

原案 HoneyWorks

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スキ キライ



西川ビーンズ文庫

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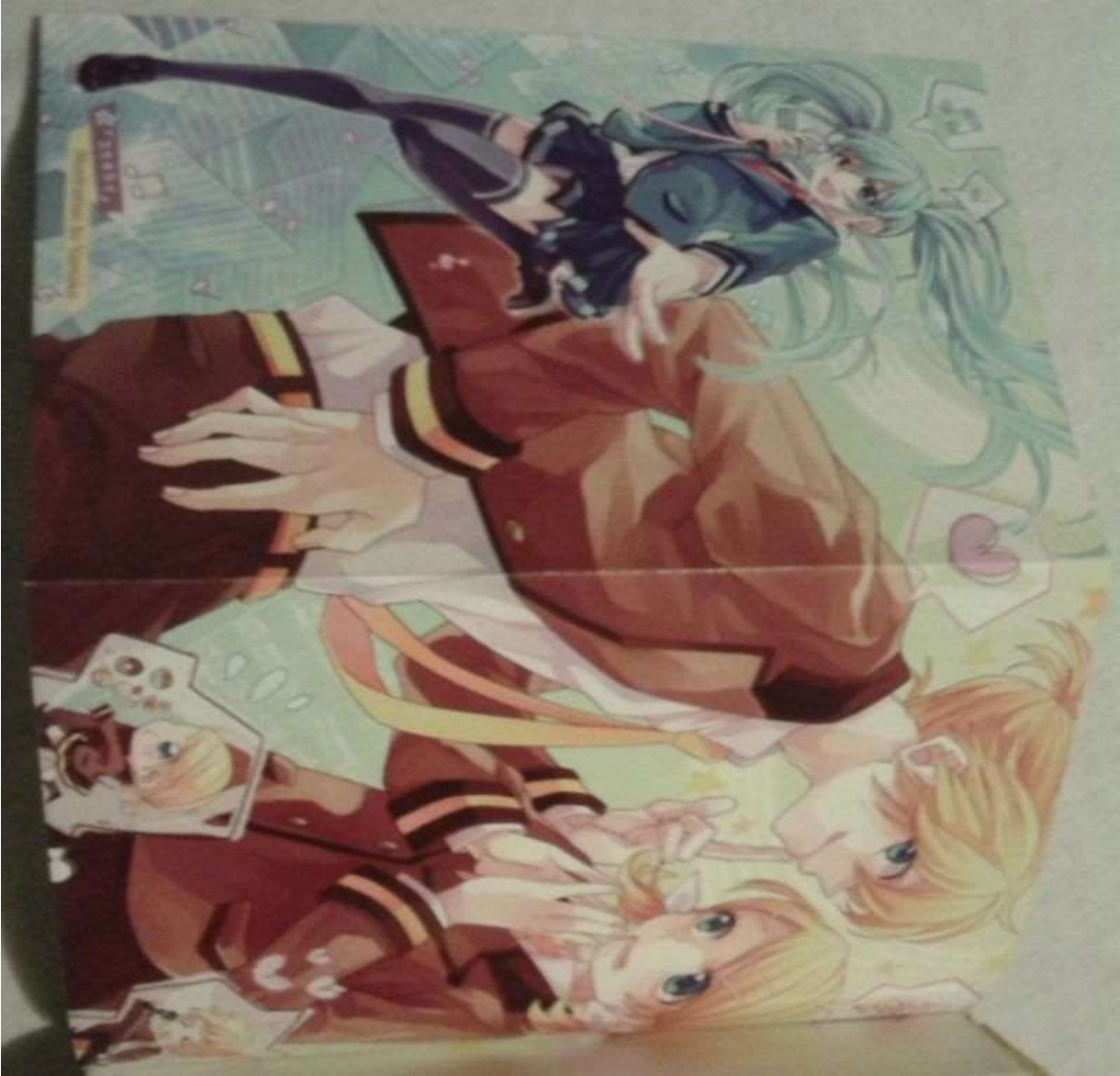








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Suki Kirai

Chapter 1

“An announcement to the new students! The teary-eyed angel over there called Otosaki Rin is going to be my girlfriend, so keep your hands off her. Ah, and don’t fall for her either, of course.”

No way. I can’t believe this.

What, why did it end up like this.

On the stage in the gymnasium with all the students gathered together, Kagami Len declared in a loud voice, the spotlight shining down on him. My head spinning from the unthinkable timing of what he shouldn’t have said, even now it feels like I’m about to collapse.

As I’m dumbfounded, the root of all evil waves his hand at me, his face beaming with a smile.

And so, because of a certain playboy, it was suddenly decided that the plain me’s high school life will end up turning into an uproar.

[Sorry that I can’t help there. Looking forward to Rin’s cookies <3]

While I was waiting for the cookies to finish baking, I got a text from my best friend Chika.

Chika is also a member of the Home Ec Club, and she works as a member of the student council.

What’s more, she’s the vice president although she’s only a 2nd year student.

Even today, she’ll be standing on stage with the president at the new students’ welcome party.

Cheerful and kind, Chika can clearly voice her opinions.

Compared to me, who’s frankly plain and shy, I think we’re the type who lives in different worlds.

Even so, we became so close because she strongly persevered at calling out to me every day.

[Don’t worry about it in the least. Do your best at the meeting, Chika! And the cookies are for the new students, alright?]

After sending back an encouraging text, I took a breather and absentmindedly gazed out the window.

It’s the second time that I’m looking at the cherry trees in leaf from the Home Ec room.

(Since they bloomed late this year, the flurry of falling cherry blossoms must’ve been beautiful for the entrance ceremony.)

Standing on top of a hill, there was a lot of greenery on Aisaka Private Academy’s grounds and the row of cherry trees from the school gate to the school building was popular with the cram school students as well. Similarly, I also fell in love with it at first sight in the school’s pamphlet.

“Rin, are they gonna finish baking soon?”

The door opened and the Club President suddenly poked their head in.

I stand up from the chair in a hurry and rush back to the oven.

“Ah, yes! About 5 more minutes.”

“Good, in that case they’ll be ready by after school with plenty of time left.”

Later on today, the new students will be in the gymnasium and the club activities will be introduced

to them.

Then, after school, the new students will go and visit the clubs they're interested in to hear more about them.

These cookies are bribes- I mean, snacks for them.

"Though, won't there be leftovers if I made so much?"

"There's no point in saying something fainthearted like that now! Got it? My magnificent club introduction will attract the new students' attention and with your cookies, we'll get the ones who come to visit through their appetite, every last one of them, alright."

"Every last one..."

"Certainly, every last one of them is impossible, since there's the Light Music Club. It looks like their fans are among the new students, who came to take the exams to pursue them."

"...As expected, it's the same again this year, huh."

Aisaka Academy's Light Music Club, called Honey Works, Haniwa for short, is a famous band even within the prefecture.

There's no end to the students who enter school because they admire Haniwa, and similarly I was into them during my middle school years, too.

Most importantly, at that time it wasn't Kagami Len, but a songstress called Miku who was leading them.

"Seriously, I'm way hyped for today's live concert for the new students! Rin, you can't wait either, right?"

"Well, it's our special event..."

"Haha. With this, the Prince will end up with the number of his fans increasing again~"

In this Academy, there's only person who's called by the nickname of Prince.

I haven't once called him that before, and I won't ever call him that.

"Speaking of which, Rin, you're in the same class as the Prince, right? Good for you."

"...It's not good at all."

Hopelessly feeling downhearted, my voice came out low, like I was naturally crawling on the ground.

At any rate, Kagami Len has been the cause of my worries for half a year.

Certainly, I'm a fan of Haniwa, and I like his singing voice, too.

Even so, I've never particularly thought of wanting to get close to him. Absolutely not.

It was enough to watch him from a distance, but for some reason, after last year's cultural festival, he's been chasing after me.

My peaceful days were broken too quickly, because this boy who's treated as a prince took notice of me more than necessary.

That playboy...

It may be meager, but give me back my calm everyday!

"I see. For the shy Rin, the Prince's fierce appeal is a heavy weight, huh."

".....What are you talking about?"

"It's no use denying it, because the rumours have made their way up to the 3rd years."

"Oh.....!"

"Last year, Len-kun showed up in Rin's class whenever it was recess, right? I heard that when you

passed him by in the hallway, he waved his hand while shouting out your name.”

“Please forget it, please erase it from your memory right away.”

“Do you hate it so much? Well I’ve always wanted to ask, what started it?”

“I’d like to ask the same thing!”

I have no idea why he’s teasing me.

Simply because it’s fun? Or is his aim to bully me?

In any case, I want him to stop being a nuisance at once.

“Hey, Rin..... Is it until 2nd year that he’ll keep publicly frolicking about that ‘I’m her boyfriend, it’s a date’?”

“..... But for me, that’s fine for the time being.”

“Eeh? Don’t you want a boyfriend?”

“.....Hmm, well.....”

Unable to completely deny the club president’s words, I ambiguously laughed.

It wasn’t like that during middle school, but when I became a high school student, the number of couples increased.

Let’s say that listening to love stories, it’s not like I was completely uninterested either.

But, how should I put it...

For me who hasn’t had their first love yet, none of these things come to mind.

Even when friends ask for advice, I end up thinking that it’s just like the stories in the world of dramas and light novels.

Even when I’m asked ‘Does Rin have someone she likes? What type do you like?’, I can’t answer at all.

“And what about you, Club President? Before, you’ve said that there’s someone you admire, right?”

“I’m okay. After all, they’ve long graduated. Speaking of Kaito-senpai, he was the club president of the Light Music Club when I was a 1st year. ”

If that was 2 years ago—.

The club president’s words made my heartbeat leap.

“Miku-san! The songstress Miku-san was also there, right!?”

“Hm? Aah, yeah, since she was a year above me.”

“I see, of course! How nice, I’m jealous!”

“So Rin can let out such a huge voice, too..... What, are you a fan of Miku-senpai’s?”

“Yes. So much that after hearing that Miku-san is in Aisaka’s Light Music Club, I wanted to take the entrance exam because of it.”

Miku-san is Aisaka Academy’s prided legendary diva.

Scouted while she was still in high school, going to Tokyo without waiting for graduation, she became one of the pros just like that.

After her major debut song, since she was always regularly in 1st place on the rankings, Arenaclub’s live tour was decided for this year. What’s more, she’s been invited to overseas festivals, to the point that there’s also a rumour that she might really advance further.

“You ought to give some attention to the Prince as well, even if it’s just a tenth of what you have for Miku-senpai.”

“I refuse.”

“Oh no, your future’s full of troubles like this. The welcome party is after this, so keep a smile?”

“I-I’ll make an effort.”

“Please do so. Well, I’m off to secure new club members with all I’ve got.”

The new students’ welcome party was livelier than usual.

The first years’ reaction to the Club President’s explanation was also extremely successful, at this rate it seems like it’ll get hectic after school.

“Well then, the last club for today is up next. Let’s call for the long-awaited ‘those people’. Aisaka Academy’s prided Light Music Club is taking the stage!”

Hearing Chika’s introduction as the emcee, the entire student body stands up at once with shouts of joy.

Taking that as a sign, the stage’s curtains slowly rise.

“— Welcome to Aisaka Academy.”

The spotlight shining down on him, the Prince who’s on vocals, Kagami Len gives a friendly smile. Even though he’s just standing in front of the microphone stand with the guitar in his hands, his presence is impressive.



スポットライトに照らされ、王子ことハルヒが、
ギターを弾きながら、ステージに立ち上る。それだけなのに、
観客たちは、ハルヒの歌声に、

I know that just by being there, he's giving off an overwhelming aura.

"The new students are getting lively without holding back, too."

Wrapped up in the excited cheering, Haniwa's concert began.

The first song, which could be called the standard, is 'Bamboo-cutter Overnight Sensation'.

Without the members inciting them to do so, at the intro they broke out in clapping to the beat from every seat.

Next was a new song called 'Confession Rehearsal'.

Though it was my first time hearing it, the refreshing melody and cute lyrics won't leave my ears.

(The feel of this sound..... I'm sure that Kagami Len composed this one, too.)

After the last note resounded, the MC began before moving on to the third song.

The songs and the band members, then the Light Music Club's activities are introduced.

If the new students were overwhelmed or not, just like it was for the other clubs, not a single cough is heard.

Instead, the usual girls from the 'Prince Fan Club' were being noisy.

"Here! Look over here, Prince!"

"Prince, you're so cool! Wave your hand!"

Looking at those girls who call Kagami Len as Prince, it's like they're the groupies of an idol.

(Though I heard they even wave pen lights at the regular concerts.....)

Today's event is a party after all, so it's possible that they're holding back.

The person himself quickly lowered his head once, that's all the reaction he's giving to the fangirls.

"— So with that, the next song will be the last."

Before I realized it, the club activities introduction had ended. To Kagami Len's words, the members pick up their instruments.

Then the next moment, he started to sing a capella.

"So it ends with this, I won't cry."

He didn't say the song's title, but I knew it right away.

(It's 'Crybaby Boyfriend'.....!)

It's the song that was recorded as the secret track on Miku-san's debut single.

I've always liked it, but after I heard Kagami Len sing it at the cultural festival last year, it wouldn't leave my ears.

Are they friends, or are they lovers?

Or is it an ambiguous relationship?

Their farewell is depicted in the heartrending lyrics.

(Just once would be enough, I wanted to see Miku-san singing.)

On the other side of thinking that, it's strange because it feels like this song is perfect for Kagami Len.

Just as if it was written for his sake.

(Ah, again..... Oh, what am I going to do.....)

Something hot streaming down my cheeks, I realize that I'm crying.

Oh no. His singing voice made me cry at the cultural festival last year, too.
My tears don't stop even as I keep brushing them away with my fingertips, and even my chest tightly squeezes.

(The girl beside me is crying, too.....)

I can't see that well in the dark gymnasium, but I think there are other girls with tears in their eyes.
His singing voice has the mysterious power to softly touch someone's memories.

(.....Even though the real Kagami Len is just a playboy.)

Since today's a welcome party, and just by the fact that the MC was there to keep things under control, it's usually merrier with everyone forgetting about their troubles.

Even without going as far as dressing like a gyaru-oh, the mood was light enough.

It's because the person himself accepts it with a smile even when the girls call him Prince face to face.

As I was thinking about things like that, it felt like my eyes met with his, standing on the stage.
Surprised, I have trouble breathing.

Unable to move like I was tied down, he suddenly closed his eyes.

— I don't remember too well what happened after that.

The keyboard sounding the last note, the applause and cheering started a little late.

I think that surely everyone gave themselves over to the song's echo.

Me too, I finally came to my senses after noticing the sounds around me and I clap my hands.

Amidst the lingering excitement, Kagami Len took the microphone from the stand.

Could this be an encore? He's still going to sing for us?

Amidst everyone's expectations welling up, I look up at the stage, too, with my heart racing.

“Sor-ry, I forgot to say the most important thing.”

Basking in the gazes throughout gymnasium that are on him, Kagami Len cracks a smile.

— The next moment.

Unbelievable words followed.

“An announcement to the new students! The teary-eyed angel over there called Otosaki Rin is going to be my girlfriend, so keep your hands off her. Ah, and don't fall for her either, of course.”

Politely, he went out of his way to point at me from the stage.

All sorts of gazes shift over to me at once.

(THIS BOY, HE'S REALLY THE WORST—!)

While feeling dizzy like the blood flow in my body has been reversed, a powerful sense of déjà vu strikes me at the same time.

Yes, this is— exactly the same as last year's cultural festival.

Though this time Kagami Len is being called Prince, he gave off the impression of a puppy when he entered the school.

Even though his height was no different than mine, since around the time GW {Golden Week} passed, apparently he himself said 'It's like puberty finally got to me?'

Participating in the concert at the cultural festival like that, the fan club was born among the girls. At the same time, Kagami Len.... uhm... let's say that's when he started taking notice of me.

(That time, too, maybe my eyes met with Kagami Len's on stage? Or so I thought.)

Although I don't know as a matter of fact, afterwards on the last night of the festival, he himself called out to me.

Why did the Prince of the Academy, to the plain me?

Even while thinking it to be strange, I ended up nodding my head in agreement when he said that he wanted to talk to me in private.

It's because I was still deeply moved after he sang 'Crybaby Boyfriend'.

Thinking back on it now, that was the start of everything.

"Um, what did you want to talk...."

"I like you."

"Eh?"

"Your answer's already supposed to be decided."

"..... Excuse me?"

I misheard it, if it isn't so, then it's a plan to shock me or something.

Suddenly confessing to me although we hadn't even had a proper conversation until then, that's too slanted.

To me steeling myself against him, Kagami Len closed in on me by saying "Let's become boyfriend and girlfriend!" with a serious expression.

“Hey, wait, why? Going out....”

“I like you.”

“...U-uhm, you see.... because! Listen to what I’m saying a little, idiot—!”

As I started to panic when he lightly grabbed my hand, in the end I complained on the verge of tears. Until Chika accidentally passed close by, an impossible argument continued between us like that.

Ever since, he’s been chasing after me like a half-stalker.

After becoming a second year in high school, we ended up in the same class, and I gradually ended up running out of places to run away to.

What made my head hurt the most was that the gazes of those around us mercilessly ended up focusing on us.

The boys aren’t like that, but the girls really are severe in various ways.

Why did Len-kun, for such a plain girl?

Hey Prince, what’s so great about her?

Like that, I’ve heard such things secretly whispered behind my back many times.

So like I’ve said, I’d like to know that, too!

I haven’t the slightest idea!

How much easier would it be, if I could say that to the girls.

“Ah—ah, a real shock..... I came to this school because I admired Len-senpai.”

“But we don’t know yet, do we? We just have to steal him away from this person called ‘Rin-senpai’.”

Even the new students starting to cause a commotion, the gymnasium ended up becoming noisy right away.

The sight of Chika and the others standing on the stage, trying their best to get the situation under control, it appears awfully distant.

My ideal high school life, my peaceful life....

At an incredible speed, it’s rapidly fading away.

At this time, feeling like I was starting to lose consciousness, I couldn’t even anticipate it.

Together with Kagami Len, that I’d lead an even busier and clamorous life—.

Chapter 2

After GW, the classroom was overflowing with a listless atmosphere, like after coming out of the pool.

Opposite of the dull mood, today's another sunny day in May outside the window.

(Really, I don't have any luck with raffles.....)

On the first seat change after becoming a 2nd year, I got the worst outcome of sitting beside Kagami Len.

The single biggest relief is that Chika was in the seat in front of me.

".....Chika, do you think you can show your face at the club activities today?"

Fifth period ending, I softly tapped Chika on the shoulder.

"Sorry, that might be tough. The preparations for the ball game....."

"That's not something to apologize for! It's coming up next month, after all. Ah, tell me if I can help you with anything?"

"Aww, Rin~! Really, what a good girl you are....."

"Oh!? H-hey Chika....."

Chika kneeled on the chair and stretches her arms out to hug me.

"They say that absence makes the heart grow fonder, we're fine, too, right?"

"That can't possibly be-. Chika-chaaan, are you insinuating something about me?"

"Well, if it isn't Len-kun. You were there?"

"I was, I was! I was part of the conversation, too! Hey, Rin-chan."

I hurriedly turned my head away, and tightly grabbed onto Chika's blazer.

"Len-kun, this is your answer."

Chika jerking up her chin, Kagami Len-kun turned around.

I carelessly glanced at the group at the window, too, curiosity overcoming my fear.

(That's.....they really are glaring at me, huh.....)

Even in the class, the girls who stand out conspicuously are Kagami Len's fans.

It seems that they're holding up a strict prohibition on stealing a march on each other in the fanclub, I frequently got stuck with getting a 'severe warning'. Some of them had boyfriends among them, but being a groupie was like having a different stomach for dessert or something.

"Hey, can't you pay some more attention?"

Chika said in a hushed voice, suspiciously staring at the ringleader.

"That sure is an unreasonable request. Besides, it's a fact that I like Rin? Don't you think it'd be even weirder to be all sneaky and secretive about it?"

"Haa? You're just simply pushing your own feelings onto her. I'm saying that if you're really thinking of Rin, you have to choose the time and place."

I phrased it differently, but I kept complaining with something similar to what Chika said, too.

But the reply is always the same.

"If Rin's looking at me without running away, it's okay like that."

Letting loose the familiar line with a smile, Kagami Len peeks at my face.

Like this, it's meaningless even if he lowers the volume of his voice.

Sure enough, I heard a voice that seemed displeased coming from Haraoka-san and the others in the

Prince Fan Club.

(Even if I resolutely ignore them, it ends up like this after all, huh....)

Kagami Len who won't retreat at all, Chika who protests against him and me who's at my wits' end. This triangle that you can't see the end of continued until the homeroom teacher came to hold the SHR {Short Homeroom}.

Before he could talk to me, I ran out onto the hallway like I was running away. On my way to the club room with hurried steps, the chime signalling a school broadcast sounded from the speakers.

"Year 2 Class 1, Otosaki Rin. Please come to the Music Prep Room urgently."

It seems that even over the machine, there's no change in that imperative intensity. The owner of that voice was the super Spartan music advisor famous who had taken the position since this spring, Meiko-sensei.

(I wonder why she called for me.....?)

I have no idea, but for now I hurried to the specified spot.

When I timidly knocked on the door of the Music Prep Room, a cheerful voice replied from inside.

"Yes, come on in."

