FIGURE IF THERE ARE PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO CAN WRITE MORE INTERESTING STORIES THAN ME,

THEN I'D LIKE TO WORK TO SUPPORT THEM.



YOU KNOW HOW FUJII-KUN WON THE LITERARY AWARD IN FEBRUARY?

READING HIS PIECE, I REALIZED I FELT WAY MORE MOVED THAN FRUSTRATED.

I FELT THE SAME WAY DURING HIS AND SHIBASAKI-KUN'S MATCH.



IT'S SO COOL THAT YOU GUYS ARE MARCHING TOWARD YOUR DREAMS.

HOW NICE.

DO YOU HAVE ANY CAREERS IN MIND, MOMO?



I STILL PLAN TO WRITE AS A HOBBY, ANYWAY.

OH, I SAID IT WAS YOUR AWARD THAT MADE ME DECIDE, BUT DON'T FEEL RESPONSIBLE, OKAY?

IF ANYTHING, I'M THANKFUL THAT YOU HELPED OPEN MY EYES.



HUH? SEMPAI'S ACTUALLY A GOOD STUDENT ?!

WHAT'S WITH THAT REACTION?

BAD BAR-USD!

YOU COULD PROBABLY GET INTO A GOOD UNIVERSITY WITH YOUR GRADES, KASHIWABARA-SAN.

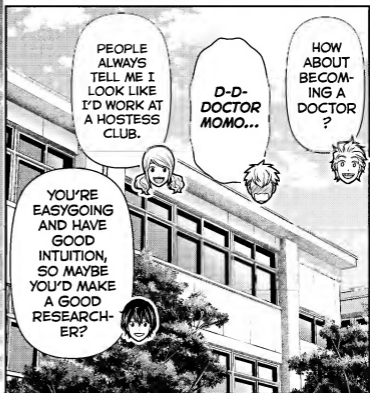


SNUGGLE!

IS THAT A JOB?

THEN MAYBE A WIFE?

HMM. IF I HAVE TO CHOOSE,



PEOPLE ALWAYS TELL ME I LOOK LIKE I'D WORK AT A HOSTESS CLUB.

D-D-DOCTOR MOMO...

HOW ABOUT BECOMING A DOCTOR ?

YOU'RE EASYGOING AND HAVE GOOD INTUITION, SO MAYBE YOU'D MAKE A GOOD RESEARCHER?





SOME DAYS,
YOU CAN'T
HELP BUT
SIGH...

BUT I
FEEL
YOU.

WHAT'S WITH
YOU POPPING
UP OUT OF
NOWHERE WITH
"HELP ME"
PRACTICALLY
WRITTEN
ON YOUR
FOREHEAD?

SIGHING
CHASES AWAY
HAPPINESS,
Y'KNOW.

WHAT'S
WRONG,
NAT-
CHAN?

W
H
O
A!

E
J
O
L
T

IT'S
FROM
THIS
MORN-
ING'S
QUIZ.

THAT'S ...
A HELL
OF AN
ANSWER
SHEET.

SOMETHING
TELLS ME
THE ONE
YOU GOT
RIGHT WAS
A GUESS,
TOO.

Math Quiz Answer Sheet

Alex J. Matsukawa

1	2	3	4	5
① $\frac{1}{2}$	② -9	③ 5	④ 16	⑤ 20-X
6	7	8	9	10
⑥ $\frac{1}{2}$	⑦ $\frac{1}{2}$	⑧ $\frac{1}{2}$	⑨ $\frac{1}{2}$	⑩ 2

BOOM

TUTOR
ME, NAT-
CHAN! I'M
BEGGING
YOU!

BE A
HERO!

MIDTERMS
ARE NEXT
WEEK,
RIGHT?!

YOUR ENGLISH
ABILITY IS A BIG
ADVANTAGE,
BUT YOU WON'T
GET THE JOB
YOU WANT WITH
GRADES LIKE
THESE.

AFTER
CLASS,
THE
TEACHER
TOLD ME,

AND
HERE I
AM...

SATUR-
DAY

ISN'T IT
KINDA
EARLY?

UHH...
IT'S ONLY
SEVEN,
Y'KNOW.

