

Never Alone: Satoru's Story

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Chapter One

Good Ol' Tri City Academy.

An old school turned into a modern school with some paint, new buildings, and lots of technology, with perfect lawns, boasting only around five hundred students total. My school for the last two years.

I glanced around the front yard, searching for my friends. I'd arrived last night, skipping the orientation for the new students. I didn't volunteer as a guide this year because there weren't any new guys in our class, only one girl. It was nice; I didn't have to do the tour and all the other responsibilities. Though Grant was the new student last year and he wasn't so bad. I came back from a quick jog, being the only one in the dorm besides Grant. The others were coming this morning.

"Oi! Mori!" I whipped around to see my friend Casey rushing up the sidewalk.

"Oi! Casey!"

We hugged, patting each other on the shoulders.

"How'z it going with the violin?"

"The violin is great. Can't say the same for the person playing it," I grimaced.

"You are such a modest guy, it's disgusting," laughed Branson, coming in from behind me.

"Hey, Branson!" I laughed.

Branson was another loyal old dorm mate, star linebacker for the football team.

"Seriously, bro, you are a rockin' player," he complained as we walked into the main hall of the main building. It's called the "Jackson" building, but no one ever bothers to call it that. It's always been the main building since the school started.

"Not lately. I'm having a hard time, writing and even practicing..." I sighed.

"You're in a funk, everyone gets in one," said Casey shrugging, "Got in one last year. I wasn't measuring up to what I wanted in track. But I got over it, so you can too."

Find a pretty girl to be your muse and it'll alllll become clear the meaning of life..." He said, waving his arm around the room.

I rolled my eyes.

"Everything is about girls for you," I said.

"Hey, half of the world are women, so they kinda are a big deal."

Branson and I both groaned.

"You are so cheesy that Kraft would reject you," I said as we went down the hallway that took us to the exit closest to the dorm walkway.

"Whatever. Have you ever had a girlfriend?" asked Casey, putting his hands behind his head as we walked. Branson shifted his big duffle bag to his other shoulder, still holding his smaller bag as well as a roller bag and backpack.

I ignored Casey. "Hey, you want me to help you with that?"

"He's always relied on the kindness of strangers..." Casey quoted as I took the duffle bag.

"Casey, I love you, bro, but shut it," chuckled Branson. He glanced at me, then nodded his head.

"Have you ever had a girlfriend?"

I rolled my eyes.

"Why is everyone interested in my love life suddenly? My sister was teasing me about getting a girlfriend this year at dinner," I grumbled.

Naomi was starting her second year at Tri City as an eighth grader. Did not make her any less annoying...as much as I love her, but yeah...

Both looked at me with expected faces. I caved.

"Okay, I have been on a few dates with girls to dances but no serious girlfriends. Happy?"

"Marginally. There is a new girl. Maybe she's 'the one,'" teased Branson.

I internally sighed. I do believe in that stuff. My parents are proof, but I doubted I would find anything in high school. Real life doesn't work like that.

"Okay, now you are starting to sound like him. What about you two? Share and share alike...." I mocked.

"I have yet to catch an eye of a lovely lady of this school," said Casey.

Branson blushed, turning his face down.

"Okay, who do you have a crush on?" I demanded. I knew Branson never had a girlfriend, but blushing? He was stuck on someone. Had to be.

"Well.... Hailey...."

"Yes! She's so hot, you'd rule the school!" laughed Casey.

I elbowed him.

"What, you two are going out or what?"

"No. I mean, we hung out a few times, we're sort of neighbors. Saw each other at a few city events..."

"Go for it, dog!" laughed Casey.

I sighed.

"I agree, but not with his wording..."

Branson shrugged as we swiped our key cards to enter the boy dorms.