"Excuse me. Um, I'm Otosaki Rin from Year 2 Class 1.... Eh? Eeh!?"

As I'm about to ask what she wanted from me, I'm bewildered by the scene that I jumped into.

For some reason, Kagami-kun in his jersey was there with Meiko-sensei.

"We've been waiting for you, expected new club member!"

Standing up from the chair, I was welcomed by Meiko-sensei grinning ear to ear.

Since she was wearing heels, the level of her eyesight was about the same as Kagami-kun's.

(Hm? With this flow... It can't possibly be that the new club member = me!?)

I wonder what it could be. I can't see the circumstances at all.

When I glimpsed at Kagami-kun, he was smiling just as happily as Sensei.

"The advisor's signature is already on the club admission form, all that's left is for Otosaki to sign it."

"U-um! Admitted to where?"

"Isn't it obvious? To the Light Music Club!"

"Well, I, I'm already in the Home Ec Club...."

"At our school, it's not prohibited to be in two at the same time, right?"

"That's true. Hey, that's not the point!"

Seeming like I'll be forced to join the club at this rate, I raised my voice right away.

Just as I did so, there's a sinister sparkle in Meiko-sensei's eyes.

(What shall I do, maybe I ended up making her angry.....?)

"Hey, Otosaki....."

"Y-yes"

“You’ve been practicing the piano for a long time, isn’t that so? Then, you’ve dabbled in composing and arranging, right?”

My reaction was late to those unexpected words.

But when I still somehow managed to nod, she suddenly gripped both my shoulders.

“Making an effort with Kagami, compose a new song! As far as I can see, you’re the most suitable for it.”

“Th-that’s impossible! Even though I’m practicing the piano, it’s really only as a hobby……”

“Since I became the advisor, we’re taking the MVP spot at this year’s cultural festival!”

“For that, we want Rin to help us.”

“……If it’s Kagami-kun’s band, I think they’d be able to take the MVP spot as they are now. Rather, if someone like me were there, I would only be a hindrance anyways……”

“I want it to be Rin.”

He said it in a decisive, unwavering voice.

“I don’t wanna do it unless it’s with Rin. It’s hopeless, without Rin.”

I thought that something like that is breaking the rules.

It was him with a thoroughly serious expression before my eyes, not the usual playboy.

Gazing into his clear eyes as they give off a strong light, I can’t even avert my gaze from him.

“It’s the vocalist who’s the closest to being the MVP in our club saying that, but how about it?”

Meiko-sensei speaking to me, I turned my neck as if it was released from being tied down.

From my parched throat, my voice won’t come out at all.

“……I-I’m……that is……”

As I was bewildered, Meiko-sensei lightly tapped her heels and turned to face Kagami Len.

“Well then, Kagami! That’s all I wanted to discuss, so head over to the perimeter.”

“Go-t it. Rin, see ya later.”

Leaving behind a wink, Kagami-kun leaves the Music Prep Room.

As I try to follow after him, my name is called this time.

“Otosaki! Once you’ve filled in the admission form too, change into your jersey and go for a run.”

“Huh? Um, but, about joining, I’ve yet to……”

“Can’t hear you. What was it again?”

“……Respectfully, I have the privilege of signing.” {She uses very polite expressions here.}

About a week has passed since I’ve been basically forced to join the Light Music Club.

Somehow finishing the muscle training around the perimeter today as well, I’m sitting on the carpet in the AV room.

This soundproofed room is Haniwa’s practice room.

“Ah!? Cold-……”

Something chilly touching my cheek, I cower away from it.

When I turn around, Kagami-kun was squatting down with a uselessly refreshing smile.
He's gripping a plastic bottle. Just when did he go and buy something from the vending machine?

"Rin prefers water, right? Here you go."

".....Thanks."

On the first day we had an exchange of "I don't need it" and "Don't hold back", but after realizing that Kagami-kun won't back down in the least, lately I've decided to meekly accept it.

(It's fine if it's just this much, right.....?)

It doesn't particularly mean that I let down my guard. Since brainwork awaits afterwards, it's energy-saving mode.

"Ah, something smells nice. I wonder what it is today."

Opening the window to cool down, Kagami-kun suddenly leaned forward.

Curious, I opened the window beside him, too and poked my head out.

"I guess it's probably cheesecake. The one made with fromage blanc."

"Fromage? What's that?"

"It means 'white cheese' in French, I guess it's used often in desserts like cakes. Together with fruits and jam, it's also eaten like yogurt."

"I see. I don't think I've eaten any before."

"You can eat some at the cultural festival if you come to our place. In that case, should I reserve some now?"

"Please do so."

Since Kagami-kun nods instantly, I hurriedly take out my cell.

Making a memo so I won't forget, I'll properly tell it to the club president later.

I get the feeling that if this ended as a joke, it'd be a pity all the same.

(It's related to the club's sales, so it doesn't really matter, right?)

".....Ri-Rin-cha-n?"

"What? Hold on a sec, I'm almost finished typing."

"Nope, not gonna wait!"

"Huh? Hey, waaaaaa!?"

His eyes suddenly opened wide, Kagami-kun plunged for my cell.

To be more exact, for the pink strap.

"It's the Sukikirai Kyunkyun Strap!? Obtained only by the ones who were chosen in the carefully selected lottery, the legendary....."

".....Y-yeah. You're pretty well-informed."

While starting to feel somewhat interested, I deeply nodded.

This omamori-type strap with the cute panda and bear comes as a set in pink and blue.

Their names are Riajuu Strap and Kyunkyun Strap.



“If you have Kyunkyun, then that means you have Riajuu, too, right? Did you already give it to someone? If you haven’t, then give it to me! If you gave it away by mistake, then let’s go and get it back.....”

“You won’t trick me like that! The legend that if you confess with this strap, you can feel your heart squeeze for eternity and you’ll become satisfied with your life, I know it too!”

We breathe heavily, as both of us finish speaking in one breath.

Rescuing my cell from Kagami-kun, we take a break like great swordsmen.

Maybe having given up after a while, Kagami-kun suddenly straightened his posture.

“.....You’re concerned about them {the Home Ec Club}, aren’t you?”

“You don’t have to look so apologetic, I can see right through it. That aside, you’ve cooled down enough by now, right? So, let’s finish this song as soon as possible.”

“Ee, what, you’re pretty enthusiastic, hu-h? Do you hate being with me so much?”

“Without sugar-coating it at all, that’s putting it plainly, but I guess that’s about right.”

“Rin, you–are–so–cold–!”

Kagami-kun glumly puffs his cheeks, but that’s just not possible for me.

The gazes of everyone in the Fan Club get sharper day by day. It seemed like the fact that I’ll be dismissed once the song is finished kept me safe.

(But if the other members were also present, it might be different.....)

Apparently they’re active in concentrating before a concert, and they usually gather once a week.

Furthermore, when Kagami-kun gets into composing a song, apparently it’s the others’ turn to practice individually.

“.....Kagami-kun, when you compose a song, don’t you feel like wanting to consult with someone?”

“Isn’t that why I asked Rin?”

“Not that, I meant the band members.”

“With them, I guess it’s like I consult them about arranging it once it’s done.”

“Can’t you do that this time, too?”

“I told you, that I want to get the MVP spot. In that case, there’s no point in doing it the same way as before.”

(Then you should just do it with the members from the composing.)

Especially with Tsurumaki Kanata-kun on bass, it looked like they were best friends.

They probably get along a lot better than with the likes of me, and most importantly, he ought to become an immediate asset.

“.....Hey, why me?”

“Because when the new song’s theme came to me, I thought that it’s hopeless without Rin.”

Before I knew it, Kagami-kun had gotten closer until he was right beside me.

I could even see myself reflected in his clear eyes.

Without averting my gaze, I waited for his next words with bated breath.

Then, Kagami-kun slowly opened his mouth–

“Making an announcement! The topic this time is just ‘love’.”

“Impossible.”

“Eeh, an immediate answer? Try thinking about it seriously a little more.”

“What’s impossible is impossible. After all, I haven’t even had my first love...yet...”

While saying that, I realized that I’m quickly going pale.

This is the worst, my tongue slipped. I’ll definitely be teased that I haven’t had my first love yet!

“.....Is it true, what you just said?”

As I’m looking down, Kagami-kun’s calm voice descends on me.

(This... instead of getting teased for it, it drew him in.....?)

This is trouble. If that’s the case, it might be better if I did it the other way around and laughed it off.

“Yeah, so?”

“.....I see, that’s how it is.....”

(No no, get more into it!)

I unintentionally added a retort, but you couldn’t sense it in the atmosphere that I was making light of it.

As can be expected of him, it looks like he has that kind of delicacy, too.

“Then, won’t you make me your first love?”

I take that back. He’s a playboy, he’s a playboy through and through.

Taking a deep breath, I snapped back right away.

“That’s why it’s impossible, absolutely impossible, impossible by all means!”

“Fufufu..... The more invulnerable it is, the more it fires you up, doesn’t it?”

(I was stupid for seriously listening to him.....!)

Since I always kept running away from him until now, I don’t know Kagami-kun that well.

It’s only as of late that we’ve started talking to each other properly.

That’s why I really don’t understand. Is this for fun, or is this a prank.....

I wonder why he’s obsessed with me?

(.....Don’t mind it, don’t mind it. I just have to endure it until the cultural festival.)

Telling myself that, I began playing the keyboard.

Chapter 3

I made several discoveries about Kagami-kun since it was decided that I'll help him with making a new song.

For example, that he truly loves singing.

He's a sore loser, he doesn't skip practice even if no one's watching, he doesn't cut corners.

Then, this was the most shocking thing, but.....

Why! Kagami-kun composed by humming.

"How in the world can you make such wonderful songs by humming!?"

"After recording it, I had Kanata and the others copy it down by ear."

Kagami-kun says casually, after school in the AV room that I've become completely familiar with.

As I'm amazed by that, he further continues.

"Rin, you have perfect pitch, right? Transcribing my humming to sheet music, if we record you playing the keyboard on the spot, I figured it might be easier for them to practice, too."

"..... You're seriously aiming for the MVP spot."

"O-f course! To obtain the guardians' votes, I really understood that it's tough to do on spirit alone."

"Oh I see, 'cause the guardians' votes are added twice."

"That's why the classes that put on a show have an advantage. After that are the regulars, such as the Wind Instrument Club and the Drama Club."

"But Kagami-kun and the others were nominated last year, weren't you?"

"We got the special award, you know-. Since we had the most votes from the current students."

I get it now. That's why he's excessively frustrated and became so desperate about it.

But it seemed like it wasn't just that for Kagami-kun.

"Besides, Miku..... The only time the Light Music Club got the MVP spot was during that age."

"Huh? Kagami-kun calls Miku-san by just her first name."

Those were unintentionally mumbled words.

But the moment I voiced them, my heartbeat jumped with a heavy thump.

On the other hand, Kagami-kun had ended up falling unusually silent.

"Erm, that is, I didn't mean to say that calling her by her first name is bad. It's just that, I got curious that maybe Kagami-kun had met Miku-san before."

".....Of course I've met her."

"O-ohhh..... It must've been at the cultural festival or something? 'Cause Miku-san had already made her Tokyo debut by the time we entered the school."

"Actually, Miku's an acquaintance of mine. Since she lived in my neighborhood."

The puzzle pieces fell perfectly into place in my mind.

The two of them knowing each other, Kagami-kun was entrusted with 'Crybaby Boyfriend'.

Then to follow in her footsteps, he wants to get the MVP spot at the cultural festival, too.

(In that case, why.....)

Why did he make someone like me join the club?

Why am I helping with composing a song for the sake of taking the MVP spot?

Am I really the right one for this?

“.....Will it be okay, with me? Wouldn't someone else be better?”

“Hm? Wait a sec. By someone else, you mean for making the song?”

“Actually, I'm Miku-san's fan. That's why I know that she's made a lot of wonderful songs other than 'Crybaby Boyfriend', and I think it's natural that she took the MVP spot.”

“That's why, so I won't lose to that.....”

“I think that Kagami-kun's songs and singing voice are just as wonderful. But you're aiming even higher than where you're at now, aren't you? If that's the case, you should search for someone who can give advice more actively on making a song.”

(It's impossible after all..... For me.....)

Firmly holding back the feeling of wanting to get away from here right away, I silently waited for Kagami-kun's words.

Only the sound of the wall clock's second hand frightfully reaches my ears.

After who knows how long had passed, Kagami-kun finally started to speak, little by little.

“There's something lacking in my songs..... I realized that Rin has that something.”

“Besides, I like Rin's singing voice. When you sang along to my humming, I started to think that I want to stand on stage together.”

That serious look resounded way more than the flirty 'confessions' until now.

If I could agree, I want to do it.

But I understand that someone like me can't live up to Kagami-kun.

“Since I've already told you my feelings, Rin, will you tell me yours next?”

“.....I,”

“Len, are you here?”

The door suddenly opening, the bass player Tsurumaki-kun stuck his head in.

Maybe instantly sensing the atmosphere in the room, he tilts his neck and raises one eyebrow with a 'Hm?'.

“Sorry, did I interrupt?”

“You sure did—. Kanata, you can't possibly be aiming for Rin.....”

“Don't lump me together with you, idiot. I forgot something here.”

“Eeh? Kanata-kun did, whose selling point is being a cool beauty?”

“What's with that?Well, forgetting something was just by coincidence.”

“See, didn't I say so! Certainly, Rin's the world's, no, the universe's cutest, though.”

“Different coincidence. I dunno why, but Meiko-sensei's calling for you in the hallway.”

Hearing Meiko-sensei's name, Kagami-kun's face literally changed color.

With a sigh, Tsurumaki-kun watches him leave the AV room in a hurry.

"Sheesh, that boy..... sorry for being noisy."

"As it was to be expected, maybe I've already gotten used to it."

"Ohhh..... I'm relieved, Otosaki sure can speak her mind, too. Then, I'll take the plunge and ask..... how's he doing? Since he gets incredibly nervous while composing, I got a little worried."

".....So that's how it is."

That was kind of unexpected. It's like a completely different person, compared to the Kagami-kun I know.

(Maybe I'll try asking about it more.....)

As I was hesitating, I heard the sound of shoes dashing through the hallway at full speed.

In a blink, the door opened with great force and Kagami-kun shouted, his shoulders heaving with his breathing.

"Okay, that's enough! Rin is mine! As if I could let her be all alone with Glum Glasses!"

"The only thing correct about what you said just now is that I wear glasses."

"Kagami-kun, you've mastered the art of creating fantasies, huh."

"That's way too cruel! Even Rin being like thaaaaat."

After Tsurumaki-kun went home, we continued working on the song.

A lot of things were left unsettled, but none of that mattered once he started playing the melody. My head becoming empty, I could no longer think of anything else but the song.

In the end, that only lasted until Meiko-sensei came to take a look.

(What should I do, he's there again today.....)

I came to get my bicycle from the parking area, but Kagami-kun is waiting for me without riding his.

Actually, from the day that I joined the club, no matter how much I declined, he accompanied me to the station.

Even though his station is in the opposite direction.

"Rin, aren't you hungry? Shall we stop by somewhere?"

".....I have somewhere else to go. See you tomorrow."

"Wait a bit! Hey, did something happen? Or, did I do something?"

Putting on an indifferent expression, I shake my head without saying anything.

"Then, let me accompany you to the station. I'll wait until you're finished with your errand."

Perhaps because he thought that just saying so was useless, Kagami-kun resorted to using force.

Grabbing my wrist, he pulls me along like that when I try to come to a stop.

"I can't let a girl go home alone so late."

Keeping my gaze cast down, I shake my head again.

"Could it be that you're holding back? Rin doesn't have to worry about it, since I'm doing it because I want to."

When I don't give him the slightest response, Kagami-kun continues speaking.

".....Then, how 'bout we do this? In exchange, call me by my first name?"

"Excuse me!?"

"Good, you finally opened your mouth....."

It was an awfully relieved voice, like I've never heard before.

I raised my head in surprise, but I couldn't see his expression well because of the backlight.

"Hey, won't you call me like that?"

As if he were trying to say that he won't forgive the silence, Kagami-kun puts a little force into his grip.

(.....Wow, his hand is big.....)

I know it's not the time for that.

But that was the honest impression that floated into my mind.

Feeling the warmth spreading from where he's touching me, my voice comes out high-pitched.

"L-let me go after I call you that!"

"Alright, go ahead."

(Eh? So he's not going to let me go in advance.....)

It's possible that he thinks I'll run away if he releases me in advance.

"Hey, Rin. Still?"

".....Le-Len.....Len-kun....."

I said it. I ended up saying it.

This is the worst: my heart beating so hard that it seems like it'll jump out, it hurts and I'm having trouble breathing.

(After this, what sort of expression should I make when I'm talking to him.....)

When I looked at how he was doing, Len-kun had already covered his face with one of his hands.

"Len-kun? What happened?"

".....Nah, um..... or rather, that had more destructive power than I imagined....."

"Destructive power?"

"Oh, sorry! I kept gripping your hand....."

Though it subtly didn't become a conversation, Len-kun let go of my hand as promised.

Then, while staggering as if he had caught a cold, he starts pulling his bicycle down the hill road.

(Oh well, we ended up going home together until the station after all.)

That said, it felt awkward to leave Len-kun alone who was acting weird.

Though I'm used to walking to and from school on this road, over and over again it feels like I'm about to trip over invisible bumps.

Plus, we're not talking at all.

He sometimes says a word or two intermittently and that's it.

".....Speaking of which, the place you wanted to drop by?"

(Uh-oh, so he remembered. It'd be hard to say an excuse by now.....)

Avoiding meeting his gaze to an extent that's not unnatural, I pointed at a certain store.

“Over there..... Yes, the newly-opened general store!”

“Eeh, since when..... they’re starting to put away the sign! Let’s hurry.”

“Wa-wait, Len-kun! Don’t pull my hand.....”

Fortunately, it didn’t even take 5 minutes to reach the shop.

It feels like a narrow escape from death, really.

“Rin? Aren’t you going inside?”

“It looks like they’re busy with preparations for closing up, I’ll pass on it today.....”

Even during the time I was answering, I couldn’t tear away my gaze from the pendant hanging in the window.

Maybe it’s a quartz. Though the entirety of it is whitish, depending on the angle, it looks like it shines with the colors of the rainbow.

“It’s a rainbow quartz, huh.”

“Awesome! Len-kun, you know it?”

“Well, I did just now. Look, the description is written on the card.”

“Oh, I missed that as I was admiring it..... I mean! Why are you looking at it.....”

“That’s because Rin, you’ve been intently staring at it. Want it?”

“I don’t!”

Feeling like my face is about to burst into flames, I passed by in front of the store with quick steps.

Coming after me in no particular hurry, Len-kun starts talking in a slow voice.

“Be more honest—. You were really staring at, weren’t you?”

“.....Did you see the price tag? As a natural thing that quartz costs ten thousand, even such a small one, you know.”

“Ugh! Actually, you sure know a lot about it. Is it true that you like that sort of thing?”

“You don’t need to tell me, I know that it doesn’t suit me.”

“What the heck?Rin, you’re a little mean to yourself, aren’t you?”

“That’s not true.”

“I can say the same words right back to you—. It definitely suits Rin, I can guarantee it.”

I wonder why Len-kun is full of confidence.

I wonder why I feel happy.

Holding down my restless heartbeat from above my dress shirt, I speak while praying that my voice won’t tremble unnaturally.

“.....But it’s Len-kun guaranteeing it.”

“Awful!! It may not seem like it, but I’ve got a sense for beauty in its own way, alright?”

“Aah, in its own way, huh.....”

“Rin-chan, that’s not the part you need to pick out, you know.”

When I made fun of him like I would with the club president or Chika, Len-kun went along with it.

(.....Why, I should’ve done it like this all along.)

After noticing that it seemed like just the right sense of distance, the conversation became more

enjoyable, too.

So much that the way to the station felt short because of it.

Changing from the long-sleeved uniforms to the short-sleeved ones, the nights become shorter and the days become longer.

Around the time I had found where I belong at the Light Music Club where I showed my face at once a week, school rushed into summer break.

“Eh! Len-kun, you started working!?”

In the donut shop we stopped at on our way home from club activities, I accidentally let out a loud voice.

Sitting in the seat opposite of me, Len-kun shushed me, putting a finger to his lips.

“Sorry, but that surprised me..... Won’t it be a problem, doing it alongside club activities?”

“It’s fi–ne, it’s fi–ne. It’s only during summer break. Anyways, wanna go on a date tomorrow?”

“Whoa!”

Startled, the straw makes a weird noise. No, I was the one who made it.

That Len-kun, his expression is so nonchalant that it’s obnoxious.

“Rude. Didn’t you take being startled too far?”

“A date, that’s..... If you ask that so suddenly.....”

“It puts you on the spot, huh, I bet girls have all sorts of preparations. But, it’s okay! Meiko-sensei and the others asked me, tomorrow we’d just be running errands.”

“.....Excuse me?”

“In short, for me it’d be a date, but the rest of the world would call it ‘shopping’, I gu–ess.”

Is he picking a fight with this? Yeah, he’s definitely picking a fight.

Seeing me flustered, there’s no doubt that his goal was to smirk.

“What if you went alone?”

“Sorry, sorry. You were unable to stomach that I said shopping?”

“If you meant to say that you can’t carry things with those slender arms, I guess I could help out?”

“It’s because I thought I’d get turned down if Rin was aware that it’d be just the two of us–.”

