

Singing A Song You Don't Know

Von Tukuyomi

It was only five o'clock in the afternoon, but the streetlights were already on and the cloud-covered sky was darkening rapidly. It was February the 14th, and Kirika's feet, which were covered by thin and wet pink shoes, almost painfully let her know that it was indeed still winter.

She had been walking for quite some time already, and her feet were almost numb by now. Still, the shoes made an ugly squishing sound with each step. Kirika hoped she wouldn't catch a cold. She couldn't remember ever having had one, but then again, her feet had never been this cold before, either.

One of the best assassins in the world, getting a cold because she carelessly trod into a puddle. Repeatedly. She didn't know what to think of it.

Not that it would sound any less stupid without the "assassin" tacked onto her name. She was irritated by this word describing her. She needed to find something else she was good at, honestly. She could pick up drawing again, or do something else entirely. Anything.

As if to make up for her freezing feet, Kirika hid her hands in the pockets of her white jacket, in an attempt to at least keep her fingers warm. In the back of her mind she reprimanded herself to have declined Mireille's last offer to go shopping with her. It might even have been fun...

'Not thinking about that.' Traumatizing was the word that instantly crossed her mind, but she waved it past her like a policewoman would on a crossing where the traffic lights didn't work. No use stopping.

She trod softly through the thin layer of snow which the slowly falling snowflakes were only minimally adding to.

She wasn't really the type to do window-shopping, but as she noticed that her eyes wandered down to her feet more often than watching through the large glass panes to her sides, she found that she wasn't really doing that, anyway.

Kirika noticed the streams of people entering and leaving the stores to her sides, seemingly in a hurry. Kirika dodged them to the best of her abilities, idly wondering

why there were so many people out shopping on a perfectly normal weekday.

Kirika hadn't entered any of those flashy shops all around her ever before, simply having gotten here because it was as good a place as any, away from the apartment.

Though the sheer amount of people entering and leaving the shops did pick her interest. She was tempted to look into at least one, but with so many people around, there was just no way.

Maybe there was a back entry somewhere...no. That would probably raise unnecessary suspicion and attention, and Kirika wanted none of that. She just wanted to look, for lack of anything better to do, but also because...those people looked so happy. By the time they left the shops, they still seemed to be in a hurry, but still they smiled excitedly.

Were she to leave this street now, she would probably berate herself on why she wasn't able to deal with large crowds for at least a couple of days. What was the worst that could happen upon entering one of those shops?

Nothing that could compare to always keep wondering just what those shops were about, Kirika concluded.

So curiosity got the better of her and she entered the shop closest to where she had been standing, which had its name written in bold pink letters on the window pane and apparently sold sweets.

As she read the word 'sweets', she idly wondered what Mireille was doing right now. She hadn't seen her since morning, which while being her fault since she was the one who left the apartment in a hurry and without a word to the other woman, also made her uneasy. She wasn't used to be apart from her for so long. For more than half a year now, they've practically been together day and night.

Thinking back to their argument this morning, she gave a deep sigh as she opened the door to the shop.

"...Mireille?", Kirika asked, a little hesitantly. She was standing by the window with a glass of water in her hand, ready to tend to the flower in front of her. Mireille and her cared for it together, though Mireille tended to forget about it occasionally. Kirika didn't mind, for contrary to herself, Mireille always seemed so busy with other things, even though she tried to hide it most of the time. Doing Mireille's turns of watering the plant seemed more like aiding the blonde in times of stress than anything else. Though she did sometimes wonder if Mireille noticed.

"Mm?", the blonde's short response came late, interrupting Kirika's thoughts which had already stretched into other directions and thus slightly catching her off guard.

As Kirika laid her eyes on Mireille, she saw the other woman sitting in front of her laptop, obviously distracted. Busy. Her fingers, which were rapidly typing an email, almost

drowned the girl's quiet voice.

"...I just wondered...", Kirika started, but soon trailed off when she saw that Mireille wasn't really paying attention. Which made her feel even worse for having talked to her, when she had noticed before that the blonde was busy. But this had been bothering her for a while, and she suddenly felt the need to bring it up again. At the sight of the extremely annoyed look that Mireille gave the computer screen though, the petite brunette couldn't quite find the words.

"Well? What is it?", Mireille asked in between rapid clicks with her mouse, inwardly cursing her old-fashioned email program for not seeming to be capable of sending one short email even after six tries. Was it even the program?

Kirika turned her gaze back to the flower in front of her, contemplating whether to turn back or say it. Mireille didn't seem to be in a good mood today. At all.

"I just wondered...", Kirika repeated, deciding to get it over with. "Do you remember what I told you on Christmas?" Kirika heard Mireille give a long sigh behind her, but no answer came forth.

Instead, upon turning around again, she found Mireille still staring at the computer screen. Her displeased expression had worsened and now almost mirrored plain disgust.

"What do you mean?", she finally asked, continuing to type a little too forcefully. Her email program had just failed her for the seventh time, and Mireille wasn't sure if she had ever been closer to throwing the whole damned thing just out of the window. No, she certainly hadn't.

It was times like these that she wished she knew a little more about computers, at least enough to overcome the problem she had right now. Her mind jumped to Kirika for a second, and Mireille grew impatient. She should have known better than this, but how could she expected the incapability of those people?

Deciding to give up the email, she instead scoured the website for a phone number. There just had to be one. It was her last hope. She would give those people a good piece of her mind. Letting her down like that, it was unforgivable.

She could feel her anger rising the further she scrolled down the almost shabbily designed website.

"I thought you would forget...", Kirika whispered, but nonetheless succeeded in breaking Mireille's train of thought. Mireille had grown used to the girl's quiet voice, and never overheard it. But still, the fact that she spoke this sentence so quietly, with a hint of disappointment and silent accusation, irritated her and added to her current frustration.

"Just what is it, Kirika?", she asked louder than intended, while slamming her mouse on the table in an irritated manner. No telephone number. She was doomed.

As her mind worked quickly to figure out an other way out of her current misery, she

missed the sound of Kirika's retreating footsteps.

"It's...nothing. I'm sorry.", she heard the brunette mumbling, and it annoyed her against her will.

Finally averting her eyes from the screen, she looked across the room, finding Kirika suddenly close by the door.

"Are you sulking?" Mireille asked sarcastically, but upon looking into Kirika's eyes, which conveyed all the emotions her face did not, immediately realized that she had gone too far. Seeing her putting on her jacket and shoes, Mireille quickly got up from where she sat, but before she found the words to stop her, the petite girl was gone.

"Good evening!", the saleswoman of the pink sweets shop greeted Kirika happily as she set foot into the building.

"G-good evening.", Kirika replied a little self-consciously, feeling the looks of the other customers on her. They didn't last long, though, and with a small sigh of relief, Kirika went over to the display she had seen through the window.

There were several heart shaped boxes, all of which had a tag on them that indicated that they all contained some sort of chocolate. But not just ordinary chocolate. The labels read 'Valentine's chocolate'. She found that word on every single one of the boxes, sometimes written in such a curvy and thin fashion that Kirika could hardly read it at all.

Kirika unwillingly raised an eyebrow at the odd name. Valentine? Was it a flavor she hadn't heard about? She knew chocolate, of course, though she had never gotten into the habit of eating it often. It was tasty, but not much more than that.