These buildings were newly built over the old ones, which I had stayed in my ninth-grade year. I don't miss the ancient abodes. Everything up to date, cleaner, and working showers that wouldn't take ten minutes to give you hot water. The dorms for each grade were a single floor for the tenth through twelfth. The lower grades had a separate building, thank heaven. Little midgets never shut up, staying up all night. I like younger kids, volunteer at the local library every summer to help with the little kid programs, but I can't say I like the tweens much. They've lost their cuteness and gain obnoxious attitudes that stay that way till about senior year and even then, no guarantee. Save for Naomi, still had her cuteness for the most part.

We walked into our common room to see Dylan walking out of his room, full uniform and back bag swung over his shoulder, texting on his phone.

"Hey! Dylan!" I yelled.

Dylan is a super nice guy, a private introvert. We bonded a little when we first came here. Music our glue. He does blue jazz music despite his goth like appearance. We wrote a few songs together, then performed them at last year's Art walk.

He smirked as we fist bumped. Once the rest of us got into our uniforms, we headed over to the main building for breakfast. I didn't see Austin anywhere.

"Anybody see Austin yet?" I asked, out of curiosity more than anything else.

"Yeah, he already left with the other brainless trolls," muttered Dylan.

Brannon shook his head.

"He's a smart guy. I don't get why he runs with that lot."

"He dumped Bonnie, so that tells you right there he lacks brains," said Casey.

"Hey, I think that's the new girl with Kat and them," said Dylan as he chowed down on his breakfast burrito. I swiveled around in my chair to look.

She was petite, at least compared to the other girls. Her long brown hair was loose, framing her pixie face. Her eyes were focused on her food. They were a bright green. I tilted my head. She was cute...real cute. I noticed only a touch of eye makeup and maybe some gloss on her full lips, but that was it. She had a face that I liked. Which, for some reason, surprised me.

Lex Grand walked over and started harassing them.

"Drat. I thought maybe Lex would have been transferred to another school," I muttered.

The girls chased him off, and he returned to his table with the rest of the brainless.

"No luck. But there is this year so here's hoping. He thinks the whole team is supposed to work around him, the idiot. Yes, quarterback is important, but it's a team," said Branson, stabbing at his eggs.

"Coach hasn't tossed him?" I asked.

"No luck. Though she is at the end of her rope," he sighed.

I glanced back again at the new girl. She smiled at something Hailey said. It was a timid smile, not sure yet on how to talk to them or something. I was curious. Was she shy like Dylan?



Walked into Biology with Grant, taking a seat in the far back. I enjoy science, though I'm no great shakes at it. We pulled our books out and watched others trickle in. Lex with Jerome and Nate wandered in, taking a table one up from us and a row over. They were laughing over something, what I didn't care.

Ava Riddle and Jemma Huston walked in, with the new girl right behind them. Despite of myself, I smiled. Grant, thankfully, said nothing as I watched her take an empty seat beside the empty-headed blonde known as Sarah Callow. She'd chased after me last year for a date to Homecoming.

I said no, resorting to ninja dodging tactics to avoid her. She figured it out, so she and Lex became a thing for the third time. But at the end of the year, it blew up. Sarah caught him cheating, I guess, with one of the cheerleaders that was her mortal enemy or something. She left though, so hence the new girl.

I saw her talk to Sarah, but she was indifferent. I frowned. How rude.

"Want to sit with the new girl? I'm sure I could get Sarah to switch," muttered Grant as our teacher, Mr. Greene, walked in.

"Shove it, you're getting as bad as Casey," I muttered back.

Mr. Greene asked the new girl, Abigail Davis, if she preferred to be called Abby. Lex called out,

"Nah, she'd been named Abigail by her momma. She doesn't like to be called anything else!"

He and Nate started laughing, like a pair of what they were, donkey rear ends.

Mr. Greene called things to order, and we went through the rest of the class without any issues. But as soon as the bell rang, Lex took advantage. Mr. Greene stepped out with his phone. I saw Lex watching him. As soon as the teacher was out, he and Nate got up to block Abigail from leaving.

Without looking at Grant, I grabbed my bag, charging right up behind the idiot.