“Huuh!? Of course not! When and where are we meeting tomorrow?”

“As expected of Rin, you get what I’m saying~. Then, at 10 am in front of the station, thanks.”

(If I could, I want to go home just as I am, turning back the way I came.....)

The next day, the moment I saw Len-kun wearing plain clothes in the crowd of people in front of the station, I intensely thought that.

“Rin, that one-piece is cute, it really suits you.”

“.....thank-you-very-much.”

“Ahaha! Why the broken words? Could it be that you’re embarrassed?”

Feeling as reproachful as can be, I stare at Len-kun who's laughing in high spirits.
It might not be an empty compliment, but for me, it isn't anything other than unpleasant.

If I'm to give a live coverage of the situation, the surrounding gazes were focused on Len-kun. Casually wearing a three-quarter length jacket over his jacquard-patterned cutsaw {dress shirt made from jersey}, men and women of all ages look at him twice.
(It looks like that sort of thing doesn't bother Len-kun.....)
Maybe he's already gotten used to catching people's attention, he's walking extremely normally. Or perhaps I should say, he seemed to be in such a good mood that it seemed like he was about to start humming even now.

"The two of us walking like this, aren't we like newlyweds?"
"Leave the sleep-talking for when you're sleeping."
"It would be nice to live near Shouto in Shibuya. And with three kids!"
"Alright, I'll bear it with clenched teeth."
"Eeh? Why is it that you only smile like crazy at times like these?"

With the drive to leave behind Len-kun who's speaking in a pathetic voice, I turn my back to the station and brusquely walk away.
But unfortunately, I didn't know our destinations for the day.

".....For the errands, what do we have to pick up and where?"
"At the music store, a baton for Meiko-sensei, guitar picks for Kanata..... what was it, they did entrust me with the order slip... Huh? Where is it?"

Len-kun is fumbling in his jacket, but I can see a paper in the back pocket of his sarouel pants. I wonder if this is a gag for the sake of softening the situation.
After hesitating for a moment, I reached my hand out towards the paper.

"Not there, look in the back."
"Eh? Th-thanks..... Then, let's pull ourselves together and go."
"Where to?"
"To our new home!"

You're still saying that?
I thought of retorting with that, but Len-kun's bright red face drew back my words.
Taking a better look, his ears are red, too, to the bottom of his neck.

".....Before that, how about we get some tea somewhere? Wouldn't it be better to cool off a little?"
"Eh, you mean cool off my head? Rin, you're awful~"
"Now listen here, I'm seriously worried!"
"Rin is! Worried about me! What should I do, I'm about to cry for real....."

It's hopeless. More than usual, it's not possible to hold a conversation.
(Even if I say that, I can't think that he's intentionally dodging the conversation, can I?)
How should I say it, I'm feeling fluffy?
Absent-mindedly, a preoccupied air, ready to run away?

“For the time being, shouldn’t we get the errands done first? Then, let’s go and get tea somewhere afterwards.”

As if he had pulled himself together, Len-kun started walking in a gallant manner.

Is he merely playing the fool again, or could he be waiting for me to make a quip at him this time? On the standing signboard of the music store that’s our destination, the arrow is drawn pointing in the completely opposite direction in which Len-kun’s headed.

“Umm, Len-kun……. It looks like the store’s the opposite way, though.”

“Huh? No way, how come?”

“……Look.”

“Of course, it moved, huh–.”

Though I tried to suggest that we go some other day, I ended up getting a smack in the eye.

Len-kun forcibly tried to brush me aside by the shoulder and move over to the right-hand side.

“Why?”

“Just because–.”

Though there was no way he didn’t notice that I was in a huff, Len-kun looks as if it’s no concern of his.

But, I found out the reason for that right away.

(I was walking on the roadway side…….)

Even after that, Len-kun alternately showed suspicious behaviour and consideration.

I thought that he invited me because he wanted me to help him with carrying the stuff, but ultimately Len-kun ended up carrying it all by himself. On top of that, he didn’t even let me open and close the door of the shops.

(At this rate, it really is like we’re on a date…….)

Without a sense of reality, the memories of what we talked about are unreliable, too.

When we made it back to in front of the station, I ended up feeling relieved at the bottom of my heart.

“Good job. Thanks for coming along with me today.”

“Same here, sorry for making you carry most of the stuff.”

“Didn’t you promise not to say it? Kidding, I like this honest side of Rin, too.”

“……!”

(Oh no, I was supposed to accept it with a laugh and let it slide…….)

As for Len-kun to whom I had just provided material to tease me with, he’s wearing a serious expression for some reason.

As I was bewildered by the atmosphere suddenly changing, I heard a small cough.

“…….There’s something I, want to give……. to Rin.”

From the pocket of Len-kun’s jacket, a small box tied with a ribbon appeared.

Holding it out to me, his gaze encourages me to accept it.

I only keep standing still, in the end Len-kun placed it on my palm.

“Open it.”

I've seen this kind of exchange in dramas.

But there's no way it could possibly be happening to me. Not to mention, it's with Len-kun.

(Be still, my heart.....!)

I'm sure that there has to be a punch line waiting again.

Telling that to my heart that's making an impossible misunderstanding, I slowly untie the ribbon.

But seeing what's inside, my heartbeat ended up getting increasingly faster.

"This is....."

"Rainbow quartz. I figured that if it's a pendant, Student Counseling won't have a problem with it either."

Len-kun smiles inconspicuously, as if he's revealing a secret.

(Perhaps, why he started working..... what Len-kun wanted was.....)

I'm happy. I honestly felt that way.

At the same time, I feel like I can't stay a second longer.

"Thanks. I truly feel happy."

".....How you feel?"

"For something I'm getting from a friend, how should I say it..... I think it's too extravagant."

"Aah, that's how....."

Without any notice, Len-kun's voice suddenly became low.

(Did I end up saying something horrible.....?)

"Rin, do you like me? Or do you hate me?"



With this timing, that question?

Taken aback, I end up staring back at Len-kun without saying anything.

A serious voice in that instant earlier, now he's wearing the friendly smile that I'm familiar with. Then, a flirty confession like business as usual.

It's the same as always, isn't it.....?

It is, isn't it.....?

(If this had been before I joined the club, I would've said I hate him without hesitating.....)

While we faced each other and devoted ourselves to composing, I saw a side of him that's not just a playboy.

If it's as friends, I also found out that we get along pretty well.

Then, what about now?

I wonder what the difference is between like and hate?

To begin with, I wonder what sort of feeling love is?

“—Sorry, for troubling you.”

Hearing Len-kun's voice startles me. How much time had passed?

It seems that I had completely frozen up.

“Well, that is..... um.....”

“You don't need to strain yourself to answer now, really, don't worry about it. It's fine, if I can stay by Rin's side.”

I don't remember how I got home that day.

Before I knew it, without even eating dinner, I was just simply lying down in bed in the dark room.

(The whole thing is kind of like a dream.....)

But the rainbow quartz shining in my hands affirms that it isn't a dream.

(Like and hate.....It's hopeless, I don't get it at all.....)

But, I at least understand that the inside of my chest is getting hotter.

As if it were complaining about something, I can hear the sound of my heartbeat more clearly than usual.

Sweet, yet painful.....

I wonder, what is this feeling?

Chapter 4

A week has passed since I went out with Len-kun.

Since that day, I haven't shown my face at the Light Music Club for a while.

Is it a teething fever, or is it a cold..... Anyways, I ended up confined to my bed and got stuck with not leaving the house.

When I explained the situation to Meiko-sensei in a text, Len-kun contacted me right away. Since I don't remember giving him my address, I think he probably asked Meiko-sensei for it.

[Things are all right here, so get plenty of rest without worrying—!
Ah, I don't need you to reply, either]

Spoiled by Len-kun's kindness, I ended up shelving everything until the day I returned to school. (I need to at least thank him for the rainbow quartz.....)

Inside the cooler bag, there's a cake made with fromage.

He's said so before that he wants to eat some, and it'll be practice for the cultural festival, so I thought it would be just the right opportunity.

(Borrowing the Home Ec room's refrigerator, I'll take it out just before.)

And there's one more thing.

The Sukikirai Riajuu Strap is in my uniform's pocket.

Of course, there's no deep meaning.

Since he wanted it so much, it's only because of that that I'll let him have it.

It's okay if we can get even, on equal footing, with this.

"Ah, Ootosaki Rin.....!"

After passing through the school gate, someone called my name from behind me.

I turned around by reflex, but I regret it as soon as I see who the voice belongs to.

Haraoka-san and the others, every member of the Prince Fan Club, were gathered there.

(Argh, I'm getting glared at again.....)

When I turn back ahead in a fluster, this time I could hear the whispering voices of the people all around me. As if I had been surrounded by an encircling net, I let out a small scream.

Among them were people I've never seen before as well, it seemed like first years and third years were also mixed in with them.

"Hey, is that rumour true? Was it seriously Ootosaki-san who went on a date with the Prince?"

"Like, I've heard that someone saw the two of them walking around in front of the station....."

"So Len-kun finally got a girlfriend~"

To the words that were whispered by everyone, I quickly turn white as a sheet.

(No way, we were seen.....)

We were just shopping for the club! We're not going steady either!

I feel that I have to clear up the misunderstanding and say that, but my body won't stop trembling.

(I just wanted to spend my days in peace and quiet.....why.....)

Stung by the gazes of the people around me like poisoned needles, it even brought back horrible memories.

It happened when I was in middle school.

Back then, I was even more ignorant about love than I am now, I didn't really understand it. That's why I was close with both boys and girls, and apparently that became a reason for them to criticize me.

Calling me things like flirt. Or everybody's friend.

After being constantly showered by surprising words, I finally noticed.

That if I want to live in peace, I mustn't stand out more than necessary.

That I shouldn't carelessly get close to boys in particular.

"But it's funny! That rumour, they obviously must've seen the wrong people."

"Exactly, there's no way Len-kun would go steady with a plain girl, right?"

Standing still while they pass by me, Haraoka-san and the others laugh as they deny it.

Getting hooked on it, other people also whispered things like "Now that you mention it...."

(I'm glad, it could've been worse.....)

Was it really okay?

Just because the misunderstanding was cleared up here, it doesn't necessarily mean that the rumour itself will disappear.

But, in that case..... I wonder what I should do.

I get the feeling that even if it's the truth, repeatedly telling it to everyone will have the opposite effect.

(Is there no other method than distancing myself from Len-kun after all?)

Without reaching an answer, I headed towards the classroom, dragging my heavy feet.

Chika worriedly asked me "Do you still have a fever?", but I couldn't do anything other than ambiguously laugh and shake my head.

All along during homeroom, Haraoka-san and the others' gazes pierced through me.

Despite that, since it doesn't seem like they want to say anything either, I unnecessarily get scared.

I felt Len-kun's gaze from the seat beside me, but oddly, he didn't call out to me today.

It's possible that he sensed the mood for once.

(In any case, I shouldn't show my face at the Light Music Club today, huh.....)

I'll have Chika and the student council members eat the fromage cake.

When the chime rang at the end of the school day, I ran to the Home Ec room as if I were running away.

The door suddenly opened as I was moving it to the cooler bag from the refrigerator.

Thinking it was the club president, I lifted my head, but unexpected people were standing there instead in an imposing stance.

“Do you have a minute? There’s something we have to talk about.”

“.....Haraoka-san.....”

The usual four people were standing behind her.

Plus, there’s also a group of people who are checking in on things from the hallway.

“Getting straight to the point, are you the one who’s spreading that rumour?”

“Eh.....”

For a moment, I didn’t understand what she said.

Neglecting me as I’m dumbfounded, the people from the Fan Club keep mouthing off one after the other.

“We warned you over and over again, didn’t we? The Prince belongs to everyone, so cut it out already.”

“Did you think you could make a good match with the Prince? Aren’t you getting a little too carried away?”

“Hey, since you said Meiko-sensei invited you, we’d let it slide that you joined the Light Music Club, too.”

“Actually, the Prince is the Prince, right? Why would a girl like you.....”

“To be honest, Len-kun is kind of like a loser lately.”

“Ah, I know! Even though the cool and a little sadistic prince type is what’s popular—“

(Why.....? Why are they talking about Len-kun, too?)

At that moment, I spoke up in such a loud voice that I even surprised myself with it.

“Don’t speak ill about Len-kun!”

“.....Hu-huuh? Isn’t it your fault in the first place, for clinging to the Prince?”

To Haraoka-san’s counterargument, the Fan Club’s people vigorously nod in agreement, too.

This time, I was at a loss for words.

(Uhm.....? When did I ever cling to Len-kun?)

It’s possible that it won’t get across to these girls, no matter how I say anything.

I wonder if they ever had any intention at all to listen to what I have to say in the first place.

“Ahaha! What an incredible reasoning that is.”

Cutting through the oppressive atmosphere, Len-kun’s well-projected voice resounded in the hallway.

(Len-kun.....!?)

I realize that everyone present here is perplexed by Len-kun’s unusual behaviour.

Even Haraoka-san and the others, whose badmouthing got heard, went completely pale.

“I’m the one who wants you to cut it out already. Of course, I’m really grateful for your support of the band, and I do think that I want to live up to the expectations?”

Len-kun’s tone of voice suddenly became kind, he spoke to them while looking at their faces one by one.

Just as if he were being the MC at a concert.

“But, don’t they call this kind of thing private? Who I like, what sort of attitude I have towards someone, it doesn’t concern you people, does it? It’d be great if you could drop it.”

“Bu-but! Len-kun, didn’t you go steady with Miku-senpai in middle school?”

“You still like Miku-san, don’t you!?”

What was that just now?

Miku-senpai and Len-kun, they were going steady?

“Is that story true?”

Taken aback, Haraoka-san asked the first-year who was looking at the scene from a distance.

Firmly nodding, they informed her: “I heard it from my older sister.”

After that, things were thrown into utter confusion.

But all in all, it felt like the happenings of a distant world.....

By the time I realized it, I had already ran away from there.

I heard Len-kun shouting for me to stop, but I couldn’t afford to turn around.

Really, it’s kind of ridiculous.

Like between boys and girls? I ended up seriously thinking about things like that.....

Like? Hate?

Len-kun said it a lot up ‘til now, didn’t he.

That was just fooling around as friends.

He even went steady with someone like Miku-san, there’s no way he’d like someone like me.

The legendary diva, and the plain girl who can play the piano a little.

You can’t even compare the two.

“I have to hurry and reach Chika.”

The cooler bag that I put the fromage cake in felt awfully heavy.

Not a week has passed since the start of the new school term.

As usual, I can’t look at Len-kun’s face.

With the seat change, we got separated to the window side and the door side, I get the feeling that the outfield has also gotten quieter.

(But it can’t stay this way forever, can it.....)

Regular classes start tomorrow, and club activities will properly resume.

For the new song, only the lyrics and arrangement were left to be done.

It’s a little bit early, but I think that it won’t be much of a hindrance if I leave the club now.

(But, for what reason? With what sort of expression, how should I say it?)

If I trace it back to the beginning, it’s since the time we went shopping for supplies during summer vacation that I’m unable to look at Len-kun’s face. Since he gave me the rainbow quartz pendant that day.

“Ah, again..... Isn’t the Prince always yawning?”

“He was fast asleep during SHR, wasn’t he? His eyes looked red, too, I guess it’s sleep-deprivation?”

On the way back from the school assembly, the girls in the class worriedly whispered amongst themselves.

I naturally end up listening attentively to just the parts that I'm concerned about.

"Perhaps he's under the influence of the incident with Haraoka-san and the others' assault....."

"That he's going steady with Miku-san?"

"It's just a rumour, but it looks like the Prince got dumped."

"Eh, isn't it still going on? That's what I heard."

Unable to listen any longer, I quietly left the line.

When I do so, Chika notices and runs up to me.

"Rin! Where are you going?"

".....I thought I should go to the infirmary."

"Okay, I'll go with you."

"Eh! I'd feel bad about it. It's fine, I can go on my own....."

"What are you saying, with such a pale face! I'll go and tell the teacher, so just wait there."

"Wait Chika, I really....."

"There's something I want to talk about with just the two of us. Okay?"

Being told that by my best friend, I have no other choice than to nod in agreement.

As we head quietly towards the infirmary, the 'Out of Office' sign hung on the doorknob.

"Perfect. In the worst case, I was thinking of going somewhere else."

".....So it's such an important matter."

"Rin, don't you get it? It's about Kagami Len."

Sitting down on the bed, Chika lightly patted the spot beside her.

Unable to calm down for some reason or other, I sit down leaving a bit of a bigger distance between us.

Without showing signs of being bothered by it, Chika speaks in a decisive voice.

"I won't ask what happened. I bet it's not something an outsider should interfere with anyways."

".....Thanks."

"It's not something you need to thank. Besides, there's something I want to say *because* I'm an outsider."

".....Okay."

"About Len-kun and Miku-senpai."

Aahh, just as I thought.

Chika noticed that things were awkward between us.

If I were to say my true feelings, the feeling of not wanting to hear it is bigger.

It was long exhausted already, and I don't want to be hurt any more.

(Even so..... I get the feeling that if I turn my back to it here, I won't ever be able to move forwards.....)

Making up my mind, I stare straight into Chika's eyes.

"Please. Tell me."

Facing me, Chika stares back without a word. As if she were trying to peek intently into the depths of my heart.

"— Alright. Just, don't forget this one thing."

The past is the past.

What she told me after that preliminary remark was the story of Len-kun during his middle school years that I couldn't even imagine.

"Len-kun and I went to the same middle school, right? Our mothers got along, it seems they went to places together and gave each other advice about their problems."

"Apparently things were a little complicated in that family from the beginning, when Len-kun was a second-year, they eventually got a divorce..... While they were in the middle of discussing things with the lawyers, his mom passed away in a traffic accident."

"You might not be able to imagine what I'm about to tell you, but Len-kun's a crybaby. Miku-senpai moved here just after his mom's funeral, she looked after him like an older sister."

"Before long, the rumour spread that the two of them started going steady..... But when Miku-senpai was 17, she got scouted, right? The commonly accepted theory is that she had to go to the capital to make her pro debut, so things died out over time between them."

What Chika told me was sad. It was painful.

But more than that, the truth that I finally found out wrenched my heart.

I thought that Len-kun was entrusted with 'Crybaby Boyfriend' because they knew each other.

But actually, it's not that he was entrusted with it in the first place.

That's a song for Len-kun and Miku-san's sake.

The crybaby is Len-kun, the strong one is Miku-san.

(I wonder what kind of feelings Len-kun sang it with all along....)

He only performs it when it counts, too.

It stirs the hearts of the people listening to it so much, too.

All in all, that's because it's full of Len-kun's feelings for Miku-san.

"I ran away..... It must've felt awful."

The mumbling gradually turning into a tearful voice, the drops fell on my skirt and left a stain.

Selfishly misunderstanding, I ignored Len-kun as he called for me to stop.

And I've been avoiding him ever since.....

"Hey, Chika, you know what? I'm the *worst*."

"I arbitrarily decided that Len-kun's a playboy..... Having to make a song with him, even after I became able to talk with him like friends, I thought that it's just another joke again anyways, I never took it seriously when he said something to me...."

"And yet, when we went shopping together and he asked me 'Do you like me? Hate me?', I took him seriously. And then when I heard Len-kun and Miku-san's story, I selfishly felt betrayed....."

"To tell truth, I..... Len-kun, I—"

After that, I couldn't make a sound.

".....I get it, I get it. I noticed Rin's true feelings."

Quietly reaching her hand out, Chika strokes my head to comfort me.

"Do you remember what I said just now? The past is the past."

".....But, I don't know what I should say."

"Okay, I took away Rin's 'but'! If you don't pay attention, it'll become a habit, you know?"

"Ah....."

Taking a deep breath, this time Chika's hand lightly patted me on the shoulder.

"Hey, what if you took the plunge once in a while? It's not really a big deal if you make a snap decision, and once you actually start running, it might surprisingly work itself out somehow."

Seeing that I can't answer, Chika keeps talking.

"Rin, even you think that things can't go on like this, right?"

".....Yeah....."

I mustn't avoid Len-kun forever.

Forget about nothing changing, the situation will just keep getting worse.

Besides—.

No matter how Len-kun thought of it, I had fun being with him.

If it's as friends, we might be able to get along even better.

After apologizing, with that I'll tell him again.

Putting aside like and hate, we'll make a fresh start from the beginning once more.

I'll say 'please become friends with me'.

"Thanks Chika, I gotta go."

"kay, good luck."

The path to the AV room on the top floor of the north building had never felt so long before.

After taking several deep breaths, I slowly open the door so it won't make a sound.

(Today Tsurumaki-kun is here, too.....)

Sitting around one desk, he and Len-kun were looking at the score with serious expressions.

It looks like they had decided on the arrangement, a song title that I've heard at a concert before was flying around.

Len-kun hums, Tsurumaki-kun plays it again on the bass.
Without uttering a single sound, the song takes on a new form.

(Both of them are wearing incredibly serious expressions.)

The face in profile that I should've gotten completely used to seeing, it seemed like it belonged to a different person now.

Concentrating on the music, it looks like his world consisted of nothing but that.

(.....Surely, he hasn't even noticed yet that I came.)

I went as far as preparing myself mentally before I quietly slipped in, so I wonder why I'm feeling so lonely.

Selfishly distancing myself from him, selfishly feeling a 'wall' between us, it really can't be helped.

"Len, you did it again."

