

Mizu No Koe

Mizu No Koe

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A normal story.

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As all living organisms would say, sleep is essential. And it's true. Sleep, indeed, IS essential. A necessity, a process of life...

And also a serious pain. The seemingly endless beeping that echoes painfully in my mind supports my statement greatly.

I sit up.

Five years. For five long years, has this undeniably annoying excuse of a wrist watch alarm been shattering my sleep. And the amazing thing is, I still don't remember which of the four buttons shuts it off. I get it right after the flash button.

20:02 p.m.

... Ah... Now how did I miss the dark room.

I guess my eternal blunder of setting the alarm time does come in handy at times. I wouldn't like to be sleeping next to the haunted classroom anyway. Or any other class room for that matter.

I sigh.

Now then... Why did I set my alarm at 8:00 this morning...

I begin my mind trigger sequence. Seriously though, why did I call it mind trigger when I'm remembering? Shouldn't it be memory trigger? Though I guess most would just call it remembering. Then again, why am I having this self-conversation?

Anyway, I'll just skip the before school sequence. It's the same anyway. Then again, what isn't repeated daily during my school life? Subjects of conversations? Perhaps... Why am I talking to myself again?

I guess asking this question has been another habit I've acquired ever since I entered middle school. I blame puberty. Got it at an early stage, probably the same time girls do. Normal people wouldn't be able to see the connection. Then again, aren't I normal? The way I'm conflicted with myself, I'd say not, but based on another? Who knows? I may be insane or just beyond normal. Now then, back to the connection-

"..."

Suddenly it feels so much lonelier standing alone in this semi moonlit club room...

"..."

I have seriously got to stop doing this.

Fine inner me's. Have it your way.

Mizu No Koe

Skip. Skip. Bio homework, page 57, not that I'm going to do it until tomorrow. Skip. Skip. Listened to another one of Tajiri's love rumours. Skip. Skip. Slept like a rock on the club room table.

"..."

Not a very good mind trigger. I guess change in sleeping position and surrounding does affect it in some way.

I reach for Yuki in my front pocket and scribble it down on the wooden table. I'll transfer the notes on to paper later. I'm too lazy to dig into my over loaded portable file right now.

Wait, it's coming back...

I lay my head on the cool table surface.

Before I slept...

...Tajiri made me an official member of some dead club?...

I bite my index finger as I try to remember. Another common habit of mine when I try to remember or think.

"The lost... And found club..."

Now that's strange... As far as I remember in my pathetic 16 years of living, I don't have such a feminine voice.

"Mmmmmmmmm....."

Damn. And I was just about to blame puberty...

"..."

"Wait-"

I lift my head resting on me left arm. In the room lit solely by faint moonlight, I seek the voice that spoke out to me. I can hear a distant mutter. Could it be... An incantation of some sort? Will I be forced into some B-rated fantasy anime world? Will I forget everything that's happened in my life (not that it's anything important)? Will I...

...Find my true love?...

Now, back to reality.

That said, I can think of over dramatized events almost everywhere and anytime based on anything. Such is the nature of a self-proclaimed thinker. Also the reason why I have plenty of white hairs by now; or maybe because it's inherited... Meh.

"Ahahahaha...."

...

Laughing to myself. Not a very good sign.

Mizu No Koe

Anyway...

I turn to face the part of the room where the voice came from, and I see exactly what I expected to see.

Nothing.

Well, can't really expect much from a night blind person. I am a man of many disabilities.

I choose to get up and do a little stretching before I go for the event.

Seriously, the 3D world is getting too accustomed to the 2D world...

Normally, most people would think events in anime tend to stay there but in reality, those events can happen here in the 3D world too. The fine line between the 2D and 3D worlds tend to entwine at times, causing these events to be possible. Of course, it's not always you get to witness such an act. You'd have to be unexceptionally unlucky. Why am I explaining this to myself anyway?

Well, I'm done. What a pain...

I scratch the back of my head and reach for my right pants pocket to get Hikari-chan. In the dark, I grope her slim and tiny body to seek out the area to turn her on.

Wonder how others would think of this wonderfully selected choice of words.

99% Would be thinking of an otaku gleefully harassing a semi-nude porno anime figurine.