"Let go of my arm, please!" she snapped at him. "I don't like people touching me!"

"What ya scared of germs or something? Come on..."

"Let her go, Grand," I ordered him.

He whipped around to see my glare fixed on him.

"What is it, Satoru?"

"Mori, for you, Grand," I said.

I moved to stand beside her. I was not completely sure if my anger was just because I didn't like Lex and how he treated girls in general, or it was specificity because of Abigail. She was new and didn't need this kind of harassment. I clenched my fists. Lex knew I was a martial artist. His football skills wouldn't do him any good against me, plus Grant would back me up. He took the hint.

Lex released her arm, glanced at me. Maybe to make sure I wouldn't deck him as he passed us. My glare not stopping him from kicking the books she'd dropped.

I waited for a second before turning to help her pick her stuff up.

"Lex is a bully and a perv. He chases any girl who is new because they don't know yet. He's a huge jerk," I explained. I was annoyed, and it came out in my voice.

"Yes, I figured that out, surprisingly," she said with sarcasm, taking her books from me, hugging them close to her chest. We stood, smiling at each other.

"Thanks, by the way," she said.

I chuckled.

"No problem. My name is Satoru Mori," I said, putting out my hand to her.

"Abigail Davis," she smiled, shaking my hand.

I could fully appreciate her green and gold eyes. They were bold, like an abstract painting...

"Are you in eleventh grade?" she asked, blushing, looking down. I realized I was staring. Oops.

"Yes, and if you want, I can switch seats with Sarah in class. She is as dull as her lip gloss. Feel free to sit with me in any class if you want if we share it with Lex if you

want. He does this sort of stuff to annoy Sarah. They've been on/off forever. Also, just because he can."

She snorted.

"Sounds about right. Thank you. Though I think most of the time, I'll be able to sit with my dorm mates. But I appreciate the gesture all the same."

I nodded. I glanced at her pile of books to spy a copy of *Pride and Prejudice*. I pointed at her book and said,

"Looks like we are in the same English class. If you need help, let me know."

"*Pride and Prejudice* is one of my favorites," she smiled, holding her chin up in pride.

I grinned. Book worm.

"Then maybe we should compare notes after class. I hear Mr. Keene is a tough teacher. How about at lunch today? If, of course, you want to. If you'd rather sit with your dorm mates..." I said, leading off my sentence. She thought for a second, then smiled at me.

"I think they can spare me for serious study work for one lunch," she said. I smiled back, my heart skipping a beat.

"Good. What's your next class?"

"Um..." she dug her schedule out of her notebook.

"Gym..."

"Shame. See you in English," I said, bowing my head in disappointment. I waved, then walked down the science wing, my mind happily focusing on her green eyes.

Chapter Two

A Truth universally acknowledged about overly pushy cheerleaders

Grant told Casey everything by the time I'd slipped into computer class. They teased me throughout Mrs. Rutland's class by typing messages on the screens when she wasn't looking. I tried to ignore them as I worked on creating a mock website for our first assignment. I had a hard time focusing between my moron friends bringing up the "cute" new girl, Abigail. I thought now she was better than cute, but that was just my opinion.

The bell finally rang, releasing me from Grant and Casey. At least until we got to English class. I rushed away from them, Casey quoting stupid love songs. I put my wireless earbuds in to block his endless chatter. It was the piece of Mozart I was practicing for a residual. I was trying for a big deal three-week music internship over the summer. I let the notes weave in and out of my mind as I walked to Mr. Keene's room. I knew of his reputation as being a hard-core teacher, the type who does not tolerate slackers or sleepers, and teaches the heavy classics. I did not have him in ninth grade. I had the other teacher, Mrs. Meyer. Casey had him, and mentioned he was "intense, but if you stay awake and do the work, you'll make it through."

I walked in, taking out my earbuds. I saw that mostly it was the guys who had arrived first. I then remembered Abigail had mentioned she was in gym. It was going to take them a bit to change, then get here from the girl's gym.