Tsurumaki-kun suddenly stopped playing and rapped on the score with his finger.

"The chord at the end of the high note, it becomes the same as the one before it. Actually, isn't that Miku-san's habit?"

"Ah-..... Yeah, got it."

"You weren't aware of it? Sheesh, pay attention."

Seeing Len-kun drop a forced smile, I felt dizzy.

As if the floor was crumbling, my feet suddenly.....

Clatter!

Rattling the door I was holding onto, I ended up making a huge noise.

As expected, they noticed and our gazes met up perfectly.

"Rin! I'm glad, I thought you wouldn't show up yet today."

"Otosaki, did your summer cold get worse? It's because Len dragged you around, isn't it, sorry about that."

"Huh? Kanata, what are you acting like a good person for? I can apologize properly on my own, you know!"

"What, you haven't apologized yet?"

From the odds and ends of the conversation, I find out about Len-kun's consideration.

He skilfully covered for me as to why I didn't show my face for club activities.

"Uhm, well..... I'm fine now."

When I ambiguously laugh it off and tell him not to worry, Len-kun's expression enthusiastically brightens.

"I'm glad!! Then hey, let's finish up the new song, too. This time, we should do the double vocals, huh. Making the lyrics like a dialogue, will you sing with Rin and I?"

"Oi, I haven't heard about that."

"Yeah, it's the first time I mentioned it."

That's totally Len-kun's pace.

Putting aside my feelings, things proceed rapidly.

“I tried writing the lyrics partway through. Rin, would you put your parts into the empty spots?”
Without taking the score that he held out to me, I shook my head.
“.....I didn’t say that I’d do it yet.”

The next moment, the atmosphere turned cold.
(I..... what did I say.....?)
Surprising myself, I unconsciously cover my mouth with my hand.
Even though I came to apologize, it ran in the opposite direction at full strength.

The one who broke the delicate silence was Tsurumaki-kun, who had ended up caught up in it.
“See, that’s the normal reaction. Next time, be sure to tell things to people in advance.”
Standing up while saying that, he left the club room without time to stop him.
Leaving behind Len-kun and I.

In the AV room that was as silent as a grave again, we couldn’t even meet each other’s gazes.
After a while, Len-kun called out to me in his usual manner.
“What’s been going on lately? Meiko-sensei was concerned, too.”
“.....Yeah.”
“Ah, no, I don’t mean to blame you, you know?”
“.....Yeah.”

To me giving nothing but automatic responses like a robot, Len-kun lets out a sigh.
Scratching the back of his neck, he begins to talk, seeming awkward.
“It’s only a guess, but..... Were Haraoka-san and the others the cause?”
“Eh.....?”
“Is it tough, being in the band?”
Len-kun’s questioning got at the heart of the matter, it froze the air of this place at once.
“.....Listen, Len-kun.”
The moment I tried to speak out, Len-kun interrupts me.
“I sort of said it as I pleased, but Rin, you should act the way you did all along. It’s fine, I’m going to protect you. Rest easy and leave it to me.....”
“Sorry.”

Cutting off Len-kun, I apologized on the spur of the moment.
For some reason, he doesn’t respond to it glibly like before.
(Even though I came all the way here to see him and ask him to start over again as friends.....)
I realize that we can’t stay as friends anymore.
My heart, my entire body accused me of that.

“Sorry, for what? What do you mean by it?”
“.....I get glared at by the girls in the Fan Club, too, and I really hate it.”
I didn’t come here to say something like this.
But, I..... lost to myself. I ended up running away from it.
(It can’t be helped. We can’t stay like this forever, as friends.....)
It’s better like this.
Forced termination.

“Rin.....”

Is he talking to himself, or is he calling out to me?

After saying it with a sigh, Len-kun was silently standing perfectly still.

The smile I've gotten used to long gone, it's as if a different person has come into sight.

(What should I do, perhaps I made him mad.....)

The blood draining from my entire body, my hands tremble slightly.

But what I heard next was a somehow gentle voice.



“— Got it. It’s okay, I’ll sing it with ‘la la la’ in the worst case.”

What’s okay?

Aah, I see. We were talking about the new song’s lyrics.

As I’m taken aback, Len-kun passes by me at a quick pace.

Ultimately leaving the score on the desk, he puts his hand on the door.

“Le-Len-kun! The score.....”

My voice that finally came out was hoarse with nervousness.

“Do what you want with it, Rin.”

“.....Eh?”

When he finally turned around, Len-kun was kindly smiling.

So it’s too much to bear, it pierced my heart.

(Aahh, really..... I ended it myself.....)

I just silently looked after Len-kun, his back disappearing past the door.

Chapter 5

The cultural festival is less than a week away.

Since it's held every year during the 2-day period of September's 2nd Saturday and Sunday, right after summer vacation ends, during this time, it feels like the whole academy has become restless.

By the way, I spent my days unable to calm down, too.

The new song's score was still in my bag, yet to be in a bug-ridden state.

(I wish I could ask Len-kun for advice, though.....)

Since that day, we haven't exchanged a single word.

I'm the one who put the distance between us, but more than that, it felt like he was avoiding me.

(How did we talk to each other until now?)

We weren't sitting beside each other anymore after the seat change, it's only now that I realized that we mostly don't have points of contact.

It's Len-kun who calls out to me to the point of it being annoying, it's also him who makes the jokes.

As for me, unable to even find the start of a conversation, I can't catch the timing either.

Chika calls out to me in a worried voice one way or another, but I can't keep relying on being spoiled by her like that.

Because it's meaningless unless I do something about it myself.

(What I can do now.....)

After school that day, I decided to visit the AV room after not having been there for 3 days.

Just like Meiko-sensei said, Len-kun wasn't there.

"Lately, it looks like Len hasn't shown his face at club activities either?"

When music class ended, Meiko-sensei told me to stay behind.

Well sure enough, it was about club activities.

From the word 'either', I realized that she knows that I haven't shown my face, too.

"Let me tell you, clashing with someone over a difference in musicality happens often, I won't get mad over something like that. I won't tell you to participate in club activities every day, either. Sometimes you feel like it, sometimes you don't, right?"

Shrugging her shoulders, Sensei mischievously asks "Isn't that so?"

When she sees with her own eyes that I nod my head in silence, she suddenly changes her expression.

"But you know, I just don't want you to have any regrets. Do you understand?"

To the supportive words, this time I let out my voice and replied with a "Yes".

Sensei smiled and said "Good", mussing up my hair.....

Until the end, she didn't force me to do it like this or like that.

Then, she made me remember the most important thing.

(.....I said I'd do it, didn't I?)

Certainly, joining the Light Music Club happened by going with the course of events.

But the one who decided to make a new Haniwa song with them, was me.

Nobody else but me.

Even with or without the thing with Len-kun.

At least from my beloved Haniwa's music, I won't run away, I don't want to run away.....!

Having made up my mind, I came back here {to the AV room}.

Setting up the keyboard, with a mechanical pencil in one hand, I unfold the score.

Reciting the lyrics I thought of while I play the music, I check if they're easy to sing and if they fit with the sound.

While I'm playing it over and over again, it seemed like I cheered up a little.

"I thought I heard something, so it was Otosaki."

Slowly opening the door, Tsurumaki-kun peeked his head in, carrying his bass on his shoulder.

Without Len-kun beside him, it looks like he came to practice on his own.

"You want use the room, right? If I'm a bother, I can go elsewhere....."

"No need. Rather, won't I be a bother for writing the lyrics?"

"It's totally fine."

I did deny it, but half of it was a lie.

Instead of Tsurumaki-kun, I'm the one who's worrying about too many things.

As I'm hesitating over how to broach the subject, an uncertain voice calls out to me.

"I don't think it's my business, but..... Is it okay, like this?"

"I'm sorry for causing you trouble."

"Nah, we don't particularly think of it as trouble. Even before Otosaki joined, we've clashed with Len-kun many times, and we probably will again, for the sake of continuing the band."

"..... Me too, I feel that it's not right to run away anymore."

"I see, then I'm glad. Because you know, Len really likes Otosaki's piano-playing."

"My..... piano-playing....."

It was the first time I heard it.

When I blink in surprise, Tsurumaki-kun bursts into laughter, as if he's being nostalgic.

"I guess it was during our first year. After school, he was awfully boastful that he's passing by to listen to the piano, but to be honest, you'd call that a stalker."

(.....Why, that's.....)

I certainly did play the piano and sing in the music room after school for a period of time.

But I did it secretly and alone, I didn't think at all that anyone saw me.

"Can I say one last thing?"

I'm too surprised to give a reaction, Tsurumaki-kun continued without minding it.

"You might not be able to tell because he's too much of a playboy, but he's been looking at Otosaki since a long time ago. To be precise, since the entrance ceremony."

Len-kun, was always, watching me?
How much do I..... know about Len-kun?

I only watched him when it was convenient for me.
Always his smiling face, I don't know his mad face nor his crying face.

"I'm, really..... I just kept running away....."

"— It's hot today, too. I'll open the window."
Probably, I think he pretended not to have heard me.
Speaking as if he was talking to himself, Tsurumaki-kun opened the window wide.
Together with the wind, I can hear someone's voice.

(This voice.....)
I couldn't possibly mistake it for anyone else's voice.
It's Len-kun.
A capella without even the guitar's accompaniment, he's singing 'Crybaby Boyfriend'.

It's, Miku-san and Len-kun's song.
Then, the new song— I want to make it mine and Len-kun's song.
My honest feelings, the time we've spent together until now, I'm going to turn them into lyrics.

There's not even a week left until the cultural festival.
It's my first time composing lyrics, I don't know how far I'll be able to write them.
(But, I want to do it. I want to convey it to Len-kun.)

"Tsurumaki-kun, tell Len-kun. That I'll definitely deliver the new song's lyrics."

From that day, shutting myself in the AV room after school every day, I immersed myself in writing the lyrics.
For the sake of going to see Len-kun, carrying the new song.

(The sky is so high.....)
A refreshing wind blows through the little bit dry air.
From the window of the Home Ec room that has closed its stall for the day, I looked up at the clear autumn sky.

This year's cultural festival was also blessed with fair weather, on the second day, more guests came than any previous year.
Chika said: "There are a lot of guardians, but the majority of the guests are intending to see Haniwa's concert" apparently.
(Tsurumaki-kun also said that all the tickets are sold out.)

When I checked my watch, there were less than 10 minutes to 3'o clock.
When the Dance Club's performance ends, it'll finally be time for Haniwa's concert.

(I wonder if Len-kun saw my text.....)
I sent him the new song's lyrics in a text, after finally finishing them last night.

At first I thought I'd meet him and hand them over directly, but when I thought of our plans for the day, it would've been difficult. Our turns for watching over the class's display were different, and I'm in charge of the Home Ec club's cash register, too.

So I chose the quicker and more certain method, but there's no reply yet.

I wonder what Len-kun is thinking about now?

I wonder how he feels about me?

Uneasiness kept floating to the front of my mind.

What's more, when I think of what I'm about to do, my legs tremble.

(..... No, I've decided already that I won't run away anymore.)

Taking off the apron, I left the Home Ec room behind.

A throng of people had already appeared around the stage that had been set up in the courtyard. The Dance Club having finished their performance, I can see them going off stage while responding to the cheers.

"I have to hurry....."

"Where to?"

A voice answered to the words that I had whispered, not intending for anyone to hear them.

When I turn around in surprise, Haraoka-san and the Fan Club members had gathered there.

(But the concert is starting soon, is it okay if they hadn't taken their places yet?)

Yeah right, as if I could ask them that.

The realization hits me, seeing their stern expressions.

That they came to see me precisely because it's before the concert begins.

Surrounding me, the girls begin to walk.

Forcing me to walk with them like that, with me in the center, they end up pulling me away from the stage.

The great migration finally stopped when we arrived before the stalls that were closing up as the sale time ended.

From a distance, I can hear Haniwa's performance.

Though the girls should care about it, too, they don't try to move at all.

As I thought, it looks like they don't want to give me the stage.

"How do you feel about Len-kun?"

Without any preliminary remark, Haraoka-san directly stepped forward.

While suddenly feeling like I'm about to draw back, I steel my guts and hold my ground.

"I feel that I want to properly face him."

"What the heck, have you looked in a mirror before? Or Otosaki-san, were you actually an excessively self-conscious person?"

Considering her shrill voice to be a signal, the other people began to laugh with disgusted looks, too.

The same goes for me, it's not like I believe in myself yet.
Like Haraoka-san said, it's possible that I'm an excessively self-conscious person.
But that isn't a reason to make it all right to run away.

"..... I'm sorry for not making it clear until now."

"Ha? What are you apologizing for?"

It seemed like this time, it wasn't irony or anything, but a genuine question.
Looking around at the dumbfounded Fan Club members, I take a single deep breath.
Then, sticking out my chest so my voice won't waver, I announce the answer that I finally grasped.

"I was scared and turned away my eyes from Haraoka-san and the others, and from my true feelings as well..... But I'm going to end that today."

".....People say whatever they want, you know."

"Yeah. So watch me."

Smiling at Haraoka-san, whose expression stiffened, I ran off.
The performance had already started on stage, the new song's intro is being played.

Hurry, hurry.....!

Unless I give it my all here, I'll regret for the rest of my life.
The chilly air makes my lungs scream, but I don't have time to mind that.

(...Huh? Is that the prelude?)

In the score, the singing should've started, but the performance is continuing even now.

Did it get rearranged? What for?

Did they wait for me? Why?

When I take the mike from the staff, my eyes met with Len-kun's as the lights shine down on him.
The surprise lasted for a moment, Len-kun welcomed me with a smile as bright as the sun.
I smile back the best I can, and danced out onto the stage.

*"Like Hate I don't get it ... I hate you
I like you It can't be Anything but I like you
Like and Hate I don't get it
It can't be stopped Like Hate"*

Chapter 6

Finishing the double encore, Haniwa's concert came to an end with great success.

I only intended to sing the new song, but I got introduced as a member by the MC.....

In the end, I stood on stage until the very end as the keyboard-player and part of the chorus.

"Oh, the after-festival started." {the bonfire and dancing event after the last night of the festival}

Looking down at the courtyard while leaning on the railing, Len-kun speaks in a happy voice.

Standing beside him, I just mumble "yeah" in a slightly hoarse voice.

There's no one else on the roof.

No wonder, this place is usually locked and entry is forbidden.

This time, as a student council member, Chika secretly lent us the key and specially let us up.

Apparently as a services prize for livening up the cultural festival.

In contrast to the lively stage, silence flows on the roof.

There's a lot to talk about that I can't put into words, but I could only let my gaze roam.

Len-kun too, he held his breath as if it's unbelievable that he had been inciting the crowd until just now.

"For the new song, I decided on a title....."

It was a quiet voice that seemed to melt into the dusk.

From my dry throat, I somehow squeeze out a reply.

"What is it?"

".....How does 'Like Hate' sound?"

"Just as it is, huh."

"Rin likes curve balls better?"

It's been a while since I've seen Len-kun mischievously smile, it cheers me up a little.

Wanting to cover up that tears welled up in my eyes, I shook my head after I pretended to think for a bit.

"I guess I like straight ball games better."

Just by saying 'like', my heart trembled.

(I have even more incredible things to say after this, will my heart last?)

Taking a breath and filling my lungs with the air that had considerably cooled down, I turn towards Len-kun.

"Uhm....."

"Uhm, hey"

" "Ehh?" "

Our voices overlapping, we both blinked.

In the next moment, Len-kun continued without hesitation.

"Sorry for not showing up for club activities all this time."

"Th-the same goes for me! Sorry."

".....Why is Rin apologizing? I'm the one who troubled you."

"No. Well, originally, I misunderstood and....."

To cut off the rest, Len-kun exaggeratedly shakes his head.

"I, that day..... Rin told me that she really hated it, I thought that I can't keep trying my best anymore..... I thought I shouldn't try my best."

"But it's about that! Len-kun, there's something I want to say—"

Once again, Len-kun stole away my words.

This time, with a gaze brimming with an intense light.

"But hearing the message from Kanata, I thought I'd bet on the last possibility."

That I'll definitely deliver the new song's lyrics, Len-kun believed in those words.

That's why they prolonged the new song's intro until I appeared.

"Len-kun, why are you so....."

"— Hey Rin, the day we first talked to each other, do you remember it?"

"Eh? The after-festival when we were first years, right.....?"

"Aaah, so that's how you perceived it after all....."

Saying that, Len-kun laughed as if he were troubled.

"We talked even before that. To be frank, at the high school entrance ceremony."

"Eehh? Why, that much earlier.....? We weren't even in the same class."

It doesn't look like he's lying, I think it's probably the truth.

But I, really don't have the slightest memory of it, not even a bit.

"After the ceremony ended, you were making a phone call beneath the row of cherry trees, right?"

Then, you suddenly broke down crying."

"Ah....."

To Len-kun's words, I realized that the doors of my memory are being thrown open.

For me, that day was a time of 'departure' in a double meaning.

The day before the ceremony, my pet dog Suzu, who was struggling against a disease for a long time, suddenly fell into a coma.

We were always together ever since I was little, I brought her up like we were sisters, and not wanting to leave her side even for a short time, I planned on being absent from the entrance ceremony until right before it.

(But, Suzu miraculously woke up.....)

As I was heading to Aisaka Academy, and then after the ceremony ended, I got a call from the hospital.

"Just now, she breathed her last."

What I heard was the cruel truth, I ended up breaking down crying right there.

Where I was, the gazes of the people around me, all of it flew away.

That's why I completely relegated the person who lent me their handkerchief far off into my memories.

(.....That, was Len-kun.....)

I wonder why I forgot?

Why didn't he name himself until now?

When I vacantly stared at Len-kun, he looked back with a kind gaze.

“Ever since then, I was always curious, the next time was when I came across you playing the piano after school in the music room, right? Then, you were crying again and singing ‘Crybaby Boyfriend’ all alone.”

(Tsurumaki-kun told me already, but he really did see me.....)

Because of embarrassment and feeling like running away, I couldn’t say a word.

And Len-kun too, his voice trembled.

“That there was another kid who cried just like me over the same song, it burned into my memory, you know?”

I didn’t even need to ask the reason for it.

Remembering being with Miku-san, and singing, he cried.

“After that, I ended up following you with my gaze before I knew it..... Rin, you call yourself plain, you smile even when the people around you force troublesome stuff on you, seeing it had me on pins and needles.”

“.....Yeah.”

“But, you don’t ever let up, you calmly look around you and help out, that’s the kind of girl you are.... You showed a super cute smile to the kids who had let their guards down. I learned those kinds of things about you.”

What the heck is he saying, throwing around words like cute.

Stop the empty flatter. I’ve had enough of that.

The things I want to say keep floating into my mind one after the other, but I can’t speak with just my breath escaping.

(Oh no, what should I do, my cheeks are getting hotter.....)

My heart already keeps throbbing, Len-kun says something that makes it beat even faster.

“When you heard my song at the cultural festival and cried, I could shake off a needle inside me, you know? Then before I knew it, I confessed at the after-festival.”

“Rin was the first person that I felt like I wanted to protect. Thanks to Rin, I could graduate from Miku, who I was always dragging along.”

“Rin, do you like me? Or do you hate me?”

The same question as before made my breath stop.

But, the eyes that reflected me in them and the voice that asked, they both wavered slightly.

Since I understood that Len-kun was just as nervous as me, the unnecessary strain left me.

“Even hate has two sides

Now we are In love”

A capella, I sang my most favourite part from ‘Like Hate’.

Staring in round-eyed wonder from this sudden turn, Len-kun is at a loss for words.

This time, it’s my turn.

“.....I don’t like being in front of people, modestly and without standing out, I wished to live in peace and quiet. That’s why even though I like singing and playing the piano very much, if it weren’t for Len-kun, I don’t think the day would’ve come in my life where I performed in front of people like that.”

“But that’s not all.....I really enjoy the time I spend together with Len-kun, it’s the first time I realized that I can laugh like that.”

What I consistently tried not to look at were my true feelings.

Afraid to leave the safe world with no discord in it, I turned my eyes away from my changing self.

Even Len-kun’s existence that brought forth the change, I tried to avoid it.

“Rin, don’t cry anymore, okay?”

“.....This is the kind of feeling ‘like’ is, huh.”

“Eh?”

“I like you, Len-kun.”

“.....Eh? Eeh? Eeehhh!?”

“Len-kun, your face is turning bright red.”

“W-well of course it would! My dearest wish of becoming boyfriend and girlfriend, I’m joining the people who’re satisfied with their life!”

Len-kun’s desperate shouting reminds of that thing’s existence.

When I put my hand in my uniform’s pocket, my fingertips bump against the strap that has been waiting for its turn all along.

“.....Here, accept this. It’s to thank you for the rainbow quartz.”

Abruptly becoming embarrassed, I said it in just a little bit blunt manner.

But Len-kun is far from not minding it, he stares in round-eyed wonder like in a manga.

“Th-tha-that! The Sukikirai Rijuu Strap.....!”

After placing the blue strap in Len-kun’s hand, I take out my cell.

The Kyunkyun Strap, aka the pink omamori, gently sways in the breeze that has lost its heat.

“If you have the two as a set, it’ll make your love come true. That legend was true, huh?”

As the evening sun sets, the moon rises in the eastern sky.

Neither coming before the other, we held hands wrapped in that pale light.

A year later, I became an official member of Honey Works.

The last cultural festival of our high school life ahead of us, Len-kun is more enthusiastic than usual.

