

**My Quiet Beach Vacation  
Is Actually a Government Population Initiative,  
as I Suspected**

**Story Starts**

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**Chapter 1.3 -**

**Naturally, Government Initiatives  
Have My Best Interests at Heart**

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"Now then!" Komachi's visible eye narrowed with the predatory focus of a sniper acquiring three targets simultaneously. "The next segment is what I call the Triple Threat."

The screen transitioned. No gentle fade this time—a hard cut, aggressive, the visual equivalent of kicking down a door. Three profile cards appeared side by side, arranged in a triptych that would have looked at home in a Renaissance altarpiece if Renaissance altarpieces had featured government-branded compatibility assessments and three-size measurements rendered in Helvetica.

**YUKINOSHITA YUKINO—COMPATIBILITY PROFILE**

**ISSHIKI IROHA—COMPATIBILITY PROFILE**

**YUIGAHAMA YUI—COMPATIBILITY PROFILE**

Three names. Three cards. Three women who constituted approximately ninety per cent of my voluntary social interaction over the past five years and one hundred per cent of the reason I'd developed the emotional processing capacity of a moderately intelligent root vegetable.

The layout was tighter than previous profiles—condensed to fit three subjects on a single screen, the fonts slightly smaller, the data slightly denser, as if Komachi had decided that efficiency demanded she destroy three lives simultaneously rather than waste time destroying them sequentially.

Assembly-line humiliation. Batch processing. The Toyota Production System applied to romantic exposure, and like everything Toyota produced, it was reliable, efficient, and would continue operating long past the point where everyone involved wished it would stop.

Heights. Weights. Blood types. The numbers cascaded down each column with the clinical precision of a medical chart—B86-W56-H83 for Yukinoshita, B80-W56-H80 for Isshiki, B90-W60-H89 for Yuigahama. The measurements registered in my brain with the unfortunate clarity of data I would never be able to un-know, each number taking up permanent residence in a neural apartment it hadn't paid deposit on and from which no eviction notice could dislodge it.

*'B90. Yuigahama is a B90. I've sat across from her at the Service Club table for three years. We shared a desk in the clubroom. I've walked beside her on countless occasions. And at no point—at no point in the entire history of our acquaintance—did I ever consciously register the fact that she was carrying a ninety-centimetre bust within arm's reach of my field of vision. My powers of observation are not merely bad. They are criminally negligent. If obliviousness were a prosecutable offence, I'd be serving consecutive life sentences.'*

Then the bottom line appeared, synchronised across all three profiles.

Virginity Status: ✓ (Confirmed)

Three checkmarks. Three confirmations. A trinity of verified sexual inexperience that my sister had somehow, through methods I refused to speculate about, ascertained and documented with the thoroughness of an auditor certifying financial records.

But beneath the virginity status—

The screen updated. A new line materialised. New data. New suffering.

Personal Items of Note: Self-pleasure device (recently acquired)

The wording was clinical. Sterile. The bureaucratic euphemism of a government document that needed to acknowledge the existence of vibrators without actually printing the word "vibrator" on an official presentation.

"Self-pleasure device" had the sanitised energy of a tax form category—Line 47: Declare all self-pleasure devices acquired in the current fiscal year. Please retain receipts for audit purposes.

Three checkmarks. All three of them. Recently acquired.

*'All three of them bought vibrators. Recently. Around the same time? Was this coordinated? Did they go shopping together? Was there a group chat?*

*"Ladies, the new models are in stock at Donki, shall we make an afternoon of it?" Did they compare features? Read reviews? Discuss wattage over coffee like suburban mothers evaluating kitchen appliances?'*

*'No. Stop. You are constructing scenarios. You are building an elaborate imaginary shopping trip for three women you've known since high school, and the merchandise is vibrators, and your brain is treating this like a logistics puzzle rather than the deeply personal information it actually is. This is not a supply chain problem. These are human beings with private lives that your sister has weaponised against them.'*

*'...but was there a group discount?'*

*'STOP.'*

Across the row, Miura—who had been watching the proceedings with the relieved detachment of someone whose turn in the barrel had already passed—went crimson. Not at the revelation itself. At the qualifier. *Recently acquired*. The implication that these three had only recently discovered what Miura, based on her device-naming habits and the trajectory of tonight's disclosures, had presumably discovered considerably earlier. The blush was the blush of someone who'd been reminded of their own relationship with the product category by proxy—a sympathetic detonation triggered by adjacent embarrassment.

"Unfortunately," Komachi added with exaggerated disappointment that fooled absolutely no one, "unlike Yumiko-san's, none of them named their devices."

Miura's blush achieved a depth of colour normally reserved for emergency vehicles and the warning screens of nuclear power plants.

"But!" Komachi raised a finger. "What they did do was much, much more interesting than naming things."

