

Telling Their Stories

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Telling Their Stories

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Summary

Monika wants to talk to the rest of the Literature Club about her feelings for the MC. So do they.

AU: They're all real people. No game rules.

Notes

Warning: This story contains depictions of mature and serious subjects from a writer who has none of the maturity or seriousness required to properly write about said subjects. If you are at all offended by this, it is suggested that you ignore this content and leave the rest of us to have some fun in life.

Thank you.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

It was an early summer's day, Monday to be exact, as Monika walked into the empty classroom that had been repurposed to be the Literature Club of the school.

Her Literature Club. She was Club President, after all.

Well, that's not exactly true. She thought, as she adjusted the big white bow at the back of her head that helped separate her long ponytail from the rest of her light brown hair.

Although she thought she did her job as President as well as anyone could expect of her, she couldn't really claim full ownership of the club. Despite her lesser title as Vice President, Sayori had been there from the very creation of the club, the cheerful, blue-eyed girl who was always sporting a bright red bow on the top of her short, sandcoloured hair, doing a splendid job of keeping the group happy, and together. She had just as big a right to the club as Monika did, but since Monika had the ultimate title as President, the leadership role naturally fell on her, and it also included having to make the room presentable before the other members arrived.

A crease furrowed the girl's brow, as her thoughts settled on the other members.

Right. Today's the day.

Her big green eyes scanned the room, searching for left over papers or writing utensils left behind by the group using the room. Her gaze ended at the big round table in the middle, noticing what once had been a half-eaten tuna sandwich covered in mold, seemingly from last Friday, left to rot throughout the weekend.

Monika rolled her eyes, thinking some choice thoughts towards the owner of this unfinished food item. She pulled up her sleeves, and got to work.

Grabbing a pencil, she stabbed the disgusting sandwich and pinched her nose as she hoped its integrity was strong enough to stay attached to the writing tool for long enough to reach the garbage bin.

Please don't have maggots, please don't have maggots, please don't have maggots... She thought as she tiptoed towards the bin, afraid to breathe in and accidentally catch a whiff of the sandwich. It wouldn't do well to throw up in the classroom today.

Luckily, the sandwich didn't slide through the pencil as she briskly walked across the room, and with a triumphant move, she dumped both the sandwich and the pencil down the garbage bin. She felt a little bad about wasting a piece of school equipment like that, but the pencil's sacrifice had been for a good cause: not getting her friends grossed out on a Monday morning.

As she got out a spray bottle and a wash cloth from the room's cleaning cabinet, her thoughts lingered on her friends again. Aside from the before mentioned Sayori, she thought about the

tall girl Yuri, with her long purple hair who seemed to really be settling into this club. While obviously smart as you could tell from her poems, she had struggled with her self image, not wanting to speak up, and mostly sitting for herself. It wasn't that she didn't desire the others' company, or disliked them in any regard, she was just... shy. But lately, her demeanor had changed, ever so slightly. She'd begun being more close with them, some days even reading books with them at the round table instead of sitting in her usual corner. She contributed to conversations, and on rare occasions she could laugh when they goofed around. She'd still get flustered, and would start to stutter if she felt too much attention was being put her way, but it spoke volumes how she could now have full arguments with Natsuki without turning into a sputtering mess, like before.

This led Monika to think about Natsuki. As different from Yuri as day was from night, Natsuki was the shortest girl at the club, with similar hair length to Sayori, only coloured bright pink, usually with various bright red ribbons tied into it with a hairclip resembling an hourglass settled on her front bangs. Whereas Yuri was quiet, shy and timid, Natsuki was loud, bold and forthcoming to a fault. You could hardly go through a day without the short girl making some snide, sarcastic remark to at least one of them, yelling about them not taking her seriously (or, god forbid, calling her "cute") and of course her never-ending arguments with Yuri about whether or not manga was literature. Monika sighed as she sprayed off the table, and dried it again with her cloth. Natsuki could be difficult to deal with, but she did have her set of redeeming qualities. You could almost always tell that she didn't mean her seemingly spiteful comments about the other members, with her tendency to bring along delicious baked goods for them to share together attesting to that.

Having cleaned the table, Monika went to return her cleaning supplies to the cabinet she'd retrieved them from. Shutting the door, Monika closed her eyes, and lowered her head as her thoughts drifted to the fifth member of the club.

MC.

The only boy in the club, Sayori had brought him along at Monika's request to get the minimum amount of required members to make their club official. He'd apparently been a childhood friend of Sayori, but immediately after being introduced to their club, she along with the other girls had instantly taken a liking to him. He'd been shy at the beginning, not at Yuri's level, but as shy as you would expect from someone getting put on the spot in a room with four decently attractive young members of the opposite sex. Sayori, bless her heart, had probably just dragged her friend along to the club without telling him what to expect, who'd be there, or even that the club was about literature.

Nevertheless the boy had adapted quite well in here, and he got on remarkably with the other girls. Of course he'd be getting on well with Sayori, but even without their history together, Monika suspected that the Vice President could make friends with the postman. Natsuki had taken a liking to the boy as well; although she still ribbed on him and was as... Natsuki with him as she was to everyone else, it was easy to tell that she treasured his presence and appreciated that there was finally another member she could talk to about the "underappreciated quality of manga," as she put it.

Yuri was also happy about the young boy, putting value into his kind and polite way of speaking and Monika suspected that she also secretly loved to get his praises for her more advanced poems which often went a little over the head of the likes of Natsuki and Sayori.

Indeed, MC's introduction into the club, considering he was a boy after all, had gone better than any one of the girls would have dreamed to expect. Perhaps... even a bit *too* well.

She had suspected something between them for a while now. The way Yuri would blush a bit more for seemingly no other reason than her noticing the boy. The way Natsuki would giggle at jokes from him that she would scoff at if they came from any of the other girls. The way Sayori would engage him using way more physical contact whenever she spoke with him than any of the others. It could just be her being more comfortable with him due to the amount of years she'd already spent with him, but Monika had her doubts. Sayori was comfortable with everyone, but not to this degree.

She didn't even think they were aware of their changes in behaviour around him themselves.

Of course, she couldn't leave out herself, because she was just as guilty as the rest. She found the boy simply adorable. She would often find excuses to talk to him more than she would the others, and throw subtle hints and innuendos into her sentences so she could monitor just how flustered he'd get at the suggestions he got. Seeing him blush over being near her or at something she said, was her favorite thing in the world.

Maybe not the most professional of activities for the Club President to engage in, but she couldn't help it. After months of doing this, she'd finally realized it.

She loved MC.

And, from what she could tell, so did the rest of the club. Once they realized it, anyway.

Monika exhaled, opening her eyes, still leaned up against the cleaning cabinet.

This is going to be tough.

Today would be a special day for the Literature Club. Today would be the day where Monika would proclaim her undying love for the male member before the others could beat her to it.

She convinced herself it would be for the best. Of course she didn't like taking something they obviously all adored for herself, but it wasn't like they all couldn't still be friends afterwards, right? Her and MC pursuing a more serious relationship shouldn't impact anything. They'd still have the same working dynamic between each other, still share their common interests for literature.

Rationally, it shouldn't matter who dated who outside school hours, right?

Yeah, right.

She couldn't even convince herself. Would *she* be happy watching from the sidelines as Yuri, Sayori or Natsuki announced their love for MC? Would she accept their happiness, shrug, and go about her day as usual, as if nothing had changed?

She didn't even need to consider that. Of course she wouldn't and she suspected the others would share that sentiment.

Still, it needed to be done. It couldn't be held off another day, since that was another day where one of the others could snatch him out from under her, while he was still single. Ultimately, this was for the best. Yes, she felt a bit guilty about doing this to them, and she knew that even in the best case scenario, even if they somehow accepted it and remained friends, there was no way this wouldn't deal a serious blow to that friendship. Worst case scenario, the others would hate her forever, her beloved club would dissolve and she'd lose the three best and only girl friends she'd ever had. But in both cases, she would have MC.

Win-win.

She felt more than a little awful for even thinking that, but... she was in love. All's fair and stuff.

The classroom's door opening broke her out of her trance, and she looked up to see all three girls making their way inside. Gathering up her courage, Monika made her way towards them.

Immediately, she could tell something was different about them. Instead of making her way directly to her spot in the corner of the room, Yuri stopped short several meters, crossing her arms. While she had managed to get a bit more out of her shell lately, she usually still needed to sit alone at the start of these meetings to charge her batteries. She looked a bit stressed, eyes looking ahead, not at anything in particular.

Natsuki came in next, carrying a tray of colourful cupcakes with glistening pink frosting, covered in rainbow sprinkles. She too, looked a bit unusual, although Monika couldn't quite put her finger on why. Her pink hair with the red ribbons looked just like it always did, and her face was sporting a familiar sour expression. She knew Natsuki was quite capable of showing happiness, but her default expression was usually a frown, so nothing new there. If she had to pick out the reason why she looked different, she supposed it had something to do with her eyes. Normally, if she was in one of her moods, she would have a far away look, as if mentally picturing the object or person of her frustrations. If the object or person was in the room with her, it was much easier to tell, as she would stare it down until she thought she'd weakened its spirit enough to attack, usually in the form of yelling about whatever problem she had with it. They had all been the target of that at some point. But what she was doing now, was unlike anything else she had done before. Her eyes were shifting between targets, more specifically, Yuri, Sayori and Monika herself, eyes darting between them all, lightning fast. And strangest of all, it didn't seem like her usual "stare down until I'm ready to yell" gaze. Monika couldn't explain why, but the small girl looked like she was... unsure?

Sayori was the most visually different from the girls. Where she would normally bounce in through the door, cheerful eyes as bright blue as the ocean sparkling as she announced her own arrival followed by her making her way to everyone and asking how they were, or complimenting their look.

But today... her eyes were weirdly dull, looking down at her feet, as she slowly walked in, no smile on her face, replaced by a slight frown.

But weirdest of all, instead of the usual school uniform required for all students attending the

school, a thick christmas sweater, maroon red with things like dancing snowmen and reindeer plastered around randomly, was now covering the top of her body, a tall turtleneck going all the way up to her chin. If it wasn't for her increasing worry for her friends, Monika would have maybe found the juxtaposing sight of the sad girl with the bright red bow on her head and the cheerful christmas sweater comical, but no one was laughing as Sayori made her way to the side of Yuri, slightly behind her, almost as if she was trying to hide away.

Well, this just got a whole lot harder.

Monika had hoped for Sayori to be her usual happy self, but seeing her like this, the topic she wanted to present to them all seemed almost too cruel.

Almost. It had to be done.

She tried to bring some cheer into the room herself by flashing one of her patented Club President smiles, but Natsuki just stared at her like she couldn't comprehend such a foreign strange concept of "fun." It didn't seem like Sayori or Yuri had even noticed.

Monika had seen Yuri this way before. When she had to present a poem to the room, or formulate a particularly complicated argument, she had a habit of going into a trance, picking the precise words to use, placing them together to craft expertly put together sentences. After she had put them together, she could usually speak them with perfect pronunciations and inflections, but if she didn't do this or was interrupted, she would struggle forming even simple sentences. Monika decided to not disturb her, and getting on Natsuki's bad side this early was not desirable either.

She approached Sayori, smiling brightly at her.

"Love your attire. What's the occasion?" The Club President said, in an attempt to ease the atmosphere and perhaps break the ice a bit.

Sayori just looked at her, unspeaking, with enormous eyes. She seemed... afraid? No, not afraid. Terrified.

Before Monika could say anything else, Natsuki loudly interrupted.

"She's just cold. Give her some space."

Monika looked dissatisfied toward Natsuki, the aggressive girl staring daggers. Monika took a few steps back from Sayori, and Natsuki, still carrying her colourful tray of pastries, moved briskly towards the girl in the overlarge festive sweater.

Monika was too far away to hear, but she did notice Natsuki standing on tiptoes to reach Sayori's ear as she seemed to whisper words to her.

What is going on?