The way this 'Valentine chocolate' was presented, though, did intrigue Kirika quite a bit. She was familiar with the saying about curiosity, but with so many things she didn't know, she just had to.

Inconspicuously looking around the smaller than expected shop, she patiently waited by the display until the other customers had left, then went through a few sentences in her head before walking over to the counter behind which a gentle-looking lady stood.

"Is there anything I can help you with?", she asked sweetly and yet professional.

Kirika, being a little taken aback at the fact that the woman obviously knew what she wanted without her telling her so, lifted her arm to point to the display she had just come from. "This...Valentine's chocolate over there.", she started, and found the saleswoman immediately nodding, urging her to continue.

"...is it different?", Kirika asked, cutting her sentences to a minimum of words as always.

Eyeing the saleswoman curiously, Kirika saw her expression slip for a moment until it was replaced by another smile.

"W-well...it is Valentine's chocolate.", she said a little urgently, but seeing her customer's still confused face, searched for a way to elaborate. "I guess for the one you're giving it to, it is special and very different from ordinary chocolate."

"Giving it to...", Kirika repeated, more to herself than the other woman. So it was meant to be chocolate you only give to other people rather than eating yourself. Mireille immediately flashed through her mind, and without another thought, she decided to buy some of these Valentine's chocolates for her. She just hoped it would be enough. She was sure Mireille was still angry at her.

"Would you like to buy some?", the saleswoman asked after a minute had passed between them with neither of them saying anything.

Kirika quickly nodded and smiled a little, more out of amazement that the other woman had once again read her thoughts perfectly than anything else. But as she looked back at the display, her smile faded instantly.

As she turned her eyes back to the saleswoman, she looked a little helpless. "Which one...would you recommend?"

The saleswoman gave another thin smile, having expected this question. She didn't let it show though, and quickly made her way to the nearby display and back to the counter, presenting Kirika with a blue, almost angular box that felt smooth to the touch.

"This is what I'd recommend.", the woman said, then leaned forward and gave a confidential smirk. "Guys love those."

Kirika felt her cheeks color a little at the close proximity of their faces, but didn't step back, thinking that it might seem weird and misplaced in a probably common situation such as this. She did this more often recently, and wondered if she was getting too careless, letting her feelings show on her face.

Unaware of Kirika's reasons, the saleswoman smiled at her supposed achievement. "Will this be the one, then?", she asked, but to her surprise received a negating gesture in response.

"Ah...actually..." Kirika fumbled for words, feeling a little self-conscious about her personal shortcomings regarding chocolate. She had no idea what kind of chocolate Mireille liked, as she had never actually seen the other woman eating some. The saleswoman's advice that men liked this kind of chocolate was of no help either, but trusting her instincts, Kirika decided to pass on that one. Which still left her with too many different flavors to overcome on her own, so she went for the only available help there was.

"Which chocolates...would you like?", she asked and, remembering Mireille's advice for daily situations, again tried to smile a little while doing so. She found that it worked wonders sometimes, and even though she saw a hint of perplexity on the woman's face, she knew that asking the next woman about chocolate was probably still better than relying on her own poor judgment.

Startled, but trying her best to regain her professional attitude, the saleswoman thought for a moment and then presented Kirika with a slightly smaller box which in Kirika's opinion was colored in a tone only slightly lighter than blood. Which was fitting for a heart, in a way.

Ignorant of her petite customer's morbid thoughts, the woman said slightly awkwardly: "W-well, I do like those." Pause. "They're strawberry-flavored."

"I'll take those, then.", Kirika said without hesitation. The box seemed nice enough, and aside from the slightly questionable color, she genuinely hoped that Mireille would like it and accept her apology. She still wasn't completely sure what it was that she had done wrong, but that didn't matter as long as everything was going to be fine again. She didn't want anything between her and Mireille to change.

Shortly after paying, Kirika left the store with a hopeful expression on her face, ignorant of the highly puzzled saleswoman she left behind.

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This was the worst. It was the worst day to be hopelessly waiting for the post to deliver a parcel, the worst day to be pissed about its lateness, and the very worst day to get mad at Kirika as a result. This was quickly becoming the worst day ever, Mireille noticed as she was pacing the room.

And it was all her fault, no less. She should have known better than to order a Valentine's gift on the previous day, express delivery or not.

Hell, she should have made something herself, like the girls in all those cliché movies on TV. But she wasn't one of those, was she? And could she even remember the last time she'd been standing at the stove on her own, trying to make something more complex than scrambled eggs? She didn't think so.

'Kirika always took care of those things, I didn't have to do a thing.' She had probably been selfish, but it was hard to decline and not give in to Kirika when she never seemed to mind doing it. So she took it for granted.

Why such grave thoughts entered her mind even though Kirika had been gone for only a few hours, she didn't know.

"She's still not back.", she mumbled to herself, the truth of it weighing so heavily in the silent apartment that she had to say it out loud.

Mireille didn't know just why it had been so hard for her to just apologize right away, and stop Kirika from getting...from running away.

She really was sorry. And yet, the way the smaller woman always looked at her with these shy eyes, the way she always asked for the tiniest things with such hesitation as though she was practically living under her tyranny...!

...there she went again.

Looking at the window opposite her, she saw a reflection of herself in front of a dark background, standing at the pool table just like someone who didn't know what to do with herself. Which was true, in a way. She knew now what she should have done this morning, but now it was too late to go after her. She didn't have the slightest clue where the other girl was.

She wasn't worried about the petite brunette, she knew that Kirika could take care of herself better than anyone else. In fact, she was more worried about herself, and what she would do if Kirika wouldn't come back.

Walking closer to the window, she reached out with her right hand and tipped her reflection on the forehead, which did the same. "You're an idiot, Mireille Bouquet."

A few minutes later, she left the apartment hastily, leaving only a short note on the pool table.

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By the time Kirika came back to the apartment, after having spent five contemplative minutes mentally preparing herself in front of the door, she found the apartment empty.

She assumed so from seeing that the light was out, but still looked around the corner to see if the blonde really wasn't home. She wasn't.

Kirika wasn't sure what to think of that, but before she had much time to ponder on it she found the note Mireille had left for her.

She breathed a small sigh of relief as she saw that it was just ordinary note paper, and not a real letter or anything of the sort. She shouldn't be worried.

"I'm sorry. I'll be back."

Those five words were all there was to it, but Kirika still felt a little glad reading it. Mireille wasn't someone who liked to apologize, so for her to do so, even with only two short words, already meant a lot.

Kirika continued to regard the letter for a few moments, until she folded it and put it into one of the pockets of her trousers.

'She will be back.', the Japanese girl thought contently. 'And she is sorry.'

She unconsciously put a hand over her heart, literally feeling a weight being lifted from it. Maybe things weren't as bad as she had thought they were. Maybe she had just overreacted, as much as she disliked the thought. She had noticed that recently, she was taking the things Mireille said much more seriously than before. She tried to analyze every word, searched for hidden meanings, and almost felt hurt when she didn't find any. She knew she was waiting for Mireille to say something special to her, but she couldn't say what it was that she wanted to hear.

Part of her wanted everything to stay exactly the way it was, but another part of her wanted more. But what this 'more' was, she wasn't sure.