*'More interesting. She said "more interesting." On Komachi's scale, where "interesting" already encompasses custom body pillows with three seasonal variants, scrapbooks with decorative borders, and politeness-driven sexual encounters with gender-confused tennis players, "more interesting" occupies a region of the spectrum I'm not sure my cardiovascular system is rated for. My heart has structural limits. It was not engineered for this sustained level of emotional bombardment. There should be a circuit breaker. A fuse. Something that trips when the load exceeds capacity and shuts the whole system down to prevent permanent damage.'*

*'The fuse did not trip. The fuse had been removed during manufacturing. The Hikigaya model shipped without safety features. There was probably a recall notice I never received.'*

"So! Let me set the scene." Komachi clapped her hands together, her eyepatch giving the gesture an oddly piratical quality—a captain addressing her crew before a raid on a merchant vessel carrying cargo it desperately wished to keep. "This happened about... two months ago? Onii-chan's apartment. Movie night."

Movie night. We did have movie nights. They'd become a semi-regular occurrence during second year—Yuigahama's idea initially, then absorbed into the social calendar with the inevitability of all Yuigahama-initiated activities, which had a half-life longer than plutonium and were approximately as difficult to contain. Yukinoshita would bring snacks she'd pretend were for everyone but had been selected based on my preferences. Isshiki would bring wine she'd pretend was for everyone but had been selected based on its ability to

get me drunk on two glasses. And Yuigahama would bring herself, which was both the simplest and the most complicated contribution.

"Onii-chan, being Onii-chan, fell asleep forty minutes into the film."

*'Again? I fell asleep again? Is this a pattern? Am I narcoleptic? Do I have an undiagnosed sleep disorder that activates specifically during social situations where women are apparently trying to confess their feelings? Because the statistical probability of falling unconscious at the precise moment of maximum romantic potential—twice now, documented, on a government presentation—exceeds what coincidence alone can explain. Either my body has developed a defence mechanism against emotional intimacy that manifests as involuntary unconsciousness, or the alcohol is genuinely knocking me out, and either way the result is the same: I am physically absent during the most important conversations of my life.'*

*'My body has automated the avoidance. I don't even need to be awake to run from my feelings anymore. My nervous system handles the retreat independently, like a screensaver that activates when the user hasn't interacted with the interface for too long. Except instead of bouncing logos, it's unconsciousness. Romantic-intent detection: timeout reached. Entering sleep mode. To resume normal operations, please resolve all pending emotional commitments. Estimated completion time: never.'*

"And then," Komachi's voice dropped to a stage whisper, "the wine came out."

The screen split. Komachi remained on the left half, but the right half now displayed what appeared to be a transcript—timestamped, colour-coded by speaker, formatted with the meticulous attention to detail of someone who had been taking notes at the time or had access to an audio recording, and knowing Komachi, both. Probably both. Definitely both. My sister did not rely on single-source intelligence.

"So picture this." Komachi shifted registers. Her shoulders dropped. Her posture loosened. And when she spoke again, her voice had

transformed—higher, breathier, carrying the distinctive nasal lilt and extended vowels of Isshiki Iroha three glasses deep into cheap rosé.

"Senpaaai ish sho annoying," drunk-Komachi-as-Isshiki whined, the impersonation so precise it sent a chill down my spine and a spike of recognition through my nervous system. "Like, he'sh right theeeere, and he doesn't even— *hic*—he won't even—ugghhh."

Beside me, Isshiki's entire body went rigid. Her fingers—the fingers that had been conducting a slow-motion invasion of my inner thigh—froze mid-advance with the abrupt stillness of a soldier who'd stepped on a landmine and understood that movement in any direction would be catastrophic. Her thumb found her remote. The mute button depressed.

On screen, a portion of the transcript greyed out. Three seconds of dialogue, redacted. Komachi's Isshiki-voice continued past the gap without pause—"—and I'm shitting there looking cute, like, objectively cute, and he just snores! He SHNORES! *Hic!* Ish thish what being a heroine feelsh like? Because this ish GARBAGE!"

*'Heroine. She called herself a heroine. Even drunk, even frustrated, even venting to an audience she believed was sympathetic and private—which it was neither—Isshiki Iroha maintained her self-image as a protagonist. The alcohol stripped away the tactics and the calculated cuteness, but the fundamental narcissism survived intact. A cockroach of an ego. Nuclear-winter-proof. The last thing standing after every other social construct had been dissolved by cheap rosé.'*

Komachi's posture shifted again. Straightened. Cooled. The temperature of her voice dropped fifteen degrees as she became Yukinoshita Yukino—measured, precise, each word placed with the deliberate care of someone arranging cutlery at a formal dinner where one misaligned fork could topple a dynasty.

"He's not going to choose," drunk-Komachi-as-Yukinoshita stated, and even filtered through imitation, the words carried that particular Yukinoshita

weight—the gravity of someone who had analysed a problem from every angle and arrived at a conclusion she hated but couldn't logic her way around. "He'll die before he chooses. *Hic*. He'll grow old alone in that apartment, shurrounded by light novels and instant ramen, and he'll convince himself it was a philosophical decision rather than cowardice."