Talk to the flashlight.

Needless to say, I name all of my belongings. Well, most of them. Couldn't get the chance to name the dining table. Wonder which side of the family I take after...

...

I doubt any possible answer to that question. 1/2

As for Hikari-chan, I guess it would be fair to say she isn't the weirdest thing I've taken out of my pockets. It's a fourth dimension in there.

I walk towards the sliding door with Hikari in my right hand.

I sigh. Normally, I, being a human of zero confidence, would have second thought on everything. Yes, even which ice cream flavor to buy. However, I am proud to say that my intuition is almost never wrong. And my intuition is telling me that this will be a rather awkward event.

...

Should I... Go for it?...

Suddenly the atmosphere around the room gets heavier. Gravity seems to pull me with chains, slowly forcing me down to the barren floor. I feel weak and useless...

Mizu No Koe

Because I know I am.

"..."

"So, it's over just like that, huh..."

Silence greets me.

I stand up slowly and face the curtains dancing in the wind coming from the open window.

In that period of 3 seconds, Nekitsu, the man with no regrets, turns around dramatically with a large grin on his face.

His lips move swiftly as he incants the words-

"Physical burst!!"

His hands fall on the door handle, gripping it with all his might...

And he does it.

He has made it beyond the door...

... And is greeted by none other than the goddess herself.

True end.

While these delusional thoughts run free in my head I turn to my productive side and slide the door open.

... And I am greeted by none other than the little prefect herself.

The old school building. A solitary block of classes, separated from the main school building on the west of Raja Chulan High, and notoriously famous for its infamous haunted room on the third floor. Basically, nobody goes there.

Nobody voluntarily, that is.

Yet, on this seemingly innocent night, fate had decided to play a game. A game where two entirely different people would meet... A game to see how they, together, would solve a case ... And the game of which I would lose my quiet, energy saving days forever.

I'm paraphrasing, by the way. I sigh. Now, to take care of the problem before me... I look at the tiny prefect standing before me.

...

This situation It feels...

...

Expected.

Mizu No Koe

Well, when you're a person who's imagined just about any possible event that could ever happen... Yes, I guess you could call it that.

It's sort of a practice- No. How to say, it's already become a part of my life. Meaning I automatically do it without even having to use any effort. This is pretty much normal standards for me. Come to think of it, I've imagined this scene 74 times, ending in 1247 different ways, and still counting. I'll continue later in the shower.

...

De-!! Why am I even telling this to myself?!

I scratch the back of my head. This is way too much trouble...

But...

I look at her again. I sigh.

"Analyze"

As usual, I begin by shutting off myself from the outside world, leaving only the two of us. It's something like... What did they call it... Occam's razor, though I really haven't completely mastered it yet.

Occam's razor.

A tactic in which all notable options are razed so that assumptions and conclusions can be made with a reasonable level of accuracy and confidence. In other words.

Theories.

I'm no Sherlock and it's not like I use it for solving cases anyway. I'm just interested in human nature. Unfortunately, most can't really tell the difference between that and being a pervert. Seriously...

Well, enough self-sympathizing for now.

Let's see... Signature item confirmed as beret, common black Japanese hair, tiny, and an oversized excuse of a blazer.

I tend to keep my analysis within a 2 second basis so I can't really take in that much. Trains me for a reason who knows why.

Now... Probably a freshman. Childish in behavior yet capable of being much more mature when she needs to. Probably weighs a lot more than she looks, though she's probably a good cook too. Also note that she's somewhat wobbly and her lips are 1/3 open in other words-

And before I am even able to complete my 2 second analysis the sleeping girl topples over me. How very rude. And just as expected, she really does weigh more than she looks. That aside, how did she sleep standing in the first place?? Though I guess I expected this too-

...

Mizu No Koe

This is getting ridiculous. Rich words coming from me.

Should I even be this casual about it? Who knows.

"Uuunh..."

Ah, the ojou sama is awakening...- A jolt of intuition!

"Ueeh?..."

Head to the back, left, and to original position. Deflect cross chop. Hold both wrists.

The half-awake girl looks at me with a blur look...

The start of an event, all in good time.

"Ueeh?- Eeeh??- E-E-E-E-ECCHI!!!"