“For some reason or other, we didn’t get the MVP spot last year either, right-?”

“I didn’t think I’d possibly cry over a one vote difference..... Actually Rin, don’t say it like it’s someone else’s problem!”



After school in the AV room, I was sitting in front of the keyboard that had completely become my reserved seat.

Neglecting the mike stand, Len-kun is standing in front of me.

This slightly noisy atmosphere is a part of our current daily life.

“Huge news! Something incredible came.....!”

Opening the door with a vigour that could've broken it, Tsurumaki-kun rushed inside in an unusually excited state.

Looking like he was taken aback by it, too, Len-kun blinks his eyes.

“What's the huge news? What's coming, where?”

“It's Hatsune Miku! As a special guest for the cultural festival, that diva is coming!”

“Hmm..... hey, that Miku? Seriously? Isn't that incredible!”

“Right? No matter how much being an alumna of the school counts, it'd normally be impossible, right?”

“Good for you, Rin! You'll meet Miku!”

Somewhat excited, Len-kun smacks my shoulder, but strangely, it didn't hurt.

I mean, I don't have the slightest sense of reality.

Repeating it in my head over and over again, my heartbeat gradually sped up.

“.....Wh-what should I do..... my heart can't take.....”

“Eh? Hold on, what's with that reaction!? Hey Rin, get excited over me, too~”

As Len-kun half-cries, Tsurumaki-kun and I look at each other by accident.

Exploding with laughter in the next moment, Len-kun's protesting voice echoes in the AV room.

The first summer that Len-kun and I welcome as boyfriend and girlfriend was just around the corner.

Along with a violent storm that's a specialty of this season.

Nakimushi Kareshi

Chapter 1

The last summer of my high school life ended.

It feels like it was shorter than usual because I filled it with going here and there with Rin this year.

Even though classes started, too, I was seriously worried if I could change my way of thinking.

(Because Rin is hopelessly cute in everything she does.....)

In any case, the girlfriend I managed to get at the end of my unrequited love that lasted for about a year and a half is cute.

Wholeheartedly cute. Hopelessly cute. National treasure-level cute.

When I get carried away and say something stupid, she gets mad without a moment's delay, that side of her is really the best.

And how she worriedly avoids meeting my gaze when she thinks she's said too much, I think that's breaking the rules, too.

But lately, Rin has been acting a little weird.

If I'm not mistaken, it's since a certain news was delivered.

At this year's cultural festival, a big guest will stand on stage.

Even an alumna, the legendary diva aka Hatsune Miku.

The details were obscured, but apparently it'll be a so-called triumphant return concert this time.

Because the overseas festivals from before last year are continuing, she can't return to Japan for while, such are also among the reasons.

(The reaction sure was crazy, when the student council made the official announcement.)

Of course there are people who like Miku's music, and quite a lot of kids admire her success story, that moment reminded me of that again.

Speaking of which, Rin also said that she took the exam at Aisaka Academy because she admired Miku.

"Miku-san is coming to the cultural festival? Really? Wow, what shall I do....."

Seeing Rin in a shaken up manner more or less for the first time, I unintentionally ended up laughing. She stared up at me, and that was cute, too, so I unreservedly patted her head.

"It'll be fine, just act the way you usually do. Because Rin's cute the way she is."

"I-I'm not cute! Besides, I wasn't talking about that."

"Yeah? Then, what?"

".....As a kouhai of the Light Music Club, I'm nervous!"

At that time, I said 'So that's what it's about?' and I thought it was a little bit heartwarming, too.

But contrary to those words, Rin's expression somehow didn't feel refreshed.

(I wonder how Rin feels about Miku and I.....)

“So the profile is something like this. Next is the crucial sound source.....”

While fiddling with the PC in my room, I inadvertently slip into talking to myself. Because the room is awfully silent as always, I could hear it terribly echoing.

After hesitating a little, ‘Like Hate’ flows from the speakers.

The house is all mine tonight as well anyways, or rather unless the date changes.

“.....Huh, what was this file again?”

Finding a mysterious file in the very depths of the PC, my finger that clicks with the mouse stopped. Four numbers are lined up in the file.

“0309? 0309, maybe it’s a date for something.”

Reading the numbers aloud, I was surprised.

I remember this date.

“Aah, the middle school graduation ceremony’s.....”

Clicking without hesitation this time, the sound source that I expected showed itself.

It’s the ‘Crybaby Boyfriend’ that I sent to Miku three years ago.

Originally Miku made it, at first it was only the lyrics from the girl’s point of view.

Adding the boy’s point of view into it, I’m the one who turned it into a duet.

It seems that Miku was pleased with the arrangement of it, it was recorded on the debut single.

Perhaps because it was treated as a secret track, the lyrics weren’t shown.

But I think it’s more ‘fitting’ that way.

“.....Miku, are you doing alright and singing.....”

We’ve already stopped sending each other messages, and we haven’t once met in the past three years.

Nevertheless, I still vividly remember her even now.

Chapter 2

During the summer of my second year in middle school, my mother passed away in a traffic accident. Left behind, I stood still in front of her sleeping figure wearing a white cloth.

It was after the funeral had ended that that person— my ‘father’ according to genetics and the family register, returned from his business trip.

Since it happened while the divorce was pending in court, it’s possible that he thought it was disappointing.

The only relief was that this worst man’s parents were good people.

Instead of that person who went back overseas for a business trip, they let me stay with them until my middle school graduation.

I get the feeling that at that time, I was crying every day.

Though I hoped my tears would dry up once and for all, they didn’t stop in the least.....

So that at least I wouldn’t worry my grandparents more than necessary, I started visiting a certain place.

A small overpass, connecting the residential area and the park.

In the evening, people mostly don’t pass by there, so I feel at ease.

I unbearably liked absentmindedly gazing at the sunset by myself.

“..... A text? How rare, it’s from Kaito.”

Leaning against the railing on that day as well, I was looking down at the city with the summer’s scent still lingering even though it was September already.

My cell that I had put into my jeans rang, I skim through the message from my friend who’s older than me.

[It’s been a while.

Next Sunday, I’m doing a concert at the cultural festival.

If it’s all right with you, come and watch.

You can hear something incredible.]

Kaito is three years older, our relation is that we were senpai-kouhai when we were in the Choral Club in elementary school.

After he went on to Aisaka Academy, he belonged to the Light Music Club.

It’s not that we saw each other frequently, but he occasionally contacts me.

(Oddly enough, between me and Kaito, things like our wavelength and our preferences for music sure do match.)

For him to call it ‘incredible’, I wonder just what kind of concert this is.

I suddenly got curious.

“Maybe I’ll go, to the cultural festival.....”

“If it’s a cultural festival you’re looking for, how about the one at Aisaka Academy?”

(—Huh?)

A question flying at me talking to myself, I remember that I was really startled. Cautiously turning around, an unknown girl was standing behind me before I knew it. Wearing Aisaka Academy's uniform, she was giving a friendly smile.

"I'm sorry for being so sudden. My name is Hatsune Miku, I'm a first-year at Aisaka Academy High School."

".....Kagami Len, I'm a second-year at Houshou Middle."

"Aah, just as I thought! So you're Len-kun."

"What do you mean, just as you thought..... Did you hear it from somebody?"

"Yeah, from Kaito-senpai. I'm a member of the Light Music Club, too."

Saying that, Miku revealed that she moved in next door to me.

I was very confused from the weird order, but summing up what she said, this is how things went.

During the summer break, she moved into the house beside mine that had been empty all along. Forming a band together with Kaito, she's performing the vocals for several songs at the cultural festival.

When practice ran late, Kaito was worried for his kouhai who wasn't familiar with the area and accompanied her home. Realizing that she was right next door to me, they got lively for a while.

Since I was pretty shy at that time, after hearing Kaito's name, I finally relaxed my shoulders. The same goes for Miku, it seems like she has a bit of an odd side to her, but she was unbelievably pleasant.

When we parted, I promised that 'I'll definitely go to the concert!'

This is something I noticed later, though.

It was 'unusual' that Miku, who had moved here during summer break, stands on stage at the cultural festival.

Aisaka Academy's cultural festival is held during the second weekend of September, so there's not much time for practice.

In those conditions, a transfer student, a first year at that, is holding the mike.

Miku said 'It's only two or three songs', but that's not where the problem is.

By now, I plainly understand how significant an event it was.

And, how incredible Miku is.

In fact, just like Kaito said, her performance was incredible.

First of all, her voice is good. Her volume and singing range are impressive, too.

Above all, her expressiveness surpasses everyone else's, and the way she applies a vibrato was beautiful, too.

Wow, if it's the current me, ever so many words of praise come out.

But, even the second-year Kagami Len who knew practically nothing, clearly understood.

That surely, this is the kind of person they call a star.

Because the Miku underneath the spotlight looked like she was sparkling, as if she were a completely different person.

When the concert ended, I ran to where Haniwa was without hesitation.
Then, mustering my courage, I told Miku.

“I was moved by your song. Please make me your disciple!”

About a year after my sudden proclamation to become her disciple.
When summer rolled around again, the distance between Miku and I had entirely shrunk.
So much that the people around us started asking ‘Are they siblings?’ because of it.

At that time, Miku turned me down at first by saying ‘Disciple!? Uh, it’s a bit impossible.....’
But, there was a continuation to her words.

“I’d be glad if we became friends.”

The hand she held out while she said that with a smile, was smaller than mine.
Remembering the hand of my late mother, I was moved to tears, but I tightly held them back.....
Together with Miku’s kind feelings, I gratefully accepted it.

After we became friends, time passed by in a blink.
The two of us, we went on the first shrine visit of the New Year, we went to see the cherry blossoms.
Always, Miku was by my side.

Having fun every day, our difference in age a bit irritating, I always wanted to be together.
I think that my 14-year old self was always wrapped around in his own feelings.

But that can’t even be called an excuse.
I didn’t notice it at all, that there was a something underneath Miku’s smile.

But this is something I noticed only now that I think about.
Miku was never bothered about what time she got home at, and the topic of parents didn’t come up either.
I was excessively self-conscious, I thought beyond doubt that she was being considerate about it.
I figured she might’ve heard something from Kaito, and if that was Miku’s intention, she decided to spoil me.

The truth is, I should’ve used my head just a little.
If I had done so, something might have changed.

As for opportunities, there must have been a lot.
For example, the last summer festival of middle school.

That day, Miku looked down whenever the conversation happened to break off.
When she raised her head like she had finally made up her mind about something, she just asked
‘Where should we go next?’
Getting a bad sort of feeling, I lead Miku about in her yukata.

“Len-kun, where are we going in such a hurry?”

“If we walk around at a snail’s pace, we can’t see all stalls.”

“Ahaha! You’re surprisingly gluttonous, huh.”

That’s rich, coming from someone who doesn’t know how I feel.

Thinking like that, I became a little tense.

I was anxious if Miku would say something about it or not.

I couldn’t stomach the lowlifes who called out to her without reserve either.

Standing beside her, I must’ve looked like nothing more than her little brother.

After it became painfully obvious that that’s how the people around us looked at me, I got unnecessarily irritated.

“.....Hey, Miku.”

“Yeah yeah, what do you want this time?”

“.....I didn’t say anything yet.”

“I know without you saying so, you know. You’re looking at the stall with sparkling eyes.”

Pulled along by Miku who was giggling, I gave a forced laugh, too.

No matter how much I tried looking tough, I easily end up falling apart in front of her.

While thinking that it can’t be helped, that I’m no match for her, I pointed at the jewels that were lined up in a cramped manner.

Of course they’re not real, they’re just toys.

But still, I thought ‘This is it!’

“Miku, let’s get matching ones.”

“Eh? This one.....?”

“It’s, no good? Um, if you hate the idea so much, I’m not gonna force you or anything.....”

“No! That’s not it. It’s just that, you could say I was a little surprised.”

“Ah, got it. You were treating me like a child again, weren’t you?”

“Well, I guess you could put it like that.”

Certainly, it would be surprising if a child like me started talking about rings and the like.

Thinking back on it calmly, it was an understandable answer.

But at that time I was dissatisfied after all.

It was frustrating that she didn’t notice the feelings that I had put into the toy rings.

Even if they were fake, they were real to me.

On the other hand, it’s also a fact that I had no confidence.

Somewhere in my head, I calculated that she might not turn it down if it was an imitation.

Child and adult.

Wanting her to realize it, wanting to stay this way.

While the scales gently swayed from one side to the other, I thought about if my feelings would collapse one day.

Intending to grow up like that, I only thought of myself all the time after all.

I thought that that's why I got punished.

The day before the middle school graduation ceremony, Miku called me out after sunset.
The place was the usual overpass.

Somewhere in my head, an alarm sounded.
But pretending not to hear it, I headed there with the score in my hand.
Wanting Miku to give me a final test, I think that's what I kept telling myself.

Singing in the chorus at ceremony, I was put in charge of a solo part.
Miku didn't make me her disciple, but she helped me with practicing the song.
That's why this solo part was something that we gained together.

My grandparents and Miku coming that day, I felt that I wanted to show off my good side.
I remember desperately practicing for it.

But, even so, why.....
I wonder why it's always the bad feelings that hit the mark.
What she told me were genuine words of farewell.

".....Just now, what.....?"
"I'm going to Tokyo. To become a pro."
(That's.....I didn't hear anything about that.....)
The shock running through my body, I couldn't speak.
Just by my dried lips slightly wavering, a squeak leaves my throat.

"Someone from a music office came to the concert and I got scouted."
In contrast to how I kept shaking, Miku was endlessly calm.
Until the very end, words like 'I'm hesitating' or 'plan' didn't come from her.

(Miku, you're serious about this.....)
There was no doubt that her decision was solid, I looked down with feelings similar to despair.

"When are you leaving?"
"Tomorrow."

The moment I heard those words, my breath stopped.
To the point that my vision turning dark, even standing was weird.

(.....Miku, you're not wearing the ring anymore.....)

It wasn't even necessary for me to ask what that meant.
Realizing that there's really nothing to be done anymore, I suddenly cast my eyes down.

Looking up at the sky after that, as the sunset is vigorously dying it, I repeatedly take deep breaths.
Inside my messed-up head, memories of Miku and I rose up.....

I forced a smile onto my face.

“Hey, Miku.”

The name I’ve called her so many times, like I do every day.

And yet, it’s so.....

Until today, I didn’t know that just saying it could shake my heart so much.

“Smile.”

Saying that, I stroked Miku’s head.

The color gradually returns to her face, from which her emotions had disappeared.

Fixedly staring at me like she wanted to say something, I noticed that something was flowing down my cheeks.

“So it ends with this, I won’t cry.”

Unexpectedly, Miku began singing a capella.

Her pure soprano melts into the clear air.

Melting within me as well while I cry and keep breathing, it soaked in.

“Magic for the crybaby

Magic to stop the tears

Make the same face as me Let’s smile”

Miku casting magic on me, I was able to send her off with a smile.

That year, since the peach blossoms bloomed late, twenty percent of them should have bloomed for the day of the ceremony.

But the day before, the peaches all bloomed at once.

— As if to celebrate her departure.



Chapter 3

Miku never once contacted me after her departure to Tokyo.

That's not all.

After she became famous and the media started picking her up, she rarely talked about the memories of her hometown. That includes the things from before she transferred to Aisaka Academy.

Her profile only reveals the minimum.

It seemed like that was the office's policy.

But the truth is that maybe she herself didn't want to touch upon it.

Miku's parents' divorce was pending in court.

When I learned the truth from a variety show, I was foolishly shaken up.

The two of us, we were the same.

Yet I always had her one-sidedly cheer me up.

She snuggled up to me without saying anything.

To me, who didn't even try looking at what was beneath Miku's smile.

After that, I devoted myself to music more than before.

I intended adding lyrics to 'Crybaby Boyfriend' as my way of replying.

But I couldn't say anything at that time.

I couldn't even lie and say that I'm fine now.

Still, there was something I wanted to convey.

A few days later, I got a message from Miku.

Written in her text was only one word.

[Thank you.]

The me at that time saw it and cried bitterly again.

But the 17-year old me would be able to say 'Likewise'.

"Hmmm, after listening to it again..... it really is lame."

Since my voice was still in the middle of changing three years ago, my singing voice itself was pretty unstable.

Even so, it conveys a mysterious charm, or rather a sense of giving it my all.

Well, that's just blowing my own trumpet.

Br br br.....

My smartphone began vibrating, signalling that a message had arrived.

When I tapped it, Rin's name popped up.

[I'm bringing something to club activities tomorrow, what do you want to eat?]

If it's something that Rin makes, anything.

I want to tell her my honest feelings like that, but I guess she'd surely get mad at me again.

Like, 'Saying anything's fine is the most troublesome!'

"Really, Rin is so cute."

It's not that I want anyone to hear it, my voice just naturally comes out.

This sort of thing is definitely what people call 'love'.

I was in love with Miku when I was in middle school, or so I had believed.

Actually, I always received the affection, it's possible that she was just spoiling me and nothing more.

I realized that after I fell in love with Rin.

After school in the music room, Rin was all alone.

When I saw her playing 'Crybaby Boyfriend' on the piano while crying, I was convinced.

I thought that she's the one.

A kid who cries just like me, over the same song.

That was the starting point, but before I noticed, I kept following her with my eyes.

Since Rin was clumsy at inter-personal relations, at first, seeing her gave me butterflies.

But, that's not all there was to her.

Even where no one can see her, she doesn't cheat.

Calmly looking at her surroundings, she's strong enough to help others even if it's unfavorable for her.

The insurance run was the year before last's cultural festival.

Listening to me sing 'Crybaby Boyfriend', she cried, not caring that other people were around.

Ah, they reached.

My feelings had definitely reached someone.

When I thought that, the needle had gotten shaken off.

I confessed to her at the after-festival that day, thinking that I have to do something at any rate before she's taken by somebody else.

Rin was the first person who made me feel that I want to protect someone.

I hated the thought of one-sidedly relying and being relied on.

"So that Rin's smile won't get clouded, I'm going to be beside her and protect her."

For the sake of that as well, I have to quit fooling around and convey it properly.

The limit is closing in with every moment.

Because I want to be together tomorrow and the day after, and beyond that, too.

Let's talk about my dream.

Hajimari no Sayonara

Chapter 1

A lively voice can be continuously heard through the AV room's windows that were thrown open.

A week left until the cultural festival.

Because of it, various points of the school building turned into a battlefield in the after school hours.

Might I add, I'm also spending my days in a state of sleep deprivation since I'm in the Home Ec Club and the Light Music Club at the same time.

That's why I absolutely couldn't afford to cut corners.

That Miku-san is! Because she's coming all the way here for a concert.

"Len-kun sure is late..... I want to hurry and decide on the arrangement though."

Lately, Len-kun was always getting personal talks from Sensei.

Quick pace two days a week, since summer break began.

(The reason..... has to be *that* after all.....)

When I glance at the clock on the wall, almost an hour has passed.

When I stand up from my chair, thinking that I'll go and show my face in the kitchen, the door suddenly opened.

"Sorry—for—making—you—wait....."

Len-kun comes in, walking sluggishly and with an air of exhaustion about him.

"Good work. What did Sensei want today?"

"The thing is, she repeated exactly the same thing as last time. With a serious face, she said 'Are you serious about going to Tokyo after graduating high school and making a living with a single song? Are you serious!?'"

"Incredible, Len-kun's good at impressions!"

".....Sensei told me the same thing, too. With a self-satisfied expression, she said 'It really is difficult to become a musician. In your case, isn't there a possibility to first aim for becoming an idol or a performer instead?'"

"Aah, yeah....."

There might be some reason in what Sensei is saying.

If I try and imagine it, it oddly sort of suits him.

As I'm thinking of that, Len-kun looks at me, displeased.

"I'm telling you in advance, I absolutely won't tie a hachimaki around my head or wear shorts and an athletic shirt."

".....Excuse me? What's that about?"

"Eh, you've never seen it before? Among the super-popular idols during the Showa period, there were people like that. Looking at it now, at second glance that's rock, huh?"

Why, you're surprisingly pretty into this, aren't you?

If it were the me from before, I think I probably would've retorted like that.

But always looking at him from close by, I understood that Len-kun is serious about music, so I swallowed my words.

“And besides, it would suit Rin more to be a performer.”

“You’re awful! If you say that, then it suits Len-kun a hundred times more!”

Even after becoming boyfriend and girlfriend, our banter-battles didn’t end.

Or perhaps I should say, I get the feeling that it’s gotten worse instead. In fact, it’s like a skit.

But I also figured out that that was Len-kun’s way of timing things.

“.....Oh, by the way.”

See, there it is.

After briefly saying something idiotic and laughing about it, his voice suddenly becomes serious.

Somehow, I realize that maybe he’s about to ask me something.

“Rin, have you already narrowed down your candidacy to confectionary school?”

“.....I’ve decided on my favourite.”

“A local one after all? You won’t come with me to Tokyo?”

“Len-kun, that’s.....”

“It’d be fine if you’d do it while going to school. In Tokyo, the two of us, making music, try thinking about that, too.”

I thought it was a joke at first.

But inviting me whenever possible, I wasn’t so sure about it after a while.

(There’s no maybe, I guess he’s serious about it.....)

Of course, I understand that it’s a hard thing to go to Tokyo and make music.

(That’s how it is, but, I do end up thinking that it would be fun if I was together with Len-kun.)

If I could sing by his side forever, like I have until now.....