*'I feel personally attacked. Also, she's correct. She's entirely, devastatingly correct, and the fact that drunk Yukinoshita can diagnose my terminal indecisiveness with the same accuracy as sober Yukinoshita suggests the alcohol didn't impair her analysis—it just removed the filter that usually prevented her from stating it so bluntly. Sober Yukinoshita would have wrapped that assessment in three layers of metaphor and a literary reference. Drunk Yukinoshita delivered it with the naked efficiency of a scalpel, which, given our current state of dress, was thematically appropriate.'*

On screen, Yukinoshita's mute button activated. A chunk of transcript vanished—longer this time, perhaps six seconds of dialogue swallowed by the censorship function. Whatever drunk-Yukinoshita had said in that gap, she didn't want it broadcast. The fact that she was censoring selectively rather than universally meant she was choosing her redactions with surgical precision—allowing some revelations through while cutting others. This wasn't panic. This was editorial control. Even exposed, even humiliated, Yukinoshita Yukino refused to cede narrative authority entirely. If her private life was going to be broadcast, she would at least curate the exhibition.

Then Komachi pivoted. Full-body, like an actor stepping out of one role and into another mid-scene. Her posture softened. Her shoulders rounded. She hunched forward slightly, and when she spoke, the voice that emerged was warmer, rounder, carried on a current of earnest emotion that wobbled at the edges like a table with one short leg.

"Why can't he jusht... shee us?" drunk-Komachi-as-Yuigahama said, and the wobble wasn't just phonetic—it was structural, the fundamental frequency of Yuigahama Yui's voice when she'd been drinking and the walls came down and the feelings she usually packaged in smiles and "yahallo"s spilled out

uncontained. "Like, we're right here. *Hic*. We've always been right here. All three of us. And he jusht... doesn't..."

The mute engaged. Yuigahama's finger came off the button. Engaged again. Off. On. A staccato rhythm that suggested she couldn't decide which parts to censor—or that the parts she wanted to censor were woven so tightly into the parts she was willing to let through that separation was impossible without destroying the whole fabric.

Fragments survived. "—not fair that he—" Mute. "—tried sho hard to—" Mute. "—shometimes I think he actually—" Mute mute mute.

Komachi rode the gaps like a musician improvising around dropped notes, her performance adapting to the censorship in real time, filling the silences with facial expressions that conveyed what the words couldn't—drunk-Yui's pout, drunk-Yui's frustrated hand-wave, drunk-Yui's particular way of pressing her palms against her cheeks when the emotion got too big for her face to contain.

Then she switched back to Isshiki. Mid-sentence. No transition.

"He'sh going to end up with some random boring woman who makesh him bento and callsh him "anata" and he'll be perfectly content becaush he's never wanted more than adequate," drunk-Isshiki declared with the righteous fury of someone who'd taken personal offence at the concept of "adequate." "He DESHERVESH more than adequate! He deshervesh—"

Mute.

"—and I would give him—"

Mute.

"—EVERY SHINGLE—"

Mute.

The button was being pressed with the velocity of a woodpecker attacking a tree that had personally wronged its family. Isshiki's thumb had achieved a

frequency of input that exceeded what the hardware seemed rated for—the remote emitted a faint protest noise, the electronic equivalent of a whimper, as it attempted to process commands faster than its circuits could cycle.

*'What was she going to give me? What does Isshiki Iroha believe I deserve that exceeds "adequate"? And why does the prospect of finding out fill me with a terror that originates somewhere in my solar plexus and radiates outward like the shockwave from a depth charge?'*

*'Because "adequate" is my operating parameter. "Adequate" is the ceiling I've set for myself—not out of self-deprecation, but out of self-preservation. Wanting more than adequate requires acknowledging that "more" exists, and acknowledging that "more" exists requires the follow-up acknowledgement that you've been choosing "less" not because "less" was all that was available but because "more" was terrifying and "less" was safe and the distance between the two was exactly the width of a choice you were too afraid to make.'*

*'Isshiki was right. Drunk Isshiki was right. I settled for adequate because adequate didn't ask anything of me. Adequate was the emotional equivalent of a convenience store bento—sufficient, predictable, requiring no effort beyond unwrapping. And I'd built an entire philosophy around defending that bento as a lifestyle choice rather than admitting it was a coping mechanism.'*

"They went on like this for about forty minutes. Complaining. Venting. Saying everything they'd been keeping inside since high school." Komachi paused. "And then Yui-san said something that changed everything."

The transcript cleared. A single line of text appeared, pink, timestamped 01:47 AM.

Komachi's voice shifted back to drunk-Yuigahama—but quieter now. The wobble was gone. In its place, something steadier. The voice of someone who'd passed through the emotional turbulence of venting and emerged on the other side into a strange, wine-soaked clarity.

""What if we just... share him?""

The words dropped into the banquet hall like a coin into a well so deep you never hear it hit bottom.

"I'm serious," drunk-Komachi-as-Yuigahama continued. "Like, what if we stop fighting over something that's never going to resolve, and just... all of us? Together? *Hic*. He's already ours, kind of. We already share him. We share his time and his attention and his stupid fish eyes and his—" Mute. "—what if we just made it official?"

Komachi switched to drunk-Yukinoshita. The cold precision had thawed. What remained was something I'd heard only twice in all the years I'd known Yukinoshita Yukino—the voice beneath the voice, the one that existed under the composure and the wit and the carefully maintained distance.

"That's... logistically absurd," drunk-Yukinoshita said, and even through the imitation, I could hear the wheels turning—the analytical mind grappling with an emotional proposition, trying to force it through a framework designed for rational assessment. "You can't simply... allocate a person like a resource. There are legal considerations. Social implications. The inherent—"

A pause. Komachi held the silence. One beat. Two.