Placing the chocolates she had just bought on the small tea table, she ran her index finger once again across its soft surface. She hoped Mireille would like it.

After a few minutes of simply standing there by the table waiting, she went to the kitchen and prepared two cups of tea. She prepared Mireille's and her favorite tea with even more care than usual, thinking that Mireille might return soon.

She set the tea table with two filled cups and a small sugar pot. The tea was still too hot to drink, but Kirika carefully nipped at it regardless. It was a little bitter, hardly close to the perfection she would have wished for. Bad luck, maybe.

The tea being too hot and without anyone to sit with her at the table, Kirika soon looked for something to occupy herself with.

She didn't want to think too deeply right now, especially now that Mireille wasn't here. She didn't know why, but she only ever felt at peace when Mireille was around. With Mireille there, she could sit in front of the window and ponder about everything and nothing for hours on end and be perfectly content with it. But without her, it just wasn't the same. She didn't like to let her thoughts stray far when she was all alone. It made her feel vulnerable and exposed, just as though her thoughts were visible for everyone to see.

Her fingers idly traced the green and fuzzy surface of the pool table as she walked past it. It was still spotless, and Kirika had never seen it getting any use aside from serving as a table for Mireille's laptop and peripheral equipment, which permanently resided there.

This table had never been the topic of a conversation, but now that Kirika gingerly touched every ball on the table, walking around it to count how many of them were in the pockets, she began to find interest in this game. That, and she was bored. A little.

She bent down to look under the table, and as expected, spotted the gun, which was tied to the underside, first. But even further down were two cues, both of which she

took out to regard.

Kirika couldn't claim to know much about this game, although she knew the rough basics. One simply had to use the cue and the white cue ball to shoot the colored ball into the pockets. Judging from the total size of the table, it didn't seem too hard. Depending on where one hit the cue ball, it would rotate in a certain direction and influence the course of the ball it hit. It seemed simple, really.

The more she regarded the table, the more she wanted to play. But there was one obstacle. The laptop, connected with a printer and a lot of cables was in the way, and Kirika wasn't sure if she could go as far as setting it aside.

Mireille had never forbidden her anything, even though Kirika knew she would have probably accepted it without giving it a second thought. This was Mireille's apartment. It was her home now too, but it was still Mireille's apartment, that was the way she thought.

'Will she get angry?', Kirika wondered as she unplugged the cables to separate the devices. She would get them together again without a problem. She knew that much about computers.

'No, she won't. I love her. She knows that. ' Even though they had never talked about it ever since they had returned from the manor, she knew that Mireille had read her letter. So she knew. And Kirika knew, too.

'She loves me.' She was sure of that much, too, also without Mireille ever telling her so. Kirika liked to think that they didn't need words, and instead let their actions speak. Though she couldn't help but think that it would be nice if they did talk about it. They could converse in so many languages, it didn't matter which one they chose.

Kirika transferred the heap of wires and plastic from the table to the window sill smoothly, arranging each piece in a way that made sure it wouldn't fall.

With the hardest task now over with, Kirika went on collecting each ball on the table. They were sixteen in all, and with the exclusion of the white cue ball, Kirika found that they fit perfectly into the black plastic triangle, which she found along with the cues under the table. Not too sure where to place the triangle, she instinctively rolled it over the table until the center ball was right above one of the two white dots marked on the green felt, the tip of the triangle pointing to the other. Just for look's sake, she also found herself switching the balls in the triangle around until the yellow ball with the number "1" painted on it was up front, and the odd black one with the "8" was in the center. Finally pleased with the result, she removed the plastic triangle and placed the cue ball on the second dot mark. All in all, it looked about right.

She made a quick examination of both cues, but realizing they were both exactly the same, she simply took one randomly and put the other back into its place. The cue reached right up to her nose, but being light as it was, Kirika didn't see any problems in handling it.

Due to the light wood it was made from, though, Kirika assumed that it wouldn't be able to withstand strong impacts such as direct hits, as well as not dealing enough damage to be truly effective. For a moment she had wondered, but now Kirika knew why Mireille kept a gun under the table as well. The other woman must have realized instantly that those cues were useful as a distraction at best, and had thus placed another gun there. She was smart, after all.

The honking of a car outside brought her out of her thoughts, and with her eyes still closely regarding the cue, Kirika wondered for a moment what she had been about to do with it.

Right, she was going to play pool. Play.

Situating her left hand on the table in front of the cue ball, she crooked her fingers in a way that stabilized the cue while sliding along the skin. She was ready.

She forgot her surroundings for a moment and focused only on the white ball, taking a deep breath. She then quickly thrust the cue forward.

A clean miss. The cue had slipped off her rightmost knuckle and not even touched the cue ball, which hadn't moved at all as the result.

'This is harder than it looks.'

Maybe she had just used too much force. Repositioning her fingers to form a poor imitation of the "ok" sign, she tried again. And surely enough, she hit the ball right in the center and sent it spinning forward until it hit the yellow ball, causing a chain reaction which set all of the spheres moving. Two striped ones reached the pockets as a result, while the others spread across the whole table.

Kirika smiled at her achievement. 'To hell with drawing. This is fun.', she pictured Mireille saying if she were in her place, and almost chuckled.

Deciding that she liked the striped ones, she continued to play while trying only to get these into the pockets, so that she would only have the solids on the table in the end.

As she played, she tried out several tricks. Combos, advantageous usage of the banks, spins...she quickly got a feel on how this game worked. She cleared the table in no time and started over again, getting bolder in her attempts with each time.

She would have to ask Mireille to play with her, but seeing how this table had seen no use for at least several months and more probably several years, she could already imagine Mireille's reaction clearly. She would look at her with that expression that tried to hide distaste and unwillingness with a slightly apologetic smile. Not actually declining, but most certainly not agreeing either. It was the kind of expression that always resulted in Kirika giving up on whatever she had wanted.

Yes, she would probably get the same expression she had last seen on Christmas, when she had truthfully answered the question as to what she wanted, but after

Mireille had given her that look, she had changed the topic and almost forgotten about it. Until today.

To think they fought over something like that...it seemed silly, even to her. Still, now that she thought about it, she couldn't bring herself to take all the blame. It hadn't been all her fault, had it?

It was already late when Mireille returned to the apartment. Her cheeks were flushed from the cold wind outside, and she was deeply grateful for the gentle warmth which enveloped her once she closed the door behind her.

Her heart beat faster than ever now, though. The lights were on, meaning Kirika was home. Part of her wanted to storm into the living room, but the other part didn't know what to do once she did that. So she trod slowly as an excuse to buy more time to think, but as she entered the living room the sight that greeted her caused all her thoughts to vanish in an instant. There was Kirika.

Setting her small shopping bag to the side for the moment she came closer. She knew that Kirika had already noticed her, but hadn't turned around. Mireille accepted this as her punishment, but still couldn't bring herself to hide behind a smile.

"Hey...what are you doing?", she heard herself asking, even though she knew the answer. Her eyes were locked on the girl's slim form, half standing, half sitting on the pool table to reach a ball at the center.

"I'm playing.", Kirika answered matter-of-factly.

"...right.", Mireille muttered, immediately catching the hint and mentally bracing herself for the "silent treatment". It was highly unusual coming from Kirika to purposefully not speak to her, but Mireille knew that today, there was nothing which could surprise her anymore.