I NEED
HELP WITH
A LOT OF
SUBJECTS.

CHEMISTRY,
CLASSICS,
PHYSICS,
POLITICS AND
ECON, WORLD
HISTORY...

WHAT
WERE
THEY
AGAIN?
MATH,
JAPA-
NESE,
AND
...?

THAT'S
EVERYTHING
EXCEPT
ENGLISH!

HOWDY!

ARE YOU
NATSUO'S
FRIEND?
WELCOME.

OH!

THANKS
FOR
HAVING
ME.

I DON'T
HAVE A
TABLE IN
MY ROOM,
SO LET'S
SET UP IN
THE LIVING
ROOM.



MORN-
ING...

MORN-
ING!

WHAT
ARE YOU
DOING
HERE,
AL?

MIDTERMS
ARE LOOK-
ING GRIM,
SO HE
BEGGED ME
TO TUTOR
HIM.



**RUI-
CHAN!**



UH
...
O K A Y
...

YOU CAN
CHECK
PAGE
126 OF
VOLUME
SIX FOR
DETAILS!

NAT-CHAN
TOLD ME
YOU GUYS
ARE STEP-
SIBLINGS.

UH-
HUH!

WAIT, DID
YOU KNOW
WE'RE LIVING
TOGETHER?



I WAS GOING
TO START
THIS AFTER-
NOON, BUT
THE SOONER
THE BETTER.

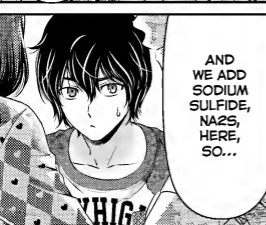
HMM.

I
GUESS
SO.



THE
MORE THE
MERRIER!

DO YOU
WANT TO
STUDY
WITH US,
RUI-CHAN?









I'M STOKED
I GET TO EAT
RUI-CHAN'S
COOKING!



YAY!

OH, WELL...
IT'S ALMOST
LUNCHTIME
ANYWAY. I'LL
WHIP UP
SOMETHING
SIMPLE.



Fan

Tas

tic!



HERE
YOU GO.



HEH,
HEH.
DON'T
CHOKE
NOW.

HAVING
SOMEONE
ENJOY MY
COOKING
THIS MUCH
MAKES IT
WORTH THE
EFFORT.



I'M
AMAZED
YOU CAN
MAKE
SOMETHING
LIKE THIS
IN NO
TIME!

THIS IS
GOOD,
RUI-CHAN!

AWESOME!
YOU'RE A
GENIUS!

SUPER
GOOD!



GINGER PORK, HAMBURG STEAK, SWEET AND SOUR PORK. STUFF LIKE THAT.

RUI'S GOOD AT SEASONING MEAT DISHES.

THIS ISN'T ENOUGH TO GET AN IDEA OF HER SPECIALTY.



WELL,

SHE MAKES STUFF THAT'S EVEN BETTER.



I'LL FINISH IT FOR YOU.

I'M GUESSING YOU DON'T LIKE THIS THAT MUCH THEN?

WHA?!

NOM

NOM



FROWN

OH, YEAH? I'D LIKE TO TRY THEM SOMETIME.



I NEVER SAID I DIDN'T LIKE IT!

GIVE IT BACK, YOU HUNG BLOND JACKASS!
TOO LATE, ALL GONE!



NOT TO MENTION I GOT TO STUDY WITH RUI-CHAN AND EAT HER COOKING!

I'M SO HAPPY I COULD DIE TOMORROW REGRET-FREE!

WOULDN'T THAT MAKE TODAY'S STUDY SESSION POINTLESS?



I FEEL LIKE TODAY GAVE MY BRAIN A BOOST!

THANKS A MILLION, NAT-CHAN!

YOU SURE? THAT DEFINITELY DOESN'T SOUND SMART...

NO WORRIES!



WHAT EXACTLY ...

...DO YOU LIKE ABOUT HER, ANYWAY?



HEY,

AL ...



...

SKYHI





BY ANY CHANCE,

ARE YOU GONNA BECOME MY RIVAL, NAT-CHAN?



I JUST ...

...HAVE A HUNCH.



HUH ?