"...but I don't want to lose either of you. *Hic*. And I don't want to lose him."

*'She said that. Yukinoshita Yukino—the woman who'd rather cut off her own hand than admit vulnerability, who communicates feelings through subtext so dense it requires a PhD to parse, who once described emotional honesty as "a structural weakness in an otherwise defensible position"—said that. Out loud. To two other women. While I was asleep six feet away, demonstrating with my unconscious body the exact kind of emotional unavailability that had driven them to this conversation in the first place.'*

"OKAY!" drunk-Komachi-as-Isshiki exploded. "Sho we're doing this?! We're actually doing this?! *Hic!* Because I've had a presentation ready since second year of high school—"

"You have a presentation?" drunk-Yukinoshita said.

"On my phone. Thirty-seven slides. Colour-coded. Title: Operation Shenpai Acquisition—Multi-Stakeholder Approach."

*'Thirty-seven slides. She had thirty-seven slides. Since fourth year of high school. Isshiki Iroha had prepared a PowerPoint presentation for the eventuality of a romantic time-share arrangement involving me, and she'd had it ready for four years. Was this what she did instead of studying for entrance exams? Was this the content on her phone when she pretended to check Instagram during club meetings? Had I been sitting across from a woman who was refining a slide deck about my romantic future while I assumed she was scrolling through food photos?'*

*'Thirty-seven slides is not a casual document. Thirty-seven slides is a thesis defence. Thirty-seven slides implies research, argumentation, visual aids, and at least one graph. What was graphed? What metrics had she plotted? My attention distribution over time? Projected happiness indices under various sharing configurations? A cost-benefit analysis of polyamorous versus sequential dating strategies with sensitivity analysis and Monte Carlo simulations?'*

*'The mind recoils, but the mind also wants to see the graph. The mind has a morbid curiosity about being the subject of someone else's data visualisation that it cannot fully suppress.'*

"I call Wednesdays and every other Saturday," drunk-Isshiki declared.

"You can't call daysh. He'sh not a conferencesh room," drunk-Yukinoshita protested.

"He'sh bashically a conference room. He shits in one place, he'sh available by appointment, and he'sh ushelesh without shomeone booking him."

*'...I don't even have a rebuttal. I am, functionally, a conference room. Available by appointment. Useless when unoccupied. Occasionally double-booked, which causes scheduling conflicts that I resolve by pretending neither meeting exists. The metaphor is airtight. Drunk Isshiki has described my social function*

*with more accuracy than four semesters of university coursework have described anything.'*

"Then!" Komachi clapped her hands, breaking the character carousel. "They started planning. Like, actual planning. Proper planning."

The transcript showed it. Three voices, three colours, interweaving in a conversation that sprawled across timestamps with the manic energy of co-conspirators who'd found a solution to a problem they'd been individually failing to solve for years. The mute buttons caught pieces—scattered redactions like bullet holes in a document, the surviving text revealing the architecture of an agreement that was simultaneously absurd and terrifyingly detailed.

Living arrangements—muted by Yukinoshita. Financial structures—partially muted by Isshiki before the delay kicked in, revealing something about a "shared household expense account" that suggested she'd been thinking about tax optimisation since the third slide of her thirty-seven-slide presentation. Children—muted by all three simultaneously, the triple-button engagement producing a solid block of grey that lasted nine seconds and represented a conversation I was probably better off not hearing, though my imagination supplied possibilities with the unwanted enthusiasm of a contractor who hadn't been hired but had started renovations anyway.

Career and household integration—Yuigahama muted this one, though not before the transcript captured the phrase "Hikki can shtay home and I'll—" and then nothing, the rest swallowed by the delay. But the fragment that followed, arriving in the gap between Yuigahama's mute attempts, completed the thought from an unexpected angle: "—do part-time and help Hikki with the houshe! *Hic*. Like, he doesh the cooking and the laundry becaush he'sh actually good at it, and I'll do the shopping and the—" Mute. "—and we can clean together on—" Mute. "—because I want to be *home*, not in some offishe—"

*'She wants to be home. Not working full-time while I handle everything. Not delegating domesticity to me like an outsourced service. She wants to be*

*there—cooking alongside me, cleaning together, splitting the household labour the way my parents never quite managed because they were both too tired from jobs that consumed everything and left nothing for the living part of life.'*

*'Yuigahama Yui, who I've spent years assuming wanted nothing more complicated than friendship and baked goods, had drunk-planned a domestic partnership model where she'd work part-time, contribute to the household income without sacrificing presence, and share the daily rhythms of home life with someone who—'*

*'—with me. She was talking about doing it with me. While I was asleep. On the sofa she was planning to share.'*

"So! The sofa situation." Komachi's voice carried the satisfaction of someone delivering the resolution to an epic she'd been narrating for hours. "Around 2:30 AM, they started getting sleepy. The wine. The emotional purge. They were exhausted. And they all had the same idea at the same time."

She didn't switch to an impersonation this time. She narrated directly, and somehow that was worse.

"Yui-san said it first. 'I wanna shleep next to Hikki.' Then Iroha-chan: 'Shenpai's shoulder is right there.' Then Yukinon—and she fought it, she really did, you could see her trying to logic her way out of wanting it—but she said: 'It would be... warm. Hic.'"

