

Scene: United Nations

There was little else Kano could do but wait alongside them.

Shizune put on her serious face as they waited. She seamlessly meshed back into her commanding role as the head of the Student Council. That determination that was always ablaze in her eye was present, glowing for miles.

He felt it would be somehow inappropriate to smile, given her serious attitude, but it was a struggle not to. She looked so driven, so fierce. "Shizune at her Shizuneist," as Rin might put it, and when she got like that...it got his heart racing, for some reason. She could get so...primal, yet retain her unique refinement.

In an unmitigated contrast, Misha lounged lazily in her chair. She twirled one of her drills with a finger as she hummed a quiet tune. As the minutes passed, the other representatives began to file in.

Lilly walked into the room, exercising care not to touch anybody with her guiding cane in the process.

Lilly: "Hello, fellow representatives. Council."

Kano: "Hi."

Shizune shot her a nasty glare, taking advantage of Lilly's lack of sight. Misha let out a laugh with her arms crossed, translating Shizune's ill-toned retort in a surreal, upbeat manner.

Misha: "Wahahaha~! Typical of you to arrive after everyone else, Satou~!"

Lilly smiled politely. Thinly. She tried not to bristle up too much, that early into things.

Lilly: "I apologize for being a little under a *minute* late. I suppose I should have stopped helping my fellow students and marched right over."

Kano subtly shook his head. Shizune hadn't been kidding about not liking Lilly, and as well as Lilly tried to hide it, it seemed like they hadn't gotten along for some time.

Misha: "You never stop to look at the big picture, Satou~! You're always busying yourself with the small parts~!"

As usual, Misha's cheery and bubbly voice had a strange effect on Shizune's cold verbal strikes.

Lilly never seemed to mind vision-oriented metaphors...around her friends, at least.

Lilly: "If I do not, who will? As I understand it, you two have taken one classmate under your wings, which is...commendable. I, however, offer a personal touch of support to my entire class."

She kept her tone of voice and her rate of breathing even, with some effort. It was clear that Shizune was in a none too congenial mood.

That all-too familiar glint sparked in Shizune's eyes as she shot up from her desk.

Misha: "What are you implying, Satou~?"

Lilly: "Simply that we have different responsibilities in differing categories, in accordance with our talents and abilities."

Kano's eyes darted from Lilly to Misha and Shizune, as each spoke. If he didn't know any better, it felt like a fist-fight was gonna break out.

Misha: "It seemed more like you were implying that we're not good with other students~!"

Lilly: "*You* said that, not I. Far be it for me to pass judgment; perhaps you're simply too busy to engage in such things."

Misha: "Of course we're busy~! We're busy with all the work that others are too inept to

handle~!"

Her smile almost wavered, but she kept it painted onto her face. Part of her own tenacity was in trying not to let them get under her skin too much.

Lilly: "Perhaps the problem is not in the workers, but in those delegating the work. You're aware that it takes me moments longer to move around the school than some other representatives, yet I've heard that you've found it fit to assign me more than the average workload."

Misha: "Kaachan~ here takes a lot longer to move around than others, yet he still gets the job done~!"

Being dragged into it despite his concerns of that very thing happening, Kano was compelled to comment on the matter.

Kano: "Um, well, to be fair...my workload is pretty light."

Misha: "He has a point, Shicchan..."

Lilly made sure to smile in the direction of Kano's voice.

Shizune crossed her arms and shot a quick glare at her two fellow Council members.

Kano: "Though I'm not yet capable of a lot of work, so I'm really trying hard at it..."

He tried to exercise prudence in adding that before things escalated, not wanting to raise Shizune's ire any. He knew it was sort of a flip-flop on the issue, though.

Lilly raised an eyebrow, but she couldn't fault him. He had to deal with them on a daily basis, after all. She halfway wondered if he exaggerated his enjoyment of that.

He glanced to Shizune with slight nervousness, in an attempt to gauge her reaction.

Shizune looked relieved to some minor extent, but she was obviously still on edge in her argument with Lilly.

Misha: "Exactly~! Kaachan~ tries, and he gets better~! He puts forth effort, which is something you could take example from~!"

Lilly: "I'm glad for him, but I do put forth a considerable effort, on top of my personal obligations. Perhaps if you put forth the same efforts in helping your classmates on a personal level as I do, rather than focusing almost solely on the procedural aspects and efficiency, you'd know how difficult it can be."

In trying to turn things around, she took a soft inhale to summon up some calm. She wanted to show Shizune she was failing at rattling her cage...even if that was only partly true. She gently pressed the offensive, wanting to take some pressure off of herself.

Lilly: "Or will you simply delegate all of that kind of work to Kano, precisely as soon as he can bear the load?"

Misha: "By focusing on procedural aspects, we've got more done than the previous Councils ever did~! Maybe you should put more effort into what we do than spending your time with a cowboy and a truant~!"

