

THERE'S
NO WAY

A SIDE

CHARACTER LIKE
ME

COULD BE
POPULAR,
RIGHT?

2

Author
Sekaiichi

Illustrator
Tomari



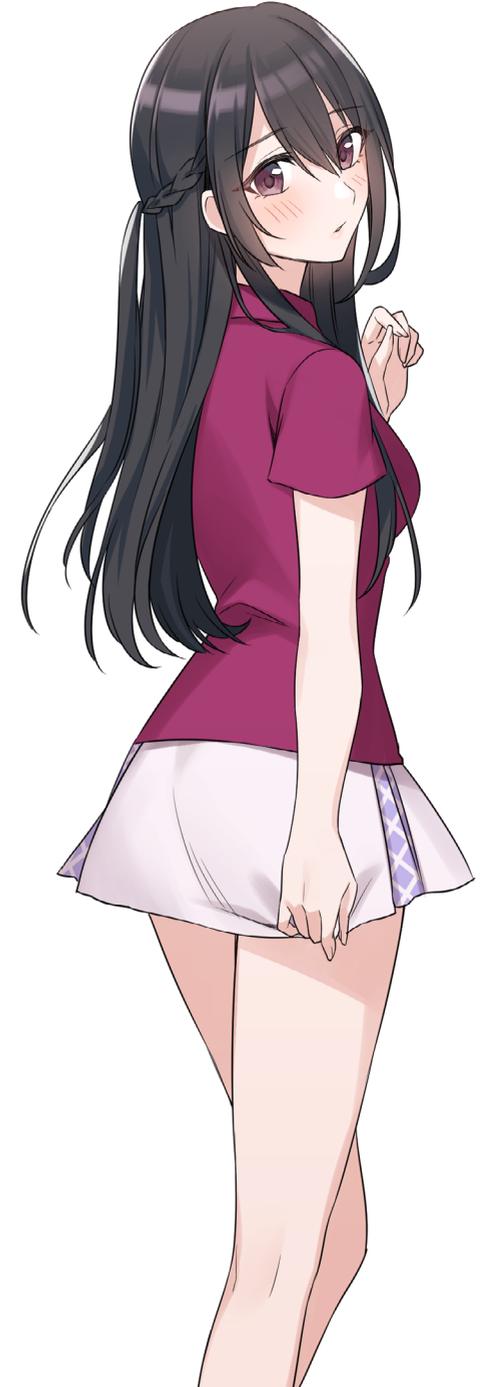
"D-DOES IT
SUIT ME?"



"WELL? WHAT DO
YOU THINK, SENPAI?"



"WHY DO I HAVE TO
WEAR THIS TOO...?"





ASAKURA YOSHITO

He used to be afraid of Yuuji until he got to know him better. Now they're good friends.

TOMOKI YUUJI

He gives off really scary vibes, which makes everyone nearby run away in fear. He believes that he's just the side character in Haruma's story.

IKE HARUMA

Yuuji's friend. As someone who's totally flawless, he should be this story's protagonist.

"I GOTCHU!"



IKE TOUKA

Even though she's faking her relationship with Yuuji, she does harbor real feelings for him.



"WAIT JUST A MOMENT
THEN, OKAY?"

HASAKI KANA

Haruma's childhood friend.
She used to hang out with Touka a lot
when they were younger, but now they've
grown pretty distant.



"YOU'D BETTER BRACE
YOURSELF, SENPAI!"

#DECLARATIONOFWAR

Table of Contents

There's no way a Side Character like me
could be Popular, right?

Volume 2

Author: Sekaiichi

Illustrator: Tomari

[Chapter 1: There's no way a Side Character like me could be popular, right?](#)

[Chapter 2: The Promise](#)

[Chapter 3: A Vertical Relationship](#)

[Chapter 4: A Confession or Something Else?](#)

Chapter 1: There's no way a Side Character like me could be popular, right?

My time in middle school wasn't the greatest. Actually, scratch that—I'd say my past 15 years on this earth have been pretty shitty.

People have always avoided me. I don't know whether it's out of fear, hatred, or something else. If I had to hazard a guess, I'd say it's because of my looks. Apparently, I look like I'm constantly out for blood. Well, that's the story of my life summed up: people stay well out of my way, so I never had much chance for social interaction.

Ever since entering high school, though, things have definitely started to look up. Yeah, I'd say my life is pretty decent right now. Don't get me wrong—there are still swarms of people who basically shit their pants at the mere sight of me or immediately want to bash my face in. But at least now I can say there are also people who understand my situation.

Take one of my classmates, Asakura Yoshito, for example. We got to know each other at a school event. Although he was scared of me at first, we've ended up becoming buds. There's also Kai Rekka. Sure, I had to beat the shit out of him first, but he's been a good friend ever since. Next, we have Chiaki Makiri-Sensei. She's one of the few people who took a shine to me, and she's been on my side from the beginning. She's never really cared about how I looked. And let's not forget about Touka. We're faking a relationship right now, but she's really been a big help overall. Last, but not least, there's the real protagonist of this story—Ike Haruma, my best friend.

Thanks to them, I've been able to experience a fairly normal high school life and live out my youth.

Well, there are still a fair amount of hurdles. I guess I should mention that there are a lot of people who doubt my innocence, as well as others who question the validity of my relationship with Touka.

One of those people happens to be Haruma's childhood friend, Hasaki Kana. She's basically the school's idol, and she's got a lot going for herself. She treats everyone equally and always talks to them with a smile on her face—everyone, of course, except for me. Let's not forget that she's a national contender in

tennis and entered this prestigious school with the highest marks in the entire prefecture. Add her beauty, friendly personality, athleticism, and brains together, and you get a formula for one of the school's most popular girls. She constantly has guys chasing after her. Even I have to admit that she's pretty cute.