I looked up to see Mr. Keene. Not very tall, maybe five foot six. He was scrolling on a tablet, his screen reflecting on his glasses.

"Mr. Keene, do we have assigned seats, or do we sit where we want?" I asked.

Mr. Keene glanced up.

"Sit where you wish."

"Okay."

I sat down, pulling out my book and tablet, tapping away until I brought up the course syllables. I sighed, glancing through it again. We were going to be doing lots of essays in this class. I don't mind writing them, but it gets tedious after a while. Most do this because it's how it's done in the colleges, even so, change things up once in a while.

A few minutes later, Casey, Grant, and then Dylan showed up, taking seats near me. I glanced back at the door. A big mistake.

"Keeping an eye out for the new girl?" chuckled Casey.

"Casey, leave him be," muttered Dylan.

Casey shrugged.

"I think it's cute, that's all!"

Branson sighed as he took the seat in front of Casey.

"Drop it, man. It's already old, and I didn't have to listen to you last period."

"Thanks," I muttered to him. Brandon nodded his head.

I glanced back to see Kat come in. I've talked to her in class on and off, but I didn't know her very well. Knew she was outspoken, a good joker, but that was about it.

She sat down, glancing at me. Kat smirked.

"She's still coming, don't worry. She didn't say much in gym, so I am guessing she's totally daydreaming about you."

"Really, Kat?" I grumbled.

She shrugged, unabashed.

I glanced again to see Abigail walk in. Her cheeks were flushed from rushing down here. She grabbed the seat beside me. She waved (at Kat, I assumed).

We exchanged smiles as Mr. Keene closed the door to bring the class to order. He placed his tablet on his stand, then took his glasses off to look at us.

"Hello, everyone. I am Mr. Keene, your English teacher for your junior school year. You should have all read the syllabus online and gotten the books. Seems you all have done so. Let me go over my simple class rules to make sure everything is clear to those who did not bother to read my syllabus."

I shared a glance with Abigail. She was sharing my feels of "hard-nosed teacher". The rumors held true as he explained the rules.

He taped the board to a roman numerical list appearing on the screen from the syllabus.

"First, you will arrive on time. I do not tolerate tardiness. One strike, you are done. You'll have to figure out another way to get your English credit. I do understand that most of the young women in this class have gym before this class, so do not be

tardy. I will not mark you tardy if you arrive right on the bell or a second afterward but no more ley way than that. Do not gossip while you change and you should be fine," he said. The mono tone of seriousness in the way he spoke reminded me of Snape from Harry Potter. I glanced at Abigail; her face was neutral. He didn't unnerve her, at least.

"Second, I do not accept late work. Ever. Unless there is an illness or similar situation that is given, I do not take it. Third, I expect your best work, best language as students here at Tri City Academy. I do not want to hear the words dude, Lol, or wassup, in my classroom. I want to hear your best attempt at the Queen's English that you are cable of as Eleventh grade students."

"Uh, doesn't the English language like, evolve or whatever?"

I put my hand on my face to keep my laugh back as Mr. Keene tried to control his face.

"Yes, but those who words reflect the life and times of society do not use text speech out of the appropriate medium," Keene said, glaring down at Sarah.

The blonde sunk into her seat. I smirked. She needed to get out of her stereotypical teenager mindset to survive this class.

"Now, if there are no other questions, let's begin with the Regency era, the time of Napoleon and a well-read woman named Jane Austen," he said, tapping the screen to a picture of the romance author.

"Jane Austen was a member of a substantial gentry family. Can anyone tell me what that means?"

Abigail raised her hand right away, reminding me of another Harry Potter character. Mr. Keene turned away from her to stare at Sarah. I could see was staring down but I couldn't tell what from the angle I was at. Mr. Keene yanked a magazine from under her notebooks, tossing it perfectly into the trash bin by the door. Sarah rearranged her books, a deep red blush across her powdered face.

