

[Yokote Suzu's monologue]

Suzu, internal: The moment I saw her for the first time, I felt a squeeze on my heart.

Featured in the historical TV show was she, the girl with a sakura hairpin. How she bashfully laughed towards the camera. How she gallantly stood there in her combat outfit.

Her name was Takashima Yuuna. It was love at first sight.

She was a hero who saved many people, Shikoku, the whole world itself. But what a tragic hero she was. Sent into merciless battles in her early teens, she struggled and one day fell.

It was then that I realised what my destiny was. To make the world realise her sheer greatness, tragedy, glory and the very miracle that was her existence.

But whenever I talked about Takashima-sama, my mom would frown and say: "Takashima Yuuna was a pitiful child used by adults, you must not call her a hero." Why did she say such awful things? The two of us usually get along well, but that was the one thing we never saw eye to eye with each other.

Suzu: Hero History Apocrypha, Fuyou Yuuna becomes a storyteller.
Chapter 7, Belling The Cat.

[Doujinshi fair venue] (Kamaboko concert hall)

Lily: Wow, the traffic is tremendous! Business is booming, I see. Never thought I'd see the Kamaboko concert hall turn into a manga fair.

Lily, internal: Today I was summoned by Suzu-kun to this "doujinshi fair", and decided to come along. I invited Yuzuki-kun, too, but she wouldn't pick up her phone since yesterday, so I came alone.

Lily: Okay, let's see where Suzu-kun's stall is... Ah, there she is! Hey, Suzu-kun!

Suzu: Hey, Lily-chan!

Lily: Wait, Yuzuki-kun is with you?

Yuzuki: Oh, Lily.

Lily: What!? Are you!? Doing here!? Do you know how many times I called yesterday to invite you?

Suzu: Heh heh heh... Yuzuki-chan was sleeping by my side at the time, you see.

Lily: Wha-!?

Yuzuki: True enough, I was in your room sleeping... because you asked me to help you make your doujinshi. So yeah, I stayed over at Suzu's yesterday.

Suz: Yep, she was helping me bind the printouts and make flyers, at 1000 yen per hour!

Lily: Yuzuki-kun... You accepted money from someone other than me again?

Yuzuki: What's your problem? Suzu is a friend, why wouldn't I help her?

Lily: I... guess that's true! But it still annoys me! Grinds my gears...

Suzu: Yuzuki-chan was a great help. Lily-chan, thanks for letting me borrow her!

Lily: Make sure to inform me next time you want to rent her.

Suzu: Got it!

Yuzuki: Since when am I Lily's property...?

Lily: So what exactly is a "doujinshi" anyway? I've heard the term before, but I've never seen the actual thing.

Suzu: Heh heh, feast your eyes! My circle, "Sakura Miracle", specialises in manga about Takashima Yuuna-sama! I write the script, draw the art and take the manuscript to the printing shop myself!"

Lily: Wow, that's crazy. You're a good artist!

Suzu: Well, my mom does draw picture books.

Lily: Now that you mention it, your mother is that famous picture book author, Yokote Matsuri. An apple does not fall far from the tree.

Suzu: The goal of my circle is to let the world know just how incredible and amazing of a person Takashima Yuuna-sama was! Which is why I turn her life and exploits into manga, easily digested even by those put off by the written word! And to maximise the reach, I'm a step away from going into red!

Yuzuki: I must say, I don't really understand why her outfit changes whenever she kisses one of her fellow Heroes or the Miko...

Suzu: T-That's because there's not much information about their fights, I had to come up with something! What's a period piece without some creative freedom, anyway?

Suzu: Urgh! That's...

Yuzuki: What's going on? What's with the crowd over there?

Suzu: That's Dishevelled Flowers, a circle that suddenly gained massive popularity and power as of late. My rival!

Lily: Rival?

Suzu: That's right. I'm devoted to Takashima-sama alone and my works are all based on historical events!

Yuzuki: Are they now...?

Suzu: And what does that circle do? They don't stick to one person, they crackship all over the place, write in OCs, reverse roles and even stoop to writing NTR! That goes far beyond "creative freedom"!