She didn't buy for a second that Sayori was "cold." It was the middle of the summer, with several degrees outside, and she'd never seen Sayori wear this sweater, even during winter

times. But seeing as the girls seemed set on not letting her in on whatever was happening, she decided against her better judgment and didn't push the subject.

Monika had originally planned to leave her declaration to the group for the end of the day, in order to get one potentially last normal club session with her friends, but seeing them like this, she knew that hope was shattered, and opted instead to just get it over with, rip the bandaid off, and jump in with both legs.

But right as she was about to call out to the group with her signature catchphrase, "Okay, everyone!" she was once again interrupted by Natsuki slamming the tray of cupcakes down on the round table, the sound of the impact echoing through the room.

"We need to talk." The short pinkette uttered. "All of us."

"Uh, okay." Monika said.

The loud noise seemed to have awakened Yuri from her trance and she looked up at Natsuki, who in turn nodded at the tall, purplehaired girl.

Monika took a seat by the round table, and Yuri took one by herself, on the opposite end. Sayori seemed to hesitate a bit, but hurried then over to Yuri's left side, where she too sat down on a chair. Natsuki on the other hand, leaned in over the table, grasping a number of the baked goods in her arms and started handing them out. One in front of Monika, Sayori and Yuri before she herself took a seat on the right side of the last mentioned. Monika had tried to thank Natsuki for baking them these treats, but the short girl had merely grunted in reply.

Silence lingered in the room after that. The bright cupcakes in front of them looked very surreal, given the atmosphere.

"So," Monika began, awkwardly. "What did you want to tell me?"

"We need to show you something." Yuri spoke up.

Monika turned her attention to the tall, purplehaired girl. "Alright."

She was intrigued by this. Usually Yuri tried to make herself smaller, less noticeable despite being the tallest of them all, and with the more attention grabbing... asserts. She would always look down, as though she could convince herself that if she couldn't see anyone else, the same would be true for her. It was downright surreal to see her be this assertive, making eye contact with her and having that determined edge in her voice whereas Sayori seemed to have adopted her previous, introverted demeanor.

"And you need to hear us out." Natsuki said in her commanding voice, so often not taken seriously because of her height and cutesy appearance. But Monika could feel how important this was to them, and would do her best to treat her smaller friend with the respect that she commanded. "Listen to what we're saying. Don't just react to how it looks and chalk it up as if we're crazy, because we're not!"

"Natsuki." Yuri said calmly.

"I'm sorry, it's just..." Natsuki closed her eyes for a moment, then took a deep breath. she exhaled. "It's just... a lot of the times when I try to express my opinion, or speak my mind, you guys will just chalk it up as 'Natsuki is being Natsuki' or not take me seriously because I look-" Natsuki visibly shuddered, as if it was a challenge just to say the word aloud. "...cute. And yeah, maybe I can sometimes appear to be insensitive and rude to you which obviously isn't okay, but I'm trying to be a better person so you shouldn't just... not listen to me because of the times I've been irrational in the past!"

Natsuki blinked, and exhaled, before slumping back in her chair. Yuri put a reassuring hand on her shoulder. Natsuki seemed to calm down a bit with Yuri's touch.

"I'm sorry if you don't think we take you seriously enough," Monika said. "If I'm being honest, I always got the impression that you liked the dynamic we had with our banter. At certain points it seemed like you enjoyed being a contrarian, and was in on the joke when we poked fun at you."

Natsuki crossed her arms and looked off to the side. "It's fine when you do it with fun, unserious topics, like when me and Yuri have our arguments about manga versus books and such. I don't take those 'fights' seriously, and neither should anyone else. But sometimes I just feel like everything I say gets disregarded as me just trying to be difficult. When I suggest improvements to the club, or disagree with one of your decisions, you usually just shut me down by giving me a jokey diss, or just chuckling at me. And, y'know, I roll with the punches. I don't want to be seen as the drama queen who can't take a joke, so I pretend like i really was just joking. But right here, right now, I really want to make sure that my words are being valued just as much as everyone else's, not disregarded as me just 'being Natsuki.'"

It was rare to see Natsuki be so genuine with her speeches. It seemed like she really was afraid that no one would take anything she said seriously. Monika tried to think back to all the arguments they'd had, and tried to recontextualize them. Perhaps she had been kind of dismissive to what she had thought at the time was Natsuki just disagreeing with them all to be funny.

"I... I understand." Monika said. "I apologize for the times I may have misjudged your intentions, and I assure you, I will do my very best as president of the literature club to hear out everything you have to say from now on with the seriousness it deserves."

Natsuki hugged herself a bit tighter as a bright blush spread across her cheeks.

"Thanks." she mumbled to her chair.

Monika sensed that Natsuki had talked herself out for the next while, and needed to recharge her batteries. Sayori hadn't moved or changed her expression at all throughout the whole conversation, so that left only Yuri to talk to.

"So what is it you want to show me?" Monika asked.

"First, we'll need to get this on the table first." Yuri said. "You're in love with MC."

A slap in the face would have probably been less shocking. Monika's eyes widened. What a moment for the President of the Literature Club to lose her way with words. She wasn't the only one reacting to Yuri's statement. Sayori seemed to shrink further into her seat, head lowered so only her hair with the red bow was visible. Natsuki closed her eyes, cringing, and muttered "Smooth, Yuri."

Monika tried to say something, she didn't know what, but just something, anything. Luckily she was spared the embarrassment when Yuri continued what now seemed like a verbal beat-em-up, with Monika on the receiving end.

"It was... pretty obvious. The way you keep touching his shoulders and arms when you talk to him, but not us. All those cheesy innuendos you drop that you think are too clever for us to notice. Your glowing smile when he asks you something." Yuri smiled despite herself. "You don't act like that with anyone else except him."

Monika had found her voice again. "What is this?" She asked, her voice more shaky than she had liked.

"Yuri likes to pretend she's Sherlock Holmes." Natsuki said. "Get to the point, detective."

The smile dropped from Yuri's face. "I wasn't! I mean, I was! I was getting there! Uh..."

Her confidence seemed to leave her body completely, as it so often did when arguing with Natsuki. It was like she planned every word to say carefully, and could formulate them all with flawless inflections and pronunciations, but as soon as someone challenged her with something she hadn't anticipated, all that preparation went out the window, and all that remained was an utterly lost Yuri, like a kid thrust into the deep end of the swimming pool without their floaties.

Natsuki didn't seem to realize what she'd just done. Whereas Yuri was a master of constructing sentences and arguments that presented different sides and perspectives of the issue, which could get anyone to understand her way of thinking, Natsuki excelled at ad hominem. Her own arguments were never really more than "you're wrong, I'm right, because I said so!" but she could shut down even the best of arguments by focusing on one part of it and attacking it to throw the debater off their game. If attacked herself, she always had a million sharp rebuttals ready at the tip of her tongue, and with her willingness to use them, she would usually win any arguments by keeping them up until her opponent simply couldn't deal with it anymore, conceded, and never engaged her again.

That was where Sayori usually came in, as the mediator. Friendly and nice towards any and everyone she met, she was a friend they could all count on to just be there for them when they needed her. It was part of why she had become the Vice President. Where Monika would struggle to shut down arguments between Yuri and Natsuki that got too heated, because of the natural finality and strictness that came with being in charge, and would just make the girls get angry at her instead, Sayori could talk to them in a way she couldn't. As a friend. As a friend who didn't want to see her friends fighting. A friend who would always come over and compliment your new haircut, or just simply said you looked really nice on a day where you seemed like you needed some positive reinforcement. A friend who would lend Natsuki money for the vending machine, and never nag her to return them the next week. A friend

who might not understand the hidden themes and nuances of Yuri's darker poems, but could always find something in them to praise. She never really tried to voice her own arguments, instead finding ways to disperse the hostility between Yuri and Natsuki in a nice way that didn't let them think she was picking sides.

Monika looked over at Sayori who still had her face hidden away. It didn't look like she was going to be able to help them balance the hostility much today, and although Monika hadn't appreciated what Yuri had been saying, she decided to be a diplomatic leader and hear them out like she had promised.

"Okay." She said. "Natsuki, stop attacking Yuri and let her speak."

Natsuki opened her mouth, then closed it again and scrunched her face up, clearly dissatisfied.

"And Yuri," Monika continued. "Any chance we can skip over the parts where my feelings for MC were so obvious? Unless you just wanted to mock me?"

"No!" Yuri was red in the face. "I mean yes! I mean, It wasn't to mock, but I can skip over that for sure! Uh..."

"Alright." Monika said. "I'll give you a minute to gather your thoughts again. I would really like to hear what you want to tell me, and not have it interrupted by petty nitpicks."

Natsuki made a face, but remained silent.

They sat like that for half a minute, Sayori still not moving, Yuri having her eyes closed, picking her words again, and Natsuki scowling at the floor. Monika tried to put on her best neutral face, while a storm raged inside her. They clearly knew about her true feelings for MC. The question was, what were they going to do with that knowledge. She wanted nothing more than to put pressure on them, commanding answers from them until she was satisfied. But she knew and trusted her friends enough to know that in no way would their intentions be malicious. They wouldn't blackmail her. What would be the point? She had come here herself to make her feelings official to the rest of the group. They had just... caught her off guard. She was glad she hadn't followed her base instinct to push Yuri, since her thoughts were such a mess. She could very likely have said something she would later regret, and it wouldn't make any sense regardless.

Yuri exhaled deeply, and opened her eyes again, looking dignified and composed.

"You okay?" asked Monika. "Ready to go again?"

"Yes, I believe so. Thank you." Yuri said. She took another deep breath.

"The short and sweet of the matter is that I love MC as well."

Oh.

"We all love him. Me, Natsuki and Sayori."

...oh.

Monika ignored the fiery feeling rising up in her stomach, the feeling that made her see her friends in a new light, rivals that had to be eliminated so she could achieve her own personal goals. She would not fall victim to petty jealousy, throw her friendship away immediately or become a bloodthirsty yandere type. She could be composed. She made a motion to speak, but was interrupted by Yuri again.

"Please, let me finish. You need to understand why we're telling you this."

Understand? I understand perfectly. You want to steal him away from me. You want to watch me suffer as you look on, you sadistic b-

No. Calm down. Hear her out, like you promised. Yuri is not mean. She wouldn't say this unless there was a good reason.

Monika nodded once, gesturing for Yuri to continue. She seemed to hesitate a bit, fidgeting with her sleeve.

"I-" She began. "I have to show you something. It's- it's very embarrassing, but..."

Natsuki put a hand on her shoulder, not in a teasing way like she would normally, but in a very uncharacteristic reassuring way. Her eyes were mild, but determined, devoid of harshness as she looked at the taller girl.

"It's not embarrassing. It's necessary. You can do this."

Yuri nodded, took a deep breath, then exhaled. She made eye contact with Monika.

"Don't freak out, okay?" She said, and rolled up the sleeves of her school uniform in two swift movements.

A gasp escaped Monika's lips.

Chapter 2

Yuri's arms were covered in white lines. Scars. Scars criss-crossing nearly every surface of her pale skin. Intersecting, long ones, short ones, it wasn't even possible to see where they began, or ended. There had to be atleast a hundred. Maybe even more.

"You-" Monika began.

"I want you to understand this." Yuri cut in sharply. "Look at them."

Monika's mind was racing, a million thoughts a second going through her head as the revelation of Yuri being a- doing this to herself crashed down upon her. This couldn't be real. She would have known. If she had known, she would've stopped her. Helped her. If she had only known...

But hadn't she known something was wrong with her? Hadn't she wondered about all the times she had excused herself to go to the bathroom or getting tea, and taking a bit too long getting it? How she would return, strangely out of breath?

Had she known, but hadn't bothered to do anything about it? Monika felt sick to her stomach. They all knew about Yuri's fascination with knives, and how she always brought a new one to school each day. People didn't do that unless they were planning on using it. Had they thought it was a weapon for self-defense, like pepperspray or a taser? No, that was stupid. Obviously she had been cutting herself, it was obvious. Obvious! How could they have been so blind? How could *she* be so blind? It was so obvious. Had she simply not cared? Was she a monster who didn't care about her friend? Of course she had known. Known, but didn't care. She hadn't cared. She-

"Monika." Yuri said.