Everyone knows that she has a thing for Haruma, but that doesn't deter heaps of guys from confessing to her every week. Like, heaps and heaps. Tons.

Anyway, back on topic—she's someone who basically likes everybody, and everybody likes her in return. So knowing that she's not only so against my “relationship” with Touka, but also against me as a person makes me feel awful. She must really hate my guts.

Now just compare her, one of the school's idols, to me, the school's outcast. That's why I'm really optimistic about how things have turned out in the last few days and how they'll develop from here. I think it could be a great chance to overturn the status quo.



A few days ago, I found a letter inside my locker. It told me to meet them behind the gym building later that day, so I did. At first, I figured it was either some stupid punk trying to pick a fight, or someone ballsy enough to try and pull a prank on me. Still, in the back of my mind,

I couldn't shake the feeling that something was off about the whole thing. But it wasn't until I saw the author of the letter that I was truly shocked.

“I'm really sorry to have you come all the way out here out of the blue.”

It was Hasaki Kana who left the letter in my locker. What the hell was going on?

The scene totally looked like a love confession. As if that would ever happen, though, right? I reminded myself that I was the side character, so I needed to think rationally. Someone like me would never get a sudden confession.

We looked at each other silently. The only sounds around us were made by the whispering wind as it played with her hair. Her hair was tied into a cute side ponytail, and it fluttered in the breeze.

After what felt like an eternity of silence, she took a deep breath, steeled herself for what she wanted to say, and faced me head-on.

“I'm so sorry, but could we start as friends and see how things go from there?!”

...Wait, what? What the hell did she just say?

I completely forgot about the whole side character thing for a moment. Had I just been friendzoned without a proper confession first? Huh?

Chapter 2: The Promise

It's lunch break. I haven't seen any sign of Touka, so I'll ask Ike if he wants to eat together instead—never mind, here she comes.

"Hey there, Yuuji-senpai! Let's have lunch together!"

In case you've forgotten, Touka's supposedly my girlfriend. Believe me, she tries her hardest to make sure everyone and their mother knows it. Just to be clear, though, we're not actually dating. In truth, we're faking a relationship.

But yeah, back to reality—she enters my class shouting excitedly so that everybody's eyes are on us. I stare back at them, and they avert their gaze and go back to minding their own business. No matter how many times it happens, I still don't find their act funny. Sometimes I swear they're doing it on purpose, but who cares at this point. Maybe I should change up the routine a bit: I could hit them with a new reaction instead of glaring at them and see how they react. It's been a month already, and this whole shtick is way past its expiration date.

I stand up and head over to the entrance to meet her. As I do, I can sense someone else's eyes fixated on me; they belong to Hasaki Kana. She doesn't really buy our relationship, and she's pretty distrustful of me. I'd really like to have a one-on-one with her to try and clear things up, but I haven't gotten the chance yet.

"Come on, Senpai! You should be a little more lively when I come to see you! For starters, maybe don't walk around looking like your dog just died?"

Okay, mom. Sorry I'm not being enthusiastic enough. Jeez.

"Yeah, whatever. Usual place?" I answer, trying to move on.

She looks pissed for a second at my flippant response, but then blushes slightly at the mention of our "usual place"—the courtyard. Huh, that's weird.

"Something wrong?" I ask.

"Oh, no, I just... I'd really like for us to go to the roof today instead. Do you mind?" she asks while averting her eyes.

She's carrying a basket with her, so I can hazard a guess why she wants to go there.



We arrive at the roof. Normally, this place is off-limits to students, but Touka noticed a while ago that the door's lock is broken. Because of that, we've come up here a handful of times already.

"Senpai, can you spread the sheet?"

I nod wordlessly, grab the folded sheet placed near the entrance, and lay it out on the ground. If I remember correctly, Touka brought it up here a few days ago. I know she's very keen on adding more things to the setup up here, as well. She mentioned bringing up a table or something? I guess the rooftop will have a lot going for it in the near future.

We sit ourselves down on the sheet.

"Welp, Senpai—today's your lucky day! I, your beloved girlfriend, have prepped lunch for you! No longer do you have to eat those nasty-ass cafeteria sandwiches that you always get. You happy?" she chirps. She retrieves a pair of lunch boxes from her basket and hands one to me.

I asked her a while back to make some food for me, so I figure that's why we're on the roof today. If we'd had this picnic in the courtyard, where everyone can see us, I can already imagine the sting from the daggers they'd be staring at me. Pretty much every other guy in school would be jealous of me.

"Thanks. And yeah, I'm quite happy about this."

"O-Oh, really?! I gotta admit, you're pretty cute when you're being honest!" she says while looking away, her face tinged bright red.

"So you're saying that since you made this, I can expect something better than those 'nasty-ass sandwiches?'"

Her cheeks puff at my remark.

"What?" I ask.

"I just wanna remind you that I didn't make you lunch just 'cause 'you wanted some,' okay?! I did it 'cause, well..."

Yeah, yeah—because we're "in a relationship." I get it. Despite this not being real, I feel as if Touka and I have come to trust each other a lot. Maybe she made this for me today as a result of that friendship. Or maybe she felt the need to do it because of our situation. I'd like to think it's the former, though—it makes me happier that way.

"Sure. Thanks anyway. I'm gonna dig in now, if you don't mind," I say as I open

the lid of the box.

Inside is a variety of foods arranged neatly in a colorful spread. It looks rather appealing.

“Okay, Senpai, open your mouth!” Touka exclaims. She takes her chopsticks, plucks a piece of bacon-wrapped asparagus from the box, and presents it to me.

“Uh... You know you don't have to feed me, right?”