Even if I understand that it won’t be so easy, there’s a part of me who imagines dreamlike things somewhere in her heart.

“You don’t need to rush your answer.”

“.....Okay.”

To the kindly smiling Len-kun, I nod my head a little.

I dare not put it into words, though.

The truth is, we both understand that we can’t delay it any longer.

It’s the autumn of our third year of high school already, depending on the examination methods, some places have already started accepting applications.

That’s why Sensei’s in a hurry to persuade Len-kun somehow, too.

(Frankly speaking, it’s faster to count Len-kun’s grades from the top in our grades.)

It seems that in the teacher’s room, our advisor Meiko-sensei is the only one who approves of Len-kun’s plans for the future.

Suddenly, I hear the sound of stilettos coming from the hallway.

It’s impossible to mistake that steady yet powerful rhythm.

Speaking of the devil and all that, it’s Meiko-sensei.

“Ooi, Kagami and Otosaki! I brought someone here for you.”

Opening the door with vigour, Meiko-sensei said so in a high-spirited tone.

Who is it? Why, I didn't even need to ask.

When I saw who came in after Sensei, I couldn't keep myself from screaming.

"Mi-, Mi-mi-, Miku-san.....!?"

Indeed, the one who has descended before my eyes was Hatsune Miku.

(Incredible..... Just like I saw her in magazines and online, no! Her aura's even greater~)

With her slim figure and small face, she looks just like a model.

"Nice to meet you, I'm a former student, Hatsune Miku. You must be Otosaki Rin-san, right?"

"Ah, yes! I'm sorry for screaming all of a sudden like that....."

"Oh, that was nothing. I was really happy that you knew who I was."

Wow, what shall I do!

That Miku-san is smiling kindly at me!?

Looking at me as my face turned red and my voice won't come out, Len-kun came forward with a wry smile.

"I think you can tell from looking at her, but Rin is a huge fan of Miku's. You know, her reason for taking Aisaka's exam was that she wanted to go to the same school as Miku."

Hold on a sec, Len-kun! Of all things, why are you so blunt about *that*?

It feels like my head is about to burst into flames from the embarrassment and the awesomeness.

"It doesn't matter if we're not there at the same time! The fact is that our alma mater is the same! or something like that."

Standing beside me as I'm worrying, Len-kun keeps going enthusiastically.

Looking up at him that I won't let him say any more, he stiffly raises his thumb with a smile.



Then, his expression suddenly turning serious, he held his hand out to Miku-san.

“It’s been a while, huh, Miku.”

“Woah! Len-kun, you’ve gotten taller, haven’t you?”

Miku-san shook Len-kun’s hand with an extraordinary smile.

Somehow, it was a lot softer than the ones she shows as a diva.

Len-kun, and Miku-san.....

I was a little bit worried about their reunion.

But with these finest smiles before my eyes, my worries were blown away.

“Earth to Rin-chaan? It’s fine that your eyes turned to hearts, but it’s because of Miku, isn’t it!”

As I’m deeply moved by their reunion, Len-kun pulled my cheeks.

“Sheesh, Len-kun! Isn’t that awful, making me do a weird face in front of Hatsune-san.”

“Don’t say that, Rin is always cute—?”

“I’m not gonna let you fool me, you know—!?”

“C’mon, idiot couple. Can we move on?”

To Meiko-sensei’s scandalised voice, I come to my senses with a start.

Bowing my head in a fluster, after I repeatedly say “Sorry”, Miku-san’s airy laughter resounds.

(It’s breaking the rules how even the sound of her laughter is lovely.)

“F’real, how far did we get in the discussion? Uhh, this is Hatsune Miku-san.....”

“I’m Miku’s manager, my name is Megurine Luka.”

She made a very beautiful bow, one that I couldn’t even compare to.

A cool and husky voice.

A calm and somehow mysterious atmosphere is in the air.

“Otosaki Rin-san, Kagami Len-kun.....”

Calling our names to reaffirm it, my gaze meets her dignified eyes.

Quickly lowering my head in a slight bow, Megurine-san’s expression suddenly softens.

“It’s much better than looking at photographs and videos, right?”

“Uhm.....?”

I wonder what in the world she’s talking about.

As I tilt my head to the side in confusion, Len-kun suddenly starts talking too fast beside me.

“Ohhh! By the way, Miku and I—”

“Are acquaintances, isn’t that right? You lived beside each other, or something of the sort.”

“Yes, exactly. That said, it’s been three years since we last met like this, though.”

“Three years? So it was that long ago..... Is Kaito-senpai doing alright?”

“He’s coming back next year from studying at a university overseas.”

Like she’s taking the baton from Megurine-san, Miku-san joins the conversation.

Though the topic was something that only the two of them understood, I relax a little upon seeing that they seem to be enjoying themselves.

They’re being so lively that it’s hard to believe that they haven’t seen each other in a long time.

prick

The area around my heart hurting, I put my hand over my shirt in surprise.
(What could this be? Sort of piercing, sort of tightening.....)

Indifferent to my bewilderment over experiencing this sensation for the first time, they keep up their conversation.

As I'm unconsciously listening to them, the phrase 'new song for the cultural festival' flies out at me.
"Can I hear that now? Even a little bit would be fine."

Len keeps talking on and on, in an unusually excited voice.

Miku-san glances at Megurine-san, then she cracks a cheerful smile.

One, two deep breaths.

In a blink, the place's atmosphere changes completely.

*"We've counted too much of the same time, huh? It's hard to forget
Your sound seems to have overflowed."*

It certainly felt like time had stopped then.

Though she didn't even have a mike, her clear voice extended endlessly.....

Something like an aura was released from Miku-san.

"For now, that's as much as I can perform."

Even after hearing Miku-san's words, I couldn't comprehend them right away.

I finally return to the real world to the sound of Len-kun clapping after a short while.

"As expected of Miku, both the melody and song are the best. Hey, Rin thought so too, right?"

I couldn't put it into words despite Len wanting me to agree, at any rate I desperately nod my head.

"Really? I'm glad."

Miku-san tries to smile bashfully as she says that, with such cuteness that you couldn't look straight at.

Restraining my heartbeat that started pounding even faster, I opened my mouth to tell her my impression.

— However, I was a moment late.

"You know, that song just now..... it's also an answer song to 'Crybaby Boyfriend'. So, I was thinking that I'd like Len-kun to sing it with me at the concert."

The room became silent as a grave.

Meiko-sensei and Megurine-san, who were making arrangements for something, suddenly stop talking.

Speaking of Len-kun who was called upon, he stared in round-eyed wonder as he was taken aback.

'Crybaby Boyfriend' is the song that's filled with memories of Len-kun and Miku-san.

This new song that is an answer song to it, if they can sing it together on stage —

When I thought that, my body moved forward on its own.

“Len-kun, well done. A chance like this, it doesn’t come often!”

“.....That, may be so.....”

“Let alone not coming often, it might never come again? You have to do it.”

“Rin.....”

When I firmly pat Len-kun on the back, I felt him slightly shaking.

(Yeah, there’s no way he wouldn’t be nervous.....)

Regardless, I want him to take this chance, so this time I softly push him forward.

When I do so, his large back that usually wouldn’t budge slowly moves.

Facing Miku-san from the front, Len-kun quickly bowed his head.

“.....I look forward, to working with you.”

“Likewise.”

(Good. Good for you, Len-kun.....)

Perhaps having heard me calling out to him in my mind, Len-kun turned around.

Then, taking my hand, he pulls me towards himself with all his might.

“Sor-ry, I forgot to say the most important thing.”

The line that I remember having heard before made my heart stir more than necessary.

Surely not, could it be, he must be joking?

“WHEN I SING, IT’S TOGETHER WITH RIN!”

Chapter 2

(Three days..... Three days.....!? What should I do, there's only three days left until the cultural festival.....!)

No matter how many times I check my cell, there's no way that the date would change. After school, in the reserved AV room, I let out a sigh to my heart's content.

Len-kun's preposterous statement was in present progressive form, it's inviting an unbelievable development.

Why! It was decided that Miku-san and Len-kun, and then me as well, will be holding a mike.

(Why did something like this..... Even though I said 'It's absolutely impossible!'.....)

Len-kun didn't listen to what I had to say in the least, somehow Meiko-sensei was keen about it, too. Of all things, even the manager Megurine-san said that it 'sounds interesting'. What's more, Miku-san smiled at me and said 'I look forward to it'—

I wonder if there's someone who could reject the person they admire after being told that so happily. No, there isn't!

(.....All I wanted was just to see Miku-san's concert, though.....)

But I was warmly welcomed to stand on that stage, together with Len-kun. It was a good thing beyond expectation that I would participate, too.

Ever since I jumped in to participate in the concert at last year's festival, it wasn't once or twice that I sang at local live music clubs. In its own way, their numbers piled up, and people who supported me also appeared.

But that was just on an amateur level and nothing more.

(It's better for Len-kun who's serious about making music, for me..... it's impossible.....)

Miku-san had already sent the new song's data, and independent practice has begun, too.

I was supposed to meet up with Len-kun and the others today as well, but they were in the middle of shopping because some guitar strings broke.

I was the only one left behind, because I wanted to get at least a little bit of practice in.....

(But in the end, when I'm alone, my thoughts start going circles and I don't make progress.....)

Lately, it's been bothering me that my pulse keeps being irregular.

When Len-kun sings Miku-san's new song, my heartbeat abruptly speeds up, it reminds me of a crackling sensation that seems to burn. This being the first time it happens, the truth is that I simply started worrying about it.

(Really, I wonder what's causing it.....)

"What's making you sigh?"

"Actually, tha-aaaa!? Hatsune-san! No way, the real thing?"

"I thought so before, but Otosaki-san sure has volume, huh?"

I'm happy that she praised me. I'm happy, but I feel like I'm about to die.

My eyes meeting Miku-san's, who had suddenly peeked her head in through the door, it feels like my heart is about to leap out.

Wearing jeans and a casquette, with red-rimmed glasses.

Perhaps it's for a disguise, it gave off a different atmosphere than Miku-san's usual appearance.

"Uh, uhm..... Len-kun and the others are....."

"Nope, I came to see Otosaki-san today."

"Me? Mi..... Hatsune-san did?"

"Miku is fine. Can I call you Rin-chan?"

"I-i-i-it would be an honour....."

Miku-san mischievously smiles as I keep expressing how grateful I am.

"Hey Rin-chan, let's go on a date!"

"A date? When you say date, uhm..... aah!?"

That's as far as I got in asking when she yanked my arm.

Like that, I become a shadow trailing behind Miku-san as she walks briskly.

"It sure has been a while since I went to hang out with friends. I wonder where we should go first."

(.....So it's been a while. I see, she must be busy, after all.)

Last year, Miku-san did the Arena tour, and she was invited to overseas festivals, too.

In between, she released three singles and one album. She appeared in commercials and magazines as well, even my parents say 'this girl, we see her often', it seemed like they naturally remembered her name.

A person like that, though it is her alma mater, is coming all the way to sing at the cultural festival's concert.

What's more, she's prepared a new song and says let's stand on stage together.

(I mustn't run away and keep using things like being nervous or feeling awkward as an excuse forever.)

She went to the trouble of making time, so I have to shorten our distance here!

"Miku-san, do you like sweet things?"

"Yeah, I like them a lot."

"Then, shall we go to a crêpe shop? In front of the station, there's a really delicious place."

After eating crêpes, we decided to walk around the shopping mall.

I had Miku-san look at western-style clothes for me, it feels like my fashion sense has gotten better just after today.

By the time the day was ending, I got completely used to being called 'Rin-chan'.

"We just walked around stores, but my feet are already aching."

At the cafe we stopped by to replenish our sugar reserves, Miku-san rubbed her feet with a wry smile.

"Ahaha. We did walk quite a lot."

"Are you okay, Rin-chan?"

"Meiko-sensei has made me complete runs around the perimeter and muscle training, so....."

"I see-. I gotta try my best, too."

(.....Huh?)

It felt like Miku-san's expression had suddenly gotten cloudy, I end up fixedly staring at the seat across from me.

"Wha—at is it, Rin-chan? Something's stuck on my face?"

"Ah, no....."

I'm glad, it looks like it was a misunderstanding.

Hurriedly scooping the parfait into my mouth, this time Miku-san stared at me intently.

(I wonder what happened..... Ha! Did I open my mouth too wide?)

"Your expression just now, it's exactly like Len-kun's."

"Eh....."

"Len-kun likes sweet things, too, so we often went to cookie buffets together."

prick

To the sensation that felt like the depth of my chest is burning, I swallow my breath.

"Hehe, how nostalgic."

Miku-san's voice and expression both convey that that's how she felt from the bottom of her heart.

(Even Len-kun, that's how.....)

During their reunion in the AV room, the gaze he sent towards Miku-san was like looking at the sun.

So bright that you can't keep your eyes open. But you're dying to see it.

It seems like I hear a voice like that asking.....

"— Why did you two break up?"

The voice that simply spilled out, was mine.

(Woah, it can't be true, why now.....)

I put my hand over my mouth right away, but the words that have already spilled out won't return.

Unable to meet Miku-san's gaze, who was just as surprised, all I could do was silently cast my eyes down.

It was the first time that there was silence between Miku-san and I since the two of us have been together on our own.

My head starts hurting from what a thing I ended up asking, to the point that I calm down.

She's a performer, and above all, I'm some person she just met.

(No matter how many times she's said that we're friends, something like this.....)

I have to apologize. I'll take back what I said.

My head finally turned around, it was about time for me to lift my face.

When I did so, my eyes met Miku-san's serene expression.

"Rather than break up, in the first place we..... how should I put it..... Aah, it's no good. It seems like I could only say things that are convenient for me, so could you ask Len-kun instead?"

"A-ah..... but....."

"It's fine. Rin-chan, you're going out with Len-kun, aren't you?"

At that time.

I don't know why, but I couldn't reply to Miku-san's question.

Miku-san said 'I'm the one who invited you,' so she paid at the café for me.

The mood that I ended up making awkward, she corrected the orbit without hesitation.

After that, when we went to a karaoke bar, she told me about things like tricks for singing a new song and failure stories from her tour. It looks like she saw through it that I'm way nervous about co-starring at the cultural festival.

"I wonder if this is what it would be like to have an older sister."

"I'm glad! Me too, I've always wanted a little sister like Rin-chan."

".....Huh, did I say that out loud?"

"Loud and clear. Rin-chan, you really are honest, huh?"

Miku-san's clear laughter echoes in the shop's parking lot.

Since the people passing by look at us with great interest, I casually move over.

(Until Megurine-san comes to pick us up, I properly have to do my job as a guard dog.)

Not long after, Miku-san got a call on her smartphone.

I think it's Megurine-san, but it seemed like they were talking about something sort of complicated.

"Rin-chan, do you have a little more time? The data I was supposed to get by tonight won't be here until tomorrow, if it's possible, I was thinking that I'd like to discuss the new song's arrangement like this."

"Ah, yes. Of course."

"That's great! Then, it's decided. Luka said she'll be here in five minutes."

Len-kun was also at the hotel where Miku-san and Megurine-san were staying.

Megurine-san had called for him and by the time we arrived, he had already spread out the score.

"It's just a suggestion, but what if we played around with the chord a little?"

I'm startled by Len-kun's sudden suggestion.

(Saying something like that to a pro.....)

But it didn't seem like Miku-san took it the wrong way, she quickly went to peek at the part Len-kun was pointing at.

"Which one, which one? Was it sort of weird?"

"That's not it, the end of the high note and such, Miku does them relatively similarly, no?"

"Ah-..... Yeah, maybe."

It was an exchange that I've heard somewhere before.

While I'm retracing my memories, something that happened during the preparations for last year's cultural festival comes back to me.

(If I remember correctly, that was between Len-kun and Tsurumaki-kun.....)

"The chord at the end of the high note, it becomes the same as the one before it. Actually, isn't that Miku-san's habit?"

"Ah—..... Yeah, got it."

"You weren't aware of it? Sheesh, pay attention."

**prick*, *prick*.....*

Aah, there it is again. The usual sensation shows up.

Instead of the sounds around me disappearing, I heard the sound of my own heartbeat awfully resounding.

"Thanks for telling me. You can't really notice your own habits."

"You're welcome. I realized it after Kanata – ah, that's our bass player – told me. It seems like I somehow caught Miku's habit."

"Eeh, it's my fault? Len-kun and I's senses really are similar, huh."

When I thought that the sounds have returned, my heartbeat heavily leapt from the conversation I heard.

(Miku-san said that their senses are similar.....)

More than that, I think that the two of them are looking at the same direction.

What if they were dating even now?

What if they started over once more?

I wonder what would happen, I can't stop thinking of it as if it's another person's affairs like that.

"You guys are a great combo, huh? Speaking of which, I heard from Meiko-sensei that Kagami-kun isn't planning on going on to university?"

Megurine-san, who looked at them seeming to be pleased, spoke as if she had just thought of something.

Even while he looked at her wonderingly, Len-kun nodded without hesitation.

"Yes. I'm thinking of going to Tokyo and making it big with one song."

"Eh, is that so?"

(So it's the first time Miku-san's heard about it, too.)

I don't have any basis for it, but it was unexpected because I always thought he had already told her.

It looks like Len-kun is more distanced from Miku-san than I thought.

"That's just perfect."

".....Luka?"

Miku-san suspiciously looks at Megurine-san.

Facing her, Megurine-san seems to be really enjoying herself somehow.

"What do you say, Kagami-kun, what if you came to America with Miku?"

America—.

That is certainly what Megurine-san said.

It seems like Len-kun heard it like that, too.

Dumbfounded, he mumbled "America?", parroting back her words.

"Luka! Isn't that still off the record?"

"It'll be announced tomorrow at noon, and you trust the two of them, right?"

Again, the sounds become distant.
My heartbeat is so much faster than before that it hurts.

(Miku-san is really going to America.....)

To tell the truth, the rumour has been going around for a while now.
She was very popular at the overseas festivals and Miku-san herself had been making ambitious comments in the interviews, so I think that the fans would've vaguely noticed it.

"Miku's incredible, overseas huh..... Even so, Megurine-san is clearly joking, right!"
Len-kun laughs loudly, as if to thaw the time he spent frozen.
Extremely naturally, as if to smooth things over.
But his voice slightly wavering, it sounded false.

"Oh my, it's not a joke. I've checked the sound of your singing and the videos. The popular topic of conversation, the vocals for a high school band, Kagami Len-kun?"

Megurine-san spoke while looking at Len-kun as if she were testing him.
Facing her, Len-kun opened his eyes wide, then he laughs as he's gritting his teeth.
"Talking about me like that..... I'm delighted."

"Len-kun and I's senses really are similar, huh."

"What do you say, Kagami-kun, what if you came to America with Miku?"

Miku-san's and Megurine-san's words were on an endless loop in my head.
It doesn't even need to be said, this is a big chance for Len-kun.

At a time like this, what I can do—
How should I say it—.....

"A-anyways! We don't have much time, let's settle on the arrangement for the new song."

"Right..... Rin-chan, what do you want to do with the keyboard part?"

The ball suddenly getting passed to me, I couldn't make an expression right away.
Len-kun and Miku-san worriedly looked at me.

".....Um, before that, why don't we make tea?"

It was just a spur-of-the-moment idea, the installed electric kettle visible from the corner of my eye.
But Len-kun and Miku-san clapped their hands, even their breaths perfectly matched.

"Oohh, as expected of Rin! When you think of what's missing, it's that, it's that."

"Right, let's have a little break. What would you like: macarons, cookies or marshmallows?"

"Eeh, why do you have so much stocked? Miku, just because you're not the type to get fat easily—"

"The same goes for you, Len-kun! Just because your body type is naturally a liittle like a model's! Isn't that so, Rin-chan?"

"..... It's true. He's the enemy of girls, isn't he?"

When I backed up Miku-san, Len-kun started pretending to cry in a strained manner.
While Megurine-san was preparing the tea, she quietly said "Perhaps he would be better as a performer. I'll introduce him to an office."
The room was wrapped in a lively and friendly mood.

(I wonder if I'm laughing properly?)

There was a huge dresser by the window, but I was afraid to make sure of it to the end.

Interlude

The room that Len-kun and Rin-chan went home from was spacious and quiet.

For the first time in a while, the sensation of 'lonely' came back again.

I'm gazing outside through the window, but it's too dark so I can't see the two of them.

Only the indescribable expression shown on my face is being reflected.

"Luka, why did you tell them about going to America?"

"Because I thought you wanted to tell it to those two directly."

"..... I guess it's better than finding out from the news."

"May I ask something? I know that you came back here to visit your hospitalized father. But why did you go so far as holding a concert at your alma mater? And preparing a new song for it, too."

Asking that now, after so long?

Why, when she didn't say anything while she busied herself about adjusting my schedule?

Those were my honest feelings.

Unable to fathom her true motives, I'm staring at Luka, but she returns the searching gaze, too.

"It felt like I had to do it."

It's not because there's something in particular that all I can give is a vague answer.

It's just that I myself don't know the truth.

Perhaps Luka expected that to be the case, she returned a small, wry smile.

"By the way, Luka— Are you serious about Len-kun?"

Even though I wasn't planning on mentioning it, it suddenly slipped out of my mouth.

Surprising myself, I'm about to be at my wits' end, thinking that I've really done it now.

"I'm serious."

Luka's voice resounded with a heavy thud, like it was some sort of court decision.

"To be precise, I'm serious about 'Len-kun's talent'."