Monika returned to reality. She realized that Yuri had been trying to say something, but her words were muffled. The scar-covered arms resting on the table seemed to push everything else away, consuming everything around her. With effort, she looked away from the hands and up at the familiar face of Yuri. It seemed to be cut in stone, eyes unwavering. Monika's own eyes swelled with tears.

"Yuri..." Monika's voice was weak, shaking.

"Look at them." Yuri repeated.

Monika looked down at them again. Even through her tears, she could still see the white lines littering Yuri's arms.

"Yuri, I-I'm sorry."

"Sorry? Sorry for what?" Yuri asked.

"A-all my fault..."

"This wasn't anyone's fault but my own. Did you take the knife and drag it across my skin? Did you threaten me to do it to myself? Was it you who got me addicted to it?"

"Should have realized... should have stopped it... should have helped." Monika sobbed, tears streaming down her face.

"I wouldn't have let you. I would have turned you away, tell you to leave me alone. I would have done it more, just to spite you. Listen Monika, I enjoyed doing this to myself. I liked the feeling. Some days, it was all I could think about. I kept telling myself to at least wait until I got home, but as I'm sure you're now aware, I just couldn't wait, it was that bad. And if you had confronted me, and told me to stop, I would've gotten angry, and probably left the club. This is not your fault."

She was wrong. This was her fault. She could have done something. And now she was a pathetic mess who sat and bawled her eyes out when her friend was clearly the one who had suffered most. Selfish, disgusting excuse for a club president.

"Natsuki, paper towel please." Yuri said.

"Yup." Natsuki confirmed, and seemed to pull a box of kleenex out of thin air. Yuri took two, and handed one to both Monika and Sayori, who had finally looked up with her big, blue eyes. She had started crying too, but more it seemed from seeing Monika so distraught than her other friend's self-mutilation.

Because she knew already. Monika realized, as she accepted the paper towel, and started drying her face with shaking hands.

"I want you to look past what I have done to myself." Yuri continued. "Really look at them. See their coloration. They will never heal completely, but notice how none of them are red. I haven't made a new one in months, and I'm not going to. You couldn't save me, even if you somehow had known, so don't blame yourself. I'm better now. Because of MC."

"Try the cupcake. It'll make you feel better, I promise." Natsuki said.

Monika looked down at her untouched cupcake in front of her, the colourful pastry looking completely out of place with the current atmosphere. Her appetite had vanished, but she obliged Natsuki and took a small bite. The sweet taste overwhelmed her senses. She still felt awful and despite what Yuri had told her, guilty. But she had always loved Natsuki's skills as a baker, and this was easily some of her best work yet. Despite herself, a small smile crept into her face, and she uttered a hoarse "thank you" at Natsuki. Natsuki merely winked back at her in response. Monika glanced at Sayori, who now flashed her first smile today, and as always, it seemed to brighten up the entire room. If Monika believed any human on the planet had the ability to cure cancer by merely smiling at her patients, Sayori was easily the top contender.

Yuri continued speaking.

"It was back in May. I had invited MC back to my house. Not on a date or anything, but we did have fun when we made that banner for the festival, and he seemed interested in my knife collection. I told him he had only seen the ones I had on open display, that I had more in

drawers and such, and he wanted to see them. It's rare for me to have someone who isn't turned away from me when I tell them about my special interests. I showed him one of my favorite daggers, one with a curved blade. I... I should have told him that I sharpen them regularly, as a pass time. He... he didn't realize just how sharp it was. When he touched the tip of the blade, I could see a bit of his blood run down the dagger. I yelled, and rushed at him, he dropped the dagger in surprise. I said I was sorry I didn't warn him, and examined his injured finger. I probably overreacted, I tend to do that. He assured me that nothing was wrong, it was just a tiny cut, and only a drop of blood was lost. Then my eyes fell on the dagger on the floor, and something changed in me. I saw the small amount of blood stain the dagger, and..." Yuri hesitated.

"You'll probably think this sounds crazy." She said.

"It was." Natsuki said.

Both Monika and Yuri looked sternly at her.

"Sorry." Natsuki said. "Go on."

Yuri cleared her throat.

"I got this... urge, when I saw the blade. It's hard to explain, but it's the same urge I get when I need to cut myself, but so much stronger. Seeing his blood on my dagger, I... I wanted to cut myself with it. Before his blood dried. I wanted to cut myself and watch as his blood mixed with my own. I'm not sure if it was to make us physically closer by getting his blood inside me, or something else, I just knew that I wanted it more than anything else at that moment, and I couldn't wait."

Monika stared at Yuri. She always knew that she had been darker than the others, and that her poems usually involved some form of gore, even if she had thought it was just a metaphor. If anyone else had told her this story, she would have instantly assumed that the person was completely insane, and would find a way to get as many walls, miles and preferably States between her and that person, but she knew Yuri. She hadn't known this side of her, but she knew that she was one of the kindest people she'd ever met, who would never hurt another living being... except for herself, she knew now. She did her best not to exert judgement over her friend, and keep her mind as open as she possibly could as she continued listening to her story.

"I picked up the dagger from the floor, and made an excuse to go get some gaze for his wound. He called behind me that it really wasn't necessary, and that he wasn't even bleeding anymore. I pretended not to hear him. I nearly ran into the bathroom and closed the door. I raised the dagger and..."

Yuri blinked and looked around her, as though going out of a trance, Monika, Natsuki and even Sayori were staring at her with looks of deep concern and even fear etched on their faces.

"Uh..." She spoke again. "I- I'll spare you the details. Needless to say, the obvious happened, and I am truly ashamed by it. I was ashamed of myself even back then, leaving my injured

guest to worry while I disappeared to do something that selfish. I hated myself, and I hated what I did, but I just couldn't stop, even as I was deeply disgusted by my own actions. And then... And then he came in."

"MC came into your bathroom?" Monika asked.

"In my hurry I forgot to lock the door." Yuri said, raising her hand to push some of her long purple hair in front of her increasingly blushing face. "He said my name, and I was completely paralyzed. I just sat there on the edge of the bathtub, blood running down my arm, and the knife in my hand. My scars were on full display. I never wanted something to be a nightmare more than that moment. I couldn't move, I couldn't speak, all I knew was that my life was over. Even if he wasn't going to tell people, he would surely think I was disgusting and cr-creepy. He would be disgusted by the sight of me and avoid me forever!"

Yuri took a shaky breath, as if she was going to cry. Monika didn't know what to do, so she stayed silent. Sayori laid her hand on Yuri's, and the tall girl seemed to relax a little. She sniffled, took another breath, and continued.

"I thought he was going to run away screaming. Instead he grabbed a towel, rushed at me, and wrapped my arm in it. He asked if I was okay. I just couldn't think straight and started crying. He... he hugged me. Told me things were going to be okay. Kept embracing me for what felt like hours on end. I don't know if I've ever cried for that long. I was so sure he wouldn't want anything to do with me anymore, and he just kept holding me. Whispering words of comfort to me. Eventually I calmed down. I tried apologizing for having him see me like that, but he rejected it, and told me I had nothing to apologize for, he just wanted to know I was okay. I assured him I was. He stayed for a bit longer, helped me clean up, helped me treat my cut. He didn't turn away or comment on my other cuts at all. The sky had gone dark outside, and he needed to go. I made him wait, and asked if I was ever going to see him again, or if our friendship had broken beyond repair. He... he told me nothing I did would ever make him not want to be friends with me, no matter what. He told me that we could meet up tomorrow, when we got a chance to clear our heads some, and talk about things. I started crying again, and he hugged me. Then he left."

Yuri took a piece of paper towel from Natsuki's outstretched hand, and dabbed her eyes.

"I was a bunch of nerves the next day. I wanted to organize my thoughts, come up with a proper argument for why I did it. I couldn't concentrate in class, or the club. I wanted... I wanted to cut myself again, but I didn't think it wise to act more suspiciously than I already did. In my current mental state, I would surely be caught again. Finally, school was over, and he followed me to my home. He hugged me again, and we sat down at the dinner table. He asked me if I was doing okay, and I said I was. We had a long talk about what I did. He didn't approve of it, and wished I wouldn't do it. I asked if he was going to avoid me, and he told me that he wasn't. He liked me, and nothing would ever change that. But he said that he didn't want me to continue doing it. I tried to tell him that I wasn't hurting anyone, I made sure to keep the cuts hidden, and I made sure to clean them. He didn't care. He said it hurt him to see me hurt myself. I told him that I couldn't stop. It was something I needed to do. An urge that wouldn't let go.

He nodded. 'I see.' he said. Then he told me that from now on, for every new scar I made, he

would make a cut on himself. I was shocked. 'No!' i told him. 'I have an urge to do it, you don't!' I yelled at him. He said that this was how it was going to be. I got angry. I kept telling him that this wasn't going to solve anything, that he shouldn't hurt himself because I and I alone had a problem. He wouldn't hear it, and I told him to leave my home. I wanted to be with him so much, but I couldn't bear to listen to him saying that he'd hurt himself because of me. I was distraught, I was angry, furious. I... I cut myself. Again. And again. Four times. To... to defy him, maybe. Show him that he couldn't make me do anything.

The next morning, in the club, I was sitting in my usual corner, reading, and he came over to me, for our usual reading session. It was like we never had a fight yesterday, and we just read together like any other day. But at the end, he... he pulled up my sleeves. I let him. Maybe because I wanted to spite him, or something. He saw the fresh cuts. And he just sighed. I pretended I didn't care, but I felt glad. 'Serves you right' I thought. It was horrible, I know, but that's how I felt. But then later, when he followed me home, I saw him take a pocket knife out. I asked him what he was doing. He pulled up his own sleeve, and my blood froze. I told him not to, I begged him, screamed at him, tried to wrestle the knife out of his hand. He was stronger than me. He made the cuts, but they were too long. Too deep. The knife was cheap. He wasn't experienced enough, and by the fourth cut he had lost too much blood. I dragged him inside my house, he was going to pass out! I managed to save him, wrapped up his arms in gaze. I cried again. I screamed at him never to do that again. He just laid there on my sofa and told me that 'it hurts, to see someone you love needlessly hurt themselves like that, doesn't it?' And for the first time, I... I finally understood him. I could overcome this addiction, to spare MC. I still get the urges, but the vision of him bleeding out in my kitchen is stronger, and keeps me from doing it. MC has four scars that will forever stain him because of my stubbornness, but the least I can do is make sure he won't get any more."

A stunned silence had fallen over the room. Yuri had finished what she had to say, and now it seemed she didn't know what to do next. She pulled her sleeves down again, hiding the awful scars on her arms. She pulled her hair back to its original position behind her ear in an effort to look more composed. Then, she burst out crying.

That broke the spell. Sayori looked on in a mixture of shock and concern as Yuri sobbed wildly into her hands. Natsuki looked confused.

"Yuri, what the hell?" She said, fumbling madly in her kleenex box, to retrieve some more paper towels.

"I-I'm so s-stupid!" Yuri said, between sobs. "I-it's my fault he-he has those s-scars!"

"Hey, hey." Natsuki laid another comforting hand on Yuri, and gave her the three paper towels with her other hand. "Scars are hot. Guys always show eachother their scars. It's a symbol of their toughness."

"N-not selfharm scars. Y-you don't s-show those off. And n-now, because of my w-weakness, MC can never show his arm off in public again! And all b-because I was selfish, and let an amazing guy like him become friends with a w-worthless girl like me."

Sayori jumped out of her chair, and threw her arms around Yuri, her head hidden behind the taller girl's shoulder. Natsuki rised from her chair as well, arms on her hips, frown on her face.

"Eat your cupcake." She said in her trademark commanding Natsuki-Is-Pissed voice.

Yuri looked up with a face of confusion underneath teary red eyes, her nose running. Sayori didn't move an inch, keeping her arms tightly locked around Yuri's body.