Misha: "...Shicchan, that was kinda mean..."

She grimaced for a fraction of a second, but kept up her polite facade. Kano gave Shizune a mildly disapproving frown out of instinct, before sighing and trying to return to some modicum of neutrality.

Lilly: "I suppose if that's how you think of your fellow students, that explains your alienation of them...and perhaps a pot shouldn't call the kettle black. Your attendance isn't spotless."

Lilly had her there. Shizune had no way to explain their little "days off" in a credible manner; Lilly

would surely turn it against her.

Clearing his throat, Kano tried to steer the meeting toward its (claimed) purpose.

Kano: "So, uh...what was today's business, anyway?"

Lilly: "A good question. It wasn't mentioned beforehand that this would solely be a meeting to critique my work, and in that case, there would have been no need to invite any of the other representatives."

Misha: "Right~! Today we're going to go over the expenses and performances from the Spring Festival~!"

Lilly: "I have my reports together. Does everyone else?"

They all agreed. Kano turned over to Misha, and whispered discretely to her.

Kano: "I wasn't supposed to do anything in preparation for this meeting, was I?"

She gave him a grin and whispered back.

Misha: "Don't worry, Kaachan~! I've got ours right here~!"

She whipped out their reports from under her chair, a proud expression on that adorable face.

He stifled a chuckle, at hearing Misha "whisper." She hadn't been very secretive.

Lilly shuffled through her papers, and made a quiet, displeased groan.

Lilly: "One of my pages seems to be misplaced. It must have been Takahashi, he handled the report last."

Misha: "You didn't make sure everything was ready *before* the meeting, Satou~?"

She took a quiet breath, to steady her resolve.

Lilly: "I did, a few short minutes before he handled it. You wanted me to be prompt."

Misha: "But you knew full-well there'd be a meeting today, you should've double checked~!"

Lilly: "If I'd checked twice, I'm sure you'd be admonishing me for not checking in triplicate."

She exhaled a light sigh, not having meant to be that direct.

Lilly: "But that's neither here nor there. I'll simply call him. I'll be back in just a moment."

She got up and walked out of the room, not waiting for any permission.

Shizune's eyes were lit with aggravation as Lilly left in the middle of their meeting on her own accord. Misha, being oblivious, translated a quick sign that Shizune gave without thinking twice.

Misha: "Who does she think she is~?"

Kano: "I suppose it can't be helped. This Takahashi fellow should've known better."

He tried to subtly shift the blame off of her, while not appearing to take sides. Sure, the guy would take some heat, but hopefully they wouldn't hold their grudge as strongly if the responsibility rested on shoulders other than Lilly's

Misha: "That doesn't mean she gets to just storm out of our meeting like she's the Queen of Scotland~!"

Shizune probably meant those words in ire, but Kano had to stifle a chuckle at Misha's delivery of them.

Kano: "Well, the meeting can't proceed without her report. She needed to make her call."

Some of the representatives and delegates talked amongst themselves in hushed tones.

Misha: "If she'd applied herself, she wouldn't need to interrupt with her incompetence~!"

Kano: "I wouldn't call her delegate making a mistake her *own* incompetence..."

Misha: "You know what I- uh...Shicchan~ means, Kaachan~!"

Kano: "I'm sure she'll only be a second, at any rate."

He tread on very thin ice, carefully trying not to dig a hole with each of his words. As intense as Shizune could be, this was something else entirely.

Misha: "Wahahaha~! I hope so, Kaachan~!"

He smiled warily. About twenty seconds later, Lilly walked back into the Student Council room.

Lilly: "He'll bring it by as soon as possible. He'll be here in no more than five minutes."

Shizune tapped her fingers on the desk, wearing an expression that said "He better be."

Kano whispered to Misha.

Kano: "So...what should we do in the meantime?"

Misha: "Hmmm~...I don't know~, Kaachan~!"

Kano shrugged. They waited mostly in silence, with some muted whispers traded amongst the rest of the room. He didn't bother trying to whisper to Misha, because she would probably respond loudly, going by her track record.

In about four and a half minutes from then, true to Lilly's word, a man walked into the room, carrying a single sheet of paper. He was pretty ordinary-looking; there was nothing remarkable to report about his physical appearance. He looked around the room in confusion; an odd sight. He should have immediately been able to spot Lilly, what with her blond hair being something of a rarity in Japan, and his vision seemed fine enough, as he scanned through the faces in the room...

Lilly: "Over here, Takahashi."

He immediately nodded in comprehension, and walked toward her. He handed the paper into her hand with no problem, once again suggesting there was nothing wrong with his vision.

Takahashi: "I'm really sorry, Lilly. I just plain forgot I had it in my hand until you called me."

His voice was nothing exciting, either.

Lilly: "It's quite alright. We can resume the meeting now, so there's no issue."