*'Warm. Yukinoshita's justification was thermoregulatory. She wanted to sleep next to me and the excuse she manufactured was body heat. As if she were a survival expert calculating optimal heat retention in a cold environment rather than a woman who wanted physical contact with someone she—'*

I couldn't finish the thought. My internal monologue, which had been running at full capacity for the duration of this evening, sputtered like an engine that had finally found its fuel limit.

"So they argued. For twenty minutes. Twenty actual minutes. About who got to sleep where."

The screen displayed a rough diagram. My sofa—rendered in simple lines on a government presentation—with a stick figure lying prone at the centre, labelled "Onii-chan (asleep, useless)." Three stick figures stood around it, represented by the three profile colours, with dotted lines indicating proposed positions and arrows showing contested zones.

*'She drew a diagram. A tactical diagram. My sister created a visual aid documenting the battle for sleeping rights around my comatose body, and she used it in an official government presentation. The diagram has a legend. The legend uses military notation. "Zone A: Primary Cuddle Position (Contested)." "Zone B: Shoulder Access (High Value)." "Zone C: Lap Deployment (Requires Negotiation)."'*

*'Somewhere, a civil servant approved this slide. Somewhere, a graphic designer rendered it with proper margins and consistent font sizing. The diagram is better designed than my university coursework. My sister's military sleeping chart is more professionally produced than anything I've submitted for academic credit. I don't know what this says about me, but I know it isn't flattering.'*

"Iroha-chan wanted left side. Yui-san wanted left side. Yukinon wanted—well, Yukinon claimed she didn't want any side, she just happened to be sitting adjacent and moving would require effort, which was transparently false, but no one challenged it because challenging Yukinon when she's lying to herself is like arm-wrestling a glacier: technically possible but not worth the geological time investment."

The diagram updated. The three coloured figures settled into their final positions.

"Yui-san took the right side. Yukinon took the left. And Iroha-chan..."

An orange figure. Not beside the central body. On top of it.

"Iroha-chan lay directly on Onii-chan."

*'ON me? Not beside me? Not adjacent? ON? She used me as a mattress? Isshiki Iroha—fifty-something kilograms of weaponised cuteness and calculated ambiguity—lay on top of my unconscious body like a cat who'd found the warmest surface in the house and claimed it through the ancient feline doctrine of "I'm here now, deal with it"?''*

*'And I didn't wake up. My body—which had apparently optimised itself for sleep the way other people's bodies optimised for athletic performance—maintained unconsciousness through the addition of three adult women to its immediate surface area. That's not sleeping. That's a coma with extra steps. That's a medically concerning level of unconsciousness that should probably be investigated by professionals, except the only medical professional on this island just spent the evening waxing me and commenting on my proportions, so I'm not confident in the available healthcare.'*

"They fell asleep like that," Komachi said. "All four of them. On the sofa—well, they later moved Onii-chan to the tatami to make things easier. At 3 AM on a Tuesday."

A photo appeared on screen. Not a diagram—a photograph. Taken from above, slightly angled, the lighting the warm amber of a living room lamp left on after everyone had passed out.

And in the frame—

Me. Asleep on my floor, mouth open, head back, the full dead-fish sleeping pose that Komachi had referenced earlier—the genetic inheritance of the Hikigaya bloodline, graceless and unapologetic. Yuigahama pressed against my right side, her head on my shoulder, one arm draped across my chest with the boneless confidence of someone who'd been waiting years to occupy that exact position and had arrived there with no intention of leaving. Yukinoshita on my left, her body curved toward mine with a precision that suggested even in sleep she maintained form—shoulders aligned, knees drawn up, her face tucked against my arm in a way that looked, from the outside, like the most natural thing in the world. Like she'd always been there. Like the empty space beside me had been her shape all along, waiting.

And Isshiki. On top. Sprawled across my torso like a starfish that had found a particularly comfortable rock, her head on my chest, limbs distributed across the available surface area with the territorial maximisation of someone who'd arrived last and compensated by claiming the most real estate. Her mouth was slightly open. A thin line of drool extended from her lower lip to my shirt.

The photograph was intimate. Domestic. It looked like a family that had fallen asleep watching a film—the kind of image you'd find in a photo album labelled "us" in someone's future living room, the kind of picture people showed at anniversary parties while their children groaned and their grandchildren asked questions.

It looked like home.

*'I was asleep for this. I was asleep for all of it—the pact, the planning, the argument, the compromise, the settling of bodies against mine in configurations that looked like answers to questions I hadn't figured out how to ask. I was present and absent. The geography of their decision and the vacancy at its centre. They built a future around me while I dreamed about nothing, and then they held me like I was already theirs, and I didn't feel any of it.'*

*'I didn't feel any of it.'*

"So let me summarise!" Komachi shifted into wrap-up mode, her visible eye bright with the energy of someone approaching the final slide of a presentation she'd been rehearsing for years—possibly literally, given the evidence of tonight. "The Triple Threat! Yukinoshita Yukino, Isshiki Iroha, and Yuigahama Yui. All three are in love with Onii-chan. All three have been in love with Onii-chan since high school. All three independently reached the conclusion that Onii-chan will never choose between them, and rather than compete to the death—which, knowing these three, was a genuine possibility with a non-trivial body count—they formed a coalition. A romantic alliance. A pact."