He didn't say a word about what he'd caught her doing. He asked her again,

"Miss Callow, can you tell me what a substantial gentry family means?"

"They were...geniuses?" said Sarah.

Mr. Keene sighed.

"Miss Callow, I would recommend highly that you focus on things other than trashy teen magazines for knowledge if you wish to keep on the cheer team."

Her head was tilted down, but I could see the red on her ears. I almost felt sorry for her, but she should have realized she needed to pay attention. She was going to this school to get ahead in life. Why she slacked off knowing she needed the good grades to stay in the cheer squad confused me, but lots of things about her went over my head.

Mr. Keene moved away from Sarah, nodding to Abigail. As he did, I noticed he looked kind of tired, with dark spots under his eyes. Though teachers did a lot of work around Tri City so I guess I shouldn't be surprised. I certainly wasn't surprised that Abigail knew what Gentry meant.

"Miss Davis, you had your hand raised. Do you perhaps know?"

"Yes, sir. The gentry were people who stood on the low end of the upper middle class, or were from a long line of descendants who did not earn a coat of arms. The Austens were a part of the lower tear of the landed gentry, those with large amounts of rich land. Jane Austen's father was from a long line of successful wool makers. Her father also was a rector for the parishes around where they lived."

Mr. Keene nodded.

"That is all accurate. Thank you. Good to see someone read their assigned readings."

I smirked as she let out a breath of relief. She glanced my way, and I winked at her. I spied, though, beyond her, Sarah glaring daggers at her. Oh boy. I stared at her, making her turn away. I didn't think Abigail noticed, which I was glad of. Sarah had no right to be mad at her for being an excellent student.

As class went along, I stole glances at Abigail. I couldn't explain it, but I found her interesting to watch as she scribbled notes in her notebook, pushing her flyway hair back behind her ear, doing it all with this intense face. Her eyes narrowed; her lips stuck out in a small frowning pout. I couldn't help but smile at her cuteness. I really hoped she did not notice how fast I stood up when the bell rang. Kat did, smirking at me with this smug face.

Way to be subtle, Satoru.



As we walked towards the cafeteria, my luck did not get better.

"Mori!"

I internally sighed. Abigail paused, watching as the head of the music department, Mr. Frank Ashland, approached me. I nodded to her to go ahead. Kat and Bonnie showed up, and the three walked together, which was good because I as I

turned to Mr. Ashland, Sarah walked past with a death glare. I flinched as Mr. Ashland clapped his hands.

"Mori! Sorry I didn't get to talk to you yesterday!"

I gave a sigh of relief in my head for that.

"It's okay. I didn't arrive until late, anyway."

He nodded, clapping his hands again. Urgh. I have no idea why he claps his hands to excessive levels, but there it was. I had to give him credit. At least he didn't do it when he conducts the Student Orchestra at least. I knew he was going to ask before he said it, but it didn't make me any less annoyed.

"Would you be willing to be first chair violin for the winter concert? I know you have that try out for the Baltimore Orchestra internship- "(clap)" -but Stephine Williams is bowing out. She has a large project for her scholarship for the Marine institute. I am not sure why a lady with such musical talent wants to be a marine biologist, but there it is."

Clap.

I took a quick breath before saying with a deadpan face, "If all you need is me to be first chair, that's fine, but she had other duties, didn't she?"

Clap and a wide smile that was marred a little with his blonde mustache. Why he didn't grow a full beard to cover up his tiny chin was beyond me. The smile confirmed my suspicion.

"Yes, well, she was also in charge of the social media posts as well as a part of the fundraising committee..."

I shook my head.

"Nope. I will help with the social media and maybe stuff a few envelopes, but that's it. I can't do all the fundraising stuff. I did it last year. And as you said, I have my recital in the spring. I am limited as it is."