'...wait, what? Nothing's right! Apologize already!', her mind screamed at her. If she was honest with herself, she would have expected Kirika to look at her in that miserable and puppy-eyed way, so that all it took was a smile to get things in order again...but that did not seem to be the case. Kirika didn't look at her at all, strangely captivated by her solitary game of pool.

'Does she even know that she can't play pool by herself?'

Which was precisely why the blonde used it as a desk all the time. She couldn't remember for the life of her what had come upon her to make her buy this pool table in the first place. Had it been the lovely saleswoman, who, while having been "of service" to the level of severe obtrusiveness, had been so endearing in her endeavor to sell something that Mireille had, on a day of endless patience, simply played along? No use thinking about that now.

Kirika was playing pool, by herself. Looking for all the world as though she was enjoying this. Thoroughly. All the while ignoring her, too.

Mireille uneasily looked to the window, surprised to find her computer equipment stacked up on the window sill. She couldn't say that she cared, though. She wasn't on exactly good terms with her laptop today. No, she even wished the whole pile would just fall and distract Kirika from her game enough to finally look at her. It didn't fall, however. Kirika had done a good job in putting it there. Maybe if a bird flew against the window with full force, causing it to fly open and push the laptop off the window sill...

...no. Sacrificing birds was not an option.

Mireille simply stood there, trying to say something in an attempt to start a conversation, inwardly disgusted with herself for behaving so shyly and hesitantly around Kirika, of all people. Wasn't she supposed to be the bold one? Just what was wrong today? She didn't get it.

A few silent moments passed until Mireille gave a long sigh.

Fine. She gave it up. It was all utterly and completely her fault and she was behaving like a shy teenager in front of Kirika because this was, despite everything, still Valentine's Day and she didn't want to mess up the four hours that remained of it!

She had to try a different approach.

"Mind...if I join in?", she asked as she leaned against the large pool table. She thought she tasted the sweet flavor of victory when Kirika finally interrupted her game to look at Mireille. Her exhilaration was mercilessly cut short, though, as Kirika averted her eyes again to look beneath the table.

"Uh-uh.", she answered in a way that, to Mireille, looked more like relenting than actually agreeing. The younger woman reached under the table to get the second cue, then handed it to Mireille.

As the blonde took it, she was surprised to see Kirika looking at her so blankly. She usually avoided prolonged eye contact and tended to look uneasy and timid when regarded directly. But it was different now, and Mireille instantly missed the puppy-eyed expression of the smaller woman.

Without a word, Kirika stopped her game and rearranged the balls on the table with the help of the triangle. Mireille watched on with raised interest, all the while trying to strike the best possible pose given a situation like this with a long, unwieldy cue in her right hand.

By the time Kirika finished setting up the game, she motioned for Mireille to begin, pointing leisurely at the cue ball. Mireille nodded, trying to seem as casual as possible as she approached the table's slim end.

Kirika had pointed at the white ball...so it seemed to be a good spot to start from, right?

Alright. So this seemed to be the ideal moment to confess that she had never played pool before. Ever. Shortly after buying the table, she had only disinterestedly skimmed through the rule book, which had soon after met its end in the paper bin.

But there was nothing to gain from letting Kirika know that. No, she just had to improvise. It couldn't be that hard.

"So tell me...", Mireille started, feeling the need to lighten up the mood in spite of the fact that she was the only one talking. "...what's in it for the winner?", she asked with a smirk directly aimed at Kirika, who to the blonde's delight, seemed to lose her composure for the split of a second. 'Yes, Mireille. Way to improvise.'

Kirika remained silent for a few seconds, but Mireille could see her cogs turning. She would show the smaller girl that every game Kirika could play, she could play too. Mireille had a feeling that this wasn't about a mere apology anymore. Kirika didn't want to hear that.

After a few moments of thinking at the highest speed she could manage without it showing on her face, Kirika answered, looking dead-serious. "Anything she wants."

Mireille's mouth fell for a moment until she had processed the answer.

'Anything! It's perfect.'

Given the possibility that she won, there would be a million ways for her to save this day opening up to her. She had no idea what to do in the case she lost, but this was not something she could afford to pass on. She would just have to secure her victory, using dirty tricks if necessary. Mireille Bouquet knew her fair share of those.

"Seems we'll be playing for high stakes.", Mireille finally answered, not without a hint of amusement. "But I'll take you on. You'll better not cop out of this in the end, Yuumura." She emphasized the last word, and saw Kirika give an ever so slight smirk in response.

Just some time ago, this word couldn't have been spoken in either of the women's presence without it insinuating the dark secret of their pasts, but they were over this now. It was still a part of who they were, but it didn't hurt anymore. They had come to a silent agreement that they wouldn't treat everything that had happened as something that would never be mentioned again. They were who they were because of what happened, and while Mireille certainly wasn't grateful for her childhood to have been demolished like that, it was too late to mourn over it now.

So this, and many other things, would be spoken with a smile now rather than sad eyes. A smile just like the loving one Mireille was giving Kirika now, almost automatically. She had come to look like this when she met Kirika's eyes.

She tore her eyes away from who was now her opponent, her smile sinking as she once again regarded the white ball before her.

Doing her damndest not to let any of her incompetence show too clearly, she positioned her left hand in front of the cue ball. She'd seen professionals do this on TV, in the short second that it took to zap to another the program.

'It's simple, Mireille. Just shoot and get one of those damn balls into one of the pockets.' Fifteen balls, six pockets. The possibilities seemed good enough.

She could feel Kirika's gaze lingering on her, but still focused on the cue ball. With one quick move, she took the shot and watched the white ball rapidly spinning towards the others. As it hit and the balls scattered about the table, her eyes tried to keep up with each of the fifteen balls' movements at once. She didn't need to, though, as two unmistakable sounds confirmed her hopes.

Even before Kirika went over to look at the balls in the pockets, Mireille counted the balls on the table and detect that indeed, two were missing. It was the ten and thirteen, and seeing Kirika's mildly surprised expression as she spotted the balls, she guessed it was a good thing. She would simply try to clear the whole table of those striped balls, and win the game. Hopefully.

"I'm not so bad, am I?", the blonde asked playfully with a glance to Kirika. The brunette nodded and smiled gently. "I'm surprised." There was no hint of disappointment or dishonesty in her voice. Not that Mireille deemed her capable of lying. Still, she couldn't help but wonder what the other girl was up to.

Her ego nevertheless boosted by the recent accomplishment, she followed up by aiming at the bright yellow nine, which was situated mere centimeters away from a pocket. It was an easy target, so it didn't give her as much satisfaction as she succeeded in clearing it off the table. Still, things were looking good.

However, Kirika still looked as content as before, and upon noticing she was being looked at, said: "You play well, Mireille." She said it in a way, that, had she been any other girl, would have pissed Mireille off. She wasn't making fun of her, was she? Again she looked at Kirika then smacked herself inwardly before turning back to the pool table. Of course not. This cute face could not be fake. Never.

Mireille proceeded to aim at the next best striped ball that seemed to be in a likely position to be pocketed. If this kept on, she would win the whole game in one go.

'Wouldn't that be nice?'

She took another shot much like the one before. Only this time the cue slipped and hit the ball at the side, giving it an unfavorable spin that sent the following ball into the wrong direction, missing the pocket by far. An accident.