He scanned the faces of the people in the room, but to no avail. He shook his head, and sighed.

Takahashi: "Which one of you is Misha?"

Misha stood up and gave him a big wave.

Misha: "Wahahaha~! That's me~!"

Takahashi: "Ah. W-well, please excuse Satou. It was my fault."

Misha: "Sure thing~!"

He bowed in an overly polite manner, and shuffled out of the room as fast as he could without coming off as too awkward, or disrupting things further.

Misha: "He seems nice, doesn't he, Kaachan~?"

Kano: "Yeah..."

He was a bit puzzled by the man's behavior, but the guy seemed alright.

Lilly shuffled her papers into the proper order, via memorization techniques and Takahashi's direction, and handed them to the delegate to her left, as they all passed their documents over to Shizune's seat at the front of the room.

Shizune neatly stacked their papers and began to go through them, swiftly but thoroughly.

Kano glanced over to Misha. If he was bored, she must've been *dying*, knowing her.

Misha twiddled her thumbs together in the meanwhile. It looked like she was engaged in a little thumb wrestling match with herself.

He chuckled noiselessly. If he had the strength to, he'd probably be doing the same thing she

was.

Shizune put down the stack after a short review of its contents; she looked fairly pleased.

Misha: "Looks like we made more than enough to cover our expenses~!"

Lilly: "If you'll refer to page eleven of my report, you'll see that my class' stall performed exceptionally well, and especially during my shift. A case against the incompetence you alleged, I should think."

Misha: "Are you saying it was *only* because of *you* that the stall did well~? That's incredibly selfish to say, Satou~!"

Shizune shot Lilly a devilish grin right off the heels of her translated remark.

Lilly: "It's not selfish if it's true. Earnings rose dramatically when I was offering customers courtesy and service with a smile. Not to brag, simply to point out that perhaps certain other school services could do with a touch of courtesy."

Misha: "Oh~? Are you trying to imply something about our Student Council, Satou~?"

Lilly: "You're the one who assumed I was referring solely to the Council. That speaks volumes, wouldn't you say?"

Shizune began to appear increasingly frustrated. Her verbal attacks were being thrown back at her at every turn.

Though Lilly wasn't aware of it, she seemed to have the faintest hint of smugness about her. She wasn't the vindictive sort, but dealing with Shizune was another matter entirely.

Misha: "Nonetheless~, there were several stalls that performed slightly under the average, so we should take those into account for when Tanabata begins to near~!"

A few muttered apologies echoed through the small room.

Kano: "Maybe...Lilly could give the other class cashiers some pointers?"

The suggestion slipped out of his mouth before he could think about wanting to stuff it back inside, since there was already so much tension.

Shizune stopped herself short of glaring in protest, but he had a point. If it would help increase their productivity for Tanabata, she had to consider it.

Kano offered her a timid grin, and some supplication. He knew her position in the Council was miles above his, even if there was a small quantity of ranks. Only quality mattered, and Misha was much closer to vassalage than himself, to boot.

Kano: "Just, uh, throwing ideas out there."

Misha seemed considerably more enthusiastic than Shizune. Then again, Misha was the sort to be enthusiastic about anything.

Misha: "Good idea, Kaachan~!"

He smiled appreciatively, settling more at ease than he'd been able to in several minutes.

Misha: "Lilly, what do you think of Kaachan's~ idea~?"

Lilly: "I think he's taken up quite a knack for weaving ideas to help the school, as of late, and this is certainly no exception."

Kano muttered a faint "Thanks," knowing that it was a safe bet that Lilly's legendarily keen hearing would pick it up.

Lilly: "I'd be happy to offer my assistance, in that regard."

Misha: "Shicchan~, what about you~?"

Shizune glanced back and forth between Kano and Lilly. She desperately tried to weigh other

alternatives in her head. Maybe they could downsize on their number of stalls? But then they wouldn't be able to cover enough ground. There wasn't a way out of it. Shizune ultimately gave a silent sigh. She nodded in agreement, trusting Kano's idea.

However, Shizune wasn't out of the fight yet.

Misha: "If anything goes *slightly* wrong, Satou~, it's on your head~!"

Misha: "And with you overseeing it, Shicchan says she's sure something is bound to~!"

Her lips went terse for a moment.

Lilly: "If you wish for me to fail in the first place, I'm sure you'd sniff out some minor detail."

Kano weakly tugged at his collar.

Kano: "Well, I WAS the one who suggested it, so I'm responsible for it, too. It wouldn't only lie with her."

Misha: "You haven't let us down yet, Kaachan~, unlike a *certain someone~!*"

Lilly: "Perhaps if you could make some efforts on expanding your attention span, you'd remember that I filed my last reports ahead of schedule."

Misha: "One small success doesn't make up for a mountain of disappointment, Satou~!"