I stood firm, staring right into his hazel eyes. If you weren't firm with Mr. Ashland, he would take advantage of your weaknesses to rope you into the worst tasks. That's how I got roped into fundraising my sophomore year. It was almost too much juggling practice as well as trying to raise the funds for the competition in the spring against other student orchestras in the state. Never. Again.

Mr. Ashland frowned, but at least he didn't clap. He nodded.

"No problem. Richard Cox is the secretary so I can get him to pick up the slack."

"*Poor Richard*," I thought ironically. He was too nice to say no and a great clarinet player.

"Right. Bye, Mr. Ashland," I said, waving as I walked straight into the cafeteria.

I glanced around to see Abigail was talking to the rest of her dorm. I jumped into line behind Austin, grabbing an Italian sub, a few extra packets of dressing and a bottle of water before going to the nearest vacant table. I pulled out my copy of *Pride and Prejudice* and my notebook. Abigail walked towards me with her own lunch. With grace I would akin to a skilled musician. She slipped right into the chair across from me, placing her tray down, pulling her own copy of the book out, brushing her hair out of the way. I smiled at the gesture. Her face was bright. She had a cheeky smile, her eyes sparkling. She frowned though at my question.

"So how was gym?"

"Fantastic. Basketball is the best sport ever," she said with a large amount of sarcasm.

I chuckled.

"I do prefer material arts and hockey myself," I grinned.

She did a double take.

"Martial arts? What form?"

I smiled. I wondered where her enthusiasm came from.

"Bruce Lee?"

She shook her head.

"*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. It's all their fault."

I laughed. That was an unexpected answer. I smiled, then answered her earlier question.

"I practice Bujinkan and some Iaido. I have some Samurai blood on my dad's side, so at an early age I became fascinated with the old legends and begged for lessons. Dad took me to one, and I was hooked. Though I don't do tournaments anymore because of other interests, but I still practice."

"That's cool. You'll have to show me some moves. Most of what I know I learned from action movies, anime, and manga, therefore not much to talk of."

I smirked back at her.

"Sure. Mr. Keene moves in class were ruthless," I remarked, unwrapped my sub. I poured mustard and a vinegar dressing on it, then took a bit. I noticed she grimaced a little. Okay...feeling a little self-concise now.

She ate her own sub a little before saying,

"I'll say. I had a tough English teacher in eighth grade. He would have given her a run for her money."

"Yeah. I mean, he knows his stuff, but doesn't come off as Mr. Sunshine does, he?"

"Not even close. The rumors of him being tough were true, that's for sure. I don't even want to think his opinion on graphic novels and manga," she sighed.

I put my water down to stare at her. We looked at each other for a long moment before she blushed and stared at her sandwich. I felt a little bad, but it was nice to see her green eyes up close. At least, they sort of looked green. They looked like they had flecks of other colors. I asked a simple question to make her feel better.

"What's your favorite manga?"

Her eyes lit up.

"Orange. It's sweet, tragic, deep thinking. Though I do love my Shonen, *Naruto*, *Bleach*, *Fairy Tail*, and so forth. *My Hero Academia* is my newest favorite."

"I just finished binge watching the whole of *My Hero Academia*. It's pretty awesome."

"It's goes beyond you could say," she said with a cheeky face.

"Very much *Plus Ultra*," I laughed, finishing the rest of the superhero motto.

"Just wish I could watch the newest episodes when they drop in English. subtitles are a pain," she said, sighing into her hand.

I blinked. Against my wishes, Casey popped into my head. From when he went on about how "tutoring" is a great way to get a girl to fall for you better. I did my best to block it by giving a genuine offer out of kindness, not a pickup strategy.

"I could teach you Japanese if you want, at least enough to not have to rely too much on the subtitles," I told her.

She smiled widely.

"I'm no great shakes at languages. I almost failed Spanish and barely passed French with a poor accent," she explained.

I nodded.

"It's okay, I'm a decent teacher. We can try at least. At least enough so you don't have to rely on the subtitles as much."