SKYHIGH



GUESS
I WAS
WRONG.

OH.

WELL,
THAT'S
GOOD!



BESIDES,
I ALREADY
HAVE
SOME-
ONE...

I
LIKE.

WH-WHAT'RE
YOU TALKING
ABOUT?
NO WAY!



THANKS
AGAIN
FOR
TODAY!

L
A
T
E
R
!

G
L
A
D
T
O
H
E
A
R
I
T!



C
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K

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L
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P

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L
A
P
S
I
N
H





SOMEONE
WANTED
HAMBURG
STEAK,

SO I'M
GETTING
THEM
READY.

WHAT'S IT
LOOK LIKE?
MAKING
DINNER.



PLAP / 10

HUH?

WHAT'RE
YOU
DOING?



...HAD A
HUNCH.

I JUST
...



...



HUH?

SURE
...

IF YOU'RE
FREE,
THEN
LEND ME
A HAND.



MAYBE.

NO,
DEFINITELY...

HE'S WRONG.

CHAPTER 84: SWEETHEART



NO, NO!
I REALLY
MEAN IT
THIS TIME!

...
BUT
?



1ST LIT.
DEPARTMENT

NICE
WORK!



YOU
DABBLED
IN VARIOUS
GENRES,

BUT I THINK
YOUNG ADULT
FICTION IS
ULTIMATELY
RIGHT UP
YOUR ALLEY.

BUT I
THINK
IT'S YOUR
BEST
WORK
SINCE
THEN.

IT'S NOT AN
EASY TASK
COMING UP
WITH SOME-
THING THAT
SURPASS-
ES YOUR
AWARD
PIECE,

IT WAS A
DISASTER
AND I
ENDED UP
BOTH
REJECTED
AND
FRIENDLESS.

I HAD A
CRUSH ON
MY BEST
FRIEND'S
GIRLFRIEND
IN MIDDLE
SCHOOL,
Y'SEE.

MAAAN.
I KNOW
HOW
THAT
GOES.

YOU'VE
EXPERIENCED
THAT KIND OF
DRAMA, TOO,
TSUTAYA-SAN?

YOUR
USE OF
METAPHORS
IS EXCELLENT
AND MAKES
IT EASY TO
SHARE HIS
PAIN.

TAKE THE
MOMENTS
WHERE THE
PROTAG-
ONIST'S
AMBIVALENCE
COMES INTO
PLAY, FOR
ONE.

THEN I
FEEL LIKE
I HAVE
TO ASK,
FUJII-
KUN.

IF YOU CAN
EXPRESS
THESE KINDS
OF FEELINGS
SO EASILY,

I'M
HOME.

COULD IT
BE YOU
HAVE A
CRUSH ON
SOMEONE
CLOSE TO
YOU?



WE TALKED ABOUT MAKING SOME TWEAKS AND PUBLISHING IT AS A ONE-SHOT.

OH... HE SAID IT WAS A LOT BETTER.

REAL-
LY?!



WEL-
COME
BACK.

HOW'D
HE LIKE
YOUR
MANU-
SCRIPT?



THAT'S
GREAT!

WAY
TO
GO!



HUH?
?

Y-YEAH
...

I GUESS
THAT HIKE
HELPED PULL
YOU OUT OF
YOUR SLUMP,
AFTER ALL.



I'M GONNA GO OVER MY DRAFT WHILE I'M STILL IN THE MOOD FROM THE MEETING.

OH.

OKAY ...



DID YOU EAT?

YEAH, I GRABBED SOMETHING WHILE I WAS OUT SINCE IT WAS LATE.



COULD IT BE YOU HAVE A CRUSH ON SOMEONE CLOSE TO YOU?



BY ANY CHANCE,

ARE YOU GOING TO BECOME MY RIVAL, NAT-CHAN?



YOU KNOW HOW SOMETIMES YOU GET JEALOUS WATCHING A GOOD FRIEND HAVE FUN WITH ANOTHER FRIEND?

THEY'RE WRONG!

ANYONE WOULD BE HAPPY TO BE TREATED KINDLY. IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO IT IS!

IT'S LIKE THAT!



NO...

...



THUD

DID YOU EAT?

MAYBE I
REALLY DO...