Lilly let out a long but silent exhale through her nose. She tried to avoid clenching her teeth.

Lilly: "The only mountain present is the one constructed by your hyperbole. Nobody else has complained about my performance, whether student or faculty. Quite the opposite."

Misha: "That's because your laziness rubs off on them, making them *blind* to your performance~!"

Misha: "...Shicchan, that's not nice..."

The smile was wiped off of her face in an instant.

Lilly: "Perhaps Shizune would have a more realistic view of the approval I've received if she was given some to call her own. She has a grand total of *two* friends now, yes?"

She *hated* getting nasty like that, even if subtly, but Lord help her, Shizune was intent on pushing her every button.

Shizune furrowed her brow and gritted her teeth, signing furiously.

Misha: "Umm...Shicchan says 'at least *my* friends are hard workers who care about the Council, unlike your lazy friends~!'"

Lilly was nearly glowering at that point, though she tried not to give Shizune the satisfaction of seeing any real wrath.

Lilly: "Or maybe it's that not everyone lives razor-thin social lives, so they don't have quite as much time and energy left to devote."

The whispering of the other representatives had come to a unanimous halt, all eyes on the two of them.

Shizune's face was beet-red. It was flushed with a combination of burning anger and complete embarrassment.

Misha: "So devoting my time to something I care about and want to help get better makes me a lesser person, Satou~?!"

Lilly: "Perhaps devotion is merely a veil, to hide a certain...lack of proficiency in other fields."

Lilly felt a tinge of guilt at her words, but Shizune was basically asking for it. At least, in the heat of the moment, it sure made her think that way.

Despite himself, Kano found himself regarding Lilly with a mild glare. He spoke up on Shizune's

behalf, driven by impulse regardless of who started what. Though he was prone to get easily annoyed by some things, he had even less patience for a situation where two fundamentally good people were at each other's throats over frivolities.

Kano: "Shizune simply doesn't have time for other friends. When she's not busy doing the work of five people combined, she pours all of her efforts on being the best friend she can to Misha and I; the same kind of effort some would use to maintain over a dozen friends. Also, she's...aiding me, regarding my condition."

Lilly took a deep breath. She'd lost herself in the moment.

Lilly: "Kano, I didn't mean..."

Kano: "I know. I think there's simply been a misunderstanding. You both help people in a multitude of ways, not all of which are easily noticed. Wouldn't you agree, Shizune?"

He added the next part in a private whisper to Misha.

Kano: "Tell her that...what she is to me, Lilly is to Hanako, basically."

Misha gave him a cheerful nod and signed his words over to Shizune. Shizune couldn't help but blush a little bit, giving him the faintest smile underneath all the anger that Lilly had stirred up in her.

She must've seen through him. He'd intended to use the example as a platonic one, but she seemed to have taken to mind how easily Hanako would touch Lilly, be it by holding hands or even clinging to her side, even if the ladies' displays of skinship were obviously not romantic in nature. An awkward cough was unavoidable.

Lilly: "I think that's a fair assessment. Perhaps if Shizune could observe when I was helping one of my classmates deal with a terrible breakup, last week, she'd notice that I am making a non-obvious effort. I helped her through a great deal of emotional turmoil, and that's only one example."

The on-edge Shizune didn't give a nod to any of Lilly's statements. She did seem to be calming down, at the very least, as seen by her *slightly* more relaxed posture.

Lilly: "And...perhaps my judgments were somewhat harsh and made in haste."

Lilly: "Maybe we could both try to be more patient and understanding. That way, we can spend more time strategizing on how best to help the school."

She showed a hesitant smile over to Shizune's way.

Shizune rolled her eyes with her arms crossed across her chest.

Kano: "I think that's reasonable. Don't you, Shizune? I mean, it's best we focus our energy and resources where it matters."

She let out a silent sigh and finally nodded in agreement, for Kano's sake.

Out of anyone's line of sight, under the table, he reached over and gave her elbow a brief, but soft rub. An understanding and grateful gesture, so as not to disturb the meeting. He hoped it would help soothe her, too.

She looked over at him and gifted him with a warm, if nervous, smile.

He smiled back, feeling quite relieved that she'd finally relented. He'd nearly been sitting on the edge of his seat.

Spotting her smile, Misha clapped her hands and lit up the room with one of her own.

Misha: "Yay~! We can finally work together~!"

He couldn't help but grin, and Lilly's spirits were lifted, as well.

Lilly: "So now we fill out the last few forms to complete the audit, correct?"

Misha: "Right~!"

He watched Shizune pass out the papers in authoritative fashion. Each of them set to orderly work, wanting to get back to their respective lives. She passed him one as well. With a light shrug, he picked up a pencil and joined in. It was decidedly similar to the kind of paperwork he'd been handling recently. He noticed everyone else had been given a few sheet, but he'd only received one.