With a short sigh the blonde retreated a step from the table, giving Kirika enough room to play. One little mistake. It wasn't like Kirika would suddenly clear the whole table in one go...was it?

With her eyes glued to Kirika's face, she hoped she was wrong. She knew without

having actually seen Kirika play that she was a strong opponent. The brunette seemed quite serious, unlike the way she had looked when Mireille had been playing.

The way she focused on the cue ball with all her concentration, her eyes darting all over the table as though calculating a hundred possible outcomes of one shot...Mireille couldn't help but gulp. This was serious. And still, there was this playful twinkle in her eye, the kind one might expect to see in a child who was up to mischief. It was only now that Mireille realized how much Kirika seemed to enjoy this game, and when Kirika lowered her body over the table to reach the cue ball, slightly sticking out her tongue in concentration, she gave off such a cute impression that Mireille felt the sudden and unexplainable urge to hug her.

She didn't. 'Don't we play for fun?'

She couldn't. 'Why did we fight in the first place?'

Kirika was aiming at such an easy target that Mireille clicked her tongue at the sight. Well, she could at least allow her that one. She averted her eyes for a moment and looked out of the window. But the hollow sound of a ball reaching a pocket remained unheard. Though she had heard the sound of balls clicking and moving all over the table. This could mean only one thing. Yuumura Kirika had missed.

'She missed!'

A giggle threatened to cross her lips as she turned around. 'Don't laugh, Mireille. Be nice.'

She forced the giggle back down and gave Kirika a sympathetic glance, even though the shorter girl's contentment didn't seem scratched in the least.

Trying not to let the somersaults she was currently performing in her mind show, she walked up to the table. She could almost hear her mind's cheers coming out of her ears.

"Well, that was unlucky.", she said with suppressed sarcasm. However, Kirika's smile only seemed to have widened. "A little."

Unwelcome thoughts started to enter the blonde's mind as she tried to figure out what Kirika was so happy about.

Was Kirika letting her win on purpose? Unlikely. Was she being paranoid? Probably. But what frightened her the most was the question whether Kirika knew what Mireille was about to ask of her in case she won. Could her mind be read this easily? It was disheartening, frankly.

Still, even given the possibility that Kirika wanted her to win, she had to end decide the game for herself.

The Corsican felt about ready to win the game. Only five more balls.

However, upon taking a closer look at the pool table, Mireille instantly knew that it was impossible, and wished she had taken a closer look at Kirika's shot. Kirika had no intention of letting Mireille win. Quite the contrary.

Indeed she had not managed to pocket even one of her balls with her last shot, but she had miraculously managed with only one shot to maneuver six of the solid balls almost directly in front of the pockets, the blue two being in dead center. What had only a few seconds ago looked like a random arrangement of colored spheres on a green cloth, now seemed like a piece of art, her still randomly situated striped balls balancing out the others' perfect positioning.

Mireille failed to find the right words. To hell with 'unlucky'. As far as she could remember, pocketing one of the opponent's balls was considered a foul, as well as not getting rid of at least one of her balls.

She could do nothing to keep her turn. Everything she did would most probably result in one of Kirika's balls being shot into a pocket. A word Mireille had come across on the internet immediately crossed her mind: OWNED.

There was nothing to be done, she had to make the best of it. She leaned down over the table to reach the white ball, which was not only in the center of the table, but also almost touching the two, which made it hard to play it at all. Mireille tried to reach it from different sides of the table, but there were also those few centimeters missing. All the while, Kirika followed her, coming to a halt directly behind her, observing Mireille's actions.

"Having fun, are you?", the blonde asked, but had to smile despite herself. She had to be giving a strange image. She looked at the Asian girl with a mock-pout.

"Yes." Kirika agreed and met Mireille with a smile that the blonde had never seen before. Her head was slightly tilted to the side and her eyes were closed, as though to grant her lips free reign to shine all over her face. In short: It was gorgeous. So gorgeous in fact, that Mireille couldn't bring herself to even sigh at what amounted to an almost cheeky remark. Maybe it was because it was an almost cheeky remark coming from Kirika, that would cause Mireille to swoon rather than being upset.

"Just you wait.", she whispered before sitting down at the edge of the pool table to lean to the side. One foot still barely touched the ground. At least she could reach the cue ball now. Opting for the best solution under the circumstances, she aimed for a combo, which pocketed one of her balls as well as one of Kirika's. Still, it was better than nothing.

With a smirk she left the table to Kirika, who by now could barely contain the excitement she felt.

There was the hint of a smile at the corners of her mouth which caused them to tremble as she prepared herself for the first shot. It seemed ready to explode and spread all over the face at any second.

With the blue solid ball still in the middle of the table, she aimed the cue ball at it with a forward spin which in turn caused the two to drop the yellow one into the pocket shortly before doing the same. Much like this, the red, violet and green ball were cleared off the table.

Mireille couldn't help but stare, slowing coming closer to the table to get a better look. She watched as the brunette gracefully took shot after shot, sending each solid ball into a pocket without fail. In numeric order too.

By the time Kirika cleared the black eight, Mireille couldn't suppress a chuckle at her own foolish hope of ever winning against someone like her. Seeing Kirika's evident confusion, she smiled proudly at her.

"I guess I'm just the big loser today.", she sighed, looking truly apologetically for the first time that day. Kirika quickly shook her head, but Mireille would have none of it. She came closer to Kirika, and upon reaching her took the cue out of her hand and placed it on the pool table.

Unsure of what to do with her hands with Kirika so close in front of her, she gently stroked a loose strand back behind her ear, noticing how the lush brown hair had gotten quite long again. She would need to cut it again, soon. "Forgive me?" Her voice sounded shy and awkward despite her efforts for the contrary.

Kirika thought for a moment. As was often the case, the sheer hopefulness she felt didn't translate too well to her facial features, and her expression remained unchanged for the most part.

Mireille was about to withdraw her hand when Kirika caught it and placed it back against her head. She smiled comfortably at the touch and Mireille felt her body grow warm.

"Uh huh.", came the simple response, and Mireille was glad. They remained like this for a moment, but while Kirika didn't seem to mind the silence between them, it began to make Mireille nervous. She looked away and onto the green table, seeing her remaining balls.

She casually flicked one of them with her finger, causing it to roll away.

"You planned this from the start, didn't you?", she asked with a sense of self-irony, but smiled.

"No. I simply enjoyed playing.", Kirika replied in that cute and irresistibly honest voice of hers, earning a loving smile from Mireille. "With you.", she quietly added, and her shy smirk made it impossible for Mireille to miss the double entendre.

"Why, you little...", Mireille said in mock-anger and tipped playfully at Kirika's forehead, which caused both of them to giggle.

Mireille didn't know if she had ever seen Kirika this relaxed before. Sure, they had been having a good time ever since returning from the Manor, but there had always been that little barrier left between them. They would never touch each other so casually, speak so jokingly and laugh so freely like they did now.

Was it because of their little fight in the morning, or the game of pool, which had been, in spite of Mireille's expectations, been so much fun even without winning? Or was it because it was Valentine's Day?

As the thought occurred to her, she remembered for the first time the present she had bought. But the way she was leaning against the pool table now with Kirika right in front of her, she had little desire to get it just yet.