"W-what?" she managed, hiccuping a bit.

"Your cupcake. Eat it." Natsuki said, her voice unwavering and firm to the crying girl in front of her. "You haven't touched it at all. I haven't poisoned it, y'know."

Yuri looked down at the untouched pastry in front of her as if it was a foreign object from outer space. She slowly picked it up, and took a small bite from it.

"Good, isn't it?" asked Natsuki. Yuri gave a small nod in response.

"Of course it is. I baked it after all. Now keep your mouth busy with that instead of spouting silly nonsense with it, look at me, and listen." Natsuki sat down in her chair again, and Sayori let go of Yuri, returning to her own seat. Yuri turned to look at Natsuki with wide eyes, as some crumbs from the cupcake littered her lips.

"Number one." Natsuki held up a finger. "The whole cutting thing is a closed chapter. He doesn't blame you, he doesn't judge you, and neither do we. I think it's pretty freaking stupid that you did it in the first place, but I understand that you were dealing with some shit. All of it is in any case completely irrelevant, since you haven't done it since, and you won't do it again, correct?"

"Y-yes." Yuri stammered.

"I told you to shut up. Eat your cupcake." Natsuki said. "Number two. Does MC really seem like he gives a fuck about what anyone else thinks about his appearance? With *that* haircut?"

Yuri had just taken another bite of the cupcake, and snorted when she heard that. She started shaking, trying not to open her mouth to laugh while chewing and swallowing. She somehow managed to do it, and said in a weak voice, "That haircut is really not working for him."

"I think he could parade around naked in town with the scars on full display, and everyone would still only pay attention to how awful his hair looks." Natsuki said, smile creeping into her face.

Yuri gave a shriek of laughter. Monika was in awe. On an incredibly lucky day in the club, when caught up in the moment of something really fun, you could maybe catch Yuri giving a quiet chuckle. To see her laugh this hard and loud, after what she'd just confided to the group, because of Natsuki of all people, was completely absurd. What would be next? Would Natsuki declare Edgar Allan Poe as her new favorite Author?

Yuri was clutching her stomach, as her laughter eventually ebbed out. Tears were still streaming down her face, but this time, they were of pure joy. It was contagious, even Sayori was smiling, and Monika could feel one on her own face. After such a heavy speech from Yuri, something lighthearted and silly was just what this group needed.

The room quieted down again, and Natsuki continued.

"What's done, is done. No use in hating yourself, wishing you'd done differently. Regret is for losers who live in the past, and you're way too smart to be one of those. So don't be silly. MC loves you, and you love him. That's all that matters." Natsuki said.

Yuri took a paper towel, and wiped away her tears.

"Thank you Natsuki." She said. "That was really nice of you to say."

"Yeah, yeah, this whole club would collapse without me here to keep a level head, I know." Natsuki said. Monika could never quite tell when she was being sarcastic or not.

It might still collapse. Monika thought to herself. It was clear what Yuri's story had meant. 'MC saved me, I need him more than you do, back off Monika.' She couldn't even argue against it, not without sounding like a heartless bitch, anyway. Did it matter? For all she knew, she WAS a heartless bitch for not realizing what Yuri had been doing. Had it really been obvious, or was the benefit of hindsight screwing her over, telling her how dumb she was because that's just what inner voices do?

No. I know in my heart that's not true. Yuri is one of the few people I'm fortunate enough to call my friend. I would never have knowingly let her suffer like that, if I had known. I didn't turn a blind eye to her struggles because it was the easy thing to do. I didn't, and couldn't, have known.

It was true that Monika had walked in here this morning, fully prepared for the possibility that she and her friends would part ways forever, but it had always been a worst case scenario. She truly treasured their friendship beyond anything else, besides the longing in her heart for MC, and losing them would definitely break considerable chunks out of it. But she saw now, even though it was a nearly unbearable thought, that she had to give up her love. Her heart screamed at her to fight tooth and nail to ensure MC would end up hers, but her heart was selfish and irrational. She was a smart girl. She knew when she had lost. She could only hope she could bear still seeing her friend regularly, knowing she had full ownership over the thing she wanted more than anything, but couldn't possess, because if she did leave this club, she would truly have nothing left. Was constant reminders of her heartbreak worth it, as long as she could still see her friend?

Monika sighed.

"Thank you for telling me, Yuri. I am truly happy that you have found someone to help you through your problems, and I hope the best for both of you." Monika said.

Why does my voice sound so hollow? I meant what I said! ...I think?

Yuri's small smile disappeared entirely.

"Monika, I..."

"There's no need apologize." Monika interrupted her, rising from her seat. She felt like she would begin crying soon if she didn't leave. She would definitely cry later, but that should be in the comfort of her own home, where she could hide away from the rest of the uncaring world so they couldn't bear witness to how immaturely she would handle this loss. Her bed would be her best friend as she would leap into it, kick and scream, curse her friends, curse herself for cursing her friends, then curse them again. She'd pull out her own long hair, many of her personal items were likely to be broken, swept off her desks in crying rage. And just to complete the cliché, when she had exhausted herself so much that she couldn't resort to violence, she'd turn to self-loathing as she would empty a full tub of ice cream while bingewatching some trashy show. She just hoped that she would get over it before tomorrow's school day. Maybe she could call in sick. She was a model student, the principal would surely cut her some slack.

"I get what it is you're telling me. You need him more than I do, I understand that now. But I think I need some time to myself now, so I'll have to cut this club meetup short..."

"Clearly you don't understand what we're telling you." Natsuki piped up, looking irritated. "Because that wasn't the point of this."

Monika didn't know if she could deal with Natsuki anymore today. She began to grate on someone after a while, with her aggressive way to speak to people that didn't make room for the other persons emotions. She knew that this was just the short girls way to express herself, and she couldn't help it, but it really had a way of becoming too much.

"I'm sorry, Natsuki, but-"

"No!" Natsuki cut her off. "You will NOT dismiss me for 'being Natsuki' again. You're breaking the promise you made at the start of this!"

"I'm not, I just-"

"You are! You think that you know where the rest of this talk will go! That Yuri told you her story just to make you understand why you couldn't date MC, with me and Sayori coming along as some kind of moral support! You think that now you've heard Yuri's story that we're just going to sit and list all the reasons why you can't have him! You're wrong! And if you listened like you said you would, maybe you'd get that!"

"Natsuki..." Yuri said to try to calm her friend down. Natsuki punched the table. Sayori let out a gasp, her eyes wide. Seeing this, Natsuki froze, as she realized how much she was frightening her friend.

"Dammit..." She exclaimed in a quieter tone, to herself. She rose from her chair, grabbed the cupcake in front of her, and walked off to the corner of the room where she stood with her back to the rest of the group.

Sayori made a movement to rise as well, to help her upset friend, but Yuri laid a soft hand on her shoulder to stop her.

"Give her a minute to calm down, okay?" Yuri said softly.

Sayori nodded, still looking concerned.

"Monika..." Yuri said, looking at the club president. Monika turned her attention from the girl with her back turned in the corner, to the purplehaired girl in the chair.

"I can only imagine what you're feeling right now, but please understand that we're not doing this to hurt you. Natsuki really didn't want to get angry, but it comes so naturally to her when she's passionate about something. We talked the night before, and she said herself that she wasn't going to ruin this by having a temper tantrum, and I think she's really mad at herself for lashing out. She has something to tell you herself, and so does Sayori."

At the mention of her name, Sayori looked down at the floor again, and nodded slightly.

"Natsuki will come back in a little bit when she's calmed down a bit. She would really like you to listen to her as you listened to me. I promise you, it's not what you think it is."

Monika took a deep breath, and exhaled. Her emotions were a whirlwind, and she wanted to go home, but she trusted Yuri. If she and Natsuki needed her to listen to more, she would. She sat back down in her chair, and grabbed her cupcake.

"Okay." She said, and took a bite of the pastry. It helped, to know that even though Natsuki could be difficult with her way of talking, that she was able to make something so delicious and sweet. As if her sarcasm and aggressive mannerisms and insults was a mask she put on, while her true personality came through her baking.

"Thank you for your patience. This truly means alot to us." Yuri said, and Sayori nodded earnestly.

They sat like that for a few more seconds, when Natsuki turned away from the corner she stood in, and began walking towards the group again. Her head was so far down, as if she was hiding her face in shame. Monika saw that the cupcake she had taken with her was gone. Sayori rose from her seat, and met Natsuki halfway, giving her a big hug. Natsuki accepted the hug, putting her arms around Sayori. They stood there for a few seconds, before Natsuki clapped the red bowed girl on the back, and Sayori released her. Natsuki continued toward the round table.

Natsuki's head was still down, hiding her expression.

"I'm sorry for my outburst." She muttered. "I really didn't want to raise my voice and become what I said I wasn't."

Monika knew how much Natsuki hated to admit when she was wrong. It was a sign of how important this was to her, that she didn't try to put the blame on someone else, and accept full responsibility.

"It's perfectly understandable." Monika said. "I was being a bit hasty, and jumping to conclusions about the purpose of this meeting, and I'm sorry for that. The Club President should always hear her members out fully. I would be delighted to hear whatever it is you want to tell me."

"No hard feelings then?" Natsuki looked up, and Monika saw her eyes weren't angry, instead filled with feelings of hope, hope that she hadn't screwed this up beyond saving. Monika smiled at her.

"No hard feelings." She said.

Natsuki smirked.

"Okay, but prepare yourself. This won't be the same kind of kneelapper like Miss Chuckles there told us," she said, gesturing her head at Yuri who couldn't help but smile despite herself.

Monika smiled at her words, but did feel a bit worried.

You too, Natsuki? She thought. Did she too have scars?

Chapter 3

Natsuki began unbuttoning her school uniform. She threw it over her chair. Yuri and Sayori looked on without raising an eyebrow. Natsuki stood there, in a white t-shirt, and motioned to take that off as well.

"Uh, Natsuki?" Monika said nervously, as a blush made itself known across her face. Although this was surely a part of what Natsuki had to tell her, she didn't quite know if it was right for her to watch Natsuki strip naked.

"Don't worry, this won't be as hot as you think." Natsuki's words were lighthearted, but a definite shaking had entered her voice, and her hands shook noticeably as she took hold of her shirt and raised it over her head.

Monika gasped.

Natsuki stood there, a tiny bra keeping her upper body from being completely exposed, but her lack of modesty was the last thing on Monika's mind. Blue marks, the kind you'd sometimes get from a particularly unlucky collision with a household object, typically on your knee or somewhere else on the leg area, littered the pink-haired girl's torso. Her belly was almost black, and the bruises travelled upwards, coloring her disturbingly visible ribs, and even her bare shoulders. Though the marks seemed almost aggressively randomly placed, Monika couldn't help but notice that they were also strategically put to be completely hidden when Natsuki was wearing her clothes. Her arms, unlike Yuri, was completely untouched, and so were her bare legs visible beneath her skirt.

"There's more." Natsuki said, and turned her back on the girls, revealing even more marks and bruises littering her back in a similar fashion.

"Natsuki... what did you do?" Monika asked, horrified.

"Believe it or not, they're actually healing steadily. You should have seen me a week ago, now *that* wasn't pretty." Natsuki said.

Monika didn't fall for Natsuki's attempt to sound casual. The shaking in her voice had become more pronounced, and goosebumps had started appearing on the parts of her skin not tainted by the marks.

"Doesn't it hurt alot?" Monika asked, unable to fathom how Natsuki could even stand with wounds like this.

"Like a bitch, probably." Natsuki said, grabbing her t-shirt from her chair and pulled it above her head. "Painkillers have been my best friends lately, no offense to any of you. Can barely even feel it." She gave her side a few slaps to demonstrate her point.

"Natsuki!" Yuri said sharply.

"Don't worry, the broken rib is on the other side." Natsuki said, dismissively.

"Broken?!" Monika exclaimed.

"I don't care, you shouldn't treat your wounds so lightly." Yuri said sternly. "If you keep playing around like that, they'll never heal properly! Take it from someone who knows about self harm, and regrets doing it every day of her life."

