

See Ya!



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Chapter 1: Difficult present

I hate hospitals. I hate the dishonesty of the place, painting an image of normalcy when anything is but. I hate the masks the staff wears. How every move feels choreographed.

"Excuse me?"

The sudden noise from the doctor breaks the stillness of the room

"Mr Nakai, your mother is currently stable. However, a pacemaker must be inserted into her to stabilize her heartbeat. Afterwards, she will have to take medications daily"

The doctor hands me the prescription for the list of medicine my mother is to take every day for the rest of her life.

Staring at the piece of paper handed to me was certainly a familiar feeling, the endless list of words converging to static noise in my mind.

Side effects, adverse effects, contraindications, and dosages are listed line after line with cold precision.

I still can't understand any of it.

All I could do was cover my face with my hands in a pitiful attempt to hide my pathetic state. A weak sigh escaped from me anyway.

"The surgeries will cost around 60,000 yen as well," the doctor added.

For a few seconds, only the sound of the mechanical equipment could be heard. The doctor stood there waiting for a response

"I understand, doc," I replied.

I said that just so he could leave; truthfully, I didn't understand. It happened to me already; why did it have to happen to my mom? And why now, at such a low point in my life?

Every time I thought I hit rock bottom, I always managed to sink deeper and deeper into the void. Is this what adult life amounts to? Just an endless loop of falling, then climbing only to fall deeper than you ever were?

Even when something good happens to me, it feels like just a brief respite from all the suffering that has come my way and is yet to come.

After a few minutes of wallowing in self-pity, I got up and left the hospital. I didn't bother bidding farewell to my mother; it's not like she'd hear it anyway.

I opened the door to my apartment, accidentally stepping on a pile of books by the doorstep. Lab apparatus scattered all over the floor, unwashed dishes in the sink, and an overflowing trash bin.

Ignoring the clutter, I walked towards my bed, the only escape I had. I closed my eyes and attempted to sleep, but I couldn't even be granted that. My thoughts prevented me from getting any rest.

I'm lost; I don't know where to go. I can't even see where I'm going. Should I even move? Maybe I should just stop, maybe I should just-

Before I can finish the thought, I was brought back to reality by furious knocking on my door.

I opened it and what greeted me on the other side was-

"What took you so long to open?!" Kenji exclaimed

"What do you want this late at night?" I groaned

"I'm here to tell you something"

"Can't you tell me tomorrow morning?"

"No, I would be asleep then. "

I debated whether or not to let Kenji in, but seeing as I've got nothing better to do and I can't really sleep, I decided I wouldn't lose anything. I didn't have the energy to argue with him either.

Kenji makes his way to my dinner table and takes a seat while I prepare something to drink for the two of us

"Damn man, your place is a mess. How do you live like this?"

Hearing Kenji, who's borderline blind, point out the state of my room was certainly a reality check

"Tea?" I asked

"Just water"

I handed Kenji the cup of water and took a seat opposite him. I stirred my tea and let it cool off a bit before drinking.

Kenji broke the silence. "So, how is your mother doing?"

"Worse"

"What about her treatment and surgery costs?"

I couldn't muster up the energy to respond with words, but the silence was enough for Kenji to understand what had happened

"Hisao, you're in need of money, right? What if there was a way you could earn money, enough to pay off your mother's hospital bills and your student bills? Would you take it?"

I look at Kenji, perplexed.

"Of course I would"

Kenji takes a second before opening his mouth, with what looks to be hesitation plastered on his face

"Okay, hear me out. A guy I know put me onto this massive global science expo happening in three months. If you win, they hand you a hundred thousand dollars cash, buy out your research, and put you on the map with the biggest labs in the world. You get to be the big-shot scientist you always wanted to be and pay off your debts. It's a win-win."

For a moment, the promise of escaping all my problems just like that sounded nice. But grounding myself in reality, I knew I would have better chances finding the money I needed on the ground

"Listen, man, these expos happen every year, and they get thousands of applications from the brightest scientists around the world. Those guys have backers and came from prestigious universities."