I knew a few apps and books that would help her with the basics. I would have to get mom to send the books...

"I wish I could teach you something in return. I'm not that great at anything."

I raised an eyebrow at her. Teach me?

"I doubt that highly if you passed the tests to get into this school. What are your favorite things to do?"

I pushed my plate aside. She put her own food aside, then took a breath and rolled her eyes.

"Draw, write, read. I do mostly fan fiction, but I've written a few original short stories, mostly fairy tale reimagines."

I shrugged.

"I could learn to be more 'artsy'. I'm an overly structured person. Over-achiever my sister says. My parents though are laid back. Not tigers at all. I am just hyper focused on whatever interests appeal to me. Like my martial arts and violin."

Her eyes became big. I felt my cheeks get a little red. Most people never seemed to be that interested if you didn't play a guitar or piano. Her next statement made me fall for her harder.

"Lindsey Stirling is my favorite modern violinist," she said, getting excited.

I loved seeing that. I tried hard to ignore my heart doing back flips.

"I love her as well. I got to see her with *Evanesce*."

"Oh! love them too! Deep, beautiful haunting voice..." she sighed, resting her chin her hand.

"I got to watch her on her one solo tour. What songs do you like the most?"

"I loved her third album..."

It was fun talking to Abigail. As lunch went along, I realized that she was the first girl in a while that I'd had such...involved conversations. Maybe even the first. She was so cheery and bright, and real. She didn't hold back.

She asked me about Mr. Ashland, and I explained, "Yeah. Mr. Ashland is in charge of the orchestra. I agreed to help sub for one player for one concert. I have to practice for a scholarship tryout for over the summer break. That's why I didn't sign up this time for the orchestra instead of independent music study."

"When is the concert?"

"Just before Thanksgiving break. It's a big day musical event they do at the local music center with some other schools. We aren't a large one by any means, but not that small either."

I tried not to grimace at all the extra practice I was going to have to do, eating up lots of my free time. The thought annoyed me, because I would miss out hanging out more with Abigail.

We did finally start talking *Pride and Prejudice*.

".... I dunno if Elizabeth did have a crush on the Colonial. I mean, yes, they hung out together, and she found him a wonderful gentleman..."

Out of the blue, Sarah walked over with her dorm entourage. Yvonne the blonde and Ng. I smelled her before I saw her. The view I got of her was one I really did not want. She got in my face with her big pink lips, then yelled in my ear,

"Satoru! Are you coming to the bonfire dance?! I wondered if you were going to go with me?"

I tilted my head to see Abigail staring at Sarah with a raised eyebrow.

"I'm afraid I'm not interested, Sarah. Thank you, though...." I said, trying not to choke on her perfume.

"Oh, come on, Satoru! YOLO!"

I saw Abigail's eye twitch.

Doing what I could to stay calm, I said,

"I thank you for the invite, but I will not go with you to the bonfire."

Especially seeing how Abigail seemed to be not happy about her asking me. Interesting.

"Awww! Satoru! Come on!"

Sarah shoved my books out of the way, taking up all my attention. I leaned back as far as I could from her imposing fragrance and body, sighing. What she then said got me ticked off beyond belief.

“Really, why are you giving this plain jane geek the time of day? To play then toss? Why don’t you skip the play? Have some serious fun with me?”

Before I even opened my mouth, Abigail snapped at her.

“Look, bimbo, take your fake chest somewhere else. He said no, in a gentlemanly way. Besides, we were having a light-hearted literary discussion of classical regency romance.”

I smirked at her mouth, open wide like a fish trying to take a breath. Sarah finally moved so I could see Abigail again. I smirked at her, and she smirked back.

Sarah snorted at us. Her two friends were glaring.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Did I use too big of words for you?” she asked in a snarky tone that made me grin wider.

Sarah gave her a death face.

“You little...” she snapped, calling her a word that made me boil.