For some reason, I started feeling gloomy and I let out a sigh in an effort to conceal it.

I probably— It's painful to see Len-kun next to me, who's being forced to make the same decision as I did back then.

Afterwards, it was as usual.

Having reconfirmed tomorrow's schedule, Luka goes back to her room next door.

After soaking in the bathtub and doing some muscle training and stretches, I lie down in bed.

What's different from usual is that my eyes closed immediately.

Then, for the first time in quite a while, I had a dream.

(Ah, this is a dream.....)

What made me realize that is that Len-kun and I were there.

The sight from the summer festival before my 3rd year of high school rolls before me like a movie.

But he seems so full of himself.

I think Len-kun was attached to me.

At that time, because his appearance was like a puppy's, when we passed by friends from middle school, I remember that they mocked us by saying "Taking him for a walk?".

He always ran straight to me after that much.

I was happy because it was like I got a little brother, it was more reassuring than anything else.

There's no doubt about it, what supported me at that time was Len-kun's smile.

When I became old enough to understand, my family was in a state that's called 'in-home separation'.....

To my parents, me getting scouted became the trigger.

When they found out that Luka was from a major music office, the custody dispute suddenly began.

Heading towards the debut, it was an important period that I had to use for the sake of making songs.

My home was no longer a shelter, I started staying out until the sun went down.

Before a month had passed since I moved, I found a favourite place for myself.

A small overpass, connecting the residential area and the park.

In the evening, people mostly don't pass by there, it was just right for singing.

After the Light Music Club's practice ended, I took up the habit of heading there straight away.

(That's where I met Len-kun.)

At first, I just went past him.

Len-kun was at the overpass before me, I slipped by and went to the park, feeling a little regretful.

As I passed him by and unintentionally glanced at him, Len-kun's eyes were bright red.

I realized that he came here to cry, too.

"Maybe I'll go, to the cultural festival....."

"If it's a cultural festival you're looking for, how about the one at Aisaka Academy?"

I remember the first time we talked like it was yesterday.

The truth is, I was sure that he was 'Kagami Len-kun' before I called out to him.

'The boy at the overpass' was always on my mind, when I accidentally grumbled about it to Kaito-senpai, from all sorts of pieces of information, we discussed that it could be Len-kun.

"First I'll text Miku, then I'll send it to Len, too. If he reacts to it, then it's him."

Then just as Kaito-senpai said, I met Len-kun.

After that, it passed by in a flash.
He came to the cultural festival and we became friends.
Winter passed by, spring came—.

Before summer came around, I decided to walk on the path of music.
All alone, without even telling Len-kun about it.

The very moment that Luka found me, everything other than music left my conscious.
Though I knew that I still had to push away my instable 'little brother', I couldn't stay beside him.
As I was hesitating over when I should tell him, I stayed silent until the very end.

I think there were countless other methods that were better and wouldn't have hurt him.
In the end, I was the dearest to myself.
By immersing myself in music, I wanted to be saved.

After a while, a single e-mail arrived from Len-kun, to my PC address.
The name of the attached file was 'RE: Crybaby Boyfriend'.
When I clicked on it with trembling fingers, his reply flowed from the speakers.

"Thank you."

I listened and listened, repeating that word.....
I decided that I won't turn back any more.

The next morning, Luka exceptionally had music playing while she drove.
What's more, a song that's not mine.
".....That's Len-kun's, isn't it? Didn't you already listen to it before?"
Seeing that we stopped to wait on a red light, I call out to her in the driver's seat.
"It was after you that I listened to the demo tape and thought of wanting to meet him."
From the back seat, Luka's expression reflected in the rear-view mirror seemed like she was about to start humming any moment now.
"Meeting him directly and hearing his voice live, I became sure of it. Kagami Len, that boy is changing."
".....I understand your feelings, too, Luka. But..... isn't this a bit too soon?"
"Says the girl who debuted at eighteen."

Luka says it without hesitating and no sarcasm either, giving off the air that that's to be expected of a capable woman.
She's the one who taught me about things like having resolution as a pro and pride.
As a manager, and as a competent producer.

I believe in Luka's ear for differentiating between music and her sense of smell, and Len-kun's songs gets me excited, too.
It's a bright sound, filled with possibilities.

“But.....”

Unable to find a continuation to my words, I drop my gaze.

I wonder why I’m feeling so heavy-hearted about it.

Len-kun’s smile as he laughs together with Rin-chan crosses my mind—.

“The one who has to reply is Kagami-kun, not you.”

To Luka’s words, I deeply sank into the seat.

Having finished the arrangement for the new song, it was completely dark outside by the time we left Miku-san’s hotel room.

(It’s a little bit chilly to be in short sleeves today.....)

In the southern sky, I can see autumn’s Great Square of Pegasus.

It’s a little bit different from the night sky I gazed up at with Len-kun during summer break.

“What do you say, Kagami-kun, what if you came to America with Miku?”

Megurine-san’s words are still burned into my ears.

(Len-kun, I wonder what you’re thinking now?)

He’s walking beside me, staying at a distance not too close and not too far away, not saying a word ever since we left.

Since I occasionally feel his gaze, I think he might be figuring out the timing to start a conversation.

(But, it’s already..... I can’t wait for that anymore.)

“I decided! I’m going to stay here and master the way of sweets!”

I said that cheerfully on purpose, to blow away the uncomfortable mood.

“.....Eh? Rin, why are you saying that all of a sudden?”

“You know earlier, I thought of it as I was listening to Miku-san and Len-kun’s conversation. That I want to master what I’m capable of, too. So.....”

Though there’s still something crucial left again, my voice trembled.

Tightly gripping my hands, I take a deep breath.

“So, let’s walk our own paths.”

“.....I don’t want a long-distance relationship! Absolutely impossible, I’m gonna cry!”

“Don’t say that before you try it.”

I wanted to convey it properly to Len-kun, who’s laughing it off and fooling about.

I stared intently into Len-kun’s eyes.

“In the first place, we’re only seventeen years old? A lot of things will probably happen to us from here on out, we don’t know what’s ahead of us. I want Len-kun to make his dream of music come true.”

It seems that this time, I properly conveyed it to Len-kun that I’m saying this seriously.

Perhaps he thought that he can’t make fun of it anymore, for a while he searched for the words to say.

“—— I believe in Rin.”

I didn't understand at first what he meant by that.

My feet stopping before I knew it, I look up at Len-kun in a daze, with the stars behind him.

“So Rin, too, believe in me.”



What of mine is it that he believes in?

What of Len-kun's should I believe in?

Unable to ask him directly, we parted in front of the station that day as well.
While feeling Len-kun's gaze on my back.

Chapter 3

That Hatsune Miku is going to America—.

The day after Rin and I heard it directly from the person herself, Aisaka was in an incredible uproar after hearing the official announcement.

No, it wasn't just us. It was getting a lot of publicity on TV and online as well, in the flow of it, talk of the concert at the cultural festival was brought up, too.

Even though the tickets were sold out long ago, apparently the phone in the teacher's room is constantly ringing. In the first place, since it's been decided that you can't even enter the academy's grounds without an invitation card, dangerous writings are being caught sight of.

(They should've known that it would turn into an uproar, so why did they announce it with this timing?)

The answer is probably in Megurine-san's words.

When I came back from going out shopping with Kanata, Rin wasn't in the AV room. Just when I thought it was strange, Megurine-san gave me a call.

"Hah? On a date with Miku?"

"It's fine, Miku's wearing a disguise."

"No, that's not the prob..... Though there aren't any days left until the cultural festival, what are they doing?"

"That's exactly why. After the cultural festival, long-term work is waiting for her. Before that, I wanted to let her freely walk around in her hometown, and more than anything, her father is....."

I already know that Miku's parents' divorce is pending in court because a variety show reported it. Just when I thought that the divorce was finally decided, an unexpected reality was thrown at me.

"He's hospitalized now, his days are already numbered in his condition."

".....i, oi..... oi! Len, can you hear me?"

The sounds suddenly came back, as if I had gotten out of a pool. Shaking the chair with a bang, I look at the owner of the voice.

".....Ah, it's Kanata....."

"What's with that stupid look? Were you spacing out from sleep deprivation?"

"It's the day before the performance. There's a guest this time, too, so there's a handful of things I'm nervous about."

"Hey, tell it to me straight. In these circumstances, you're thinking we're in quite the pinch?"

The program songs were perfect.

We had plenty of rehearsals with the members up until today, I can say I'm satisfied.

(The problem is the new song, huh.....)

To conclude, Rin dropped out.

The day before yesterday, on the way home from the hotel Miku's staying at.

"Let's walk our own paths."

Then yesterday, right before we perform the new song.

"I want to watch Miku-san and Len-kun singing from the audience."

According to me, it was too much of a one-sided declaration.

No matter how much we tried to keep her from leaving, she wouldn't nod in agreement.

"There's nothing to be done, I guess."

"Dude, are you seriously saying that?"

"But, well-. Even if she looks cute, Rin's unexpectedly stubborn?"

"Are you an idiot or what!"

"That huuuuuurts!?"

Alongside the abusive language, he hit my head with his fist.

Isn't this bad? My eyes are flickering.....

"Think about Otosaki's feelings, too. The rumours have even reached me."

As I scowl at Kanata with teary eyes, an even scarier expression was looking back at me.

I know the source of the rumour Kanata is talking about.

It's the self-proclaimed Kagami Len Fan Club that severely bullied Rin.

Hearing that I'll be doing the concert together with Miku, apparently they went ahead and fabricated a story.

To say, we reconciled or something like that.

"Couldn't Otosaki be intending to back out like this? Is that okay?"

".....That's not it."

"Did she herself say that? Either way, go and bring her back. "

I understand why Kanata is worried.

Of course, it's not that I'm not thinking anything of this situation, either.

(But, I.....)

"I believe in Rin."

"Yeah, no, I wasn't doubting that. But, the situation is still the same? Even if it's Otosaki, I think it's hard for her to take back something she said already."

"Then it's no good like that."

To me saying that decisively, Kanata dubiously knits his eyebrows.

"To the bitter end, you want Otosaki to say that she's coming?"

"It's easy to say kind words, but I think it'd be meaningless like that. Unless we overcome this, we'll surely..... Afterwards, it'll be no good again."

If we both go and face our own dreams, we'll drift away from each other before long.

This is the turning point, if that'll only be a physical distance, or if our hearts will end up drifting away as well.

"Oh, I see. I poked my nose into your business and lost."

Cracking his neck, my best friend quickly stands up from his seat.

".....It's the kind of thing I shouldn't be saying, but are you going to be satisfied with how things are now?"

"If I properly think about what's ahead, it won't end up bad, right?"

"Oh wow, that bragging face really pisses me off."

"Whatever you say, idiot."

After laughing together for a while, Kanata picks up the case with his bass in it.

"Then, I'm off."

".....hey, thanks."

In a volume that he may or may not have heard, I whispered it as his back goes off into the distance. Though he didn't turn around, he lightly waved his hand.

Alone, I took a deep breath.

(.... I guess I'll do the tuning for the guitar.)

crash

The moment I made up my mind, the door was thrown open like it was aimed at.

When I turned around by reflex, Miku was standing there alone with a panicked expression.

"Where's Megurine-san? Going incognito on your own again?"

"Rin-chan's not going to sing the new song?"

As expected of an Aisaka ex-student. Miku knew her way around thoroughly and all that, she came into the AV room without hesitation.

Coming straight up to me, she looks up at me with a sharp gaze.

"I heard about it just now from Tsurumaki-kun.Why?"

"Sorry for reporting it late. Just, let me explain."

"You're saying that you want to wait for Rin-chan until the day of the concert, right? That's okay, I feel the same."

Seeing through my train of thought, it wasn't necessary for me to say anything else to Miku.

(I was always spoiled by that comfort, huh.....)

Even without putting it into words, even without showing an attitude, she understands.

Though it could be thought of as an ideal relationship, if you make one false step, it can be a double-edged sword.

"With Rin-chan, did something happen.....?"

"Rin's fine."

"Really.....?"

"..... That aside, there's something, that I want to ask from Miku."

Seemingly having noticed the change in the tone of my voice, Miku blinked.

A bewildered color floats in her eyes.

I've been thinking ever since I heard about Miku's dad from Megurine-san.

What would be the best thing to do for Miku, what can I do.

Three years ago and now as well, Miku hasn't told me at all about her circumstances at home. I'm not such a child anymore that I don't understand the meaning behind her choice. That's why I'm not going to force her to tell me. Still, if I could help her somehow.....

"Hey, Miku..... Are you okay? You're not straining yourself?"

"..... What's the matter, all of a sudden."

To Miku who didn't reply with yes or no, I internally sigh that that's how it is after all.

Once you end up noticing, a lot of things can be clearly seen at once.

(Miku always strained herself like this.)

"I'm not the same as I was back then, so rely on me a little."

She didn't say anything, though.

To my words, Miku's clear eyes wavered.

When I intently stare back at her without averting my eyes, I realized that the waves are rising more and more.

It also looks as if she's trying to hold back tears.

"— Three years ago, Len-kun was the one who supported my music."

Choosing her words, Miku says it plentifully.

No kidding, the unexpected answer made me gasp.

"I myself looked older on the outside..... On the inside, I unknowingly leaned on you."

"..... Miku, that's not how it was."

"Yes it was."

Finishing by saying that decisively, Miku laughed on account of putting an end to this conversation.

Then, she breathed in to take a deep breath.

"Len-kun, what if..... just what if, Luka were to officially propose that she wants to bring you to America..... what would you think?"

Miku said that staring straight at me.

"I'd be really delighted."

Miku is looking at me intently, as if she's searching for my true intention.

Those eyes were wavering a little.

Miku, who's never shaken.

Miku, who's strong.

For some reason, that Miku seems a little childlike now.

"I'd be really delighted, but..... I can't go now."

"Why?"

"I don't want to be separated from Rin. Because Rin is the one who supports my music."

I heard the tiny sound of Miku swallowing her breath.

Perhaps her clear eyes had found what she was looking for inside me, she softly took off her gaze at last.

“Incredible..... It’s really incredible. Len-kun and Rin-chan too, you’re both too dazzling.”

For a moment, I thought Miku was crying.

But when she raised her head again, Miku wore a smile as bright as the sun.

“We’re disagreeing a little right now, I think that the me from before would have shamefully made a fuss. But, I believe in her. I believe that she’ll surely understand my feelings.”

“Me too, I believe in you two.”

I don’t think there was a deep meaning to it.

To the point that even Miku isn’t aware of it.

But, she was certainly spinning her long hair around her finger.

(That habit of hers hasn’t changed either, huh.....)

Beside the crybaby me, Miku always smiled without making complaints.

Even so, when she’s uneasy or feeling down, signs show up a little bit.

As Miku was looking down now, filled with all sorts of feelings, I drew her close to me.

“.....Len-kun?”

I can hear Miku’s voice from real close.

“I was always spoiled by Miku, always supported..... That’s why I thought that I liked Miku, that this is what admiration was.”

“.....Yeah.”

“But after all, I think that was my first love.”

“.....Yeah.”

“From now on, I’ll cheer for you not as a crybaby boyfriend, but as an important friend.”

Miku took a deep breath several times.

With a smile, she spoke.

“Thank you.”



(..... I wonder..... am I troubling Len-kun.....)

Not accepting Len-kun's persuasion until the very end, it's been an hour since I left the AV room. In that time, I showed my face at the Home Ec Club, but I got driven out after accidentally mixing up the salt and sugar.

Wearily walking across the hallway, I think about what's ahead.

We had completed the preparations for the class's display ages ago, all that's left is welcoming the day of the festival itself.

The same goes for club activities, at least for now there isn't anything I could do.

I don't want to trouble Len-kun.

But, Len-kun's and Miku-san's performance, I want to listen to it from the audience—. I wanted him to understand these feelings.

I mustn't stick close to Len-kun always and forever.

If I really care for Len-kun, I want to think of Len-kun's dream first.

I wanted to properly prepare for that in advance.

Listening to their music from the audience, that was my 'resolve'.

But, I'm fully realizing that the situation turned into this.

(I loved music more than I thought, huh.....)

Going further, it can't be helped that I had fun in the band with Len-kun and the others.

I'm much, much more elated now than when I played the piano alone in the music room.

"So it ends with this, I won't cry."

Weaving through the atmosphere that has gotten busy with preparations for the cultural festival, the clear voice shook my eardrums.

At a volume that was kind of like whistling, kind of like secret talk.

Even so, it certainly reached me.

When I surveyed my surroundings, Miku-san was standing in a corner of the courtyard.

Since she was hidden behind the flowerbeds, it looks like she wanted to avoid attracting people's attention, though.....

(After hearing that she's going to America, everyone's Miku-san-fever seems to have heated up.)

Megurine-san wasn't beside her either, if the current students were to find her, tomorrow's concert is out of the question.

"Miku-san, let's go somewhere else."

Rushing over to her as inconspicuously as possible, I took her hand.

Half pulling her by force, we make an emergency escape to the teacher's room.

“Rin-chan, can we talk a bit?”

Facing me with a slightly stiff expression, I’m startled.

Probably, I mean, without a doubt, it’s about the new song.

When I nod deeply, Miku-san went to consult the teachers about something.

In less than five minutes, I was guided to the reception room that had its curtains closed.

So that I wouldn’t sink deep into the sofa, I sat down on its edge.

In front of me, Miku-san shallowly takes a seat in a similar manner.

“At tomorrow’s concert, is it true that you won’t sing the new song?”

“.....Yes.”

I did think that I have to tell Miku-san directly, but I had no way to contact her.

I also thought that she’d probably hear about it from Len-kun or Meiko-sensei.

Nothing but excuses coming to mind, I couldn’t stand it and dropped my gaze.

“Hey Rin-chan, I didn’t come to press you for an answer, you know. Just..... I wanted you to listen to what I have to say.”

To the unexpected words, I slightly nodded.

“Before, Rin-chan asked why we broke up, right?”

“Ah..... I’m sorry about that.”

Shaking her head, Miku-san moderates me, who asked a rude question.

“Long ago, I left Len-kun behind. What’s more, one-sidedly. But even so, Len-kun said ‘thank you’ and saw me off.”

“Thank you—.....”

“At that time I was really delighted..... But after reuniting, I thought it over again. It would’ve made far happier if he had said that he believes in me.”

In an instant, it synchronized with Len-kun’s words.

The words that Len-kun conveyed to me.

The words that I couldn’t digest yet in my heart.

“Going to Tokyo to make a debut..... Throwing away something to gain something, that’s how the me from that time thought. Or rather, I ended up overstepping.”

It was a deep, deep sound.

All sorts of emotions melting together, it shook my heartbeat.

In my heart, I can feel something coming loose.

Miku-san’s words are conveying something precious to me—.

“I believe in Rin. So Rin, too, believe in me.”

Len-kun’s words from then sink into my heart for the first time now.

Glaring at the floor, I desperately try to force down the tears that are welling up.

That’s why I don’t know what sort of expression Miku-san is making now.

But, the voice that I heard was endlessly gentle.

Just as if she put only her true feelings onto it.

“It’s difficult to believe in someone. Because it’s something that’s accompanied by agonizing things and bitter things as well, sometimes even pain.”

“But you know, I just realized something. That deciding to walk together today, tomorrow, and always after that, persisting through it, it’s a wonderful thing, isn’t it. So that’s why, if I were to fall in love again..... I’ll have the courage to believe.”

“Like how there’s the saying ‘treasure every meeting for it will never reoccur’, aren’t meetings and farewells something that come with life? Because of that, saying goodbye is what people end up focusing on all the time, though..... there’s something to be learned from goodbyes, too, right?”

When I realized it, I had raised my head.

I was staring intently at Miku-san.

Miku-san was staring back at me, too.

In the end, the usual smile was on her lips.

“Just now, I decided on a title for the new song.”

To the voice that was quiet yet the determination could be felt in it, I naturally straighten my back.

What Miku-san crafted was a wonderful ‘true feeling’.

“What do you think? Calling it ‘Beginning’s Goodbye’.”

From the reception room on the first floor to the AV room on the highest floor.

I fervently rushed upstairs.

Though I probably should’ve sent a text or made a call, saying don’t go home yet.

As fast as possible without wasting a second, I wanted to convey my feelings as they are in my own voice.

When I threw open the door with great force, Len-kun was still there.

Laying eyes on me, he smiles as bright as the sun.

“I believed that Rin would come.”

“.....Sorry..... Len-kun, sorry.”

Since I’m breathing heavily, it ends up coming out at intervals.

Even so, I properly conveyed it to Len-kun.

Brimming with a bright light, his eyes smile at me.

One step at a time, Len-kun comes closer.

One step at a time, I went ahead, too.

The distance between us shortened until he was right in front of me.....

Hands unintentionally stretching out, we embraced each other.

“Just now, I made a promise with Miku-san.”

“.....Yeah.”

“To please let me sing the new song together with you.”

“.....Yeah.”



While feeling the sound of each other's heart, I reveal my determination.
Hugging me tighter and tighter, Len-kun nods in a trembling voice.

"With that song, let's see Miku-san off?"

Not for the sake of saying goodbye.
For the sake of promising to meet again.

Chapter 4

The first day's weather was bad, but we had fair weather for the second day.

The record number of attendees crowd around the stage that was set up in the courtyard this year as well.

Outside the circle, the teachers were among the guests who couldn't get their hands on a ticket. The inescapable heat impatiently reached all the way backstage.