My intuition comes to plan.

The ojou sama moves for her right hand to slap me. I move my head back to avoid it, then to the left, and I return it to the original position. She continues with a cross chop which I successfully block. She isn't done quite yet. Finally, she moves to do a multiple hit attack, countered easily by gently getting hold of her wrists (or rather, sleeves), cancelling the move immediately.

Perfect block.

I salute you, reflexes.

Now... Time to get up-

I find myself somewhat defying gravity. Could it be... I've slipped? I guess I may have. Probably a rag cloth or something. Come to think of it, was that (considering the fact if it WAS a rag cloth I slipped on) there before again? Then again, I'm amazed I can still think of all this crap while I lose my balance and slowly fall.

An infinity of empty card board boxes comes toppling on the floor, sending clouds of dust flying everywhere.

"Kyaa!!!!!"

I open my eyes.

...

Ah... How nostalgic... To think I'm actually in a position where I'm above ojou sama who is spawned on the floor, defenceless.

Right arm.

I catch her knee just before it reaches my crotch.

Well, not ENTIRELY defenceless.

Mizu No Koe

Now I've gone through this scene for countless times already, thus I have already concluded the best possible words to deal with this little mishap.

In short.

"Are you done yet?"

A short silence.

"..."

Ah, there it is. The expected surprised look. Wait for it... Now the frustrated one's in place... And final touch...
Voila, a genuine ojou sama pout.

"You!!!-"

I'm going to have to write this down later...

Mirai no atashi, [future me]

Aren't you glad you were able to participate in an event like this in the 3D world?

"Hey! Don't ignore me!!!"

I turn back and look at the pouting girl.

"I'm sorry, you wanted to continue with the blush event?"

"Of course! It's the appropriate event! You shouldn't have avoided all those hits in the first place!"

That's a tall order, considering you'll probably never feel the pain of being kicked in the crotch...

I sneeze.

I curse my allergy to dust. Then again, I'm not even sure what I'm allergic to. The doctor just assumed that it was dust. Then again, theories are theories.

I sigh. I get off from her.

Two people sitting on the dusty floor of a dusty moonlit room. Not exactly an everyday event, but I'm not complaining. Yet.

The little lady begins talking with words that don't seem to reach me. A skill I've developed over the years to write in peace.

As she rambles on, it's best that I think of my event solution now.

Navy blue blazer... It would be bad if I got involved with this little prefect...

Then again, it's not like I've never picked a fight with one... Though I guess it's only okay because it's HIM...
A prefect who never writes down names and runs- sorry. Paces around the school at extreme speeds. It seems

anyone can be a prefect now...

ï¿½Back to the original thought...

...

Pain is inevitable. Lots of pain, to be exact.

However, if I choose to ignore her now, she'll probably tail me around until I enter her arc anyway...

Yet if I enter her arc willingly there may be bonus flags to capture...

But bonus flags probably means more work to do...

In other words...

THERE IS NO ESCAPE.

No, there probably is. Not like I ever listen to myself. I guess I just want a rose coloured school life... Shocking pink. Now where have I heard that before?...

I turn to look at the Ojou sama who isn't done yet.

...

Cross chop.

The startled little girl stops and looks up at me.

Oh... Nice reaction... I've never really imagined this scene played out with a hat on before. And I guess now I know.

"What are you doing?"

"I cross chopped you."

"Of course you- De!!!- Why am I going so casual about this?!"

... This little lady here has issues...

"You!!!"

She's probably pointing at me... This is getting quite boring... Guess I'll play around with her a little.

"Senpai"

"S-senpai?"

"Yes, that's what little kids like you call your seniors."

"I-I'm not a kid!!!"

Mizu No Koe

... So the 3D world's been catching up with the 2D world, eh?...

"I'm 16! Just like you!!"

Oh... Well said...

"I'm a big girl now!!!"

I take that back.

Great... Now she's got me in the mood... Better leave or I'll be forced to repeat the entire process all over again.

I stretch as I get up.

"Where are you going?"

"Out."

"Out where?..."

"... Dubai."

Before she gets the chance to reply, I've already opened the sliding door. One foot reaches the outer boundaries of the club room...