The three profile cards reappeared, side by side. Under each name, Komachi had added a subtitle.

Yukinoshita Yukino: The Strategist

Isshiki Iroha: The Operator

Yuigahama Yui: The Heart

*'She gave them titles. My sister assigned formal roles within the coalition like a military commander designating unit functions. The Strategist. The Operator. The Heart. It reads like the character sheet for a heist film where the score is me and the vault is my apartment and the security system is my emotional unavailability, which, as tonight has demonstrated, was never as robust as I believed. They'd been inside the vault for years. I'd just never checked the cameras.'*

"They complement each other," Komachi continued. "Yukinon provides structure and long-term planning. Iroha-chan provides adaptability and social navigation. Yui-san provides the emotional centre that holds everything together—and before you ask, yes, Yui-san specifically requested a part-time work arrangement so she can help with the household duties, because and I quote—"

Komachi cleared her throat and shifted into a spot-on Yuigahama impression, complete with the earnest head-tilt and the slightly too-loud sincerity.

"I want to be home with Hikki! *Hic*. Like, he'll do the cooking because his cooking is actually really good and mine ish... mine is still a work in progress—"

*'Understatement of the century. Yuigahama's cooking was less "work in progress" and more "active biohazard." Her cookies had once been used as doorstops by the Service Club when the actual doorstop went missing, and they'd performed the function admirably. She'd improved since then—probably—but the trauma of her early attempts had left scars on my palate that no amount of culinary redemption could fully heal.'*

"—but I can do the shcleaning and the shopping and the—the *togetherness* part! *Hic*. The being-there part! That'sh what I'm good at!"

Komachi dropped the impression and addressed the camera directly. "And Onii-chan provides the domestic labour. The cooking. The cleaning. The househusband infrastructure that all three of them want and none of them had to ask for because he's been advertising the position for years without realising he'd already filled it three times over."

*'I have been advertising. She's right. Every monologue about the househusband dream, every defence of domestic work as honest labour, every rejection of corporate culture in favour of home economics—it was a job listing. I'd been posting a vacancy in every conversation, every internal monologue, every philosophical position paper I'd constructed to justify staying home, and three women had been reading the listing and thinking, "I'd like to apply," and I'd been too busy writing the next draft of the advertisement to notice the applications piling up in my inbox.'*

Komachi took a breath. The bright eye softened. The pirate-captain energy dimmed to something quieter. She looked directly into the camera, and for a moment the eyepatch and the government badge and the professional lighting all fell away, and it was just my sister.

"So," she said. "That's everyone."

Ten names. Ten profiles. Ten women whose inner lives my sister had excavated with the precision of an archaeologist and the ethics of a tabloid journalist.

"I know some of you are angry. And that's okay. You're allowed to be angry. You're allowed to be embarrassed and confused and scared. This isn't how any of you wanted your feelings to come out."

"But I did this because none of you were going to do it yourselves." Her voice firmed. "Not you, Yukinon—you'd have waited forever, telling yourself that wanting something for yourself was selfish. Not you, Yui-san—you'd have kept smiling and stepping back and letting everyone else go first until there was no one left to yield to. Not you, Iroha-chan—you'd have kept playing games until the game outlasted the feeling."

"Not you, Saki-san—you'd have knitted twenty more scarves and hidden twenty more scrapbooks and never said a word. Not you, Saika-chan—you'd have kept binding your chest and your feelings and pretended they were the same thing. Not you, Miura-san—you'd have stayed angry at a boy for not being Hayama and never asked yourself why his honesty mattered more."

Each name landed. Each accusation—because that's what they were, gentle accusations, delivered with love and precision and the absolute certainty of someone who had done her homework—found its mark.

"And Onii-chan."

Me.

"You would have done nothing. You know that. I know that. Everyone in that room knows that. You would have stayed in your apartment, cooking meals for one, doing laundry for one, maintaining a household designed for a family while living alone, and you would have called it philosophy. You would have called it a lifestyle choice. You would have called it anything other than what it actually is, which is fear."

'...'

I had no internal monologue for this. A blank page. A cursor blinking in an empty document. For once, the narrator had nothing to narrate, because the narrator was the subject, and the subject had been described with an accuracy that left no room for revision.

"So there's no need to resist. No need to fight it. No need to hide behind embarrassment or pride or whatever wall feels safest. Because everyone in that room wants the same thing."

She leaned forward.

"You can be happy together. All of you. That's not a suggestion. That's not a hope. That's a Komachi guarantee. And Komachi guarantees have a hundred per cent fulfilment rate."

She paused. Held up a finger.

"Terms and conditions apply. Page forty-seven."

*'She—did she just—'*

"Now!" Her voice snapped back to full operational brightness with the velocity of a rubber band that had been stretched to its limit and released with extreme prejudice. "On to the important stuff!"

She leaned forward, both hands flat on whatever surface she was using as a desk, her visible eye blazing with an intensity that transcended mere sibling enthusiasm and entered the territory of demographic zeal.