Yuzuki: Uh... I'm sorry, but I have no idea what any of those words mean.

Lily: Neither do I.

Suzu: What you need to understand is that to someone purely dedicated to spreading the word of Takashima-sama, they're a sworn enemy! But the way things are going, Dishevelled Flowers are totally going to overtake me in popularity! I hate that! I just want my Takashima-sama book to be read by as many people as possible!

Yuzuki: Would you keep it down?

Lily: S-Such passion...

Suzu: If I'm to keep up with those hacks, I need to come up with new material! Lily-chan! Yuzuki-chan! You will be helping!

Yuzuki/Lily: Eh?

[Outside Marugame station]

Suzu: Here we are, Marugame city!

Lily: Yesterday we were at a fair in Kanonji, now we're in Marugame gathering material. Suzu-kun, you are persistence personified.

Yuzuki: So, what exactly are we doing?

Suzu: Tracing Takashima-sama's steps! After being assigned to the Taisha, she lived in the Marugame castle. There should be traces of her all over this area!

Lily: Oh yeah, the Heroes used the Marugame castle as their base, right? They lived and trained here, I hear.

Suzu: Exactly! By experiencing Takashima-sama's way of life directly I will invoke Takashima-sama within myself and perceive her! Then I will assimilate her into myself and become her avatar, guiding my inner self to a higher level of being!

Yuzuki: You're starting to sound like a religious fanatic...

Suzu: This isn't just about finding material to draw anymore!

Lily: What do you mean?

Suzu: I received a challenge yesterday.

Yuzuki: Huh?

Suzu: Take a look at my phone. Here's what I got in my DM.

Lily: Let's see..."I read your doujinshi with great interest every new release. You know a great deal about Takashima-sama the Hero. But how much do you know about Takashima Yuuna, the person? Can you truly say that you understand her without knowing her human side?"

Yuzuki: What the hell is this?

Suzu: The way I see it, the message must've come from a fan of Takashima-sama like myself. They mean they know something about her that I don't... And lording it over me! Unforgivable! I'm her number one fan!

Yuzu: R-Right...

Suzu: But the sender does have a point. I only looked at her as a Hero, ignoring her as a person! So I'm going to experience Takashima-sama's life here and deepen my understanding of Takashima Yuuna, the regular girl!

Lily: Takashima Yuuna as a person, huh? You're right, that is intensely intriguing! It's not something history books and TV shows touch upon often.

Suzu: The first thing we must experience is... udon!

[Udon restaurant]

Suzu: *slurp* *munch* This restaurant is where Takashima-sama, born in Nara, had her first bowl of authentic Kagawa udon!

Lily: *slurp* It's great.

Suzu: They say Nogi-sama and Uesato-sama personally showed her this place. It's where Nogi-sama and Uesato-sama took her udon virginity!

Yuzuki: Can you not word it like that?

Suzu: I won't leave even a drop of this soup! *gulp* So this is the taste... of Takashima broth.

Lily: Could you not word it like that?

Suzu: Thank you for the food! Now that we've deepened our understanding of her food habits, it's time to go shopping!

Lily: Wait, hold on, not so fast!

[Marugame city, Tooricho shopping district]

Suzu: Marugame city, Tooricho shopping district! In the past, Takashima-sama was seen strolling around it with Nogi-sama and Uesato-sama. Okay, I'll be playing Takashima-sama! Yuzuki-chan, you do Nogi-sama. Lily-chan, you pretend to be Uesato-sama! Let's go, girls!

Lily: U-Uesato...? I'm to pretend I'm Uesato-sama? No no no no! The absolute audacity! The insane insolence!

Suzu: What's wrong with her?

Yuzuki: Oh, Lily has a phobia of Uesato-sama's name.

Suzu: That's a weird phobia.

Lily: Aaaagh! Uesato-sama! Uesato-sama! I've done nothing wrong!

Suzu: Okay, Yuzuki-chan, act like you're Nogi-sama in her youth!

Yuzuki: Nogi-sama in her youth?

Suzu: Just act hot-blooded, I guess.

Yuzuki: Uh... Listen up, y'all! Nogi Wakaba, comin' through! Outta the way, rabble!