“What's wrong with you, Senpai? You never know if somebody is spying on us right now, y'know. We gotta play the part just to be safe!” she says with a smile.

“The hell are you talking abo—Mmph!”

She doesn't even let me finish my sentence before stuffing the food into my mouth with a devilish grin. I wanna chew her out so bad, but the food's actually pretty frickin' good; I'm left chewing the food without a complaint instead. I savor the taste. Man, it's tasty. What can I say?

“Sooo... how is it, Senpai?” she says with the same devilish grin.

“Pretty good,” I whisper.

“Nice,” she says with a sigh of relief.

Seeing her smile like that brightens my mood, and my annoyance totally dissipates. I completely forget about the fact that she almost made me choke. I guess she notices me smiling back at her and finds it creepy, because hers instantly vanishes. “What's wrong?” she asks.

I can't tell her that her smile lifted my spirits. I gotta think of something else to say.

“Just don't go suddenly shoving food in people's mouths like that, please,” I answer as brusquely as possible.

“Oh, okay! I'll be sure to let you know next time!” she replies. She picks up a piece of omelet from her box and pops it into her mouth.

Man, does that mean she's planning on pulling that shit again? Ugh, whatever. Just smile and eat, Tomoki. Smile and eat.



We've finished eating, so now we're sipping some tea and chatting while we wait for the break to be over. I suddenly recall Hasaki Kana's stare back in class. Guess I can ask Touka about it.

“You and Hasaki have known each other for years now, right? You were basically friends or something at some point, if I remember correctly?”

Touka's smile vanishes the moment she hears Kana's name.

“Um, why are you even asking me about that?”

“I'm just curious about her.”

That murderous look she gave me the moment Touka stepped in and called my name flashes through my mind. I'd like her to acknowledge my relationship with Touka, considering she's the one who's the most adamant about it being “real.” I know the two of them don't get along very well right now, but I want to know what they were like before. I'd be lying if I said I'm not curious about it.

“Oh, so you're curious about it, huh? But, uh, d'you think it's a good idea to, like, talk about other girls in front of your girlfriend? You sure are tactless when it comes to women, huh? How about, I dunno, not doing it at all?” she says. She's got a poker face on, but her voice clearly indicates she's angry.

Man, and she was so happy until now. It's not teasing, either—she's definitely upset, and it's all my fault. I think back to that one time Kana and Ike joined us for lunch. Touka was pretty brutal toward her, but I never expected her to be such a sore topic for Touka even when she's not around.

“I'm sorry. I just want to understand why she won't accept our relationship; that's all. I only want to know what happened between the two of you that makes you act the way you do now. But if you don't wanna talk about it, let's just leave it here. I'm not going to force you to discuss it or anything,” I try to softly explain.

“Oooh... So that's what you meant. Got it,” she says with a sigh of relief. She definitely seems less pissed now.

“What did you think I meant?”

She lets out another sigh and relaxes her posture, but doesn't give me a response. Seriously? Now I'm the one who's getting pissed. Finally, she speaks up.

“I guess we got along pretty well up 'til a certain person graduated from middle school.”

“Did something happen?”

“Yeah, let's just go with that. I feel like it was for a pretty stupid reason, though, so I don't really feel like talking about it,” she mutters as she plays with her bangs.

“Okay. If that’s the case, I won’t pry any further,” I reply.

“Thanks!” she exclaims with a smile.

It’s a shame, but if Touka’s not open to explaining everything, then it’s not really my place to butt in. As if scripted, the bell rings with perfect timing.

“Let’s get back to class.”

“Yeah.”

We stand, put the sheet back where it was, and head back inside. Right as we’re about to part ways, Touka turns around and tugs on one of my sleeves.

“Oh, right—I forgot to tell you something, Senpai!”

“What?”

“It just came to me, actually. You have tests next week, right?”

Now that she mentions it, yeah. The freshmen have their first round of tests coming up, just like we sophomores do.

“I guess so. And...?”

She looks confused by my reply, but it’s quickly replaced by irritation. “What do you mean, ‘and’? We’re gonna study for the midterms together, duh! Make sure to leave your schedule open!”

“Huh? But you’re a first year. Study meets are meant for helping each other. How will ours be even remotely useful?”

“Well, you could help your cute little kouhai here with her studies!”

“Nah. You’ve got the top scores in your grade. Plus, that event the student council held a while back for the first years was plenty for you. Didn’t you say that you could study on your own, anyway?”

A vein pops up on her forehead, and she loses her cool, “But aren’t we, y’know, a couple and all that?!”

I wish I could roast her and retort with, “No we’re fucking not!” But unfortunately, I can’t, so I just nod silently instead.

“You know when couples have a ‘study meet’ together, they don’t necessarily ‘study,’ right?”

“Okay, Socrates. Maybe chill with the cryptic bullshit and get to the point?” I snap. I legitimately don’t get what she’s getting at with all of this. She wants to set up a study meet where we don’t study? What in the hell kind of idea is that?

She stares at me wordlessly. The awkward silence stretches on until I break it.

“Sigh... Okay, okay. I was gonna study at home alone anyway, so sure. I’ll open up my schedule,” I mumble, and her face lights up.

“Nice! I can’t wait! I’ll fill you in on the details later, okay?!” she replies with a happy tone. She finally leaves my side to return to class. Right before she goes through the door, though, she turns around again and waves at me.

How can she be so ecstatic about a study meet? I don’t get it, and I can’t help but feel like it’s gonna be a total drag. Then again, I’ve never had the chance to experience this sort of thing before. So I guess I might actually be looking forward to it, as well. Man, I’m kinda embarrassed now.