I can tell Kenji felt disappointed with my response; I can't blame him. I am disappointed too, but I just can't see any way it goes differently

"So what's the plan? How will you get out of this pit? Will you just let things be?" Kenji protested, clearly trying to get a rise out of me

But I was over it; I was tired. What I wanted to say was yes, I'll just let things happen. Because what could I do?

Out of nowhere, Kenji palms my face

"What the hell?"

Realizing his mistake, he relocated his hand to my shoulder

"Hisao, do you remember why you became a scientist?"

"Because I was good at it?"

"No! I meant WHO was it that pushed you to become one?"

"Mr, Mutou..?" I replied, unsure of where Kenji was going with this

"Exactly, he once said to you that the reason he became a teacher was to share a small piece of himself with others. This, this is your chance to share a piece of yourself with the entire world!"

Kenji pauses for a moment, tightening his hands around my shoulder

"Listen to me carefully, Hisao. I can't force you to act on things. But I can guarantee that in the future, you will be disappointed that you didn't act now, just as you are disappointed in your past self for not acting then."

It's true, I do have plenty of regrets, things I wish I did, moments I'd do anything to come back to. If I had just done things differently, what would my life look like now?

"So you can either stay where you are in life until you die or do something for a chance to live!"

I sit still, Kenji's words having reached me. I recall Mutou's words and my time back in Yamaku Academy. Come to think of it, those were probably some of the best times of my life, and if only I had done that... well, no point in thinking about the past.

After thinking it over, I finally let out a deep breath and faced Kenji

"Fine, give me the details then"

Kenji grins ear to ear

"Okay, here's what I've heard. The expo will be held in Scotland-"

Scotland, a place I had never been. But memories flooded into my brain as if I had. Memories not of the place but of a person.

The biggest regret of my life. I often ask myself what would've happened if I talked to her, if I tried to convey to her how much I didn't want her to leave, if she stayed. Maybe I wouldn't be where I am today. Maybe we-

"Hey!" Kenji's voice brought me back to reality

"Did you hear what I just said?" he asked

"Hey man, can you give me a while to think this through?" I replied

Kenji stayed silent for a moment

"Thought about it yet?"

"What?! No!"

"But you said to give you a moment"

"Can you just give me some space?!"

My voice came out louder than I intended, guilt started to creep in as I realized what I had done

"Kenji, I'm sorry I didn't mean to-"

"It's fine, talk to ya later man"

With that, he left my apartment. Leaving me alone with my thoughts yet again.

Scotland. Yamaku. Lilly. My mother. What should I do?

Chapter 2: Bittersweet past

I stand before the gates that still look too pompous for what they are. A creeping anxiety crawls up my spine as I open them and enter what used to be my home.

I remember my first time opening those gates, my first time walking through these halls, I used to look at the place and the students so differently. I refused to accept myself as part of the school, as someone who has the label of "disabled" hanging above their head. But now I'm standing here, and it feels like a warm hug.

It feels disconnected from the outside world, as it always has. That fact used to bother me, now, it feels like the problems I had were gone, and all I had were the memories I made when I was here.

It doesn't feel like home, no, because it was never the place that made me feel that way, but the people I met here. And we have parted ways, for the most part. But being here brings me just a little closer to the people I once considered home.

The students look so innocent, so full of promise and potential. I did not wonder what life was like for them because of their disability, because from my time in Yamaku Academy, I have come to learn the world of disabled people, and I found that beyond their disabilities, they are just like everyone else.

Admittedly, I felt envious of them. I didn't appreciate the time I had at Yamaku. If I knew what awaited me, I would've made the most of it. I wouldn't be in my room all the time. I would've tried to talk to my friends more.

If only I knew

I sat down at a bench just outside the main building. Just as I did, a tall man in formal attire sat next to me.