... But the other never makes it out alive.

I wonder how many people actually GET the chance to be flung and sent flying from a single tug on the back.

Ah wait, I forgot to take note of the possibility of her being much stronger than she looks too. Now how did I miss that?...

I think about this as I slowly give in to gravity, seconds before hearing a sickening crunch from the back of my head.

Kidding.

Of course I am. I wouldn't be talking otherwise. It would be a disgrace to just die like that so instead, I cushion my fall with a few empty boxes. Come to think of it, why are there so many empty boxes in here anyway?

"Don't go out..."

Oh?... What's this... ojou sama's all quiet now...

Probability assured. She's definitely afraid. Why am I so sure? Because I doubt she's here to assassinate or confess to me. Though I guess she genuinely (or not) looks scared.

...

Mizu No Koe

Well, might as well make a wild guess.

"You saw a ghost."

Ojou sama drops the tray in her- Wait, since when was she holding that tray?...

A sudden wind blows and the window rattles violently. The sound of the spinning tray on the floor echoes throughout the entire building. An ominous aura seems to fill the room, covering it with a miasma of sorrow. Her breathing quickens... And she collapses to the floor.

Silence.

I look at her.

...How could I have missed this fact?... All these symptoms... Her actions... All of them have proved that I have failed to notice one very important thing.

From the floor, ojou sama turns to look at me, her pupils scarily centered to the middle of her eyes. Slowly, she moves her dry lips, the only medium of which I could use to read the inaudibly quiet words she would now say.

"H-how... Did you know?..."

She's probably from the drama club too.

"Answer me..."

Well, considering the fact that the Lost and Found club is directly beside the infamous haunted classroom of Raja Chulan High...

"Are you an esper?!"

... Now that's going a little too far... Speaking of espers, I heard there was one in Taman Cempaka 2... Think I'll meet him one of these days... Have a coffee at the coffee house... Or maybe not.

"An alien? An android? An alien android? Or a..."

I wonder how active her imagination is...

"...mind reading carrot alien disguised as a human being so that your kind can take over the world, or..."

I rest my case.

Still, I can't stay here forever. And I don't think this ojou sama's lecture is going to end any time soon.

Sigh... What a trouble... I bite my index finger.

RN mode activated. Analysis underway... Analysis complete.

The choices are:

Mizu No Koe

1. 1: (Cross chop)
2. 2: (Ignore her)
3. 3: (Walk out the door)

Oh, a moderate leveled reality novel choice point... But moderate is way past my level. I'm bragging to myself. Meh. It's getting a little too used to these days.

Back to the choices, the true route definitely points to choice three. It would be a disgrace if I picked choice one or two, both giving her a chance to continue rambling on. However, if I were to pick choice three, she wouldn't have the choice but to move the topic to where I want it to.

The realization that life doesn't have any saving points to return to has made me the human I am today...

... Wonder if that's a good thing...

ĩ½Still, there are possibilities that I could be wrong. All three choices may just as well lead to the same next question. Then again, I guess the other me's in the other world lines may never find out.

Because I'm putting this plan to act now.

Thus, I slowly get up... And casually walk over to the open door; again.

"Where are you going now?!"

Ignore her... Just keep on walking and she'll follow your flow...

"Aren't you afraid of ghosts?..."

Just a little further...

"Don't leave me here alone!"

Success. Though I wonder if I should be thinking this right now... The 'ghost' might just as well be a teacher...

Or a ghost.

Yes, I admit openly that I am terrified of almost everything. Feel free to comment.

When a sore loser admits his weakness first, he'll sound much less a sore loser. Wise words from Tajiri who heard it from the esper of Taman Cempaka 2. I guess I'll meet him this Sunday... Probably.

The ojou sama walks closely beside me, and being a very height sensitive person, it's a good feeling when someone so tiny is the only comparison in view. The both of us continue to walk on silently, the only other sounds made by the echoes of our footsteps and the distant sounds of passing cars.

As I walk on, I take a peek at her. Come to think of it, she looks like a real lady right now. Her hands folded gracefully as she walks forward without taking account of anything else but her destination in the moonlit corridor.

Guess I'll entertain her for a bit.

Mizu No Koe

"So, why were you sleeping in front of the club room?"