Suzu: Yeah, sounds good to me.

Yuzuki: You really don't care when it's not about Takashima, huh.

[Marugame city, hospital]

Suzu: This is where Takashima-sama was hospitalised! Excuse me! I'd like to feel like Takashima-sama in the ICU!

Yuzuki: This isn't funny, stop making trouble for the hospital!

Lily: Suzu-kun, get it together!

Suzu, internal: I continued going around Marugame to experience Takashima-sama. And my last destination was...

[Marugame Castle, front gate]

Suzu: The Marugame castle! The very place where Takashima-sama lived!

Yuzuki: I thought the castle was Taisha property and off-limits?

Suzu: Oh, about that...

Lily: No worries, Suzu-kun! Yuzuki-kun can break down any barricade as long as she has her chainsaw!

Yuzu: Since when is having a chainsaw my trademark? What I did back then, I did because I had to!

Suzu: No problem, it's fine either way. The Marugame castle is normally off-limits, but they temporarily open a part of it for flower viewing in spring. Sakura has already finished blooming, but the premises are still open.

[Marugame Castle, outer bailey]

Suzu: Here we are! The outer bailey is as far as we can go.

Yuzu: It's high enough up here to see the entire town. Don't even need to climb to the keep.

Lily: The Marugame castle had the tallest stone foundation of all Japanese castles, apparently.

Suzu: Takashima-sama must've looked at the town too, just like this. But it was an entirely different town back then...

Yuzuki: Yeah... The scenery might've been the same, but people weren't living anywhere as peacefully...

Suzu: Mhm.

Lily: So, Suzu-kun, how did it feel to tour Marugame today? Are you any closer to understanding Takashima Yuuna?

Suzu: Nope, not at all!

Yuzuki: Way to give up! Are you sure you're fine with that?

Suzu: Look, I'm just saying it how it is... We haven't experienced those years, after all.

Yuzuki: The post-calamity era...

Suzu: Yeah. I can try to imagine or project myself on it all I want, but I'll never understand what Takashima-sama felt without having actually lived through that dreadful time.

Yuzuki: I guess.

Suzu: It's just... I can't help but feel sad that she never got to see these peaceful times. I mean, this is the world she protected... If she had still been alive...

Lily: She could've been a leader like Nogi-sama.

Suzu: Who knows, maybe she would've become a normal person and led an ordinary life.

Yuzuki: You're right.

Suzu: Alright! My new work is going to be a tour report manga about tracing Takashima-sama's steps! Can't exactly write a story about her with my half-hearted understanding, can I? By the way, Lily-chan, Yuzuki-chan!

Lily: Hm?

Yuzuki: What?

Suzu: Next time, help me promote my circle by cosplaying the Heroes! Just imagine the hype, Yuunas cosplaying Yuuna!

Yuzuki: As long as I get paid.

Lily: Yuzuki-kun!?

[Fair venue]

Suzu: Business is booming! Flying off the shelves!

Lily: She turned us into cosplaying promoter girls after all... Pretty pointless.

Yuzuki: Come on, we're getting paid for it.

Lily: Yuzuki-kun, you're like a different person when money is involved... But more importantly, the new work sold out immediately to rave reviews! This circle is definitely pulling ahead of Dishevelled Flowers!

Suzu: Yeah, you're right!

Suzu: Huh, a DM? From the same person as last time.

Suzu: "I see you've done some work to better understand Takashima Yuuna. Yet you weren't able to, were you?"

Of course you weren't. Even her contemporaries barely understood Takashima Yuuna as a person. She spoke very little of herself, if ever. But I wish for more people to try and understand her as a person. I want more people to view her as one. Like your mother does. If you still wish to learn more about Takashima Yuuna as a person, then I can tell you the best method there is.

Enter the Taisha.

That's where most of the info about the days she spent lies hidden."

Suzu: Ah...

Yuzuki: Suzu, what's wrong?

Lily: She's deep in thought.

Suzu, internal: Just who is the sender? It can't be spam or a prank with those contents...
Someone from the Taisha?

Suzu: I'm sorry, I'm all sold out... Huh? You are... Karasuma Kumiko-sama?