"So...", Mireille said as she leaned forward, her forehead almost touching Kirika's. "What do you want?" She had a curious glint in her eyes as she asked this.

Kirika looked puzzled for a moment, but when it dawned on her, her smile faded and her previously content expression changed to one of fright.

"I..." She was at a loss of words. She'd taken this too far. It had been fun while it lasted, but with Mireille looking at her so expectantly now, she knew that she had taken this entirely too far. She shouldn't have been bluffing. She had only done so to get Mireille to apologize in the first place. She hadn't really thought about what to ask for.

"What's wrong? Just ask for anything. I agreed, after all.", Mireille said reassuringly, seeing how Kirika was fighting with herself. "I won't get mad, promise.", she added. After all, what could be the worst that could happen? It wasn't like Kirika would ask her to dance naked on the roof.

She regarded Kirika curiously, who seemed to be contemplating her choice. When she decided and looked at Mireille, the blonde could see small tears forming in her eyes. "Kiss me." The words were nothing but a whisper, and even so, Kirika felt as though they still sounded too clear.

"That's...", Mireille started with a smile, but soon came to an abrupt halt. "Wait, what?" Did Kirika just say what Mireille thought she did? Or was it the result of a long and difficult day, which had caused her to wildly make up things? Moreover, was it wrong to wish it wasn't the latter? Her mind was in a haze.

Sensing Mireille's confusion, Kirika stepped back, giving Mireille enough space to move away, if she wanted to. She knew she shouldn't have said it, but it was too late now. Looking at the floor beneath her feet, she took a deep breath, before looking up and facing Mireille with a new resolve in her eyes. It was honesty.

"You said I could ask for anything. I won the game. And I want you to kiss me.", she finally said, but only managed to look at Mireille for a few seconds until she had to look away.

Mireille just stood there, stupefied. If she'd had the chance to ask Kirika to repeat it for a third time, she would have done so. Something didn't seem right.

There was Kirika, trying to look strong but actually being close to tears, even for the, sometimes insensitive blonde, to see. Then there was this bold request, which, had it been spoken by anyone else but Kirika, would have resulted in a firm slap in the face. Or an outright punch, more like.

But this was Kirika, little, cute, shy Kirika. This wasn't a dare of some sort to pay her back for her bad mood in the morning, this wasn't a joke. But something about this was still off, and she hadn't yet figured out what it was. This was too unexpected.

When Mireille came closer towards her, Kirika lifted her head hopefully, but quickly looked away again when she noticed that Mireille was walking past her, over to the tea table, where two abandoned cups of tea and a solitary red box stood.

With a sigh Mireille sat down at the table, and, searching for something to occupy her hands, took one of the cups and brought it to her lips. The tea was cold and a little bitter, but it suited her fine and she didn't grimace as she took a sip and looked over the brim of the cup at Kirika, who looked as much as a pet that had been left behind as a professional assassin could. She returned the gaze, and Mireille could feel her cheeks redden for the first time for as long as she could remember.

'Am I blushing? Just how old am I?'

Mireille had never really kissed anyone. Ever since starting her training as a child, there hadn't been any time for this sort of thing at all, nor had she ever felt the desire to get closer to a person than a mere handshake. She'd assumed that she just wasn't this type of woman. But wait...could it be that Kirika expected her to know about these things?

Her hand slid casually over the table until it hit a red box that she immediately recognized, but still wasn't hers. She hadn't even noticed it before, but now the heart-shaped box jumped out at her, and she chuckled.

"That's a nice box.", she said as she ran her finger across the surface. Kirika looked up in surprise at Mireille's sudden comment, which wasn't at all sarcastic or indifferent, but sounded very gentle.

"I bought it.", Kirika said, then paused, before adding: "For you."

Upon hearing these words, which didn't particularly surprise her but still managed to bring a smile on her lips, she took the light box into her hands.

"Thanks.", she said and looked at the box lovingly. "That was sweet of you." Mireille opened it to reveal a set of heart-shaped chocolates. She gently picked one of them and held it between her fingers, regarding it. Kirika watched her intently, unable to tear her eyes away. She had to see whether or not Mireille liked them. She didn't want to hear it, she wanted to see it on her face the second the blonde put one of them

into her mouth. She didn't.

"I'm sorry though.", Mireille said and made a face at the slightly melting heart in her hand. "I guess my present doesn't seem very original." She tried to say it seriously, but couldn't contain a small chuckle.

Kirika looked puzzled, and Mireille nodded at the corner behind Kirika, where the entrance to their apartment was. Following Mireille's eyes, she saw a small plastic bag standing beside Mireille's boots. It was partly transparent, and Kirika could detect a heart shape. She didn't need to think to realize what it was.

"For me?", she asked, and tried not to sound as excited as she was. Mireille had bought her things before, but this was different.

"Of course.", Mireille said with a wave of her hand. Who else would she put up with a terribly crowded store for, even arguing with the saleswoman about which chocolates to choose for well over ten minutes? "I'm sorry I didn't get you something else. There's no meaning in giving each other the same present."

"You're wrong." Kirika said with a shake of her head and went to retrieve the red box that was intended for her. Even though it was the same, it was still different. "Thank you, Mireille." The brunette favored Mireille with a sweet smile that truly seemed to come from her heart, and almost succeeded in making Mireille blush again.

Mireille finally put the little piece of chocolate, which had begun to stick to her fingers, into her mouth. The strong taste was already overwhelming when her tongue came into contact with it for the first time, and Mireille had a hard time keeping her face straight. To make things even more difficult, Kirika was looking intently on, obviously waiting for a reaction.

"W-Well...", Mireille said after swallowing the irritable clump of artificial strawberry aroma whole, "this certainly tastes..." What? Horrible? Disgusting? Poisonous?

She wavered for a moment, but when she saw Kirika following her example and trying one of the chocolates as well, she smiled almost wickedly. Giving Kirika a few seconds to first savor the taste completely and then regain a blank expression, she finished: "Traumatizing."

Kirika only managed to nod slightly, before swallowing it also. She hadn't known something that sweet and with such offensive taste could exist. She didn't think she would buy chocolates again, ever. When she returned to look at Mireille though, her tense expression softened. The blonde smiled.

"Well, at least we're even.", she said jokingly, moving the box of chocolates to the opposite end of the tea table. 'Certainly not even with that saleswoman, though.', she added mentally.

"Mm-Mm.", Kirika replied and shook her head. "We're not...even." She said it almost casually and Mireille would have overheard its meaning had Kirika not touched the

pool table to emphasize. Oh. Yes. That.

She had almost forgotten about it, so well she had improvised. ...why had she improvised again?

"So you want me, even though I'm always so difficult?", Mireille asked and averted her gaze from the smaller girl, looking more self-conscious than Kirika would have expected of her. If she hadn't known better, she would have said that Mireille looked almost shy. The image brought a small smile to her lips.

"More than anything.", came Kirika's honest reply, and Mireille felt her heart flutter in anticipation.

This was it, she knew. In reflex, she quickly took the half-empty cup of tea into her hands and sipped at it, trying to buy a little time still. The tea did wonders to diminish the ugly aftertaste of the chocolates, but couldn't calm her heartbeat in the least.