"Hey, you one of the new students?" he asked

That voice sounded familiar

"I- uh, no. I'm just scouting the place out" I replied

"I'm messing with ya, Hisao" he chuckled

I turned to face the man who turned out to be Mr Mutou, who hasn't aged a day since I last met him

"So, what brings you here?" he asked

"Just reminiscing, I guess"

"Just reminisce?" he prodded

I let out a sigh

"I just... feel lost. Like I don't even know where I'm going with my life. I have so many piled-up issues, and I don't know how to move forward."

Mutou pauses for a moment, taking in what I said with careful consideration

"Money problems?" he asked

For someone who acts a bit socially awkward, he sure is good at reading people

"And the stresses of adult life"

Mutou nods. "Remember what I told you back then, Hisao? How I wanted to share a piece of myself, and that's why I became a teacher. That passion I had was actually a compromise."

"A compromise?"

"While being a teacher didn't sound bad, I actually wanted to be a scientist. But I had little siblings to feed and my parents, well, they were taken from us when I was just 18"

I turned to him with a concerned expression. "I'm so sorry"

Mutou nods to acknowledge

"I knew how expensive university can get, and the funding that being a scientist requires. So I opted to go for a career path that allowed me to get a steady income as soon as possible. I landed a teaching job at a small public school, until eventually, I made my way up to Yamaku Academy"

I sat there still, not really knowing what to say

"I guess what I'm trying to say is. I won't claim to know all the answers, especially not in regards to your circumstances. But to tell you the truth, I didn't know where I was going when I was your age either. Hell, I'm in my 40s now, and I'm still trying to figure it out. But I just kept on moving. Even if we don't know where we're going, all we can do is keep moving. Because if you stop even a little bit, you're left behind."

"Was I right to not pursue being a scientist? Maybe, maybe not. It could have worked out, it couldn't have. But I made my decision, and I stuck with it. I didn't let the world chew me up and spit me out; **I moved.**"

I sat there, contemplating what Mutou just said. I remember he said something similar to me when he told me about missing lessons while I was in the hospital; it's nice to know his character is consistent.

"Thanks, Mr Mutou. I really needed that"

"No problem, and just Mutou would be fine. We're both adults now after all"

"How's Yamaku Academy now?" I asked

"Well, what with the new students and all, I can't help but keep up."

"Speaking of, how are the new students? Were they like us?"

Mutou lets out an exaggerated sigh

"You wouldn't believe it, it's like handling 10 Mishas in a classroom. I'm surprised I've managed for this long"

I let out a hearty laugh, one I needed at the moment, and one I haven't had for a long while

"10 Mishas? That's insane!"

Mutou laughs with me. For the first time, I get to talk to Mutou not as a teacher but simply as a fellow adult. One who is a bit more experienced than I, but who's also lost. One who's still finding his way, we're just two adults who are lost in a chaotic, constantly moving world.

Mutou and I do some more catching up for a while until the bell signals his next class coming up. We bid our farewells, and I sat on the bench. I am glad I ran into him, I needed that conversation and that laugh.

After a while had passed after Mutou went to his class, I entered the main building to take one look at Yamaku and my old classroom.

Reminiscing on the memories I had in these very same halls made me wish I had just cherished those years a bit more, if only I knew what life had in store for me in the future. I never would've imagined I'd wish to stay in those moments forever, but now I'd do just about anything to go back.

As I was about to leave, I noticed an unmarked room on the third floor. There was no signage, but I could tell what room this was.

The door was slightly ajar, not closed, but not open. As it was when I first opened it. A memory I would never forget.

It's the tea room, where Lilly and I first met. When I opened the door, for a second I swear I saw her, standing there with the light shining on her beautiful blonde hair.

I snapped myself back to reality as I entered the room. The tea ingredients were no longer there, nor the pot used to make the tea. To anyone else, it's simply an empty room. But to me, it stored something so precious.

I find it sad that whenever someone else would enter this room, they wouldn't see anything, know of anything that happened in this room. The happiness I got from entering this room that day, and the heartbreak it would eventually lead to. Not a trace of our history remained here, but I guess that goes for a lot of places in this world.

People are forgotten, places change, and memories stay without any tangible evidence. But maybe it is up to us to value those memories even when nothing physical of it remains.