MAYBE IT'S
TRUE.



I WON'T

NOT TO
MENTION...

HOLD BACK
FOR HINA-NEE
ANYMORE.

BUT RUI'S
BEEN BY MY
SIDE EVER
SINCE HINA
LEFT.



IT FEELS
DIFFERENT
FROM WHEN
I FELL IN
LOVE WITH
HINA,



I VOWED
TO BE
WITH HINA
FOREVER!

HOW
LOW
CAN I
BE?!

EVEN
THOUGH
WE BROKE
UP...

WHOA,
WHOA.
THAT
DOESN'T
MAKE IT
COOL TO
LET MYSELF
GET SIDE-
TRACKED!

SHE BECAME
AN IRREPLACE-
ABLE PART
OF MY LIFE
BEFORE I
REALIZED IT.



LET'S SAY...

HYPOTHETICALLY,
OKAY?

LET'S SAY RUI
AND I START
DATING FOR
REAL...



NO LUCK WITH
ONE, SO YOU GO
FOR THE OTHER?

NO-NO
POINT

3.
SHE'S
HINA'S
LITTLE
SISTER.



NAT-CHAN,
YOU TRAITOR!

NO-NO
POINT

2.
SHE'S MY
FRIEND'S
CRUSH.



I KNEW GETTING
MARRIED WAS
A BAD IDEA...

NO-NO
POINT

1.
WE'RE
FAMILY.



...

I ALREADY
KNOW...

...WHICH COURSE OF
ACTION IS SAFEST.

IN ORDER TO
KEEP THINGS FROM
ESCALATING FURTHER...

GOING ANY
FURTHER
WOULD
BRING MY
CHARACTER
INTO
QUESTION!

GAAAH!
IT'S A
TERRIBLE
IDEA NO
MATTER
HOW YOU
SLICE IT!



...AT ALL COSTS!

...I HAVE TO
SUPPRESS THESE
FEELINGS...



KNOCK



KNOCK

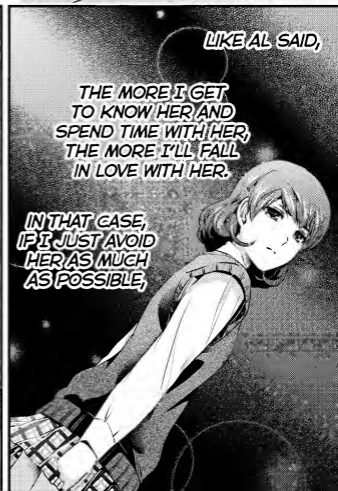
OH
...

I WAS
UP LATE
TWEAKING
MY MANU-
SCRIPT...

HURRY UP
OR WE'LL
BE LATE!

IT'S
ALMOST
EIGHT.

HOW LONG
ARE YOU
GONNA STAY
IN BED?



READ
ALoud
FROM
PAGE
148.

AND THAT
MEANS
YOUR MIND
SHOULD
BE WIDE
AWAKE.

YES,
MA'AM.

I'LL
COME IN
EARLY
STARTING
TOMOR-
ROW...

OH, REALLY?
THEN I
GUESS YOU
GOT MORE
SLEEP THAN
EVERYONE
ELSE HERE.

I...
OVER-
SLEPT.

WHY
WERE
YOU LATE
TODAY?

FWUMP?

OH!

THAT'S
RIGHT!

I'M
IN THE
GROOVE,
SO I'LL
HAVE
DINNER
LATER.

SORRY,
GO ON
HOME
WITHOUT
ME.

AL AND
I MADE
PLANS TO
GO TO
KARAOKE
TODAY!

I HAVE
TO MEET
WITH MY
EDITOR
...

I'M ON
CLASS
DUTY THIS
WEEK, SO
I'M HEAD-
ING OUT
FIRST!

HUH? WE
DIDN'T-

SHUT UP
AND COME
WITH ME!







AH
...



FINE,
THEN.

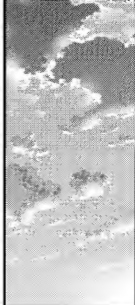
I
SEE.



IF YOU
HATE
ME THAT
MUCH,

THEN
SUIT
YOUR-
SELF!