As each of them conducted their business, he was getting it done at a decent pace, compared to normal. He progressed decidedly slower than the rest, but he was writing legibly, at least. It was mostly information that had become second nature to him, filling out so many similar kinds of papers, lately. It wouldn't be much of a problem-

Oh no.

No, no, not now.

Scene: The Inferno

Pure, unfiltered torment surged along his spine without so much as the courtesy of a warning. His eyes drastically widened in shock, but he narrowed them back to normal as soon as he could, before anyone noticed. A small squeak escaped his throat. It was *bad*, that time. Excruciating. Already, he was devoting a lot of energy to suppress a loud shout at its unrelenting severity. His mind was barely keeping itself together; he had to keep reminding himself he was in a room full of people.

Kano: "E-excuse me."

He reached for a tissue on the desk, and it took every ounce of his being not to let his arm visibly shake. He blew his nose to create the facade that he'd simply sneezed. In reality, it felt like the Devil's own hands were wrenched tightly around his backbone.

He struggled desperately, and somehow managed to maintain his poker face. Nothing else about him appeared too out of the ordinary, even as he used every shred of his resolve not to start screaming at the top of his lungs.

[Dear You -Feel- - Higurashi no Naku Koro ni](#)

He didn't want to embarrass himself, and especially not interfere with the meeting, considering Shizune had just calmed down...

...but dear God, *the agony*.

He could feel it spreading along his limbs, like a deadly poison. His right foot locked up, his suffering reaching even to his farthest extremities. He kept his eyes directed toward that sheet of paper, as though in deep focus. All he could do was try to push out the irrational urge to end his life with great haste, just to make the torture stop.

As the nausea began to churn in his stomach, all he could do to stem the tide of pitch-black thoughts of his never-ending inferno was to reflect upon happier times. He imagined Shizune gently wrapping her arms around his shoulders. Giving him the most tender, heartfelt little kiss. All while struggling with the futility of cursing damned, merciless God for his fate.

Some small solace was brought to visit him, when he remembered Shizune silently laughing, under the bright blue sky. He had to survive through life testing his soul, so he could hear her truly laugh, someday.

A few tears spilled onto his sheet of paper, and he moved it aside to keep it dry, all the while maintaining a nearly perfectly straight face, some trembles notwithstanding.

All he could think about was what he was trying to achieve in the future. He thought that he'd merely wanted a normal life, but he wished to help people, like he watched the people around him do.

He promptly willed his tears to stop.

He had to be strong, for himself and those he cared about, even as he contemplated the nature of the sick son of a bitch who crafted destiny, to imprison him in the cage that was his body.

Who could look down and watch without intervening to stop the travesty before his eyes.

Lilly had some idea of what he was going through, as well as he hid it. His breathing was more than labored; it was sharp and staccato. She hoped she was wrong, but she had a hunch he was in the clutches of utter physical despair. No matter what, she'd respect his wishes. He wanted to be treated normally, so that's what she'd give him.

Kano: "M-Misha..."

He spoke in a quaking whisper, but he knew how Misha could miss tonality unless it was obvious.

Misha: "Hmm~? What is it, Kaachan~?"

Kano: "I'll be back. I n-need to use the...bathroom."

He struggled as hard as he could, to keep the distress out of his voice.

Misha: "Sure~, no problem~! I'll let Shicchan~ know."

Kano: "M-...mm."

He murmured in agreement, and went to wheel himself out as rapidly as he could without raising too much suspicion. All he had to do was keep it together for a few moments longer. A student thankfully, mercifully helped him open the door, and closed it behind him. He rolled along at a frantic pace as soon as he was out of their vision, desperately trying to ignore his spine's rebellion all the while.

It was the worst it'd been in *months*. He finally got to the bathroom, after what felt like an eternity. After a brief scan of the stalls, he saw no telltale feet, signaling that nobody else was there. He hastily opened the door to one of the larger stalls, wheeled himself forward, and fell on his knees in front of the toilet.

He started emptying the contents of his stomach into the toilet as soon as the lid was up, the act of vomiting only compounding his suffering. Fire roiled through his insides, and past his throat, tainting his tongue with an unholy, foul flavor.

Frigid sweat trickled from his forehead and palms in large beads. He felt cold as a cadaver.

As he sobbed his eyes out, he began punching the side of the toilet clumsily, but enough to hurt his knuckles and arm some. A primal but futile effort that served as some sort of petty distraction, and nothing more. He didn't know if it eased or spurred his anger.

He began throwing up again, and knowing the men's restroom was a good distance from the Student Council room, and that mostly everyone had left school already, he could hold in his screams no longer. They ripped past his lips, punctuating the retching wails between losing

portions of his lunch.

He screamed, cried, and gripped the side of the rims so hard, his knuckles turned nearly as white as the porcelain they held.