Natsuki looked like she was about to retort, but thought better of it, and sat down again. She began putting on her school uniform again.

"You're right." She said. "Sorry."

"Natsuki, please." Monika implored. "Did you do this to yourself?"

"Nah." Natsuki denied. "I actually don't like pain that much. I'm just used to it."

"Who did this to you, then?" Monika asked. "Are you getting bullied? If you tell me their names, I can get them expelled in a heartbeat."

"Bullies know not to mess with me, if they know what's good for them." Natsuki smiled darkly. "No, my body's state is all my dear old dad's doing."

"No...!" Monika exclaimed.

She'd heard about abusive parents of course, but she just couldn't comprehend someone who was supposed to protect their children from everything with their all, no matter what, doing this. A child was supposed to trust their parents, seek help and guidance from them. Not live in permanent fear of their next strike.

"Yup." Natsuki said. "I'm what you might call 'a problem child.' My mom apparently couldn't stand me, so she left me with my dad while I was still a baby. Of course, as you just saw, he didn't exactly appreciate me very much either. Sometimes I think about which one of them I hate more. I mean, at least my mother never laid her hands on me, but she did leave me to someone who did. Who's to blame? Which one is the worst? What came first, the chicken or the egg?"

There was an anger inside her voice which Monika had never heard before. Usually when Natsuki became angry, she exploded with it, making sure everyone around her knew how she felt, and why she felt like that. This was more like a quiet heat rising steadily, but controlled.

It's not aimed at us, this time. Monika realized.

"Why did he do it?" She asked.

"Oh, it's the same bullshit as all the other sob stories." Natsuki said, shaking her head. "I didn't respond clearly enough.

Smack.

My tone was disrespectful.

Pow.

I woke him up from his nap.

Wham.

I tried to ask for a single goddamn meal after starving the entire goddamn day.

Ka-chow."

She highlighted each sound effect with a knock on the table. She wasn't looking at any of them.

"It's actually pretty funny. Despite being blackout drunk for most hours of any given day, the bastard was a damn surgeon with his strikes. He'd never hit me where people would notice. Always places hidden from the public by clothes. Makes me wonder if he was a target for it himself when he was a kid, learned from it, and took it out on me in some kind of revenge."

Monika thought to herself that all these things she learned about her friends today was pretty far from her definition of "fun."

"Yuri had a theory, actually." Natsuki said. "She said that the reason I seek confrontations and insult people, could be because it's a way for me to do it to someone I know won't hit me in response. Because if I tried doing it to my dad, he'd probably not take it so kindly.

She paused for a bit before continuing.

"Which isn't really nice to think about, since that means I'm just taking my frustrations out on those I know can't fight back, making me just as bad as him."

"That's not true." Yuri said. "Your dad abused you physically, didn't feed you enough and neglected you. Anyone would have a rough time making friends if they had to deal with that. It's his fault you're malnourished to the point where you can't even make it through the day without asking for money for the vending machine. You had no chance against him, a tiny girl like you versus your father? Trying to seek out verbal conflicts with people is a much better way to act out than going to his level and physically assault people. You are not the same."

"You said it yourself, though." Natsuki retorted. "I'm a midget. I'm turning 19 next week, and I still look like a 13 year old. I couldn't hurt anyone even if I tried, and I would be knocked out if anyone above the age of 9 gave me a serious punch.

She sighed.

"It's the principle of the thing. He probably dealt with some shit when he was little, now he's dealing with it by being an asshole to me. I am dealing with some shit right now, and I'm dealing with it by being an asshole to everyone around me. It's a blessing in disguise that I'm so unlikable that no one would ever settle down with me and give me children that I could abuse myself."

"Stop that." Yuri said. "You're not avoiding violence because you're weak, but because you're a good person, unlike your dad. Even if you were six feet tall with a hulking gorilla's physique, you would never, ever hurt another living being."

"Now that's a mental image." Natsuki commented.

Yuri smiled weakly.

"You're not anything like him, and you never will be. I don't even think you could hurt him back, if given the chance."

Natsuki sighed.

"Yeah, you're right. Even if someone had tied him to a chair, and given me a bat, I probably couldn't even land a single swing, despite what he's done. He's my dad. I... I couldn't hurt him, even after everything he's done."

"That makes one of us." Yuri said, bitterly. "If I saw him in the street, and I had one of my combat knives on me, I don't think I could hold myself back. I'd do everything in my power to inflict just a fraction of the hurt that he's made you go through all these years."

Yuri had her fist clenched, and Monika had never heard as much venom in her voice before. She couldn't blame her.

"Same." The Club President said. On Yuri's side, Sayori with her face in an almost unrecognizably angry expression nodded in agreement.

"Thanks guys." Natsuki said, in a mixture of bemusement and genuine gratitude. "But I don't think you'll get the chance."

"What happened to him?" Monika asked her. "Please tell me you're no longer living with him."

Natsuki looked at her, smiling in grim satisfaction, as if remembering a time where she had won over Yuri in an argument.

"MC happened to him." She said, glee in her voice.

Monika raised her eyebrows as Natsuki began telling her story.

"It was about two weeks ago. My dad had left for the weekend, probably to throw the money he and I earned that week away on some gambling or alcohol, or whatever. I like when he does that, since it means I can be at home without being afraid of doing something he would see as annoying. But then I had an idea. I'd become good friends with all of you, and I just kinda wanted to... hang out, as strange as that sounds with how I usually act. I sent out a group text to all of you. MC seems like he doesn't mind my... behaviour, so of course he'd say yes. And I can always count on you, Sayori."

Sayori gave a small smile.

"What I didn't expect was for Yuri to accept the invitation as well."

"I was surprised to see the invitation." Yuri said. "Back then, I had the impression that you didn't really like me, but when I saw the text, I got happy. You'd never taken that kind of

initiative before. I was curious to see what you were like outside school."

"I've always liked you." Natsuki said. "I think sometimes you can act a bit condescending, pretentious, holier-than-thou, and just plain weird."

"Uh, thanks?" Yuri said, unsure.

"But you stick to your feelings. You like something, and you won't let anyone tell you it's wrong to like that. I can respect that. I *do* respect that. And I respect you.

That was perhaps the nicest thing Natsuki has ever said to Yuri. Monika thought. Yuri seemed to think so too, since she blushed, mumbled a "thank you." and looked down.

"Anyway, they all told me they'd like to hang out, but we didn't know where to go. Yuri's place makes Sayori nervous because of all the knives on display, and Sayori doesn't like staying in her own room more than she has to. We'd all been at MC's place more times than we could count. So he suggested they come to my home."

Natsuki sighed.

"Normally I wouldn't let them, but with my dad out I figured what the hell. Usually when he takes one of his trips, he'll be gone the whole weekend, returning Sunday night where he'd wake me up to cook him something. If I was careful about erasing every trace of them before he came home, I figured there wasn't any harm in letting them stay over for the afternoon."

"I remember that text." Monika said. "I was angry with myself to miss out on such a momentous occasion, but I always turn off my phone when I practice piano, to not get distracted."

"Eh, it's fine." Natsuki said. "It wasn't that good. I had no idea what we were going to do, and we just sat around for the most part, awkwardly."

"I liked it." Yuri added, trying to cheer up Natsuki.

"Wow, the quiet shy girl likes sitting around doing nothing? Shocker." Natsuki said.

Yuri frowned, but said nothing.

"Sayori saved the day from being a total waste." Natsuki went on. "She suggested that I try to teach them how to bake, and MC thought it was a good idea. I normally prefer baking at my job as an apprentice, since I'm usually unhappy at my house, with all the memories, but I figured that with my friends over, I could maybe ignore that aspect. The house does have a pretty nice kitchen, since cleaning up is pretty much the only thing I can do without dad taking some kind of offense.

We started preparing to make cupcakes. They weren't too shabby at it considering it was their first time. I'd have MC help me a couple of times before, so he kinda knew what he was doing somewhat. Sayori was very enthusiastic about it, which went a long way in lightening the mood, since I know I can be a bit of a pain to work with. I was probably way too bossy with them."

"You weren't." Yuri said. "You only raised your voice three times, and you didn't call us any names, even when we messed up with the whisking and sprayed batter all over your walls."

Natsuki laughed.

"We?! That was all you, you clutz! I have no idea how you managed to do it. You sprayed it everywhere, you even ruined your clothes. How could I be mad at you, it was freaking hilarious!"

"The mixer was more powerful than I anticipated" Yuri mumbled, blushing deeper.

Natsuki snorted.

"We were having so much fun, just us four goofing around in the kitchen, trying to bake cupcakes. At last we got the batter into the forms, and put them in the oven. We were all laughing so hard that no one heard him come in."

"Heard who come in?" Monika asked. Then she realized, and was overcome with dread. "Oh. Oh no."

"Oh yes." Natsuki said, her cheerful smile from remembering the day darkening. "He had returned early. Probably lost a bunch of our money in a gamble, returning home to take his anger out on me. But he didn't expect to see three other teens in his kitchen littered with batter and baking supplies."

"It was awful." Yuri said, shivering at the memory of the event. "He just stood there in the kitchen doorway, staring at us. He didn't say a word, just breathed heavily. I could smell the alcohol from across the room."

"He was so angry, he was lost for words." Natsuki went on. "I'd never seen him like that before. It was somehow scarier to see him so quiet than when he would scream and hit me. I didn't know what to do, my world was crumbling around me. I wasn't really thinking about the beatdown I'd receive, I knew that was completely inevitable. I was just thinking that now my friends would find out everything about my relationship with my father. They would freak out, tell everyone, make me even more of an outcast. If I survived my dad's rage that day, I would 100% lose my friends, forever."

"You weren't thinking rationally." Yuri said quietly. "No one would blame you for it, with that man staring at you that way. But we would never think of you like that, not me, not Sayori, and certainly not MC. We're on your side, forever and always."

"Yeah." Natsuki said in a weak voice. It sounded like she was struggling to hold back tears. "I guess I knew that, deep down. I was just... so scared. I was so fucking scared."

She took a deep breath.

"None of us said anything. Nobody wanted to break the spell, least of all me. He just stared at us, and we stared back at him. I'm sure it was at most two minutes, but it felt like hours of just us staring at each other in silence."

"That sounds awful." Monika said. "I can't even imagine. I wish I had been there. Maybe I could have done something."

"I wouldn't have wanted you there. Natsuki said. "I didn't want any of you there, expose any of you to that bastard. I wasn't even scared he was going to hit me again. What if he had laid his hands on Sayori? I wouldn't ever have been able to forgive myself if that happened. And he could have so easily done so. I would have been powerless to help her. I wouldn't have been able to do anything at all."

She took a shuddering, shaky breath.

"Wh-what happened?" Monika asked, scared of the answer. She couldn't see any way out for the group, even though they had obviously found a way, or they wouldn't be here.

"MC." Natsuki simply said, her composure gone, her voice breaking as she started to cry.

Yuri took over.

"He walked over to her dad, as casually as always, and stretched out his hand. He introduced us, and himself to him. He apologized for the mess in his kitchen, and assured him that we would clean up after ourselves before we left. He even offered him to help himself to one of the cupcakes once they'd finished in the oven. There was no fear in his voice whatsoever, he- he was just being a perfect, polite houseguest to the man. As if totally oblivious to the tension."

"The idiot just stood there and stared at MC's hand." Natsuki bitterly spoke up again. "Probably too drunk to understand a word of what he was saying. The bastard ignored him and turned to look directly at me. He said my name in that tone of voice I was so familiar with. The voice that promised pain, lots of it, for me. I knew there was no point in saying I was sorry, to say they were leaving, to say anything at all. He could barely restrain himself to not go apeshit on me there and then, in front of my friends, and I'd rather die before letting that happen. I just walked over to him, by his side, as he told my friends to leave immediately. And..."

Monika was surprised to see Natsuki's lips curl up into a smile.

"...man, MC is so freaking awesome."