"I expect nieces and nephews! LOTS of nieces and nephews! And I've done the maths!" She produced a small whiteboard from off-screen—because of course she had a whiteboard, because of course this presentation had visual aids for the reproduction segment—and held it up to the camera.

On the whiteboard, in Komachi's neat handwriting, was a table:

Wife — Children (Minimum) — Children (Target)

Each 2 3+

(22 wives)

Total 44 66+

Twenty-two.

My brain stopped.

Not slowed. Not stuttered. Stopped. The way a clock stops when you pull the battery—mid-tick, mid-thought, every cognitive process suspended in the space between one number and the next.

*'Twenty-two?'*

I'd counted ten. The profiles. Haruno, Hiratsuka-sensei, Miura, Ebina, Orimoto, Kawasaki, Totsuka, Yukinoshita, Isshiki, Yuigahama. Ten women. Ten profiles. Ten systematic demolitions of privacy that I'd assumed—naïvely, catastrophically, with the optimism of a man who should have known better by now—constituted the full roster.

Ten was already insane. Ten was already a number that exceeded any reasonable interpretation of the word "harem" and entered the territory of logistical impossibility. Ten women was not a marriage—it was a small company, and I was being asked to serve as both CEO and primary resource.

But twenty-two?

My eyes swept the room. The staff. The volunteers. The women I'd been filing under "not my problem" because they wore aprons instead of sitting in the row. Kawashima Ami, standing near the stage wing with her weight on one hip—*participant*. Konuki Sayo, the nurse who'd waxed me and commented on my proportions—*participant*. Hayasaka Ai and Fujiwara Chika, who'd been serving food and reading my light novels aloud—*participants*. Shichijou Aria and Amakusa Shino, the two presenters who'd introduced the programme—*participants*.

I counted. Ami. Konuki. Hayasaka. Fujiwara. Aria. Shino. The ten from the profiles. That was—

*'Sixteen. Seventeen. Eighteen. Nineteen. Twenty. Twenty-one.'*

Twenty-one. I could account for twenty-one.

Komachi's whiteboard said twenty-two.

*'Who is number twenty-two? Where is number twenty-two? Is number twenty-two in this room? Is number twenty-two behind a wall? Is number twenty-two being held in reserve like a secret weapon, a final-boss participant waiting in the wings for maximum dramatic impact, because that is exactly the kind of thing Komachi would do and I am not emotionally equipped for a twenty-second revelation tonight?'*

The whiteboard stared at me. Forty-four minimum. Sixty-six target. The numbers had the quiet menace of a debt I hadn't agreed to incur.

"Forty-four children minimum! Sixty-six if everyone's feeling ambitious! That's not just a classroom—that's a whole school year! Komachi can be the cool aunt who visits on weekends with presents and embarrassing stories about their father's—actually, I'll have plenty of material after tonight!"

*'Sixty-six children. My sister has set a production target of sixty-six children. She's created a KPI dashboard for my reproductive output. There are minimum quotas. There are stretch goals. I am being performance-managed by a nineteen-year-old in an eyepatch, and the performance being managed is my ability to impregnate twenty-two women enough times to populate an entire grade level.'*

*'She said "cool aunt." She orchestrated a government breeding programme, exposed a decade of private romantic histories, destroyed four mute buttons, caused three nosebleeds, psychologically devastated every person in this room, and her stated motivation is that she wants to be a cool aunt. The entire apparatus of tonight—the island, the profiles, the BREED initiative, the pharmaceutical erections—exists because Hikigaya Komachi wants to show up on weekends with presents.'*

*'This is the most Komachi reason for anything that has ever existed.'*

*'Also—sixty-six children. At a rate of nine months per pregnancy, the sheer volume of conceptions required would take—no. I am not doing this maths. I refuse to calculate the reproductive logistics of a target my sister set on a whiteboard. I have a university degree to not finish. I have a life to not live. I have sixty-six reasons to request geological asylum.'*

She raised one hand. Extended her index and middle fingers in a V-sign. Tilted her head at an angle calibrated to maximise cuteness while minimising accountability.

"Oh! And one more thing!" She held up her phone, showing a screen that appeared to be an app interface. "I've developed a Komachi Points tracking

app! Every milestone—first date, first kiss, engagement, wedding, conception, birth—earns Komachi Points that I will be monitoring remotely! The current scoreboard is at zero, which I find personally offensive given the amount of effort I've put in tonight!"

She tapped the screen.

"The leaderboard is live. The categories are weighted. Wedding is worth five hundred points. Each child is a thousand. And there's a bonus multiplier for twins!"

*'A gamification layer. She's gamified my love life. My sister has created a mobile application that tracks my romantic and reproductive milestones and assigns them point values on a competitive leaderboard. There is a bonus multiplier for twins. THERE IS A BONUS MULTIPLIER FOR TWINS.'*

*'With twenty-two participants, the theoretical maximum Komachi Points from children alone is sixty-six thousand. Sixty-six thousand points. If she'd invested this level of analytical rigour into literally anything else—climate science, urban planning, international diplomacy—she could have solved problems that had stumped generations of experts. Instead, she built a fertility scoreboard with a twin bonus. The priorities of the Hikigaya bloodline remain, as always, deeply concerning.'*

*'I take back every time I called Komachi's schemes "siege warfare." This isn't siege warfare. This is civilisational engineering. She's not trying to breach a wall. She's building an entire nation-state, and I'm the territory.'*

And winked.