His tortured screams lasted for under a minute, signaling his utter breakdown of will. It was simply too much for one man to bear, yet he was somehow getting through it, second by long second.

The base temptation to bash his head against the hard, solid toilet to attempt to achieve suicide came at him so strongly, it was like it flowed through his very veins. Like it was all he was. All of his happy memories were far off in the distance, as if he'd been clutching precious gems close to his bosom, only to lose his grip and drop them into an open sewer drain, with not a single hope of recovery. It seemed like they could never come back.

Actually...all but one, as it turned out. When even imagining being held in loving arms couldn't reach him anymore, something else did. That imagined moment of him making Shizune laugh audibly. It was a stupid little thing, but he could hear it almost as strongly as if it were a real memory.

It'd probably be a stifled, odd grunt of a noise, since she had no way to regulate her voice. Surely, that was why she near-constantly avoided making any sounds like the plague, as they'd be highly odd for others to hear, but bringing her such amusement that she'd drop her guard and feel the true joy and healing of laughter, nature's best medicine...his weariness made him so numb to nearly every thought, by then, but definitely not that one. It was the only thing keeping him alive and his mind in the real world, for those few but monumentally difficult minutes.

His energy gave out further, permitting him only to weep softly, as he rest his head against the side of the rim, completely uncaring of how unsanitary it surely was. Shame accompanied such a lowly resting place.

He continuously tried to silence that voice in his head telling him "It'll always be this horrible." There had to be something better than this. *There just had to be.* He tried to envision some kind of future where he could earn his lot in life, and spread joy to people, somehow. Some kind of blessed existence, as bitterly, evidently naive as such a notion struck him.

About a minute later, he finally, limply, stumbled back into his chair. He tried his damndest to fill his head with the memories of echoing "WAHAHA~!"s that represented every good aspect that joy, innocence, and hope had ever held, and the downright invincible spirit Shizune would show with a simple smirk, often accompanied by an adjustment of her glasses. That poise, that power...

He laid his head against the stall door, leaning back to try to give his body some uncomfortable rest. He remembered being told that he was needed. If he could hold out through all of the torture-tests...maybe he could somewhat approach his dreams. His breathing eventually slowed, as that long spike of pain finally ceased, for the most part.

Resting a few minutes more, he finally opened the stall door, and washed his hands at the lower-standing sink. The only way he could even muster the strength to do so, was to imagine Shizune holding his hands up in hers, and washing them for him. He normally despised having any element of his personal hygiene tended to by others, but in that moment, it was much more difficult to think about how his fingers and wrists had to move to accomplish the basic task of

cleansing.

Not too lengthy of a while later, he had slowly wheeled himself back to the door of the Student Council room. He'd taken, by his most accurate estimate, about eight minutes. Possibly ten. With a thorough sigh, he finally resumed contemplating his most immediate situation: he had been gone long enough to perhaps raise some suspicions, but he'd done his best. Maybe they'd think he had to take longer for mundane reasons, not necessarily connected to his condition. He opened the door, and wheeled himself quite sluggishly over to his seat.

They hadn't heard any of his horrifying cries of suffering, naturally. Misha gave him a clueless grin as he wheeled himself back.

Misha: "Don't worry Kaachan~, you didn't miss anything~!"

He tried to grin back, but it was more like grim death.

Kano: "Good."

Shizune glanced over at him from above her paperwork. He'd been in the bathroom for a pretty long time; could he have come down with something?

For a moment, if she could even make out his eyes through the tired slits of his 'lids, she could see the hollowness that proceeded such scarcely imaginable nerve-wrackings. His head very subtly trembled upon the flimsy hold of his neck.

Getting up from her seat, she walked over to Kano's side.

He let out a deep cough, which he couldn't bother to politely cover. Instead, he touched her hand with the back of his, briefly, and raggedly murmured to Misha.

Kano: "Tell her...I'll be alright, and we don't wanna cause a spectacle here."

Misha: "Got it~!"

Misha signed his message to Shizune. Giving him a reluctant nod, Shizune went back to her desk and resumed focusing her attention on her work.

He looked over to her without a word, knowing she'd eventually catch his gaze. He tried to be subtle enough that other people wouldn't notice, but that she would.

As he suspected, Shizune couldn't keep her eyes off of him. Every now and again she'd find herself gazing back at him.

[Will \(Kano's Theme\) - Yuki Kajiura](#)

He caught her attention for a moment. It even hurt to smile, at that point. It was a weak one, but he mustered up an expression that was, nevertheless, reassuring. An exhausted determination, for him to overcome his emotions and show some trace of joy, cultivating a new batch of it right after all of it had been robbed from him, as it were. He didn't want her to worry.

She returned his smile tenfold. It took him a *lot* of will to give her that one show of good faith.