Chapter 3: A Vertical Relationship

Classes are over for the day, so Touka and I meet up to walk home together. As per usual, I'm getting some curious glances and not-too-friendly looks from guys who're still butthurt about me being with Touka. I guess it's part of the package deal—Touka's looks, smarts, and friendly personality have ensured her a place at the top of the school's hierarchical pyramid. She's a celebrity, just like me; although you might say I'm known for all the wrong reasons. I'm pretty much Touka's complete opposite. I look terrifying and, to make matters worse, I've never really learned to hone my social skills. I mostly keep to myself, so I'm labeled the school's token "criminal." As a result, there are all sorts of rumors flying around about me.

I look over at Touka, trying to judge her reaction. I'm a little worried, not gonna lie; it wouldn't be the first time her mood has soured because of onlookers. But surprisingly enough, she looks as cheerful as ever. Actually, she looks a little too cheerful. Something's definitely off. Maybe she's already used to everyone fawning over her because of her massive popularity at school? As for me, I'm not sure if I'll ever get used to the legions of guys staring at me and whispering things like, "How dare you get so close to Ike."

"Hey, Boss! How was your day?!" a voice rings out behind us. I turn in the direction of the soccer field and see a guy with a shaved head approaching us. His name is Kai Rekka. You may remember him as that first year who's stuck by me ever since we duked it out over some, uh, "differences," let's say. We've been getting along well since then.

I stop and wait for him to catch up to us, but Touka doesn't seem too happy about that. "What are you standing around for, Senpai? Come on, let's go home already," she says with a poker face.

"Oh, come on—we can spare a moment to talk to him, right?" I ask.

"To be completely honest, I'd rather not," she snaps back.

She's furious at Kai; not that I can blame her. I can't really argue about it either, mainly because she's angry on my behalf. At one point in our fight, he'd pulled a knife on me. According to her, she can't ever forgive him after that.

"Sup, Boss! Heading home?" Kai says, apparently blissfully unaware of Touka's anger.

"Yep. Also, can you please call me Tomoki instead of 'Boss?'"

"You got it, Boss!" he answers with a smile.

Unfortunately, his smile doesn't mean shit—seems like my request went in one ear and out the other. It's a nice smile, though. Even with his totally-shaved head, he's still a good-looking guy all around.

"Crap, Tomoki's making other first years call him 'Boss?'"

"I feel bad for that guy. My heart goes out to him."

"Didn't he shave because of Tomoki, too?"

"Goddamn. I swear, man—Tomoki Yuuji's the devil himself."

Now everybody around us has started muttering about how much of a dastardly villain I am. Did they even hear what I just told Kai? Guess he's not the only one with a hearing problem.

"You got a moment, Kai-kun?" Touka asks.

"Oh, right, I forgot you were here with Boss, Touka. Going home, too?" he answers.

Oh shit, looks like she's gotten super pissed from everyone whispering about us. I can tell.

"So, like, don't you ever realize that by calling Yuuji-senpai 'Boss,' you only make him look bad? Everyone already thinks he's a wackjob. Seriously, can you wrap your head around that for, like, one second? I respect that you hold Senpai in high esteem. That's not the issue here. You can respect him all you want, but don't you dare keep fucking him over with that title crap, or I swear I won't let you two interact ever again."

Everyone falls completely silent after she finishes her heated lecture, Kai included. He looks around us, enraged after finally realizing that people have been talking shit about me, then hangs his head in shame. After a moment, he lifts his head again, looks me in the eyes, takes a deep breath, and says, "I'll be careful from now on. I apologize, Tomoki-senpai. And you too, Touka. My bad. I wouldn't have realized without you pointing it out. Thanks."

Before our "disagreement," Kai wouldn't have been able to process something like that. After our fight, however, he's been more open to taking advice, changing his attitude, and apologizing. I think it's a great thing, actually—it shows how much the guy's improving.

I look at Touka. She's standing stock still, but it's obvious she's frustrated by the whole situation. He must've put her in a tough spot thanks to his apology; I notice her click her tongue in irritation.

"I do have one thing I'd like to ask for, though," Kai says, raising his head to look straight at me. I nod to let him know he can continue.

"Can I call you Boss whenever we're alone, Tomoki-senpai?" he whispers. He blushes and lowers his gaze bashfully.

Huh. And to think he wanted to literally kill me just a little while ago. Just look at him now. I feel like I'm his role model or something. Not gonna lie, it feels pretty good to be seen in that light.

"Sure, if you want to," I respond. His dejected look instantly vanishes, and he flashes me a bright smile.

"Nice! Thanks, Tomoki-senpai!"

"Don't mention it. Anyway, we're gonna head home now. You should get back on that soccer field and break a leg. You hear me?"

"Yep! Okay, guys, sorry for keeping you! Take care on the way back!" he answers. He bows and runs back to the training field. I think he's one of the first guys who's shown me that much respect.

I glance over at Touka to see how she's faring right now. "What's wrong?" she asks.

"Nothing," I reply. She notices me looking at her and averts her eyes.

I can't really tell her I'm happy that Kai looks up to me and idolizes me so much. If I do, it'll just ruin her mood for our walk home. She'll definitely hit back with something like, "You better not lump us together just 'cause we're your underclassmen!"

Touka glares at Kai's figure off in the distance and angrily mutters, "You think this is over, you bald-headed psycho bitch? Don't think I don't notice all those dirty looks you've been giving him. How dare you."

"Oh, come on. You're exaggerating. There's no way he's looking at me like that."

She doesn't reply with words, but she targets me with her murderous glare instead. In return, I look straight back at her without flinching. We stare at each other silently, albeit tensely, for a few moments. In the end, Touka's the one who breaks our little staring contest by blushing and lowering her eyes. She takes a deep breath, which seems to relieve her bad mood slightly, and says, "I guess I

need to keep on my toes, anyways."