And just like that, her ladylike atmosphere evaporates into thin air and she's back to her normal self.

I'm just surprised how used to her I am already. Like I've already known her for a long time... I guess some people have that effect on you.

...

Or maybe it's just me.

"Ah! I almost forgot!"

Wait- What have I just gotten myself into?!

The ojou sama looks at me with sparkling eyes...

...

Which look awfully familiar.

"I've lost something and I want you to help me find it!"

... What?

"And why would I do that?..."

"Because you're the Lost and Found club, aren't you?"

"... You've lost me."

"I've lost something so you have to help me find it!"

Ah... Wonder where these kids get these crazy ideas these days...

"Look, lost and found basically means-"

Come to think of it, I'm kind of lazy right now and it's a rather long explanation process... Normally, no. But with this little lady here...

I look at her who is fuming at me.

...

Well, might as well try getting the job done so she'll leave my life forever...

What a tiring night...

"Alright, fine. What do you want me to find?"

"I thought you were about to explain?"

"I'm leaving."

"C-come back! Okay, fine! I want you to help me find my math test paper!"

...

Of all the things? A test paper?

"Where did you last see it?"

"In class."

"Have you checked in your class?"

"..."

...

Seriously?

"B-because!!!-"

Wait. Oh right... I forgot about the ghost...

"Sigh... What class are you in?"

"1-A..."

So... A top scoring ojou sama...

"Well, it's worth a go... Come on."

With that, she smiles at me and runs like a little girl back to my side.

The building we're in right now is the old wing building, meaning it'll be a little walk before we reach the main class building. If not mistaken, Tajiri said that the old wing building was once the boy dormitory which was demolished, then used as a prototype structure to the reconstruction of the entire school.

However, there was a flaw of some sort in the building structure and the school halted the renovations of this building for the mean time. And accorded to Malaysian standards, 'the mean time', basically means forever forgotten.

Thus, this building remains the only three floored one in the entire school.

Both of us make it to the last step of the stairs and we slowly make our way to the main school building.

Apparently, the school originally had only two floored buildings. Japanese students started increasing rapidly after Raja Chulan High obtained permission for the Japanese to enroll so the school did a complete renovation. However, it was found that many classes remained unused so the school inherited the Japanese club system. The main club building is in the new east wing of the school.

Mizu No Koe

We make it to the main school building and start walking up the stairs again.

So why is the Lost and Found club in the old wing building? Simple. Because we practically don't exist.½
There's a special system in our school, and that is everyone can make their own club with the minimum of one member. Meaning, the president can be the entire club in and out of itself. Sounds like a big flaw in the system. However, all new clubs must be located in the old wing building for a year before being able to obtain a permission slip to transfer to the new east wing building.

Teachers have brains. That's why they're called teachers. The new clubs are located there not because there is a shortage of club rooms in the new east wing building, but because nobody in the right mind ever goes there.

Ever since the big fire last year, nobody's dared to go there any longer. Based on Tajiri's info, that exact room once caught fire 7 years ago, where a girl died in that incident. Fortunately, no one died this time because nobody was there, but it was enough to keep most of the students away from that building. And of course, the room that caught fire, is the room right next to the Lost and Found club. In other words, the haunted room of Raja Chulan High.

Both of us walk slowly across the empty corridor.

To make things simple, since nobody ever goes there, then there isn't a reason for that club to exist. Enthusiasm slowly withers away, and viola. The new club ceases to exist, not that anyone knew of its existence in the first place.

Foolproof, really. Yet not Tajiri proof...

We stop in our tracks. The bolded words, 1-A, stare at us from above the classroom door.

I slide the door open. Ladies first.

"... Yes?"

"..."

This young lady... Fine. I'll enter first.

The thing about classrooms in Malaysia, is that you'll always know when you're in the wrong class. I don't even think there's a duty rooster in mine... That said, each of our classes have their own 'personalities', unlike the forever tidy Japanese classes. We have much to learn... But it's more fun this way I guess.

The ojou sama walks in.

"So, which one is your desk?"

"That one-"

She points at a table with some sort of paper lying on it. I can't really see, but I don't need to be a genius to know what it is.

"My test paper!!"