I take one good look at the room before leaving. The sound of the door shutting down almost feels painful, like I'm leaving something behind.

But I shouldn't feel this way, after all, I'm the one who got left behind.

I left the main building and made my way to the dorms and to the hallway where my room was. I tried to stay as far away from the doors as possible so as not to alarm the students. But I couldn't help myself from staring at the halls.

I remember the time Lilly and I slept together in my dorm room for the first time. I remember it caught me off guard because it completely went against the image I had of Lilly beforehand. I didn't expect her to agree, much less suggest the idea.

But those moments where I learned more about Lilly's true self were the ones I cherished the most. I liked the always proper and flawless Lilly, the image of an upstanding student. But I loved the true Lilly, the one who loved sneaking out at night, the girl who had such a weak tolerance for alcohol yet wanted to drink anyway, the girl who was always there when I needed her.

I remember sneaking past the guards at night, almost getting caught because of Lilly's lack of sight and complete lack of experience in sneaking out. Then when we made it to my dorm room, we would laugh about it until we both fell asleep in each other's arms. We had little care for what was going on around us at the time, we had each other, and that was enough. Or at least, for me it was.

Was it enough for her? If it was, why did she leave me? I thought, if it was just the two of us, it would be fine even if I didn't know where I was going, because we would both help each other find our ways, and we'd do it together. But I guess she didn't see things the way I saw them.

Well, of course she didn't.

I hadn't realized how long I'd been standing before I saw the student who owned the dorm room that was previously mine, standing and staring at me with a confused look. Before he could shout out to the guards, I quickly took my leave and exited the building.

As I made my way to the gate, I looked back at the school as my last farewell, not just to it but to the past. I can't stay here forever, I know that. I have to keep moving

I have to keep moving.

Chapter 3: Uncertain future

My thumb hovers over the dial button, inches away from pressing it. But I can't bring myself to do it.

What would she say? Would she even remember me? I didn't call after she moved to Scotland, she called me a few times, but I never picked up. I guess that was my fault. It's not that I didn't love her anymore, far from it, it's just I couldn't bring myself to hear her voice knowing that both of us would never be the same again.

If I hear the words "Who are you?" From Lilly's voice, I know my heart would shatter into a million pieces. What if she had found another? Of course she has. She's probably living a well-off life, with a family and everything, doing what she loves most, teaching.

The thought made me smile, but my heart ached that I couldn't be there with her, for her.

Then my mind replays the conversation I had with Mutou the other day

"You have to keep moving"

"Ah, fuck it"

I pressed the dial button

After a few seconds, the phone rings.

Every moment that passes by fills me up with anxiety that I couldn't bear. I had never been the overly religious type, but in those moments I begged God, not of anything in particular, I just begged. I needed some sort of assurance, it's been so long since I had been sure of anything

"Hello?"

That voice, it has barely changed. A bit more mature, but unmistakably hers. The voice that was and still is music to my ears. The sound I could listen to and fall asleep to, the voice, which, upon hearing it, turned my worst moments into my best.

I tried to open my mouth, to say something to her, but I couldn't. It felt like choking, I couldn't breathe, and the words stuck in my throat

"Is there anyone there?"

I couldn't bear it, the memories flooded in- the regret, the heartbreak, all of it was too much, and I knew a simple phone call wouldn't do anything.

I hung up the phone and tossed it to the other side of the room. My sorrow was replaced with what I can only describe as anger.

Anger at what? Myself for not answering? At her for leaving me behind? At the world for my predicament? I don't know, I just felt angry.

Soon the anger subsided, and shortly after the sorrow followed, leaving me with an empty void where my emotions once were. Lilly once told me I wore my emotions on my sleeve, and that my honesty would get me far in life, well, I guess she was right, because during that phone call I was dishonestly quiet. In reality, there was

so much I wanted to say about our past, and maybe what our future could still hold, or could have. I wanted to shout, but I couldn't even whisper.