"You worry too much. Kai and I are never gonna go anywhere beyond just friends."

"Tomoki-kun, Ike-san... I know I'm barging in on your conversation, but do you mind if I talk to you? It's about Kai-kun," someone behind us voices.

Touka and I turn around. It's Chiaki Makiri-sensei. She's known as a really beautiful teacher at this school, but right now, her expression is stern and cold.

"He started it, not us," Touka quickly answers. She's slightly smiling, but she's clearly on high alert.



Makiri-sensei leads us to the student counseling room back at school. "Sit down, please," she says coolly. She's just as stony as ever.

Touka does as she's told without a word, but I instead gaze over at Makiri-sensei. She's one of the youngest and prettiest teachers at our school. She also happens to be strict with everyone, but she still has a sizable fanbase among the male students despite that.

"Sit down, Tomoki-kun," she urges me. I place myself next to Touka; Makiri-sensei is seated on the opposite side. Although Touka is looking away, I stare right at her.

"Do you have any idea why I've called you here? It's in regards to Kai-kun," she starts.

"No, we don't. We haven't done anything wrong to him, so, like, I don't even know why you felt the need to drag us all the way back here," Touka retorts.

I have no idea how much of Touka's attitude Makiri-sensei is willing to tolerate. I'll just keep quiet and see how things play out.

"What about you, Tomoki-kun? Any clue?" she asks, turning her head toward me.

"I'm guessing it's because of his recent changes or something?"

"That's right. Something's clearly changed with him ever since the Golden Week holiday started. One thing that's obvious is his appearance, but he's also begun to treat you differently."

Touka sighs. I know full well that she's not the type who takes well to getting preached at; even more so if Kai Rekka's the subject.

“I’m not very familiar with him, but what I do know is that he’s the sort of guy who cares a lot about his appearance. I can’t imagine that he just decided to shave his head on a whim. I also know that he didn’t take kindly to you initially, but now he’s very friendly with you. Wouldn’t you also find that strange?”

Nah, it’s not really strange considering what happened. He shaved his head after he lost our fight, but people inevitably started spreading rumors that I’d turned him into my “lackey” or something and forced him to shave it. I assume that’s why she called us here.

There’s no way Makiri-sensei seriously believes that, right? I figure that that nonsense has reached the teachers by now, so she must’ve heard them, as well. She likely decided to meddle and find out what’s really going on. That way, she can defend me and avoid further issues from arising. Yeah, I’m sure that must be it. Her expression is rigid, but she’s likely just worried about us. She’s been looking out for me ever since I started attending this school, after all.

“Sorry, I can’t really say why,” I answer. I’d get in trouble if I told her the truth—that the two of us had a fight on the roof, and that he’d pulled a knife on me. Kai would get it way worse than me for bringing a weapon to school.

Like I said, Makiri-sensei is strict but fair. She also knows exactly when to apply the rules. We’d both get punished in this case. Still, I can’t bring myself to lie to her. I’ll just stay silent about it instead.

“I see,” she whispers faintly while nodding. “Well, I know what happened, more or less. And believe me, something did occur between the two of you. Telling me that ‘you did nothing wrong’ while also telling me that ‘you can’t say what happened’ sounds quite suspicious, but I suppose the outcome is fine. You and Kai-kun ended up becoming friends after... whatever it was. In any case, I can’t really do anything for you guys now,” she says with a deep sigh.

Nice. Looks like she was able to figure it out, and, to add the cherry on top, we’re seemingly not getting punished either. I’m relieved, but Touka doesn’t seem to feel the same way. If anything, she appears to be surprised.

“Huh? What’re you even saying, Teach? Like, you’re not gonna give us a giant lecture or anything?” she asks incredulously.

“Yeah. I know it seems irresponsible to brush this off without a clear grasp of what happened, but I’ll believe you guys if you say you’re innocent. I won’t press Tomoki-kun if he doesn’t want to talk about it, either. Kai-kun was smiling when he was talking with you two earlier, like it was water under the bridge for

all of you. There have been a lot of complaints and inquiries swirling around, though, and I really want that to end,” Sensei explains. Touka stays silent as she continues in a serious tone, “If—for some reason—I’m wrong, and there is something going on with the three of you... I’ll consider it negligence on my end, and I’ll act accordingly.”

I gulp and manage to get out, “It was resolved. You can trust us on this. I swear.”

“Well, that’s good to hear,” she says with a sigh of relief. She quickly appends, “There’s something else I’d like to say. I’m aware that you managed to solve this issue just fine on your own. But if you guys ever find yourselves in another predicament, please come ask me for advice first. Don’t rush in and do anything rash.”

I thought she wasn’t mad at first, but I guess we’re still in a bit of trouble because we didn’t go to her for help. I’m kinda ashamed, but also glad that this won’t escalate further.

“Got it,” I say.

“Okay...” Touka wearily replies.

“Seems like I kept you two for quite a while. You can go home now. I apologize for bringing you two here. Be careful on your way home, okay? Goodbye,” she says as she stands up. Her stern look has been replaced with a gentle smile.



“I knew that if I told her the truth, she would’ve understood our situation, but I never would’ve guessed that she’d be able to tell even without me saying anything.”

Touka and I are heading toward the station now on our usual route home. She’s walking next to me with her eyes focused on me while I talk. She hasn’t said anything in a while, though, and her expression is rather sour.

“What?” I ask her.

“I think she’s a good teacher, too. She knows when to lay down the law and when to be lenient. Plus, she believed in us, but...,” she trails off. It’s clear she’s uncertain about something.

“But?” I prod her.

“Don’t you ‘like her’ a little bit too much?!”

“I really respect her, if that’s what you’re implying.”

“That’s not what I meant. Actually, I think she trusts you a little bit too much, too,” she says unhappily.