Great. You made me waste all that effort of walking here for nothing. But I guess now I can finally go home...

Mizu No Koe

A jolt of intuition. And intuition says RUN.

A tiny hand touches my shoulder which sends chills all over my body. TOO LATE.

Reluctantly, I turn to face the ojou sama who is clutching the paper tightly in her hand. She opens her mouth to say something. A sign I've learnt to fear over the years.

"I..."

I want to leave...

"I'm curious about it! "

...

Now I KNOW I've heard that before somewhere... But now isn't the right time to think about that. I have to find a way to distract her from pulling me any deeper... NOW.

"...And...?"

"I'm curious how it got back in my class!"

"The deal was to find the test paper right? And there you have it in your hands."

"I'm really curious about it!"

...

This little Ojou sama has got some nerves...

Wait... No... No!!!! My logic is fading again! At this rate, I'll never make it back home!! I take a feep breath.

Calm down... Calm down...

Casually now... Slowly take a few steps out so you won't provoke-

"I'm curious..."

Too late.

"Onii chan... I'm really curious..."

Geh!!- That's cheating! Composure!!! Where are you?!!!

"Onii chan..."

Muscles failing... No hope... SHE'S GOT ME...

"Alright, fine! But after this, it's straight home!"

"Thank you onii chan!"

Mizu No Koe

I have to say, I'm impressed to see how cut out she is in this...

"First, stop calling me onii chan."

"Okay, Onii san!"

...

Ignore it... Just ignore it for this one night...

"Alright, fine. First, when did you get that test paper?"

She thinks for a while.

"During fourth period."

Right... Today's a Monday and the first period is taken up by the Monday morning assembly...

"Who was the teacher and what does he teach?"

"Moriue sensei, the math teacher."

Ah, I've actually heard of him before... A genius math teacher they say... Not that my hatred for math will ever change. He's also the disciplinary teacher I think. Scary combo...

"Didn't he return the papers the minute he entered class?"

"He did."

"So, how did the test paper get lost?"

She pulls the tip of her beret down, enough to cover her eyes, as she thinks.

Not a bad thinking pose.

"Ah!"

Oh, she remembers something...

"I remember now! Before recess, Moriue sensei collected back the test papers!"

"And why would he do that??"

"He said he forgot to tabulate the marks for the school website."

How could a teacher forget to do that?... Though I guess at 52, that's normal- Wait, I actually remembered someone's age...

"So he re-collected all of the papers before you went out for recess?"

"Yup."

Mizu No Koe

Well this is perplexing... Why her paper in particular?...

"I was the last one to hand it in."

I look at her, probably in a surprised face.

"Why? Do you sit at the back of the class?"

"Nope. I sit right in front of the teacher."

"... So why last...?"

"Moriue sensei accidentally gave me extra marks for the test so I asked him to take them back."

Wow... Not every day you see people like her...

Wait...

"So basically your test paper was on the top of the stack."

"I think so..."

Most probably it was... This narrows things down a bit... Now...

"So did your other class mates receive their test papers after Moriue sensei was done with them?"

"Yup. All of them but me."

"When did he return the papers again?"

"Sometime before the last bell rang at 2.45."

"Sometime?"

"I went to the washroom."

So something happened during that period of time between recess and ojou sama's absence in class...

"I also found out about the Lost and Found club then."

Wait...

"What? How? Aren't the girl's washroom in the main school building?"

"I always use the one in the old wing building."

"Why???"

"Because I can walk further before returning to class."

Oh...! Another pacer? I never knew there were others in school like me.

Mizu No Koe

"And you saw the club name on the bulletin board I suppose? "

"Yup. The first time I went in there was nobody there."

That's because I only went there at around 3...

"So when I returned to class, only my paper wasn't returned."

"Did you consult the teacher?"

"Of course I did! He said it was strange since he marked my paper last and it was on the top of the pile too."

"What happened next?"

"I returned to my classroom for a while."

Wait...

"What time did you return to your classroom?"

"Around 4..."

"What time did you leave for the Lost and Found club then?"

"I think it was about 7 when I got the idea to consult you. Why?"

Consult is a big word... Anyway...

This means that the culprit returned the paper only after 7.