As I was lying on the cold wooden floor of my apartment, I noticed something on the floor. I picked it up and inspected it closely; it was an origami paper crane, the one she made for me.

I had been so caught up in all of our worst memories together that I had forgotten the love we shared, the memories she gave me. Just because it ended doesn't mean it wasn't real.

I stood up groggily, trying to muster up any sense of hope I had left within me. I was unsure where to go, but I just had to move, anywhere, do anything. I knew if I stayed on the floor that I would fall back to that same empty void again.

I went to the bathroom and took a shower; the water felt like it was washing away all that worried me. It was the most refreshing shower I've had in forever.

I got out of the shower and dressed in my most comfortable clothes. I spent the rest of the afternoon fixing the mess that was my apartment. I placed all the laboratory apparatus in their proper place, fixed some of the outdated equipment, and in general tidied up my apartment. It wasn't much, but it was a start, I was moving, I was doing something.

Afterwards, the apartment looked less like a junkyard for old laboratory equipment and more like an actual workplace for a respectable scientist. I was so proud of myself that I didn't notice the smile forming on my face.

As if on cue, I could hear 3 light taps on the door. I opened it with unusual enthusiasm, and before Kenji could comment on it, I practically dragged him inside.

"What's gotten into you all of a sudden?" Kenji said, shaken up

Kenji takes a gander at the apartment, and even he could see the massive change in scenery, his jaw glued to the floor.

"Kenji, I want the details for that science expo, now"

Kenji grins ear to ear

"I knew you'd come around," he replied

Kenji and I spent the night planning for the science expo. And for a while, I'm taken back to the times we were at Yamaku Academy. But I'm no longer stuck there; there's a clear difference this time, and I see it.

Even now, though, it was still her who pulled me from the depths of depression. I know we would likely never see each other again, but if we did, I'd thank her. Some things never change, I guess.

Chapter 4: New beginning

"Hey, are you sure about this?" I asked Kenji

"You're not gonna chicken out when we're already here, dude," he replied, his voice almost drowned out by the background noise of the airport

"Yeah, yeah, I know. It's just that this is the last of my money. If I don't win..."

"Aw cmon! We've talked about this a million times already." Kenji's voice draws the attention of some passersby

"Besides, you're lucky to have me. It's the last of my money too, y'know. At least I'm coming with ya"

"You just wanted to travel," I replied half jokingly, Kenji grins

"Whatever man, let's go"

As we sit waiting for our flight, I'm reminded of that day. That day when I ran as fast as I could, in complete ignorance of my condition, if it meant I could catch one glimpse of her. And I did, but all it did for me was hurt me even more, knowing I wouldn't ever see her again.

Now that I'm on my way to her, I feel a kindling in my soul, some sort of hope that we'd see each other again. I shouldn't feel this way, I know it won't happen, but...

"Are you good, man?" Kenji's voice takes me back

"Yeah, it's just... everything reminds me of her"

"You know, you never did tell me much about your relationship with Lilly"

"Well, shortly before you and I moved together to the same university, the two of us broke up. And I didn't really wanna talk about it at the time"

"Well, do you wanna talk about it now?"

"I'm not sure"

"There's a chance we might see her, so..."

"Don't do that"

"Don't do what?"

"Get my hopes up"

"I'm just saying, it's possible"

"And what if we meet? She's likely found someone else already, she has definitely moved on. She might not even remember me anymore"

"Hey, I didn't say you two were gonna get back together, you were the one that came to that assumption. I just said we had the possibility of running into her"

Fair enough, I stayed silent knowing I didn't have a rebuttal.

"If you do see her, what will you do?" Kenji asked

I paused for a moment

"Kenji, I don't even know what to do with myself just thinking about the possibility. What do you think my answer would be for when it ACTUALLY happens?"

"Fair enough, but-"

Kenji hesitates for a second

"Do you want to see her again?"

That question, that is the question I've been asking myself ever since Kenji mentioned that the expo would be held in Scotland. And even now, at the airport, I don't know the answer.

"I don't know either," I replied