Oh, wait... She’s probably asking me if I harbor romantic feelings for Makiri-sensei. I guess she’s thinking that if it gets out of hand, it could put our “relationship” in jeopardy? How’d she even get an idea like that? No chance in hell I’d be able to score with someone like Makiri-sensei. First of all, she’s my teacher. Second of all, she’s way older than I am. Touka has to realize that much, right? Yeah, I can’t imagine she’s that dumb. Honestly, I have no idea why she’s so angry at me right now. Maybe she’s just pissed because we got dragged to the counseling room to go through a lecture.

“How is that even a bad thing?” I ask.

Touka’s expression darkens, and she whispers, “Maybe it’s not a bad thing now, but one day... What if she sees me as a potential rival and tries to go for you?”

“Why would you even say that? She’s on our side, you know.” I answer, unable to look past her comment. Makiri-sensei supports our relationship; why would she try to sabotage it? Besides, she’s our teacher. Having her against us would be big trouble... like, big frickin’ trouble.

Touka doesn’t say anything; she just smacks my arm. Why does she feel the need to hit me? And why can’t I tell her to cut it out when she does? I mean, it’s not like it hurts when she does—if anything, it tickles. I just want her to stop.

Unfortunately, Touka doesn’t speak at all on our way to the station. She keeps randomly hitting my arm instead.

Chapter 4: A Confession, or Something Else?

It’s the next day, and I’m at school per usual. I open my locker to fetch some of my belongings, but I notice something that wasn’t there before.

“The hell is this?”

There’s a letter inside; I grab it and check both sides. It’s completely blank. Well, since it’s inside my locker, I can’t assume it randomly ended up here by mistake. I’ll just open it and see what it says.

“Meet me behind the gym during lunch break,” it reads in surprisingly beautiful handwriting.

This has to be some kind of prank. This isn’t my first time receiving an anonymous letter like this, but it always ends in me getting stood up when I go to the place the letters specify. So the sender wants me to meet them behind the gym, huh? Since this is obviously another one of those fake letters trying to trick me, I’ll just ignore it. I stuff the letter inside my bag, put on my other pair of shoes, and head to class.

The moment I enter, the class chatter dies down. This only lasts a second or two, though—everyone returns to their respective discussions before I even reach my seat. Up until last year, the class would fall dead silent and remain that way until the teacher arrived. Thankfully, that isn’t the case this year.

“Morning, Yuuji.”

“Sup.”

The guy over there who just greeted me with the brightest of smiles is Ike Haruma. He’s good looking, athletic, academically brilliant, and incredibly popular with both the students and the teachers here. To top it off, he’s our student council president—he’s the closest thing to a superhero we’ll ever get. I consider him to be the obvious protagonist of this story. I mean, who else could it be? He’s also one of the few friends I have. I think he’s the only person my age who speaks to me directly.

“Morning, Tomoki.”

Whoops, scratch that. I forgot about my new friend for a moment. His name’s Asakura Yoshito, a member of the volleyball club. We met not too long

ago through an event organized by the student council. Although he was afraid of me just like everyone else at first, he got to know me a bit better. Now, I guess we're at a stage where he can talk to me as if I'm normal.

"Hey," I answer.

"What's wrong, Yuuji? You don't look very cheerful today," Haruma says.

How did he notice? Is it that obvious that I'm kinda down in the dumps?

"Seriously? He looks like he always does," Asakura quickly replies.

Of course he'd notice first—Ike and I have known each other for a while now. Plus, he's very sharp in general.

"I guess I'm a little upset, yeah," I mutter.

There are two reasons for my bad mood: first, there's the thing about the letter. Part of me wants to ignore it, but part of me is hoping that maybe—for once—it's not a joke. Second, someone's been glaring at me ever since I walked into class. That someone is none other than Hasaki Kana. She tends to have her eye on me whenever I'm in class, but today, it's more apparent that it usually is. I've never seen her so fixated on me before. It's kinda annoying.

I know that she doesn't like me very much, although she does kinda respect me in her own way. Still, it's not the most fun to be stared at like you're some museum exhibit.

"You found a letter inside your locker?" Ike suddenly inquires.

Without uttering a word, I retrieve the letter from my bag and hand it to him. Asakura looks over it, as well.

"No sender, huh? It just says to meet them there... Maybe it's a prank?" he asks suspiciously.

"Yeah, I think so, too. I'm probably gonna ignore it," I say.

"Yeah, man, don't worry about it," Ike assures me.

I gotta say, it's really nice to be able to have a normal conversation like this with other people. Ike examines the letter again and seems to realize something.

"This handwriting..." he whispers as he looks over to the other end of the class.

I follow his gaze and end up meeting Hasaki's eyes. Huh? I look away, but was that really who he was staring at? He must've been looking at someone else, right?

"Uh... actually, Yuuji, I can't really tell you who this is from, but I think you should actually take this one seriously," he says.

Huh, weird of him to change his mind so quickly. Whoever the mystery writer is, he must appreciate them—he seems pleased now. I know Ike likes to help others, so I can only assume that the letter is genuine. He's the protagonist of the story, in any case; if he says I should go, then I'll do it.

"Sure, why not?" I say. Ike sighs in relief.

"You know who is this from?" Asakura asks.

"Yeah. It's the real deal. The sender's not someone who'd do something like that," he replies.

"I mean, if you say so, Ike," Asakura responds with a shrug. He doesn't press the subject any further—that's how much he trusts Ike.

The bell rings, and everyone takes their seat. Guess I'll wait until lunch break.



Once the first period is over, I take my phone out and text Touka about my plans.