"The tea tastes good.", she said to regain her composure and looked at Kirika, smiling when she caught Kirika blushing slightly. For some reason, knowing that Kirika seemed to be every bit as embarrassed as she was, made her feel a lot better.

"You don't have to say that.", the brunette denied the compliment, shaking her head. "It's cold, too." She had tasted it herself, there was no way this tea was good by any standards. Though it might be better than the chocolates...

"Dummy, come here.", Mireille said and reached out her hand for Kirika. The smaller girl followed her request, but stopped at arm's length, unsure whether to take Mireille's hand or not.

"Closer.", Mireille said with a smirk and took Kirika's hand to gently pull her closer to herself. Taking another sip of the tea in her right hand, she wiggled her pinkie to indicate that Kirika still wasn't close enough. Kirika looked puzzled for a moment, but as Mireille leaned forward as though to whisper into her ear, Kirika did the same. Mireille's tongue ran over her lips as her face got closer to Kirika's, but instead of going for the ear, she met Kirika's lips in a direct kiss.

The smaller girl was about to move away in utter surprise, but realizing that this was exactly what she had wanted, she stayed, tentatively trying to respond to the kiss. It was an awkward position for her to be bending down over Mireille.

"...it tastes good, doesn't it?", the blonde breathed after breaking the kiss, but remained close to Kirika's face. Kirika instinctively ran her tongue over her lips, tasting the flavor of tea on them. She nodded hesitantly, unable to speak.

"There, I kept my promise.", Mireille said with a wink and Kirika detected a flicker of relief in her eyes, and her expression suddenly fell against her will. Was this...it?

"Yes...", Kirika said before turning away from Mireille, setting her eyes once more on the pool table. Her shoulders sank. If only she hadn't started this game...she felt

stupid. She gingerly touched the remaining balls on the table, the ones Mireille hadn't been able to pocket. Just a bet. She felt about to cry.

Behind her, Mireille stared after Kirika, surprised at the smaller girl's sudden change of mood. She regarded Kirika for a few moments, but when she saw the other girls' shoulders sink, she smacked herself inwardly.

She hadn't meant it like that. God, she was so clumsy sometimes.

"Kirika...", Mireille muttered barely loud enough for Kirika to hear, but didn't continue. Just what was she going to say?

Kirika didn't turn around, instead staying where she was, looking at the green cloth intently. It was boring to look at. It was perfectly even and smooth, without even the tiniest bump or stains anywhere. She didn't like it, but found no other place to look.

They had had a fight today. But Kirika, having suddenly gotten so obsessed with the thought that it wasn't even her fault, had wanted Mireille to apologize. And Mireille had. In fact, she had gotten everything she wanted this evening, the way she wanted. But she wasn't happy. Instead, she wished it would just be the way it usually was. The last months had passed so quickly and Kirika could honestly say that they had been the most enjoyable of her whole life. So why had she destroyed that? It wasn't like her to be so insolent about personal wishes and she certainly wasn't someone who insisted on having others apologize to her. No, this wasn't her. This was-

Suddenly, she felt an unexpected warmth spread over her whole back, and her body stiffened instantly. It was Mireille. She was slightly leaning against her back, her head resting on her right shoulder while her arms sneaked around her waist until they met in front of her belly. Kirika tried to relax, but felt a shiver running through her body every time Mireille moved ever so slightly.

"Want to play another round?", she whispered quietly, but being as close to Kirika's ear as she was, the smaller girl understood every word, and it confused her.

"Eh?", she managed to get out, her mind feebly trying to work despite the distraction.

Mireille smiled when she felt Kirika's hands tremble, and gently took them into her own. "I...wouldn't mind losing again.", she said with a light chuckle.

"But..." She didn't get it, at all. So it hadn't been about the bet? Kirika didn't know what to think, anymore.

Before Kirika found the right words to continue, Mireille's hands had wandered upwards, reaching the brunette's lips and halting them in an instant. "You know...I didn't say I hated it, did I?", she asked with a knowledgeable smile on her face. However, her smile soon faded when Kirika didn't answer.

"Did you?", she asked, suddenly alarmed. Had she misinterpreted things?

"Mm-Mm.", Kirika quickly shook her head, a little more forcefully than intended. "But you...you seemed so surprised...", she stated more than asking.

"Well, I was startled.", Mireille said truthfully. "And also...you could have said that in a more romantic fashion.", she added and pulled Kirika tighter to herself, causing a small "Eep!" to escape the younger girl's lips. Mireille chuckled, but stopped abruptly when Kirika turned around, coming face to face with her. The blonde could feel her arms loosening against her will. It was one thing to be so bold when Kirika wasn't directly looking at her, but when she did, it was another thing entirely. Though even though her arms released Kirika of their grasp, the smaller girl didn't step back, instead remaining so close to Mireille that their bodies were still touching.

"...romantic?", Kirika echoed, looking puzzled. While she was used to not getting things others seemed to find common, her lack of knowledge certainly hit a peak today.

Mireille took a few moments to search for any hint of amusement or mischief behind that puzzled look, but found nothing but honest curiosity. As expected, though she couldn't help but sigh exasperatedly.

"You know, like...", Mireille started, but stopped short. Nonsense. Kirika didn't know, which was precisely the problem. This was Kirika, who had probably seen people kissing more than once, without ever giving it a second thought or any importance to her life until...well, until she fell in love with her. Mireille smiled at the thought, encouraged by its importance. Her arms found their way back around Kirika's petite body, once again holding her close.

"Like saying...", she whispered, her head moving forward until it met Kirika's in another touching of lips.

"I love you." Mireille saw Kirika's eyes grow wide at these three words, and smiled lovingly. Her lips traveled from Kirika's mouth across the cheek until they reached her left ear. Mireille blew softly into the smaller girl's ear and felt her tremble beneath her hands.

"You're the woman of my dreams." She breathed, but giggled at her own overdramatic phrasing.

"And...you're the most important person in the world.", Mireille concluded as her hands moved upwards and stroked the sensitive spot at the nape of Kirika's neck as she once again came face to face with her.

Kirika's cheeks had slightly reddened, and her breaths came quicker than usual. "...you want me to say that?", she asked, the look she gave Mireille a mixture of hopefulness and wariness, her hands unconsciously seeking out Mireille's.

Mireille thought for a moment, but then smiled with a shake of her head. "Actually...no.", she replied, her right hand reaching up to trace Kirika's jaw from ear to chin. Kirika's lips inevitably curled up at the gentle touch, starting to match

Mireille's expression. "Just continue to smile for me just like that."

And Kirika did. Never had anyone said something like this to her, and as she felt a tingle in her stomach, which caused a wave of warmth to wash all over her body, she found that she couldn't stop smiling, even if she wanted to. For Mireille was looking at her with those large blue eyes of hers, and showed a smile that revealed so much more love than Kirika had ever hoped for. She had known that the beautiful Corsican blonde loved her, ever since they had returned from the Manor, but she had never thought that it could feel quite like this.

To be loved, so openly and without hesitation. Kirika forgot all of her thoughts of a dramatic, silent rebellion and for now wanted nothing more than to just submit to Mireille. Completely.

She felt Mireille gently pushing her backwards until she could feel the pool table behind her. She didn't resist, instead lifting herself up to sit on the edge of the table, allowing Mireille to come even closer.