He nodded subtly to her, for it was the only manner in which he could. He glanced around the room, noticing that a few people weren't done filling out their papers. He brought a nearly quaking hand up to grip his pencil once more, and slowly but surely, he finished what he had started. After all that, he still overcame the obstacle that paper presented, no matter how small a task it would've been for most anyone else.

He wrapped his duties up dead last, of course. He dropped his pencil on the desk unceremoniously.

Shizune got up from her desk and went around the room collecting everyone's papers. She came to Kano's desk after all of the others, lightly rubbing his shoulder as she picked up his work.

He didn't even try to hand it to her, and he leaned into her touch a little bit, despite the classroom full of people to see and perhaps notice it. With what he'd gone through, he thought he deserved, at the very least, that mere second-long consolation.

While Shizune organized the stack of their completed work on the desk, Misha let out a jubilant cheer.

Misha: "Yay~! The audit is done~!"

Kano: "Yay..."

One could scarcely call his tired chiming in a "cheer," but he sounded relieved, at least.

Lilly: "Excellent work, *everyone*."

She emphasized that last word.

Kano once again spoke in a hushed tone.

Kano: "Are we almost done?"

Misha: "Mm-hmm~!"

Lilly: "Is there any more business for us to attend to?"

Misha: "That just about takes care of it~!"

Kano rested his chin in his palm. He tried to make it look casual, perhaps bored, rather than reveal that his neck was getting awfully sore and tired.

Misha: "Shicchan~ says we can begin discussing Tanabata preparations next time~!"

Lilly: "Alright, so we shall. Are we excused, Shizune?"

She tried to take on a more polite tone, in an attempt to make up for her earlier abrupt departure to make the phone call.

Shizune gave the other representatives a nod.

Misha: "Yep~!"

Kano heaved a too-relieved sigh, before he caught himself. The other delegates left in short order, saying brief goodbyes.

Misha let out a smaller sigh of relief of her own, as everyone exited the room.

Misha: "Ah~! Finally, it's over~!"

Lilly walked toward the door, but she stopped halfway through it. She walked back in toward where she'd last heard Kano's voice.

Lilly: "Kano..."

Kano: "Yeah?"

Lilly: "I, um...you did a good job. I'm certain it must've been...difficult."

There was some delay before his response. He glanced up to see her reassuring smile.

Kano: "...You heard my breathing, huh?"

Lilly displayed a moderately gloomy frown.

Lilly: "Yes. I know it took considerable effort, but you conducted yourself in a manner wholly befitting of the Student Council."

Kano: "Thanks."

His answer was simple, and not as heartfelt as he would've liked, but he knew Lilly could hear how completely wiped out he was.

Lilly: "Shizune, Misha...thank you for aiding Kano."

For once in a long time, Shizune didn't feel like shooting a snarky reply to Lilly.

Misha: "You're welcome, Lilly~!"

She smiled warmly; something she rarely did when speaking directly to Shizune. She reached her hand out in Kano's general direction, and he took her cue and guided it onto his shoulder. She offered her support and comfort by giving it a very gentle squeeze and a pat, briefly, before withdrawing.

Lilly: "Take care, all of you. Keep giving your best efforts."

Misha: "You too~!"

Misha had another Misha-moment: she gave Lilly a big friendly farewell wave despite her blindness.

Kano grinned, ever so tiny as he could. He'd wanted those funny moments to come back, when he was all alone.

Kano: "You too. Catch ya later."

She unfolded her cane, and made her departure.

After a few seconds, when he was sure she was out of earshot, he let out a quiet, pained groan.

The noise managed to catch Misha's ears, however.

Misha: "Huh~? Something wrong, Kaachan~?"

He rubbed his forehead, and lied through his teeth. All recounting his unpleasant experience would do was spread the concepts of its misery, or so he believed.

Kano: "No, I'm just tired."

Misha: "Want us to take you back to your room~?"

He assented with a feeble nod which would've been easily missed, had Misha not been paying attention.

Shizune took the helm of his wheelchair as usual, and the trio headed down the halls and outside on the path to the male dorms.

His head and neck slumped over to his right side, causing him to sit in his chair quite crookedly, but he managed to stay seated in it nonetheless.

They reached his door, stopping just short in front of it.

Misha: "Want me to open it, Kaachan~?"

Kano: "Yeah."

Misha went to turn the knob, only to discover it was still locked.

Misha: "It's locked~!"

He sighed, and fished around the left side-pocket of his wheelchair, producing said key. He handed it to Misha.

Misha: "Ah~! Here we go~!"

She took the key and fumbled around with it in the lock, finally getting the door open.

Shizune gently pushed him to the side of his bed.

He motioned for Misha to help lift him, too. The less he had to do, the better.

Misha happily nodded and skipped over. Misha and Shizune's combined efforts got Kano into bed with minimal difficulty.

As he was moved to sit on his bed, without even realizing it, he found himself not letting go of Shizune. When it clicked into his mind what he'd done, rather than giving into the awkwardness

and withdrawing, he wrapped his arms more tightly around her.