"Sorry, but I'm going to be busy this afternoon. Eat with your friends or something," I type. I go to put my phone back in my pocket, but Touka's reply arrives immediately. She's sent me another one of those hideous emojis. This time, it's an angry red face with a small bubble that says "Huh?" It's followed by a text: "Y would u do that? I wanted to have lunch w/u u no?"

I'm sorry that I have something else to do for once. I know she wants to use me so that guys will leave her alone and all, but come on, cut me some slack, will you? It'll just be for a day. She's super popular, so I'm sure there are a bunch of people who would love to eat with her. Plus, she really needs to make some friends in her class. Real friends. Then again, who am I to talk? I barely have any friends!

"Sorry," I reply.

She instantly sends me another emoji. This time, the ugly little character is sad instead of angry.

Uh, how am I even supposed to respond to this? I wish she'd use words instead of emojis... Oh, wait, she's writing something now.

"I'll just wait on the roof k? Finish ur stuff quick & meet me when ur done!"

I'm happy that she's so eager to be with me, at least.

"Ok," I reply tersely. I don't really think too much about it. I just want to end

the conversation as quickly as possible. Anyway, I guess it's time to head to the gym.

"Yuuji!" Ike calls out right before I leave the class. What's wrong with him? He looks so apologetic right now, it's a little ridiculous.

"I think everything's gonna be okay, but just in case... If something bad happens, just gimme a call. Okay?" he says.

"Sure. Will do. Anyway, I'm off to see what's it all about," I answer.

"Sounds good," he replies, sounding more confident than before.



"I'm really sorry to have you come all the way out here out of the blue."

It turns out that Hasaki Kana was the one waiting for me behind the gym. She's unusually serious right now, so I just nod to urge her to continue. Unfortunately, she falls silent.

Well, this is awkward. I think for a moment that this would be the prime location for a love confession if this were a romance book, but I'm totally overthinking it. Let's not get ahead of ourselves here. The silent moment stretches for some time until she suddenly blurts out with a determined look on her face, "I'm so sorry, but could we start as friends and see how things go from there?!"

Wait, what? You're kidding, right?

It was baffling enough that she was the one who wrote the letter, but I could've never imagined she did it so she could friendzone me without even confessing her love for me first.

I'm seriously confused. This is just about the last thing I was expecting.

"What?"

I remain silent, and Kana clenches her eyes shut and trembles slightly.

"Hasaki..."

"Y-Yes?" she manages to squeak out.

"Did you just friendzone me?"

"Huh?" she whispers, confused.

"What?" I ask, adding to the confusion.

Another awkward silence stretches between us. Once again, it's Hasaki who breaks the ice. She shakes her head lightly and says, clearly puzzled,



“F-Friendzone you? Huh? You mean I did that to you, Tomoki-kun? I-I just meant to apologize for everything that’s happened between us. I did say we should try being friends, right?”

She seems to realize what she actually said as soon as she finishes speaking, though, because she starts to panic.

“Oh, wait... D-Did I actually just...? W-Wait, no way!” she flounders.

“Um, Hasaki?”

“No! I didn’t mean it like that! That’s not why I apologized! I just figured that since we haven’t been on the best of terms recently, I wanted to apologize for treating you so badly! A-And I...! A-Anyways! I don’t have the courage to reject a guy before he gets the chance to confess to me, okay?! So that’s totally not what I meant!” she shouts as tears well up in her eyes.

“Okay, now that the apology’s out of the way, what about the whole ‘Could we start as friends and see how things go from there’ part, then?”

“Oh, that. Uh, yeah, that’s pretty much what I said...” she mutters shakily.

“I don’t get why you’re so eager to be my friend in the first place.”

Her eyes dampen even further at my comment. I guarantee she has no argument to counter me on that front.

“I-I’ve always wanted to be your friend.”

“Yeah, sorry, but I’m not buying that. Every time we meet, your face always goes bright red, and you glare at me. It’s pretty obvious that you’re not the biggest fan of me,” I retort.

Her face reddens just like I’d pointed out. I guess calling her out like that was too embarrassing for her to handle.

“Wh-What?! You noticed that?! I-I just...! I never, um, looked at you in a bad way! Yeah, it’s true I get red as a tomato every time I see you, but still!” she stammers while fidgeting.

“Why would you look at me so much, then?”

“That’s because... Well, I...”

She’s at a loss for words. After yet another awkward period of silence, she all of a sudden gains steam and spits out, “I look at you because... because it embarrasses me! I’ve never seen a guy as handsome as you before, Tomoki-kun!”

...Wait, what the fuck? Did I hear that correctly? Is she lying? Maybe it’s some kind of prank? If it is, I ain’t fucking laughing! How could she find me attractive? I’m the school’s so-called criminal! I thought guys like Ike would be

her type.

Yeah, that’s it—she has to be lying. But say she is, what is she after? The only thing I can think of is using me to somehow get closer to Touka. I am her “boyfriend,” after all. She looks pretty damn uneasy right now, and it’s no wonder. I’m onto her; I won’t buy her lies.

“Tell me something, Hasaki—did you ever manage to make peace with Touka?”

Her expression sours the moment I mention Touka, and she looks away.

“Not since that one time we were all together and I apologized. I haven’t gotten the chance to talk to her after that...” she says, forcing a smile.

Oh, I get it now. I see why she wants to be my friend. All of this is a sham. She’s even willing to lie through her teeth to get what she wants. And what does she want, exactly? Definitely not my friendship, that’s for sure. What I am sure about is that she wants to use me to attain her goal... whatever that is.

“Why would you ask me about her, though?” she inquires, still looking pretty on-edge.

Her objective is clear as day. She wants to befriend Touka again, and she’s willing to use me as a stepping stone to achieve that.

“Oh, I know!” she suddenly shouts, interrupting my train of thought. “You don’t have to do this. I mean, only if you’re okay with it, but...”