"He just stared her dad down, no longer oblivious to the situation, but like a zookeeper would a lion." Yuri explained. "Completely without fear, his eyes not leaving his, and just... said it would be a shame to leave without trying the cupcakes."

"No. Way." Monika said, breathlessly. Natsuki giggled hysterically.

"The moron just stared at him!" She exclaimed excitedly. "Like he couldn't even comprehend someone would talk back to him!" She burst into a new set of giggles, before calming down again. "Not that I found it funny back then. I just wanted them to leave as much as my dad did, so they wouldn't see him hurt me, or the unthinkable: him hurting them."

I wanted MC to quit messing around and just leave before the situation got completely out of control. And then..."

Natsuki clenched her fists.

"The son of a bitch punched MC!"

Monika covered her mouth with her hand to stifle a gasp.

"Right in his face. His nose started bleeding, I was surprised it wasn't broken! I saw red, and for the first time in my life, I started yelling at him. 'What is wrong with you' I screamed. 'How dare you hurt him?!' I called him every name I could think of, insulted him every way I knew how. I must have seemed completely rabid. I couldn't even hear myself. I'm sure I didn't make much sense."

"You were amazing." Yuri told her. "I was so scared, watching him hit MC, thinking what he'd do to us next, but you yelling at him somehow made the situation... manageable. Like there was order in the universe again. Your voice somehow made me braver. Enough to make me grab a kitchen knife to protect me and Sayori should he turn to us."

"Not that I could keep it up for long." Natsuki said. "After yelling at him for a minute straight, as MC laid on the floor bleeding, dad decided to shut me up the best way he knew how."

Monika was afraid to ask.

"What did he do?"

"He kicked her." Yuri said. "He kicked her so hard, she collided with the edge of a wall. I- I could clearly hear a bone snapping."

"I didn't feel anything." Natsuki said. "I heard my rib break, but it didn't begin to hurt until much later. Must've been all the adrenaline. It did shut me up though, the shock of hitting the wall and then the floor. I was sure that it was all over, that he would beat us all, that I wouldn't be able to protect my friends, but just then, MC got up. His nose was bleeding and his hair was even more ruffled than usual, but he looked so awesome. He rushed my dad and pushed him into the wall!"

"Natsuki's dad were bigger than MC." Yuri said. "And yet MC completely had the upper hand. I suspect because her dad's reflexes were dulled by all the alcohol. He tried defending himself and punching MC again, but he dodged every hit. I was slowly sneaking up to them, knife in hand and Sayori behind me if he needed help, but I needn't have bothered! MC was... was..."

She struggled to find the right word for what MC had done, before Natsuki laughingly yelled.

"He was kicking my old man's ass! It was amazing! I'd never seen anyone stand up to him like that! MC was avoiding every hit, and punched him in return! My dad was struggling to breathe, he was bleeding all over!"

"MC noticed me coming up behind him." Yuri said. "I guess he was still uncomfortable with me having a knife, because he took the blade away from me, and held it at his throat. Natsuki's dad yelled up, asking how he dared threaten him, that he would call the police."

"But MC kept calm." Natsuki said. "He told my dad that if he called the police, he would have to explain all the bruises and marks on me. Explain why I had years worth of abuse on my body. He didn't say anything, but you could see in his eyes that he'd never call the cops. He's been involved in way too much sketchy stuff to think that was a good idea. So MC told him that unless he wanted to sit inside a prison cell for the rest of his miserable life, he would pack up his shit, leave, and never come back again."

"And did he?" Monika asked.

"Yup!" Natsuki said, triumphantly. "The coward ran upstairs, took whatever valuables he could fit in his briefcase, and ran off! We haven't heard from him since, nor the police."

Monika smiled. It was a hard story to believe, but Natsuki's enthusiastic storytelling helped sell it.

"So I suppose you're in a good place now?" She asked the smaller girl.

But to her surprise, the smile on Natsuki's face disappeared.

"Kind of. Not really. I now have a whole house to take care of, and my salary as a baker's apprentice isn't exactly enough to cover all the bills. Plus I've begun having some serious night terrors. I keep waking up in the middle of the night, hearing my dad's voice yelling at me, like he's right outside, coming to get in and hurt me. I often crash at MC and Yuri's places, and I'm lucky they let me."

"It's no trouble whatsoever." Yuri assured her. "You can stay over for as long as you need, whenever you need it. Don't think for a second that you're causing us problems or being inconvenient."

"You're more than welcome at my place, too." Monika said. "I have a big house, with lots of space, and no one but me using it. You can come over anytime."

Natsuki blushed.

"Appreciated." She said. "I do plan on paying you all back, when I figure out the logistics of selling dad's house, and can begin baking professionally. I know you say that it's not a big deal to let me sleep at your places, but it is to me, and I want to show you how much it means to me. Also for all the times you've lent me money for the vending machine, with me unable to pay you back."

Silence lingered after that statement. They all wanted to refuse Natsuki, but they knew they'd get nowhere arguing with the girl.

"You've all been a big help in my life these last two weeks." Natsuki continued. "But MC has seriously gone above and beyond. I have him to thank for no longer being afraid to live in my

home, to walk home from school, to do anything at all with my father nearby. He lets me sleep with him when I'm at his place, not like, doing anything, but just being nearby him I'm at ease. I never have nightmares when I'm lying next to him in his bed. I... I honestly think he's the love of my life. I don't know what I'd do without him."

Monika noticed how this mirrored Yuri's story ending, and she definitely had some theories about where they were all going with this, but she had learned from last time not to jump to any conclusions. There was still Sayori left. And based on her strange behaviour today, she had a feeling hers would be even harder to listen to than the two others.

"I'm... happy for you, Natsuki. I mean that sincerely. It's fantastic that you've found someone who can help you through this time in your life, after everything you've been through."

"Thanks Monika." Natsuki said, smiling. "He's so awesome."

Yes he is. And he was supposed to be mine. Monika thought, but she knew it was incredibly selfish. Yuri had been cutting herself, Natsuki had been abused by her father. MC had helped them both. She had done nothing, just flirted with him a bit at the club while her friends had been suffering in secret. Her rational side needed no further evidence to know who deserved to be with him the most, however outrage her emotional side was. But it didn't matter, now. Of course she could live with her best friends having him. They would still be her friends, and they would still love each other, no matter what.

Silence had fallen over the room, and the happy feelings left in the wake of Natsuki's story was steadily replaced with tension. Nobody needed to say anything. They all knew who would be next.

Sayori hadn't said a single word since she came in here, and she looked more timid than ever before now that she realized it was her turn to talk. She fidgeted nervously with the sleeves of her christmas sweater, and her eyes shifted, as if she was looking for a way out.

Natsuki rose from her seat, and lifted her chair, carrying it from Yuri's right side to place it on the left side of Sayori, so the blue-eyed girl would have a friend on each side. Sayori weakly turned her head to look at Natsuki, who in turn nodded, and placed her hand on Sayori's. Sayori looked to the tall girl on her right, and Yuri did the same.

"We'll support you through this whole thing" Natsuki said mildly to her friend.

"I know this is hard, but we'll be right here with you." Yuri assured her.

Sayori nodded slowly, and closed her eyes to prepare herself, similar to Yuri.

Yuri and Natsuki both looked at Monika.

"Whatever happens next, please try to remember how much you and everyone else loves Sayori." Yuri told her.

"It took a lot of convincing to do this, and she's so brave for doing it." Natsuki said.

Do what? What did she do? Monika's heart felt like it was pounding out of her chest. They hadn't given her this kind of warning for their injuries. What would she see? What would she hear about Sayori, sweet cheerful Sayori who could always brighten up a glum room simply by being there? The girl who could diffuse any heated situation by simply offering her friendship and smiling? She was scared, no, terrified of what was about to happen, but she owed it to Sayori to hear her out, for all the times the girl had been there for her, helped her form this club, make it something special, and of course, for introducing her childhood friend, MC, into their lives.

They owed alot to this girl, and the least they could do, was hear her out with an open mind.

"You ready?" Natsuki asked in a small voice.

Sayori slowly nodded and opened her eyes. Natsuki squeezed her hand, and let go. Yuri did the same.

The quiet girl reached out and took hold of the colourful, untouched cupcake in front of her. She opened her mouth as wide as she could, and took a gigantic bite of the pastry, crumbs spilling from her lips, her cheeks bulging as she started chewing. Finally, she swallowed the massive bite.

Okay. Not what I expected.

And then, Sayori raised her hands towards the collar of her sweater.

Slowly, painfully slowly, Sayori took hold of the turtleneck collar, lifting it above her chin, until her whole head vanished into it as she moved it further up. Everyone was silent as she struggled to get her hands out of the big sleeves, before she finally got the sweater fully off her, laying it on the table in front of her. She was wearing her regular school uniform underneath, and Monika thought she looked normal. Same Sayori as ever.

But then she raised her head.

No. No, no no. Not this. Not her. Monika's eyes widened, her mouth opening to scream, but no sound came out. She couldn't believe what she was seeing, couldn't process the information her eyes relayed to her brain.

Sayori's neck, previously hidden by the sweater, was sporting a long, giant angry red imprint, one that went all the way across her throat. It could only be from one thing, but Monika's thoughts refused to think it, as if she could make the sight in front of her go away as long as she didn't acknowledge it. But that plan was ruined when Sayori opened her mouth.

"I tried to hang myself yesterday." She said in a low, horribly hoarse voice.

Chapter 4

Sayori started coughing wildly.

"Are you okay? Do you need anything?" Yuri said, worry etched in her voice, and face.

"W-water." Sayori managed to wheeze out between coughing fits.

"On it." Natsuki hurried out of her chair, and ran out the classroom door to get to the school kitchen.

Monika felt so helpless, staring at the coughing Vice President, wishing she could do something, anything, to help ease the pain of her friend. But she couldn't speak. She couldn't move. Sayori's words echoed in her mind, accompanied by the image of her mutilated neck.

I tried to hang myself yesterday... I tried to hang myself yesterday... I tried to hang myself yesterday...

She didn't realize her friend had it that bad. With Yuri, there was at least some evidence to go off on. She liked knives, she was kind of intense, and she would leave the club for way too long, then breathe heavily when she returned. It should have been obvious what she had really been doing, where as Sayori, the happiest of them all, Monika's right hand woman, the shining light in their group... hanging herself? It made zero sense. There'd been no buildup. None whatsoever. And yet...

She hadn't known what Yuri had been doing. The so-called evidence to her cutting herself was only obvious because she told herself it was, a combination of guilt over not being able to help her friend, and hindsight. And now that her thoughts began slowing down, and stopped bouncing like pinballs against her skull, she could also think of some evidence to support Sayori's suicide attempt.

There had been bad days. Days where Sayori's smile and bubbly personality had seemed oddly forced. It didn't quite reach her eyes. She'd still be the peacemaker, bringing her flair of optimism to the whole group, and making them all feel better just by being there, talking to them. But... they could all see her eyes hadn't been as bright on those days, and her mouth had curled into a frown when she thought no one was looking at her.

Monika's speeding thoughts now reminded her of one particularly bad day, where she had actually asked Sayori if anything was wrong. Sayori had laughed her off, assuring her that nothing was wrong, that her feelings were just being silly. She had a habit of using goofy words in her poems to describe sad things, like a child who didn't quite have the hang of using more complicated words describing more complex emotions, and had said the day was being "full of rainclouds," but she had no reason to worry, since it was just her being weird, and it shouldn't have to impact the others. Nevertheless, Monika had gone to the other girls, telling them to take it easy on Sayori that day.

But that obviously hadn't been enough! That was just something she'd done to be able to say that she'd done her part to help Sayori, when she'd done the barest minimum. She could have done more! It was clearly a cry for help she'd ignored, and if she'd just done a bit more, lived up to her title as Club President, and been a decent goddamn friend, Sayori wouldn't be here

right now, red in the face, still softly coughing into her hand with that horrible mark on her neck.