I look at my wrist watch.

... It's almost 9 now... A lot could happen between an hour and a half...

In other words, I GIVE UP.

But this little lady here is a problem...

"Maybe he assumed he marked your paper so when he found out he hadn't, he sneakily put it on your desk so that you wouldn't pursue the matter?"

"Moriue sensei is a very strict man who wouldn't do such a mistake. Even if he did, he'd hold on to it for me."

Without hesitation at all...

"Fine, then what if the class rep lost it?"

"Impossible."

"Why?"

"Because Sato san is Moriue sensei's son."

That doesn't really answer the question...

Wait... Moriue Sato...

"Sato san has such a strict father, he can't really join us with outdoor activities much..."

I've heard that name before... Someone told me...

"He's also a very quiet and shy boy..."

Wait... Ah, I remember. Tajiri was talking about love rumours with me this afternoon before he went home...

And I'm sure he mentioned the name Moriue Sato.

"By the way, is he dating anyone?"

"Hmm? Sato san? Oh, you mean him and Misako chan!"

"A girl from this school?"

"Yup! She confessed to him last month."

Ah... A new blooming relationship...

"By the way, today, some of his fans caught him talking to her in the counseling room when his father wasn't there! That's a big thing since before this he only texted her!"

"Directly??"

"No, silly. By cell phone of course!"

"He brings his cell phone to school?"

Much to our dismay, Malaysian students aren't allowed to bring cell phones to school. Oh well.

"Moriue sensei often works overtime and since the school's public phones are all damaged anyway, they both keep in touch like that."

"Why would they need to keep in touch?"

"Moriue sensei doesn't have a car, so they both rely on public transportations to and from the school."

"So if one of them leaves first, they can tell the other?"

"That's the idea."

Not a solid reason, but I guess anything works.

"Besides, Sato san isn't one to abuse his privileges."

I thought as much...

Wait...

"When did his fans find out?"

"They found out sometime before the last bell rang."

"That time you were in the washroom?"

"Yup."

"How did Sato and his fans get out of the class without the teacher noticing??"

"There wasn't. The substitute teacher didn't come in either so many of us just went in and out of the classroom like nobody's business."

I can imagine...

"So let me get this straight... Sato went to the counseling room to receive a call from Misako and his fans saw him talking to her."

"Yup. Yup."

"How can you be so sure she called him?"

"Because nobody else calls him during schooling hours."

Good point.

"And he doesn't normally go all red while talking on the phone either."

Something I didn't need to know...

...

"Say... Does Sato and Moriue sensei go home at different times?"

"Usually Sato san returns home first by bus and Moriue sensei later by cab."

"Does it happen the other way around too?"

"Sato sometimes returns a little later than Moriue sensei because he's an active library committee member."

"And Moriue sensei doesn't get mad at him?"

"No, because he knows Sato san isn't doing any bad things."

"I see..."

... Well, I've made it this far. Might as well make another wild guess. I'm guessing a lot to night...

"Say, where did you see that 'ghost'?"

"E-eh?..."

A topic she doesn't want to talk about.

"I-I saw it walk along the corridor where the teacher's lounge is..."

"What makes you sure it was a ghost?"

"Of course it was! There was a faded shadow the moved along the wall and there was a low moaning voice too!"

Well, I guess I may just be right.

"Come on then."

"Wh-what?..."

"Don't you want to find out the mystery of your missing test paper?"

"... W-wait for me!"

I grin to myself as we walk down the stairs. The teacher's lounge is directly below her class, making it a short walk.

"Is this where you saw the ghost?"

"Y-yes..."

I take Hikari Chan out of my pocket and shine her light on the door before us.

Just as expected.

The emboldened letters, 'PRINTING ROOM' stared at us.
Now the only problem is how to get in...

"The printing room??"

"Yup. We just have to find a way to open it-"

'Click'

...

And I thought I'd never see an actual person pick locking a door with her hair clip.

She looks at me sheepishly.

"I'm a master pick locker."

Mizu No Koe

So I see... Now then...

I turn the door knob and flip on the lights. Nobody's probably going to see us anyway.

"Here 's your 'ghost.'"

I point at the culprit.

The Photostat machine.

"... What?"