DID SHE
TELL YOU
ANYTHING,
NATSUO-
KUN?



RUI-
CHAN
SURE IS
LATE.

SHE
HASN'T
CALLED,
EITHER.



IT'S
PAST
NINE
...



THAT
MIGHT
BE WHY
...

SHE
WASN'T
AT CLUB,
EITHER.

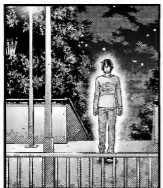
RUI AND
I KINDA
HAD A
FIGHT
TODAY.

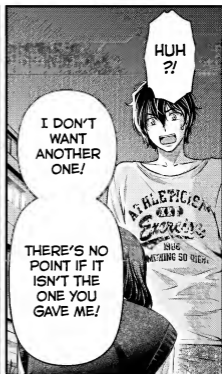


DASH!
I'LL GO
LOOK FOR
HER!

A
FIGHT
?

HUH
?







THAT
WAS
...

...THE
FIRST
TIME YOU
CALLED
ME CUTE.



I'M
BEG-
GING
YOU...

SQUEEZE



...ANY
MORE
CONFLICT-
ED THAN I
ALREADY
AM!

DON'T
MAKE
ME...





...to be continued.

EXTRA MANGA

SWEET HOME MAGIC

☆ THE STORY SO FAR ☆

A MYSTERIOUS DRUG HAS TURNED
RUI AND HINA INTO CHILDREN. AT A LOSS,
NATSUO TURNS TO KIRIYA FOR HELP...

"YASUE
HUNG HER
HEAD AS
THE WORDS
TUMBLER
FROM HER
LIPS."

"IT'S NOT
ALL YOUR
FAULT."

CUT ME
SOME
SLACK.
I DON'T
OWN ANY
KIDS'
BOOKS.

IMPROVISE
SOME-
THING.
YOU'RE A
WRITER,
AREN'T
YOU?

"UNABLE TO
MUSTER THE
COURAGE
TO SO MUCH
AS LOOK AT
HER FACE."

"HEARING
THAT,
RYOSUKE
QUIETLY
MADE
FOR THE
DOOR,"

TO THINK
THAT THIS
CHILD IS
TACHI-
BANA-
SENSEI.

ARE YOU
SURE
YOU'RE
NOT PULL-
ING MY
LEG?

STARE...

WHAT ARE
YOU READ-
ING TO
CHILDREN?





I DOUBT HE'LL TRY TO TAKE HER FROM YOU, BUT ALL RIGHT.

I DON'T THINK IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO LET HIM SEE HER, EVEN IN CHILD FORM...



キ
PULL

ANYWAY, I'LL BE BACK SOON...



OKAY ?

BE A GOOD GIRL AND STAY HERE WITH HINA.

I HAVE TO STEP OUT FOR A BIT.

RUI ...



IT SEEMS YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO SLIP OUT WHEN THEY'RE ASLEEP...

....!
WAAA



キ
WEEE
I'LL PLAY WITH YOU UNTIL YOU DROP!

GAAAH, FINE! HAVE IT YOUR WAY!



NOOO!

I DON'T WANT YOU TO GOO!



TRANSLATION NOTES



BARUSU, PAGE 51

"Barusu" ("Balse" in the English dub) is the incantation used to destroy the flying castle Laputa in the Studio Ghibli film *Castle in the Sky*. The spelling was kept as "barusu" so that it still functioned as an anagram of Subaru.



FUMIE & BATH ROMAN, PAGE 51

Fumie Hosokawa, also known as Fumin, is a Japanese entertainer who was featured in a long line of commercials for the Bath Roman brand of bath products between 1996-2005.

Domestic Girlfriend 9

KODANSHA COMICS Digital Edition

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First published in Japan in 2016 by Kodansha Ltd., Tokyo.
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Kodansha Ltd., Tokyo.

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English digital edition published by Kodansha Advanced Media, LLC,
San Francisco.

www.kodanshacomics.com

ISBN: 9781682338896

Digital Edition: 1.0.0

Translation by Adam Hirsch
Lettering by Daniel Park
Editing by Sarah Tilson
YKS Services LLC/SKY Japan, INC.