She’s got the whole air-headed cutie look going for her on the outside, but who would’ve thought that she’d secretly be so cunning and devious?

“I’d like it if I was not only your friend, but Touka’s as well. If you could help us get along again, I’d be super happy! Only if you’re fine with it, though!” she shouts while looking me straight in the eyes. She’s more resolute than I’ve ever seen her. She eventually falters and takes my silence as a no.

“I-I knew you wouldn’t be up for it... right?” she speaks hesitantly.

I’m mulling over my answer right now. What kind of relationship did they have in the past? Touka mentioned that they got along well up until “a certain person” went to middle school. Now I’m very curious to hear Hasaki’s point of view.

“Did you two get along well before?” I ask.

She answers with a sad expression, “Mhm. Our houses are close, so we hung out a lot back in the day. I’ve always gotten along well with Haruma, but Touka and I are... well, we’re girls after all, right? So we got along especially well. We

used to be like sisters, you know?"

At the mention of them being close to sisters, her expression changes, and she grins widely. Damn, that's how close they were? Who could've guessed Touka had someone she'd call "Big Sis?" Maybe I just don't have much of an imagination, but I can't picture Touka acting all cutesy and sweet like that.

"Well, up until I got into middle school, anyway," she says grimly. Up until a moment ago, she seemed so happy. Looks like her story is pretty similar to Touka's.

"Did something happen that made you two grow apart?"

She hesitates for a moment before answering. "Did Touka-chan say something?" she asks.

"All she told me is that you two had a good relationship in the past. Nothing else," I answer.

"If that's the case, I won't say anything either. I hope you don't mind. If she didn't tell you, then I don't really feel comfortable talking about it, either. I know I'm asking you for a big favor, and I'm being unfair by not telling you the whole situation, but..."

"I mean, if you don't wanna go deeper into it, then don't. Don't sweat it."

"...Okay, thanks," she says with a slight smile.

Huh, the two of them reacted in pretty much the same way on this topic.

"Let me ask you one thing, though—I know you're doing this so you can get along with her again. I get that. But why haven't you tried yourself yet?"

"I've always wanted to make things right between us, but every time I've tried to come up with a way for us to get along again, I draw a blank. I've thought about getting Haruma involved, but I didn't go with it in the end. He and Touka-chan don't get along very well, so it's for the best this way."

They've got quite the tangled web of relationships, the three of them. So it looks as though she basically wants to do something about it, but she can't come up with anything, and that's been the status quo for years now. In the end, Hasaki hasn't been able to do anything.

But there's one factor that's been added ever since Touka entered high school—me. Maybe she doesn't want to involve Ike, but I'm Touka's boyfriend. Things could go differently with me. I guess that's what she's shooting for?

I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but I'm not actually Touka's boyfriend, even if she thinks otherwise. I'm aware that Touka and I have a trusting

relationship, but even that has its limit. I don't think that either of us trusts each other completely, and rightly so.

Well, it's not like she's looking to achieve the impossible. There should be a way to do it. That's what I think, at least.

"Okay, Hasaki. I'll help you out," I say.

After listening to both sides of the story, I've made up my mind. I remember how Touka smiled, even if just slightly, back when she told me about it. I think that possibly, deep down, she truly wants to mend things with Hasaki, as well. Maybe I shouldn't butt into their lives. I mean, it's really none of my business. But if I can do anything to help them get along again, to have them return to the days where they treated each other as if they were sisters, then I'll take my chances and insert myself into this mess.

"F-For real?!" Kana shouts excitedly, a beaming smile alongside it.

"Yeah, for real," I answer with a nod. "I'd like Touka to be happy, too, you know?"

Honestly, she and Hasaki are pretty similar when it comes to expressing their range of emotions. Hasaki looks perplexed.

"What?" I ask.

"Oh, nothing. It's just the way you said that sounded suuuper suspicious," she says with a piercing glare.

Man, is she really okay with me? She did say she doesn't hate me, but what's up with that look? It only makes me doubt that she does, in fact, want to be my friend. It's funny how she's willing to use someone she hates just to become friends with someone who currently hates her. She must really love Touka, huh?

"Anyways, I guess now we're friends, right? I hope we get along, Tomokikun."

"Sure, same here."

She pulls out her phone the moment I finish my sentence.

"Huh?" I blurt out. She's looking at her messaging app. What the hell is she doing?

"Uh... Oh, right! Let's exchange phone numbers! There's a ton of stuff I need to ask you about!" she exclaims.

"Oh, so that's why you took it out. Sure." I pull my phone out as well, and we exchange numbers. By the way, it's important to note that this is my first time swapping numbers with a girl my age.

“Aaand done. I’ll send you some texts later, so be sure to answer them. Don’t just leave me on read, okay?” she says while continuing to fiddle with her phone.

She doesn’t look very enthused about all of this, though, so I’m not exactly happy either. What’s going on? Does she really want to stay in contact with me? Her current expression tells me the complete opposite, but still...

“Sure, I’ll answer the moment you message me,” I answer.

“Sounds good!” she says and sighs in relief.

Oh well, whatever. In any case, Hasaki and I are now “friends,” I guess, even if it’s merely for the sake of helping each other obtain our own goals.

Be sure to get your hands on the full version to know the rest of the story!

© 2019 Sekaiichi/OVERLAP
First published in Japan in 2019 by OVERLAP, Inc.

English translation rights reserved by Azure Books
SL, Madrid, Spain

Las historias, los personajes y los incidentes mencionados en esta publicación son completamente ficticios.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without the written permission of the copyright holders.

Published by Azure Books S.L.

Madrid, Spain

support@azure-studio.net

tentaibooks.com

Follow us in Twitter @TentaiBooks

**TEN
TAI** books