"Here, I'll show you."

I found a big, white cloth lying on one of the desks in the room. Probably what he used to get the job done.

"What exactly are you doing?..."

I ignore her and place the cloth over the machine, successfully concealing most of it. Lucky for me, I've once operated one so I know which buttons to push.

... Probably.

"Hey, do you mind if you stand here for a while?"

I point at a spot right next to the Photostat machine.

"Ookay..."

I turn on Hikari and turn off the lights.

"Here's your ghost."

I whirring sound erupts and I know I've pressed the right button this time. As soon as the Photostat machine comes to life, a low moaning sound surrounds the room.

"Ah!"

The scanning takes place and a dim light forms from under the cloth... Forming ojou sama's moving shadow on the wall outside the printing room.

"S-so that was the shadow I saw just now!"

"Looks like it."

Now. Time to settle the test paper case once and for all.

"But... Who could have been in the printing room so late after school?..."

"That's why we're here to find out... And I think I just have."

"How??"

"Because the culprit didn't have enough time to destroy the evidence."

"???"

I hold out the crumpled paper in my hand to the ojou sama.

"I got it from the waste bin and it should answer all our questions."

"???"

"Just look at it."

With that, the Ojou sama looks at the crumpled paper.

"... 7/2 2000?"

"Exactly."

"I'm lost."

"Where do you usually see numbers like these?"

"... Ah! Dates!"

"Exactly. Seventh of February."

"And 2000?"

"Probably referring to time, or in other words, 8p.m."

"Okay, but what does it have to do with anything?"

"Turn the paper around."

"Turn...-"

She paused. Exactly what I expected her to do.

"My test paper!"

"Yup."

"But then... The one that was in the class..."

"That was a Photostat version."

"But... How..."

"Take it this way. Where is Moriue sensei's desk located at? "

Mizu No Koe

"In... the counseling room?"

"Right. And you said today was Sato's first time receiving a call from Misako san, right?"

"Right... Ah!"

She's got it.

"So Sato san must have written down the time and day of his meeting with Misako chan on the closest paper he could reach for!"

"And your test paper was on the top, remember?"

The little ojou sama looks a little stunned. Looks like I'll do the rest of the explaining.

"Moriue sensei probably uses a ball point pen to write, so Sato must have used it to write down the day and date without much thought. After all, this was his first time receiving a call rather than a message."

"Soon, he realized his mistake but couldn't just pretend to cover up the words with correction tape, so he took the paper from the stack. He would later on wait for a chance to use the Photostat machine and make another copy of yours so that the original could be disposed of."

"..."

???

"I... See... Thank you..."

And with that, she smiles at me.

The whirring stops as the scanning ends, along with the tiring night a single test paper had brought upon us.

... I sigh. I grin to myself.

Now how did the atmosphere of the scene change into something so casual all of the sudden...

...

"You know what, why do you think Sato san believed I wouldn't find out about the test paper?"

"... Probably because you're so gullible."

"I am not!"

I laugh. Now that's a surprise. Then again, I guess it's because you're someone he considers innocent and trustworthy... And I think most people around you do too.

"You know what onii chan, you're not such a bad guy after all..."

"..."

"I have a name you know."

"And what might that be?"

"Nekitsu. Getsumori Nekitsu."

"Funny name. Mine is Shirokawa Ume. I'll be in your care, Getsumori kun."

"Like wise."

"By the way, did you know that today's the 7th of February?"

Come to think of it, no wonder he was in such a hurry... He didn't even have the time to shred Ojou sama's test paper...

"Won't Moriue sensei be mad if he comes home late?"

"He often goes to the public library at night, so it's not rare that he comes home late."

"I thought you said Sato was quiet."

"He didn't tell me. I just found out myself."

"Special interest in him?"

"Nope. I just like to find out about the people around me."

Both of us crawl through the hole in the old fence, careful not to get detected by the watch guard. We made it out safely.

"I'm surprised you know this escape route."

She shrugs.

"I know a lot."

She stops for a while.

"But I don't know much about you yet..."

... What?

She smiles and takes a piece of paper out of her back pack.

"So I'll be stalking you from now on"

...

A club application form.

...

Tajiri you bastard...

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