"We got the principal's permission for her to wear the sweater today." Yuri said softly, patting Sayori's back. "Normally wearing something over your school uniform wouldn't be allowed, but when he saw... it, he agreed that she needed it to avoid answering questions from other students. He didn't really ask himself, which we appreciate, just if she had it under control."

"And is it? Under control?" Monika asked, having regained her ability to speak, although it seemed like she had an uncomfortable lump in her throat, like some kind of sick joke after seeing Sayori's mark.

Sayori, having gotten over her coughing fit, nodded slowly. Natsuki reappeared in the door to the club, rushing as fast as she could carrying a tray with a glass pitcher full of water, and an empty glass. She put down the tray on the table and started pouring water in the glass.

"They were out of icecubes, so sorry if it's not cold enough." Natsuki said, slightly out of breath from running.

Sayori nodded to show that she understood, and accepted the water from Natsuki, drinking long and hard, emptying the glass. She breathed out, coughed twice, but stopped herself before it could develop into another fit.

"Thanks, Nat," she said gratefully.

"Don't mention it," Natsuki said. "Whatever you need, just say it."

"Don't rush yourself." Yuri advised Sayori. "Go at whatever pace you want, as long as you can handle it. Don't feel like you have to make it exciting to not waste our time."

Sayori nodded, pouring herself another glass.

"Whenever you're ready." Yuri said.

"I... I've been depressed for a while now." She started, her voice still raspy and hoarse, but at least she wasn't coughing, and seemed to breathe somewhat normally now. "I've never really told anyone, because it's always seemed so pathetic to me. Like, there are people in the world who has actual issues, like diseases, poverty, mental issues, and so on. It's always seemed to me like they're the ones who need actual help, not the girl who's just sad when she's got no reason to be."

She took another sip of water.

"I've been told that *is* my depression talking. Basically doing whatever it can to make me feel worthless and selfish, invalidating me. And when it's the only voice you hear at all times, and me being as bad at arguments as I am, it's hard not to listen to it and believe what it's saying."

Oh, Sayori. No.

Hadn't they ever told her how great she was? How much they appreciated being friends with her? How much she helped this club function just by being there. Surely they had. Surely they'd made sure she knew they weren't just taking her for granted?

"So I kept it a secret. No reason to make you waste time worrying about someone like me, when we have so much other stuff, more justified stuff to worry about. And I could deal with it. I could accept being an useless sad sap myself, as long as I could maybe try to brighten up other, more deserving people's days. But... it got harder to manage once MC joined our club."

Sayori's eyes drooped down to look at the table, as if ashamed of herself. She let out two small coughs, and took another sip from her glass. As she threw her head back to swallow, Monika flinched as her neck mark was flashed to her yet again.

"On paper, it seemed like a good idea." Sayori said. "I've known MC for nearly all my life. He was my childhood friend. We kinda drifted apart for a few years, but then he started walking with me to school, and it was like no time had passed at all. We were talking and goofing around just like old times, and I started getting happy again whenever I was with him. There were still the days with rainclouds darkening everything, but he was like a beacon, shining through them. And then I joined this club, where I felt like I had actual girl friends."

You DID have friends. We are, and have always been your friends, and we love you.

"Monika said that to make this club official, we needed one more member, and he just seemed like the obvious choice. If I got him in here, I'd have all my friends together, in one place. Like some sort of concentrated happiness cannon, that could blast away any raincloud that would come my way in the future.

But... it didn't happen like that.

Everything went as I hoped it would, you guys really liked him, and he really liked you. It was surprising how quickly you all hit it off. But whenever he would sit and read with Yuri, or laugh with Natsuki, or flirt with Monika, I'd feel this horrible pain in my chest. Every single time he seemed friendly with any of you, it felt as though someone stabbed a knife through my heart. And the feeling wouldn't go away, it just got rainclouds started coming more often, being with MC no longer helped, and I realized I had made a terrible mistake. I'd misjudged my feelings for him. What I had thought was just me enjoying his company as my best friend, had blossomed into full blown love. And when I saw him with you guys, the feeling of getting stabbed was me being jealous. I had gotten the guy I had feelings for into a club with three other girls who were all so much more talented and deserving of his love, than me."

No! You're wrong! Yuri gets fanatically obsessed about whatever and whoever she likes. She's so intense that she scares most people off. You approach your interests with such a lighthearted casualness. Where Yuri would sit and obsess about every minute detail of the things she wants to say for hours, you can say all the right things without a second thought. Natsuki comes off as a brat who criticizes everyone simply for having their own opinion, and it gets exhausting to be around her for more than two hours. You encourage everyone, and do your best to get into their special interests, even if you're not personally a fan of it. You're kind to everyone, and people can't get enough of you!

I'm supposed to be the Club President, I'm supposed to care about my members, and help them through their hardships, and yet I didn't know Yuri was cutting herself. I didn't know Natsuki's dad abused her. I didn't know you were depressed.

I'm the worst person in this room, and you're better than all of us put together!

Sayori kept going.

"I considered using my power as Vice President to veto MC from the club. It was never more than a thought, since it would lead to more problems than it would solve. You all loved him, and without a good reason, you would just start hating me for banning your best friend. I wouldn't be able to hang out with MC because he would hate me for banning him from his new best friends. And since I would be the only one in favor of the decision, chances are you'd just make a new club, one where you could hang out with him without me being a killjoy telling you not to."

We would never. We would respect your wishes, even if we didn't understand them. Yes, we would probably try to question your reasoning, but if you told us that you didn't feel comfortable with it, we would trust that you had a good reason.

"So I just kept quiet, like I always do when I get in one of my irrational moods, even if it got harder than ever to attend the club, go to school, or even get out of bed in the morning. Every day began to have rainclouds, voices in my head yelled louder and louder about how worthless and stupid I was, I started hating all of you every time MC talked to you, and then I'd hate myself for hating you. I felt like I was slowly drowning, the voices distracted me, so my grades started falling more than usual, cooking dinner seemed incomprehensible so I didn't bother making it, and all the while I got stabbed every day in this club. I started to doubt I'd ever get happy again."

This was the most difficult story Monika had to listen to. She'd felt terrible hearing Yuri and Natsuki's stories, but this felt like getting her chest split open by a rusty knife and getting her heart forcibly scooped out with a wooden spoon. Sayori's opening statement of trying to hang herself had been horrible in and of itself, but her story of how she got to that point was somehow worse, now that she knew where and what exactly the climax would be, and her helplessness to stop it. She couldn't travel back in time with the knowledge she had now, and even if she could, what good would she do? She couldn't just make people happy, rewrite and manipulate their personalities to follow her every whim. All she could do right now was listen to how much suffering her friend had gone through while tears streamed down her own face. She could see similar things happening to Yuri and Natsuki at Sayori's sides.

"I had started to contemplate suicide. It was a constant thought in my life these days, and the only thing that kept me from doing it was telling myself that tomorrow would be better. I'd be happy starting tomorrow. I'd turn my life around tomorrow. Don't do it, tomorrow everything will be fine. I tried calling a suicide prevention hotline, but as I tried to explain to the lady on the line what I was feeling, I realized how pathetic I sounded, and hung up so she could help people who needed it more than me. That sounds really dumb, saying it out loud, but I became obsessed with the thought of deserving stuff. You always hear about these people who struggled through depression until they said 'enough is enough' to themselves and start turning their life around all by themselves. And they always have good reasons to be

depressed, like PTSD from fighting in a war, or a loved one dying. And there I was, a teenage girl who had four amazing friends with my biggest concern being that they hung out with each other, and I still couldn't bring myself to eat anything besides oatmeal and instant ramen. I didn't deserve to be saved. I was a burden to society, and suicide began to look more and more appealing, not just as an escape route for me, but as a way for everyone else to stop worrying about looking after a lost cause."

Sayori emptied her glass of water.

"Which brings us back to yesterday. I had been lying in my bed all afternoon, not having the strength or motivation to get up. The only reason I can get up in school mornings is because I know MC would walk there with me, and I didn't want him to see the mess my room was in, or find the noose I had tied months before, hanging over my chair. Weekends would usually be spent sitting in my bed, staring at the noose until late into the evening, wondering if today would be the day, before I got so hungry that I had to get up and make myself some ramen. But something shook me out of my thoughts, and made me get up early. I could hear MC's voice outside my window."

"We had come to invite Sayori to a town fair." Yuri said, her voice calm and quiet, even as wet tears were trickling down her face. "We hadn't seen her outside school since the incident at Natsuki's house, and truth be told, we were mildly worried about her. MC was telling us stories about his and Sayori's childhoods, how inseparable they had been, how much fun they had had together, and how much she meant to him. I... I was enchanted by his words, how highly he spoke of her, and without thinking, I gave him a hug right outside Sayori's house."

"I had made my way to the window to see if it really was MC out there, and I caught the hug." Sayori took over. "And just then, when I saw how happy they looked, with Yuri's arms around him and Natsuki at his side, I knew what I had to do. Yuri had confided in me about her issues with her cutting, and how MC had helped her, and I had been at Natsuki's and knew about how MC was helping her sleep. I knew how much Monika liked to flirt with him. And I knew then that all of you deserved him so much more than me, who isn't as smart as Yuri or as talented as Natsuki, or as funny and hardworking as Monika. It was unfair to all of you that I was there with my feelings for him, making an already difficult choice between you harder than it needed to be. So I decided to remove myself from the playing field. I grabbed my noose and threw it over the hanger near the ceiling in my bedroom, where I hang my clothes to dry. I then tied the end of the robe to my heavy desk, and-"

"Please." Monika interrupted. "Stop. I- i can't hear this."

The Club President felt sick. Like she would throw up if Sayori spoke another word. She felt awful, Sayori was being so brave, telling them all about the darkest moment of her life, and she couldn't even do her the decency of listening to it.

"Sorry." Sayori said, and Monika felt even more horrible. "I think you get the gist of it, anyway."

"I'm the one who's sorry." Yuri said in a choked voice. "It's my fault... if I hadn't... that hug... should have realized..."

"Anything could have set me off. If it hadn't been you, it would have been some other thing. My mind was already looking everywhere, searching for the smallest excuse to kill me, and it just so happened to be that hug. I don't blame you, and you shouldn't blame yourself. I'm just lucky I didn't do it correctly, and that my friends were nearby."

Monika was sure she didn't want to know what she meant, but for some reason she asked anyway.

"C-correctly?" She managed.

Sayori looked up at her with her sad, blue eyes, and sighed.

"Apparently, the 'proper' way to hang yourself is jumping from a high enough point, so that the rope snaps your neck, killing you quickly and painlessly. But turns out I couldn't even do that right."

The blood seemed to freeze solid in Monika, making her spine tingle. She didn't want to hear this, but she couldn't speak. The way Sayori was so casually talking about her own suicide attempt was creepier and more disturbing than any of Yuri's poems.

"I should have researched it better. It was a sign of how much my mind had deteriorated. I just did what I thought you were supposed to do. I dragged a chair over below the noose, got up, and inserted my neck into the hole. I wasn't really afraid, or sad, but rather... satisfied. Not that the voices were impressed with me. They kept telling me that it was about time, that I should just get on with it, stop wasting everybodys time."

She hesitated, scratching her head.

"Sorry, I'm rambling." She said. "Uh... so yeah, I thought the way you did it was just, kicking away the chair, and let the rope do the rest of the work, so that's what I did."

She touched the mark on her throat, massaging it lightly as she reminisced on what she had done.

"It... it wasn't good. Obviously. The robe cut into my throat, and I was in a world of pain. I tried thinking that this was how it should be, that I deserved this, that all of this was for the best, but my body was acting on it's own. I kicked out with my legs, trying to reach the chair I had kicked over, to try and get a foothold. My fingers were clawing at the robe, trying to lift myself. I guess it was my survival instincts kicking in. Even then, I could hear the voice telling me that I couldn't even die properly. That I was pathetic for fighting back. That I should just accept it and die with some dignity. I felt like I hung there for hours, my body fighting, me giving up, realizing I couldn't take this pain and started fighting back again. Each time I tried moving it felt harder and harder, my limbs getting heavier, but still the pain got more and more intense, and I was just regretting everything. Not killing myself, but just living in the first place. Spots were appearing in my eyes, until I couldn't see. My last thought was if I should have written a note, but figured it would be a waste of time for the ones who had to read it. My poems never really were that good, after all."

