



Claude Ending O After Story

Within the sunlight filtering down through the trees, flowers of various colours swayed in the wind. When we left the well trodden path, a field could be seen just ahead. As I took in a deep breath of the noon-time air, I was enveloped by the refreshing scents of greenery and earth.

'I'm glad the weather is good today.'

'Yes, it's finally the first day of our experiment after all. It'd be unendurable if it literally got washed away by the rain.'

As he placed a heavy looking bag of fertilizer on the ground, Claude wiped away the sweat from his brow. The dirt on his gloves ended up smearing on his face. Not seeming to mind it at all, he smiled as if enjoying himself, his eyes narrowing.

A few months after it had all ended and we had put down roots in East Granary Village. We were keeping watch over a large scale field and caring for the plants growing there. Such work had now become our everyday life.

Of course, he himself would say that being a researcher was his main profession. Still, according to Claude, one couldn't eat through just research. And thus we were here, toiling away so we could make a living by raising a harvest. We wasted no time in scattering the new and improved fertiliser.

'I doubt we'd be able to grow all that much using ordinary methods. It wouldn't be realistic for just the two of us working away at it. Fertiliser, different set ups and the like.....we'll need to gradually increase efficiency over time through continuous improvements.'

'Still so passionate about research, even when it comes to something like this.'

'That's a given. Just so long as we make the right adjustments, I'm sure we'll be able to increase this field's yield. For example—'

I was dumbfounded by the number of impromptu ideas he came up with one after another.

Claude was always taking on new challenges. Testing the ideas he had come up with, failing, and then taking what he had learnt and trying something else. And when he did, he would show a smile as if to say how much he enjoyed the trial and error process. I thought to myself that he really was a researcher to the core.

(I'm so glad he can smile like this now)

Recalling how he had seemed somehow hollow when we had first met, I found myself grinning with relief at the comparison. Apparently having noticed me doing so, Claude blinked his eyes as if puzzled. At his look, I waved my hand and smiled, saying it was nothing.

Each day was exciting. Our days were full of the exhilaration of something new. The world felt endlessly vast and free.

'That said....a full day's work sure is tiring....'

Once the sun had set the village became pitch black. The dimly lit room felt like a singular space cut off from its surroundings. As I collapsed down onto the bed, completely exhausted, Claude sat down beside me.

'Farm work is a full body workout after all. When you're stooping for long periods of time, it's easier for the lower body to get tired out.'

'.....You seem fine though, Claude.'

'That's because I've been doing work out in the fields ever since I was a child. Not to mention the many years I spent travelling around the ruins.'

As he spoke, he began to knead my thighs. The pressure of it feeling just right, I relaxed into it, lying face down.

He and I were making a life together through our combined efforts—although that said, truth be told, there weren't many things that I could do. Most of the physical work was done by Claude, with many of the plans to enrich our lifestyle also coming from him.

It kind of felt like I was becoming nothing more than a burden. Was I really alright like this? Just as that worry passed through my mind—

‘Hyaah-?!’

‘.....Huh?’

At some point the hands that had been at my hips had grasped at soft flesh. Finding it ticklish, I had ended up letting out an odd sounding scream. Embarrassed at the immodest sound I had made, I slowly turned to look around. As expected, he had stopped moving in surprise.

‘.....You-.....Don't make such weird noises.’

‘S-Sorry.....It was just, the way you grabbed me felt kind of ticklish.’

‘You're really blaming me? In that case—’

‘Eh-?! Wait, sto-.....’

Apparently I had set something off inside him. His hands stretched out and took hold of my torso. Though I desperately tried to twist away from the ticklish sensation, I couldn't escape at all. In the end, to stop me struggling he trapped me firmly within his arms.

Flailing wildly around, twisting away from the hands that were touching me.....just as I was out of breath, he finally stopped. I glared at him with faintly teary eyes.

‘And I was already tired....so mean...’

‘My bad, don't be angry. As an apology—’

—Now that we're in this position, what would you like me to do.....?

My heart rate jumped at his low whisper. Before I realised it, his gaze had become heated. The arms around me keeping me from escaping gradually tightened.

I had experienced nights such as this any number of times. Still, I never got used to it. Nonetheless, I didn't feel like running away from the well proportioned features as they slowly came closer.

Reflected in his sweetly intoxicating gaze, my entire body came undone and was satisfied. In the quiet of the night, the sounds of the insects felt pleasant.

One afternoon. The coach that came infrequently brought a single letter addressed to Claude. The sender was the Royal Society that he had once been a member of.

‘An invitation to return to the Society....?’

‘Yeah, so they’ve written. That they’ll welcome me back with special working conditions.’

As his eyes slid down the page, his well-shaped eyebrows furrowed. The gist of the letter was that they wished to appoint him to the important role of lead researcher of the ruins. Along with a special research laboratory, he would also be given a position that would exert influence across the country.

When we left the royal capital, he had already turned down a similar proposal. And yet, the sender must need Claude badly enough that they had sent this letter. Having realised that truth, a bad feeling rose within me.

‘Not only would we have a guaranteed income, but they’ll also even give us a generous research allowance. If I said yes to this, I doubt we’d lack for anything for the rest of our lives....’

Truth be told, our current lifestyle was hard. If I were to count the number of anxieties for the future that I had, it would never end. If we were to agree to this proposal, we would have all we needed for our daily life, and more importantly, Claude would be able to completely devote himself to his research.

Now that I had become aware of the fact that I was a burden, I was unable to say a thing and could only look on to see how he would respond.

I stared fixedly at this profile. Eventually, his long eyelashes lowered in silence. His mouth opened slightly. And then—

‘Huh?!’

With great energy, the paper was torn in two. The letter was ripped apart with emphatically loud tearing noises. After throwing it into the rubbish bin, Claude lightly dusted off his hands.

‘A-Are you sure? That was your chance to finally return to the Society.’

‘It’s fine. It was an invitation I never asked for anyway.’

I had heard that the Society had been of great assistance to him in the past. Although he had been treated as a heretic, the support of a government organization would have been hospitable. Even now, all he had to do was give his consent and we would be living life on easy street.

And yet, he spoke with eyes still lowered—

‘If I agreed, we would have all our costs covered. I wouldn’t have to place any more hardship on you. I could even continue on with my research without any inconvenience. But.....I’m different now to how I was in the past.’

Within the gentle rays of the noontime sun, his gaze moved around him. His face broke into a smile like an opening flower.

'I'm not standing on my own anymore. I've got someone to lean on. So, I don't need their help.Isn't that right, my brilliant assistant?'

When he called out to me, my breath caught in my throat. At the same time, a warm feeling welled up inside me. That's right. I wasn't a burden. I was his brilliant assistant.

I couldn't provide him with large amounts of money. I couldn't give him a position or security. But there was something that only I could do. That's why, there was no need for me to be anxious.

'—Of course, you can count on me, my professor.'

Within the flickering rays of gentle sunlight, the young man with the straw-colored hair happily returned my smile.