"I did expect it, but that's an incredible number of people, huh....."

Growing restless and unable to calm down, I end up checking the keyboard's settings over and over again.

The chipper music that the dance club before us plays barely reaches my ears.

"Huuuhhh? What is it Rin-chan, could it be that you've gotten nervous?"

".....Well, in a way."

"I see, but it's alright! Or rather, it's needless worry? Because those guests, they came to see Aisaka Academy's Prince, aka Kagami Len☆"

".....Len-kun..... it's too late for that kind of unreasonable character."

"Waaaaa!? Wait, you'll understand if we talk it over! I really can't stand it when you retort so terribly calmly! And looking at me with that pitiful gaze, stoooooooooooooop."

""Shut up, you're annoying.""

Eh? Now, my voice collided with someone's?

Turning around in a flash, Miku-san was there, dressed in her costume.

Though it's before singing, her aura is impressive.

Everyone's hands suddenly stop, even the staff members who were moving in a hurry.

I ran up to her without hesitation, and vigorously bowed.

Putting all my grateful feelings into it.

"Eh, Rin-chan!? Don't do that, raise your head."

"Miku-san! Thank you so, so very much!"

While saying that, the tears overflow.

Miku-san gently brushes them away with her finger, bursting into an extraordinary smile.

"Isn't it too soon to express your gratitude? Let's all put on the greatest performance!"

When I stand up on stage, it feels just as if I'm drifting in the ocean.

But, the helplessness is only at the start.

The wave surging from the audience, it carries us far away.

Making that wave even bigger, we send the sound from the stage.

(More and always, I want to be with everyone like this.)
Naturally thinking like that, I shake my head a little.
It's good because it has an end, because it has a limit.

Concentrating on this moment now, I pour everything into it.
Perhaps spinning every moment is what it means to keep living.

In the blink of an eye, we're in the second half of the concert.
Wrapped in outstandingly big cheers and applause, Miku-san comes up on stage.

"I'm back."

To Miku-san's opening words, the 'welcome back' completes it as if it had been practiced.
Stepping back from the mike, Len-kun and I shouted it with all our might, too.
Miku-san, who usually does the MC-ing without faltering, is at a loss for words.



(.....Miku-san, are you crying.....?)

Since there's no large screen here, I don't think they saw it in the audience.

But standing behind her at an angle, I saw the sparkling drop spill onto Miku-san's cheek.

It was a warm, endlessly clear teardrop.

"There are a lot of meetings and farewells in life, you can't come to a stop though.....

But goodbye isn't the end, it's the beginning."

When I realized it, the grounds had fallen deadly silent to Miku-san's words.

The new song's name is announced to the lulled ocean.

"I'm going to be singing a new song now.

Please listen, to 'Beginning's Goodbye'."

I won't forget this day.

I think that Len-kun, Miku-san and the people in the grounds, surely feel the same.

This day, when the continuation of 'Like Hate', the legendary song called 'Beginning's Goodbye' was born.

I can see that Megurine-san is waiting in the car.

Not only that, the mass media was crowding around the school.

I understood that we barely had any time left.

(But, though..... I don't want to be separated from Miku-san yet.....)

"Geez Rin-chan, you've been crying all along. If you cry so much, the water in your body will disappear and you'll dry up?"

"The same goes for Mi-Miku-san....."

Regretting the farewell, Miku-san and I are hugging each other.

Len-kun's sending us a jealous gaze, but we're absolutely not letting him join in!

"..... Miku-san, I admire you. Even if you go to America, I'll always, always support you! So, please come back to Japan sometimes, okay?"

"Rin-chan.....! Enough, enough! You're saying such cute things.....!"

Miku-san, who's spirits were just as high as during the concert, hugged me tighter.

My tear glands getting more and more stimulated by it, my vision goes blurry.

Then, Megurine-san sounded the horn.

There really is no more time left.

"Hey Rin-chan, what I said in the MC, do you remember?"

".....Yes."

"There are a lot of meetings and farewells in life, you can't come to a stop though.....

But goodbye isn't the end, it's the beginning."

I believe in those words.

It's not just me.

Miku-san, and Len-kun as well, feel the same way, I'm certain of that now.

"We'll meet again, right?"

"Of course! Take care of Len-kun, okay?"

She whispered that last part so only I would hear.

Without hesitation, I firmly nodded.

Encore

No matter how much time passes, I can't get used to the takeoff.

Uneasiness and expectations mixed with various other things, I think it's because my heart is busy.

"How was it, your alma mater after such a long time?"

Sitting beside me, Luka said it while giving me a handkerchief.

While accepting that, I realize that I'm crying.

"It might be impudent, saying something like after all this time....."

I hesitated a little before saying the next words.

It's probably the same as these tears.

I didn't realize it myself, but I.....

It was a vague relationship, 'I like you' and 'let's go out' were never once put into words.

Len-kun telling me that it was his 'first love', the answer fell down with a thump.

"I, ended up getting my heart broken."

(.....Huh? I feel sort of, relieved..... maybe?)

With nothing to it, after saying it out loud.

If anything, it feels as if something that was sitting heavy in my chest all along had begun to dissolve.

Oh, I see. I'm alright.

Embracing my beloved memories, I can walk towards the precious future.

"..... By the way Luka, you haven't given up on Len-kun yet?"

I can see the template of a certain business proposal in the file she has at hand.

It was merely internal materials or something of a rough draft, but I saw Kagami Len's name messily written on it.

(When Luka gets like this, no one can stop her, huh.....)

The next time I come back to Japan, we might become senpai and kouhai at the office.

(That might be a bit nice, yeah right.)

“I’ll be back.”

Announcing my farewell to everyone and to my past self, I took off to a new stage.

“I wonder if that’s the plane Miku-san is on.”

In the AV room after school, Len-kun and I are standing side by side and gazing out the window.

The cultural festival ending, we third-years were all caught up in the entrance exam mood.

Even during that, Len-kun worked diligently during club activities, same as always.

However, that’s— a special time, only allowed now.

“Len-kun, I..... handed in the application.”

After the plane disappeared from view, I turned towards Len-kun.

For the sake of conveying my important decision.

“Next spring, let’s go to Tokyo together.”

“Rin!? That’s—.....”

“I’m going to master the way of sweets. And, beside Len-kun, I want to keep listening to Len-kun’s songs the whole time.”

Len-kun’s widened eyes wavered, afterwards he suddenly cast them down.

As my heartbeat was painfully ringing, a smile floated to Len-kun’s lips.

I understand that I, we, overcame it.

“I believed that if it’s Rin, she’ll come.”

“..... Thank you for believing in me.”

In the club room dyed with the sunset, our shadows overlapped.

Extras



(from right to left)

Members of the Haniwa Family

Yoshida-san, Shito, Gom, Kaizoku Ou, Yamako, Rokoru

Nickname: Haniwa

[Panda]: Thank you for the Suki Kirai novelization! Did you enjoy it with your heart squeezing?

[Polar Bear]: Here, we'll introduce the music composition and video production team, HoneyWorks!

Before Haniwa's founding

[Yamako]: Illustration Creation Request for First Original Vocaloid Song!?

Contact on Skype?

What's Skype!?

[Yamako]:The song that bandsmen like them are making...

I wonder just what kind of rock song it is...



Nakimushi Kareshi

[Yamako]: !?

An unlikely ballad came

It's different from what I imagined...!

While discussing the PV illustration

[From the computer]: The location for the lyrics is an overpass at dusk
Something like both of them walking off

With their backs turned

[Yamako]: Ah, then in the image

They split up left and right...?

[From the computer]: No, not like that!

Split into top and bottom on the left

The top is the way it is

They're walking only on the bottom

Something like that!

[Yamako]: ??

[From the computer]: This location is at the station

Crying while laughing

The light goes like susaaaa

Then make it go buwaaaa!

[Yamako]: ???

More pickiness than expected.....

[From the computer]: Ah, wiping away the tear

Instead of the index finger

Let's make it the thumb

Then, the angle is more

From the right...

[Yamako]: ??

[From the computer]: Basically

Something like this

[Yamako]: !?

[Yamako]: Ah...

Thank you very much.

Finished like this without incident



Next song Suki Kirai

[Yamako]: !?

A cute one came this time!

It's different from what I imagined after all.....!

[Yamako]: You sure wouldn't think that these two people thought of that song and lyrics...

But as of now

[Shito]: Lyrics here!

'I like you'

'It's unbearable how much I like you'

[Gom]: Let's have this kid say

'Fuee' here

[Yamako]: Mhm...

The expression from that time like this...

Three adults, creating by completely becoming one with the feelings of teenage girls

With new members added, there's 5 people in Haniwa!

From here on out, we'll keep being active and having fun!

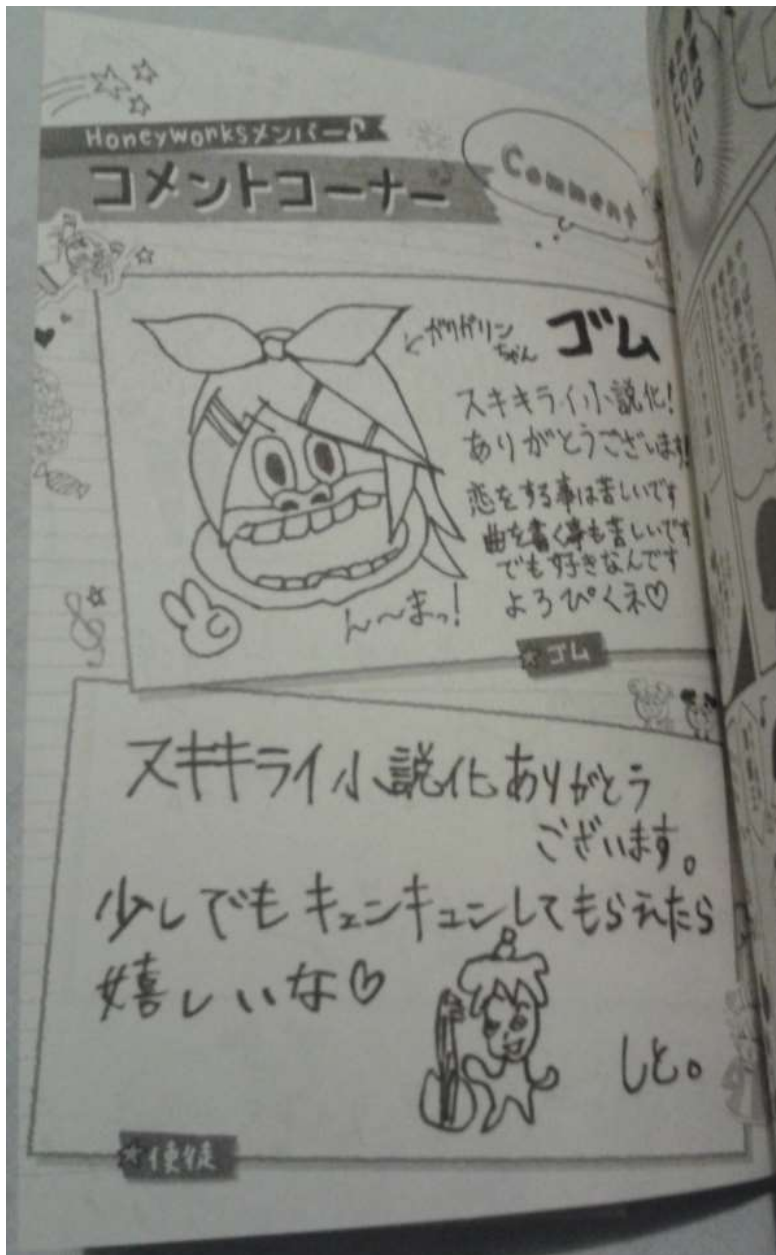
In charge of illustrations, Rokoru

In charge of the guitar, Kaizoku Ou

There's also the toy poodle Ishida, the Haniwa family's idol!

Keep supporting us, okay!

HoneyWorks member comment corner



Gom:

Suki Kirai novelization!

Thank you!

Being in love is painful

Writing songs is painful, too

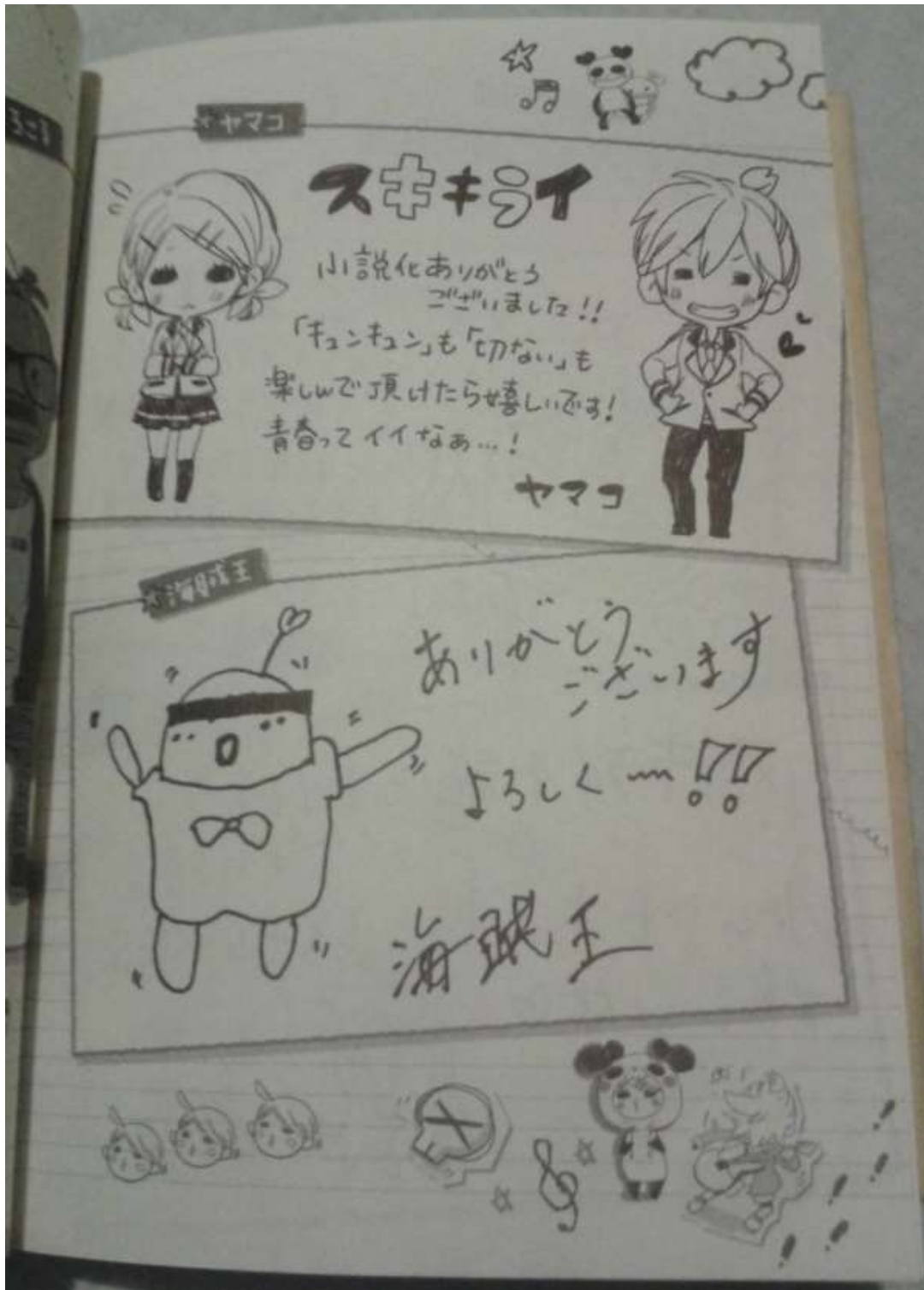
But I love it

Yoropikune <3 {an alteration on the usual yoroshiku but I can't come up with anything better for it}

Shito:

Thank you for the Suki Kirai novelization!

I'd be glad if it made your heart squeeze at least a little <3



Yamako:

Thank you for the Suki Kirai novelization!!

I'm glad if you enjoyed the 'Heart squeezing' and the 'heartrending', too!

Youth is great, huh...!

Kaizoku Ou:

Thank you

Yoroshiku~!!

小説化おめでとう!!

スチットの音楽のイラストの投稿がきっかけで、雑誌の連載が始まりました。
このイラストがきっかけで、思っていたよりも早く小説化の運びになりました。
しかも、おもしろい内容のイラストが、多くの人に受け入れられています。
私もこのイラストがきっかけで、小説化の運びになりました。
早く小説化の運びになりますように、お祈りいたします。
このイラストがきっかけで、自分も描ける事になりました。!!!
本当に嬉しい気持ちです。ありがとうございます。
おめでとう、小説化おめでとう!!



Rokoru:

Congratulations for the novelization!!

When the Vocaloid original Suki Kirai was posted, it was the winter of my 3rd year of middle school, when I didn't even think of it in my dreams that I'd be a member of HoneyWorks by any means...!

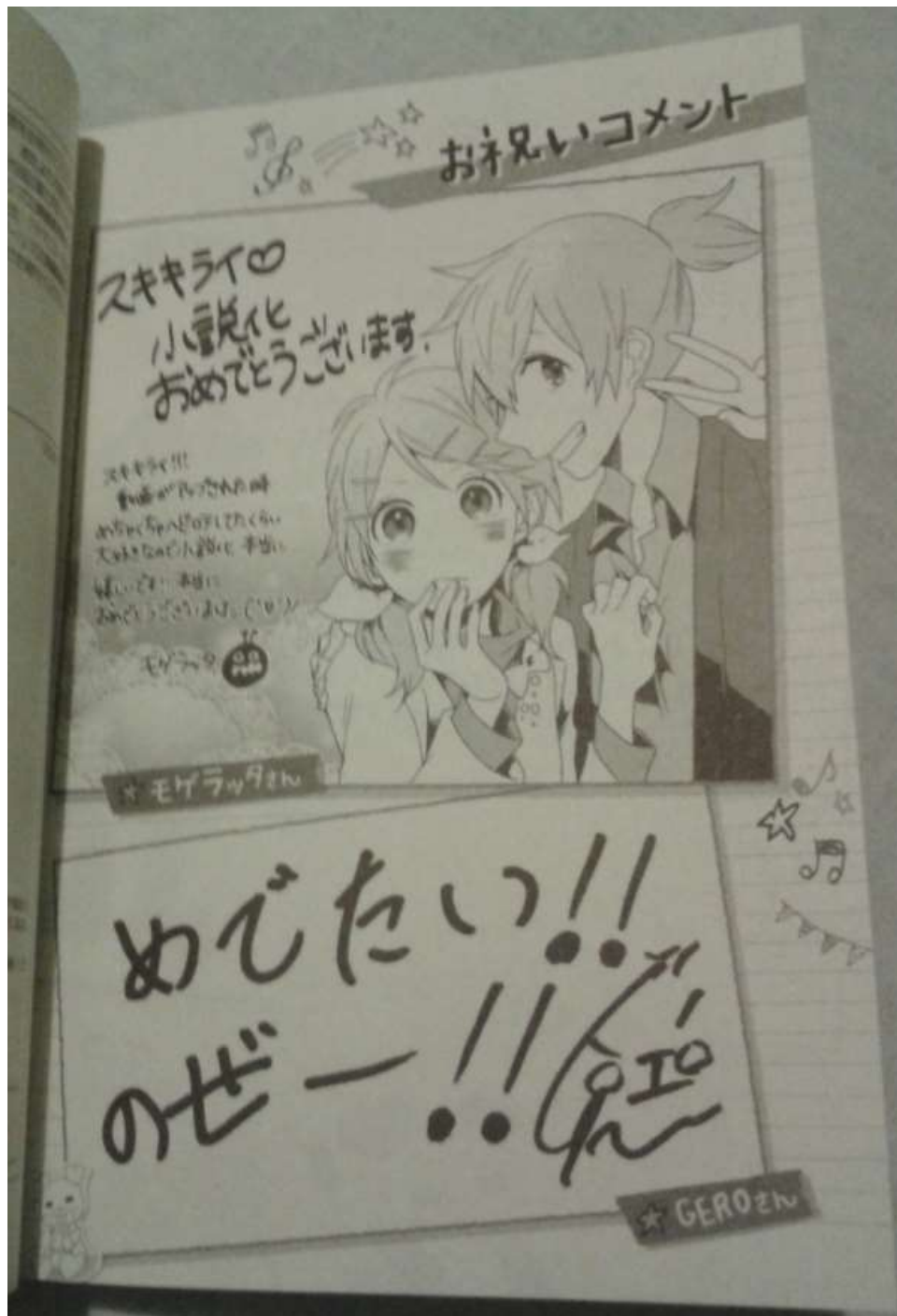
It was cute and interesting! And the illustrations were awesome, too! And, I still remember how I listened to it with my friend, with our hearts squeezing very very much.

That's what turned me into a Haniwa fan, when I heard that Suki Kirai is getting a novelization, I was really-really looking forward to it, but to think that I could even be involved in it as an illustrator...!!!

I truly am filled with happy feelings, thank you!

Once again, congratulations for the novelization!!!

Congratulatory comments



Mogelatte-san:

Congratulations for the Suki Kirai novelization.

Suki Kirai!!!

When the video was uploaded, it was absurd how frequently I listened to it, so I'm truly happy for the novelization!!

Congratulations

GERO-san:

How joyous-!!!!