“You’ve been here two seconds and you think you’re cool or something? That you can have a chance with the hot, popular guys? You little freak,” she said, clenching her fists, eyes on me.

“Huh...” I took a drink, composing myself before standing up. She jumped back, almost crushing her buddies’ toes. We were the same height, so it was easy to stare her down. She balked at me as I told her,

“I’m going to give you one last chance to apologize to Abigail. I am going to the bonfire with her, not you. Apologize and then crawl back into your popularity hole before your ugly side that not even make-up can hide shows itself. Now. Or I will report you for your language. That’s two weeks in school suspension, making you miss several games, hurting your record. Got it? I don’t care about ‘popularity’ roles and you can keep me off your stupid list.”

Sarah did her fish gasping for water impression again before giving Abigail a death glare as she did her friends.

“Sorry,” she barked, then turned to me, “You used to be so cool and hot Mori, now you’re just hot but dead in popularity circles.”

With that unimpressive declaration, she walked off to Lex’s table.

“Said I didn’t want to be part of it, don’t care!” I yelled at her before turning a back to Abigail. She had a smirk on her face but was there was a dash of annoyance in the tightness of her eyes.

“When did I agree exactly to go with you to the bonfire? You are to ask before saying that. Boys don’t make decisions for me.”

Ah. I bowed my head to her in apology.

“I am sorry for the rudeness. I was going to ask you proper, once we’d gotten to talk more, but Sarah is relentless.”

She nodded, her face and shoulders relaxing. Abigail then smirked again, this time a bit of cheekiness.

“As friends? Well...for now?”

She held out her hand. I grinned, taking it.

“Friends for now.”



I was studying in the common area, but not really. My pencil was tapping my textbook, but my focus was on the girl who I was going to the bonfire with. We talked a bit more in class, mostly class related stuff. I noticed how she had a habit of shaking her leg when she got bored or impatient, also how her hair tickled her face. Abigail was light-hearted, smart...she’d mentioned she loved Lindsey Stirling...I loved her music, which was a mix of violin and electronic. I pondered over her one song, *Song of the Caged bird*. I paused, then pulled up the song on my phone. I listened to it for a bit, taking apart the notes, intertwining it with my interpretation of the song’s title. I thought about Abigail and how she moved, and found myself opening my music sheet notebook, scribing out a few stanzas. As I worked out the notes, I found myself completely lost in the music. It had been a while since I’d written an original piece. I doubted I would have it ready for the recital, but maybe Valentine’s Day...

With my headphones on, paired with my newfound focus, I didn’t notice everyone came back into the dorm until Casey grabbed my shoulders and yelled,

“YO BEETAVON! DINNER!”

I whipped around, smacking him in the arm.

“If you are going to do stupid stuff like that, at least reference a famous violinist,” I yelled, picking up my stuff.

Dylan shook his head as Casey wisely ran from the Dorm, earning a yell from our dorm supervisor, Mr. Rodgers. (He is nothing like the tv Mr. Rodgers, super strict, I would not want to be his neighbor.)

"You writing a new song?" Dylan asked, tilting his head at my half-baked song. I shrugged, closing my notebook.

"Yeah...."

"So, Casey was right about you needing a muse, huh?" chuckled Branson. I glared at him.

"What makes you..."

"Sarah is fuming mad about you two going to the bonfire," he shrugged. "She ranted during math, I guess, from what Hailey said."

"Plus, you seem to really like her," smirked Dylan, folding his arms.

I tried hard not to blush as I shoved everything into my pack.

"She's interesting. Different from the others. But that..."

"Bro, you haven't composed in a while, and now you are after asking her out to a dance. Come on, you have the hots for her. Don't blame you, she is cute and tough to stand up to the Cheer queen," said Branson.

As we went to dinner, I listened to more of Lindsey's music, ignoring the smug look on my friend's faces. Sure, they were right, but they didn't need any ego boosts. And I had to admit, as I locked eyes with her, I really liked her.

Really, really, REALLY liked her.