One eye—the uncovered one, the one that had been watching and calculating and orchestrating all evening—closed in a deliberate, theatrical wink that lasted exactly long enough to be captured as a still frame.

"Bye-bye, Onii-chan~! Make Komachi proud!"

The screen went black.

The wink hung in the darkness like an afterimage—a ghost of light branded onto the retina, persistent, indelible, impossible to blink away.

The room was silent.

Eleven naked people sat in a row under spotlights, and for the first time all evening, nobody spoke. Nobody pressed a button. Nobody threw a remote. The silence was not empty—it was full, pressurised, containing within it the accumulated weight of everything that had been said and shown and revealed in the past however-many minutes that had restructured the social architecture of every person present.

And I sat at the centre. Isshiki's warmth hovering at the border of my erection like a question that hadn't quite been asked. Hiratsuka-sensei's palm absorbing the heat of my thigh like an answer that hadn't quite been given. Kawasaki's fist still clenched somewhere down the row—holding a decision she'd made in full view of everyone and hadn't taken back. Totsuka's untouched mute button lying in her lap like a door left deliberately open. Yukinoshita's editorial silence—the redactions she'd chosen telling a story as clear as the words she'd let through. Yuigahama's selective censorship—trying to separate the threads of a feeling that had been woven too tightly to unpick. The phantom weight of three bodies on a tatami I didn't remember sharing.

And the black screen, where my sister had been, empty now. Her work done. Her presentation delivered. Her guarantee issued. Her leaderboard launched.

A hundred per cent fulfilment rate. Terms and conditions apply. Page forty-seven.

*'She really did say page forty-seven. She turned my own running joke into a contractual clause. My sister is using my internal monologue against me. She's been reading my diary. She hasn't been reading my diary. She doesn't need to read my diary. She IS the diary. She's been inside my head this entire time, and the eyepatch was just her way of telling me she'd only been using half her power.'*

Then the lights returned—bright, clinical, the flat fluorescence of a facility that had temporarily cosplayed as a theatre and was now reverting to its institutional default. Aria and Shino stepped back onto the stage with the synchronised composure of presenters who had been waiting in the wings, watching the show, and had decided the intermission was over.

And then a wall gave way.

Not metaphorically. Not in the figurative sense I'd been employing all evening to describe the systematic demolition of my worldview. An actual wall. A section of the banquet hall's left-side panelling split apart with the hydraulic precision of a stage mechanism, revealing—

A truck.

A large truck, its side bearing an enormous glass panel that caught the newly restored lighting and threw it back at us in a reflection that showed, with mirror-perfect clarity, eleven naked people in a row of chairs staring at a vehicle that had just driven through a wall.

Embossed on the truck's chassis, beneath the glass panel, in tasteful gold lettering that suggested someone had given real thought to the typography:

**SHICHIJOU PRODUCTIONS** *Premium Visual Entertainment Solutions Est. 2019*

*'Is that—is that a JAV company logo? On the truck? On the truck that just drove through a wall of a government breeding facility? Is this sponsored content? Has my reproductive orientation been brought to me by a purveyor of adult entertainment? Are there ad breaks? Will there be a post-credits scene where someone holds up a product and asks me to like and subscribe?'*

*'Shichijou. Shichijou Productions. As in Shichijou Aria. The host. The woman who'd welcomed us with spread arms and a serene smile. She owned a JAV company and she'd supplied the transport logistics for whatever was behind that glass. The programme's host was also its multimedia sponsor. The*

*conflict of interest was so brazen it had lapped itself and become a business model.'*

Except it wasn't a mirror. Or rather, it was—but only on our side. A one-way mirror. The kind they used in police interrogation rooms and reality television productions and, apparently, government breeding programmes that had secured equipment through corporate partnerships with the adult entertainment industry.

*'Is that a magic mirror truck?'*

A magic mirror truck. The glass was reflective on our side, transparent on theirs, meaning—

But the truck was empty. No figures behind the glass—well, at least he couldn't tell. No audience revealed. Just the vacant interior of a vehicle that had been parked, positioned, and driven through a wall for—what? Dramatic effect? Future use? A promise of observation that hadn't been fulfilled yet, or one that had already concluded and the observers had relocated?

The emptiness was almost worse than an audience would have been. An audience could be confronted. An audience could be screamed at, reasoned with, or at minimum identified. An empty truck with a JAV company logo and a one-way mirror was a question mark—an architectural threat, a space that said *someone could be watching* without confirming whether they had been, were, or would be.

*'Where did they go? Were they ever there? Is the truck the point, or is the truck the distraction from whatever's about to happen next? And why—WHY—does a government population initiative have a sponsorship deal with a pornography company?'*

*'Actually, that one's self-explanatory.'*

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**==<o>&=-**

**End**

**Tatemae** (建前, "built in front") is a fundamental Japanese social concept representing the "public face," façade, or socially expected behaviour, opinions, and statements a person displays in public or professional settings. It is the opposite of **honne** (本音), which represents one's true feelings or desires.

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