Shizune blushed a light red when she felt that grasp take hold. Misha's presence made her especially hesitant, but she returned the favor and gave Kano a hug.

As he shook, she could feel a single tear drop upon her neck. One thing was for certain: he was terrified, clinging to her like a lost child. His instincts overrode even his pride, as hard as he'd tried to deny them.

She held him close to her in their warm, comforting embrace.

He said one thing, in a brittle, tiny voice.

Kano: "It's painful..."

The word he used was kurushii: a difficult pain.

She looked back at Misha, who swiftly translated for her. Shizune nodded to Kano, and gently rested her head on his chest, mimicking what she'd seen in the romantic movies and TV dramas that Misha imbibed.

Though it surprised him, since he'd been the one needing much literal and emotional support, he made sure to pat along her back with tenderness. The way she leaned into him like that, it got him to snap out of his misery, and think about her needs, too, even if subconsciously communicated through her leaning into him. He tried to hug her comfortingly, rather than desperately, for once.

When Shizune glanced upward at him; she didn't know what to think. She froze in place, unable to look anywhere else. Those confusing aches of nervousness started to settle in, but Kano's simple existence brought her something strange. It was like a foreign feeling of comfort.

He was sure she noticed the signs of his awkward little chuckle written across his face, even if she couldn't hear it.

As they held each other, Misha stood idly by the front door. She was doing her best to focus her attention on other things around the room.

With extreme reluctance, he drew back from their embrace. He laid back in his elevated bed.

Kano: "Hey, Misha...come here."

Her signature grin came back to her lips in full force.

Misha: "About time~!"

Misha skipped over alongside Shizune.

He languidly reached for her hand, and gripped it all he could.

Kano: "I can't leave you out of this."

He smiled at her. He hoped it would defuse some of the awkwardness, but it was clear that...while one couldn't exactly describe any of his physical contact with Shizune as "romantic," per se, his touch with Misha was more clearly platonic. Nevertheless, the look in his eyes was the height of gratitude, and she seemed to recognize it.

Misha: "Wah~! Of course, Kaachan~!"

It was a brief gesture, for he was feeling rather drained. He brought his hand back to his side.

Kano: "I know it's still kinda early in the night, but I need some rest. I'll see you tomorrow, probably."

Misha: "Sure, Kaachan~! See you tomorrow~!"

Misha skipped out the door. Like several other nights, Shizune and Kano were left by their lonesome.

Feeling totally spent, all he could do was smile at her with deep-seated appreciation. Shizune took one of his hands in hers and gave it a gentle squeeze. She smiled at him; it was her little way of saying good night. He responded with a squeeze of his own, predictably weaker than hers. After a reluctant withdrawal of her hand, Shizune began walking toward the door. He gave her a labored little wave goodbye. Shizune waved back as she slowly shut the door behind her. Not even bothering to remove his shoes, he was practically asleep before the door closed.

Scene: Sunshine Sketch

Elsewhere that night, Junichi brought his evening walk to a close. He entered his room, locked the door behind him, and kicked off his shoes. There was still some substantial time to kill, as Hanako retreated to sleep pretty early. He plopped down at his desk, reluctantly trugged a textbook out of his bag, and began to study. It was mostly mathematics and science, also known as the "boring" stuff. Minutes passed by as he waded through problems and formulas. After what must've been an hour, Junichi's eyes drifted over to the clock. It was starting to get pretty late. He spun his pencil around between his fingers, lost on a stray train of thought. His eyes were fixed on an empty page in his notebook. Well, it was an empty page to some. Hanging around Rin had him in a "fartsy artsy" mood. Sure, it was a blank page to some people, but to others it was a *canvas*. A space for anything to be created. Almost without thought, he started to draw something. It started out as a rough oval. With some detailing, drawing, and erasing, it turned into the outline of someone's face. He did some more erasing, taking his time, his face stolid as his hand moved on its own. After an hour of possessed sketching, shading, and detailing, he peered down at what he had created. It was a detailed sketch of Hanako's face. It wasn't *accurate* or realistic in any sense, but it definitely had a strong resemblance to her. He'd gone the full nine yards, adding in the shadows and getting every important part right. Her hair covered the scarred portion of her face, giving her that shy look she always had. Her expression was muted, yet her lips were displaying the smallest, cutest smile. It beat the pages of other sketches he'd drawn in countless detentions in the past. That particular sketch of the bashful girl he was so fond of smiled upwards at him from its place on the page next to a plethora of mathematical equations. There wasn't any time for him to tear it out and run it over to Hanako's room. She'd be sleeping, anyway. Junichi let out a yawn and pulled off his shirt. Things would have to wait for tomorrow. He flicked off the light, dove onto his bed, and dozed off to a decent sleep.