She stopped talking to pour herself another glass of water.

Monika was aghast. Her stomach was churning at the mental image of Sayori hanging in her room, gasping in futile effort to scream, limbs flailing madly as she struggled to find some desperate way to save herself, unsuccessfully. Although she hadn't been there, this vision her mind had fabricated from Sayori's story would be sure to haunt her nightmares for many months to come.

"How-" Monika's throat felt dry. "How on earth were you saved?"

"I- I don't really know." Sayori answered. "I just woke up in MC's arms, with Yuri standing over me. I never really asked."

"We heard a crash from your half-open window." Yuri explained. "Probably from when you kicked your chair. We called up to you, and got worried when you didn't reply, so we hurried into the house, MC leading the way up the stairs to your room. But... we weren't ready for the sight that met us. Me and Natsuki both froze in the doorway, struggling to comprehend what we were seeing. It was so scary. You were completely still, and your eyes were half open, looking through us. While we were staring at you uselessly, MC rushed towards you, grabbing your legs and lifting you as much as he could. He shouted at you, at us, yelling that we had to help, get you down from there. And still, I just stood and stared. I was so sure you were dead, all life was completely gone from your eyes. I tried to formulate sentences, tried to explain to myself as much as him that you were, that it was no use trying to save you, and he just yelled at us in response. I'd never heard him raise his voice at me before, but he shouted at the top of his lungs that you weren't dead. And then, I noticed one of your legs spasmed, just a little. I started hearing again, and heard the faint rattle coming from your mouth. Without thinking, I reached into my bag, pulled out my knife, and threw it at the rope above her head."

"It severed, just like that, and Sayori was released, leaving MC to catch her." Natsuki said. She was openly crying. "Yuri stepped forward to provide first aid. I... I just stood in the door opening. I didn't know what to do, what to say. I just stood there."

Monika looked at the heartbroken pinkhaired girl. She'd like to think she would have done better in such a situation, but based on all of these revelations today, she wasn't so sure.

"It was like waking up from a nightmare." Sayori said. "The voice had disappeared when I looked up at his face. I was still in pain, I couldn't talk and my neck was on fire, but as I looked up at his smile, I knew he would be able to chase away any rainclouds in my life."

The girls sat like that for a while, saying nothing as they all dabbed at their eyes with paper towels from Natsuki's quickly dwindling supply. At last, Sayori broke the silence again.

"From then on, it was a lot of crying and hugging. My throat wouldn't let me speak yet, so we all just sat there on the floor, me and Yuri and MC with our arms around each other, bawling our eyes out. I tried to say I was sorry, sorry for scaring them like that, sorry for inconveniencing them. I knew it was stupid, so I'm glad I couldn't speak, but they seemed to get my meaning anyway and just whispered words of comfort to me. It was... nice."

"I baked her some brownies while they were comforting her in her room." Natsuki said, a single tear travelling down her cheek. "I'm not good at cheering people up, so I went to the

store instead to buy ingredients. It was honestly kinda depressing to see her kitchen. I'd probably try to kill myself too, if all I had for breakfast was half a bag of oatmeal and a quarter liter of expired milk."

"That's not funny, Natsuki." Yuri said, quietly.

"I know." Natsuki said, voice breaking as she took her own piece of paper towel and dabbed at her eyes. "I- I also thought if I stayed in the room, I would begin yelling at her. Call her names, call her stupid. I felt horrible for even feeling it, but I was so angry with her."

"I deserved it so-"

"No!" Natsuki yelled. "Stop saying that. You're the nicest girl in this club. Seriously, I know I'm a total bitch, but compared to you, we're all bitches. You don't deserve anything bad in life, so don't you dare say you do!"

Sayori looked down, tears in her eyes. "Sorry."

"Don't say sorry! Are you even listen-"

"Natsuki." Yuri simply said, and Natsuki swallowed her words. "I think that's enough."

Silence again.

"After awhile, I regained the ability to speak again." Sayori said. "We had all bundled up on the floor with a blanket over us, me cuddled up to MC and Yuri at my side. Natsuki had joined, sitting on MC's other side. We were eating Natsuki's brownies while watching a movie. It was nice. No one was pushing me to say anything, to explain myself, but I knew I had to. So I paused the movie. It took me some time to say it, my throat hurt and I had more than a few coughing fits, but eventually I explained to them my depression, the voice, even... my feelings about MC."

"We all reacted the way you did, with Yuri's story." Natsuki said, looking at Monika. "That she could have him. Yeah, we all love him, and yeah he's helped us through a great deal. But not in this way."

"We tried assuring Sayori that there would be no ill feelings if she began dating MC." Yuri said. "That of course we would still be friends, all of us."

"I- I agree." Monika said. And she really did.

Sayori's story had shaken her to her very core. She'd never thought a girl who seemingly wore her feelings on her sleeve would be hiding something this dark. She had come in here today to talk about her undying love for the man of her dreams, to let them down easy as she explained why they couldn't have him. Instead, they had flipped the whole thing on its head, essentially telling her that she was the last person who had any right to MC's heart.

And to be honest? That was fine.

Of course she could deal. Yeah, she didn't think she'd ever find a man as great, as kind, as perfect as MC. But that was exactly why Sayori should have him. Because she was the best

of them, and if MC made her happy, then she should have him. But to her surprise, Sayori got a hard look in her eyes.

"No." She said.

"No?" Monika repeated, confused.

"I don't want to take him away from all of you. You have just as much right to him as I do. You're all so much more talented and smarter than me. It's not fair if I automatically get him just because I did something stupid and cowardly."

"Sayori, you're not a coward!" Monika couldn't believe what she was hearing. They had all told her that they had no problem with her getting MC, and she still thought it wasn't fair. She really was so much better than her. "You... you tried to kill yourself! You need him mo-"

"We all need him!" Sayori punched the table, her raised voice causing another coughing fit.

Monika had never heard her so angry before.

"Yuri needed him to make her stop cutting herself! Natsuki needed him to help get rid of her dad. You need him because you love him!" Sayori spoke with passion in her voice. "I can get some medication. I can see a therapist. Having MC can't, and won't be the only reason for me living! And I will not!" She hit the table again to emphasize her point. "Be the reason for you not getting the one you love."

Sayori took a shuddering breath.

"This whole thing about who deserves what, based on how good a person they are, how much they've suffered... It's dumb. It's all I hear when the voice speaks. It's the reason I didn't seek help with my depression. It's the reason I tried hanging myself. I will not have it be the reason you can't be with MC. Because..." Sayori looked up at each of them, her expression softening, and a small, unsure smile crept back onto her face. "...we all deserve love, right?"

Monika looked at her, not comprehending what she was hearing.

"We all know MC was the best thing to ever happen to this club. To ever happen to us. We're never going to find another guy like him again. Taking him from any of you... I couldn't do that. But... maybe there is a way for us all to have him without taking him away from the others?"

Monika couldn't tell where this was going. "Sayori, what are you saying?"

"She explained it to us last night, and it took us hours to get it." Natsuki said.

"This is the true thing we needed to talk about, Monika. The real reason we've talked all day." Yuri said.

"We can all date MC." Sayori said, her eyes sparkling. "Share him."

Monika stared at them all, face full of incomprehension. She could see skeptical optimism in Yuri and Natsuki's faces, and pure hope glinting in Sayori's sapphire eyes. They were actually serious about this suggestion. This was all such a Sayori-thing. To put her friends happiness above her own, to make sure that no one was left out. But the thing she was suggesting... could they really do it? Could *she* really do it? This was quite a bit more serious than sharing something like a game, or a cupcake. No one did this. It was completely unheard of. And yet... looking at Sayori's genuine face, she was actually considering the possibilities of it. It was such a ludicrous idea, and yet she owed it to her friends to hear them out.

"Did you two agree to this idea?" Monika asked Yuri and Natsuki, keeping her face neutral so as to not give anyone an impression of what she was thinking.

"At first? No way." Natsuki said. "I couldn't really see myself sharing MC with someone like Yuri, not to mention two others. No offense."

"I was thinking the same, originally." Yuri said. "But..."

"...after thinking about it..." Natsuki continued. "If we worked out some of the logistics..."

"...and managed to come up with a system..." Yuri said.

"...arranging days of the week where we can each have him..." Natsuki said.

"...in a fair, balanced way..." Yuri said.

"...and accounting for times where we just need him, like my night terrors..." Natsuki said.

"...Sayori can under no circumstances be alone at any time this month..." Yuri said.

"...then maybe..." Natsuki said.

"...potentially..." Yuri said.

"...It could work." They both said in unison.

Monika stared at her friends. She would never have thought Yuri and Natsuki could agree to do something this big. To share a boyfriend, not just with each other, but Sayori and Monika herself, too. This could never work. Too many variables to go wrong, too many feelings to get hurt...

And yet, as she looked into Sayori's hopeful face, her mood softened. *Why* exactly couldn't it work? She loved MC, and she loved her friends. They all meant the world to her, and she was starting to think maybe she meant the world to them, too. Even if she didn't think highly of herself sometimes, didn't she owe it to them to give this a try?

"...okay." She said, at last.

"Really?!" Sayori yelled, rising from her chair, then doubling over as she began to cough again. She quickly got over it though, and rushed to tackle Monika in a hug.

Monika hugged her back. How could she have planned to steal away the happiness from this wonderful girl?

"We still need to come up with a system." Monika said in a half-hearted attempt to get some control of the situation back. "I still have my doubts if we can pull this off without anyone getting left out."

"Of course we can." Sayori said to Monika's shoulder, as she didn't slacken her grip on the Club President. She sounded happier than she had been in months, and it positively melted Monika's heart. "It'll be the simplest thing in the world!"

And despite herself, in that moment, Monika seemed to believe her.

Things were going to be just fine.

"What'll be the simplest thing in the world?"

All heads turned towards the boyish voice. Standing in the door opening to the classroom, stood the familiar body of MC, a slight smile on his face, but also mild concern in his eyes, as he noticed all the folded up paper towels laying around the round table, evidence of the crying that had taken place.

"MC!" All the girls shouted in unison, and they all rose from their chairs, all running up to him and tackling the boy with a furious attack hug. The push from all fronts made them all collapse on the floor, giggling wildly.

"Sorry I was late." He said sheepishly, blushing as the four girls remained attached on top of him. "What have you guys been talking about?" In a more serious tone of voice, he added "You ok, Sayori?"

"I'm super, now that you're here!" The red-bowed girl said, her voice finally matching the usual cheeriness of Sayori.

"We were just talking about Sayori's proposition." Monika said, trailing a playful finger over the boy's cheek, her voice huskier, more flirty. She couldn't help it, everytime she saw MC she just got this way. "We decided we'd give it a try." She whispered in his ear.

"Sayori's proposition? What's that mean?" came the boy's bemused reply.

Monika snapped her head towards her fellow club members. Surely not, right?

But their guilty expressions told her everything.

"You didn't tell him?" She asked, incredulous.

"Uhh..." Yuri muttered nervously.

"We just figured he would automatically be on board." Natsuki reasoned. "You were the important one to convince."

"Convince of what?" MC said, frowning slightly. Based on previous instances of the girls antics, he wasn't entirely comfortable with being left out in the dark like this.

"Oh boy..." Monika closed her eyes. Once again, it was up to the Club President to save the day by explaining the idea someone else had come up with to the hopelessly unaware boy. They'd been in this room for a while, and it looked like they weren't leaving it any time soon.

"You're gonna love this, trust me." Sayori rasped in her reassuring voice.

He smiled cautiously. These girls were going to be the death of him one day.

End Notes

Hope you all like this story. Feedback is appreciated, and suggestions on how to improve it is accepted, although I probably won't fix anything in this particular story aside from typos, so don't hesitate to point them out.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!