"Is it...alright?", Mireille asked as she leaned in for another kiss, which Kirika accepted without protest. She wasn't sure what she was asking for, she just knew that she didn't want to stop.

In the end, they didn't get around to play another round of pool that day. By the time the clock hit twelve, Kirika lay sprawled out on the green surface of the otherwise empty table, her clothes partially removed by the woman on top of her. Even though, she thought it was still too warm. Way too warm.

The next morning almost went by without any of them noticing. The sunrays coming through the windows were already strongly lighting the silent apartment.

It was a morning, which on the surface, seemed like any other morning. Except that upon awakening in their warm and comfortable bed, Kirika felt something warm pressing against her back, and found two arms tightly wound around her belly. Usually it was the other way around, Kirika being the one unconsciously clinging to Mireille in her sleep.

Kirika was tempted to turn around and look at Mireille's sleeping face, but decided against it. She didn't want to lose the feeling of this embrace just yet. She wanted to savor every second.

She could hear Mireille's rhythmic breathing close to her ear, indicating that the blonde was still fast asleep. It was a pleasant sound.

Thinking back to the previous evening, Kirika felt her heart flutter. To think that a day which had started so horribly could have ended like that, it felt strange. But maybe because it had started the way it did, things had turned out that way. Which didn't mean that Kirika wanted to have an argument with Mireille ever again.

From where she lay, Kirika could see a part of the tea table. The tea cups were still standing on top of it, as well as the red box she had bought. Kirika strained her mind

for a moment to recall where the other one had gone, but she came up with nothing. She knew it wasn't on the pool table anymore, even though that had been the last place where she had put it.

Kirika continued to stare at the Valentine's gift, wondering what they were going to do with it. Eating them was out of the question, but throwing them away seemed too much of a waste to Kirika.

"They were really horrible, weren't they?", came a soft voice from behind Kirika, causing the smaller girl to unwillingly shiver with pleasure.

Upon remembering where her hands were, the blonde stroked her fingers over Kirika's bare stomach. "Morning."

Kirika welcomed the gentle touch, pressing her head comfortably into the pillow before turning onto her back to be able to face Mireille, all the while keeping Mireille's hands on her with her own. "Good morning, Mireille.", she said, her pronunciation once again evoking a loving smile from the blonde.

"We should throw them away.", Mireille said, once again glancing at the box of chocolates before leaning down to kiss Kirika lightly.

"Mm, maybe.", Kirika agreed and nuzzled close to Mireille.

Mireille smiled, and, unable to resist the temptation, ran her fingers through Kirika's tousled hair.

"You should have seen that saleswoman.", Mireille said, and upon being met with a slightly confused look from Kirika, continued with a small chuckle, "I really thought she was on to me. Turns out she actually was. Maybe she gave us those horrible chocolates because of that."

Kirika's look only intensified, though. Mireille found that it was the cutest look ever.

"Well, I suppose I wasn't too subtle in asking for a cute but not too girly box..." Mireille sighed at the memory. She had been in quite a hurry and had taken the first thing the saleswoman had to offer after they had finally agreed on what kind of present it was going to be.

Kirika continued to stare blankly for a few moments, but when Mireille's implications dawned on her, she looked at her with obvious curiosity.

"Can't women give each other chocolates?", she asked innocently, looking up at Mireille.

Mireille tried to look serious as she answered, but cracked at the adorable sight.

"They can. It's just...unusual.", she replied, twirling a stray lock of brown hair between her fingers.

Surprisingly, Kirika looked almost impishly as her right hand moved upward to touch Mireille's lips. "You're unusual."

Mireille's mouth snapped at Kirika's finger playfully, smiling even though she didn't succeed. "You too."

Kirika nodded, before pulling Mireille's head down to her. She kissed the blonde, softly at first, but more strongly the longer it lasted.

They didn't make it out of bed until Kirika pointed out that it was probably after noon already, and even then, Mireille whined when Kirika stripped her of the cover.

"I'll make some tea.", Kirika said as she stood up and stretched, smiling down at Mireille. The blonde didn't respond, seemingly trying to stay in bed even though she was obviously cold.

Taking the still tea-filled cups from the table to the sink, Kirika began to prepare fresh tea. This time, she would really try to make it perfect.

Meanwhile, Mireille had succumbed to the cold and walked through the apartment, picking up and putting on her clothes as she walked, as well as turning up the heating. She couldn't help but smirk as she set her eyes on the large pool table. She definitely didn't regret buying it.

She traced its surface as she walked past it and towards Kirika. "So...we're a real couple now?", she asked with a teasing undertone, but actually felt childish for pointing it out like that. But when she saw Kirika's shoulders twitch, she knew it had been worth it.

Kirika slowly turned around to Mireille, her face redder than the taller woman would have expected. She looked at Mireille blankly, for some reason unable to answer. Why was it so hard? They both knew it, and yet...talking about it seemed so difficult. She couldn't remember how she had been able to be so bold the evening before.

Kirika didn't notice she had fallen into Mireille's trap until the blonde grinned at her. "Yes will do.", she said and gave her the sweetest smile. It was one that Kirika would treasure for a long time.

Kirika was about to respond happily when the sudden ringing of the doorbell halted her. A glance at Mireille showed that the other woman was equally clueless, but the pleading look Mireille gave her was a clear sign that she should answer the door.

Kirika only wore a pair of pajama shorts and a top, but Mireille was giving her that "I really need a shower"-look and Kirika didn't mind, unruly hair or not. Though she did wonder who could be at the door. The thought of taking a gun crossed her mind, but she didn't want that.

Opening the door revealed a tall, not-too-friendly looking man dressed in blue.

"Parcel for Mrs. Bouquet.", he said without greeting, not flinching at Kirika's outfit. Kirika looked taken aback for a moment, then looked around for Mireille for help.

Mireille, who had gone out of sight of the door, now rolled her eyes and came back, greeting the man with an unfriendly look of her own.

"About time.", she mumbled as she grabbed the PDA-like device from the man's hands and scribbled down her name before pushing it back to him. Without another word, she picked up the parcel from the ground and forcefully closed the door behind her.

Kirika watched the scene, unable to hide her surprise. But when Mireille's mood made another 180° turn, she knew that her anger hadn't been directed at her.

"Here, go ahead and open it.", Mireille said with a smile as she handed Kirika the parcel, which was while being considerably large, not heavy at all.

Kirika hesitated for a moment, but with Mireille nodding at her encouragingly, eventually opened the parcel.

The content was hidden beneath a few layers of padding and filling material, and while Kirika worked to remove it, Mireille retreated a few steps, not wanting to be caught grinning like an idiot.

'No, this won't do. Look cool, Mireille. Cool.' With her lips now set straight but her eyes still sparkling with anticipation, she watched Kirika freeze at the sight of the parcel's content, before turning to the blonde.

Kirika now held a stuffed animal in her hands, completely white and resembling a cat.

"You...", she started, but didn't finish. 'Remembered', was what she wanted to say, but she didn't want to be too hopeful. Mireille was able to remain straight-faced for a few more moments.

"You know, I thought you might want to check out an animal shelter or something instead of me picking one out.", Mireille said in a cool way, which unknown to her, obviously seemed forced.

"So until then, bear with-" Mireille was interrupted in mid-sentence by Kirika, who came rushing into her arms, snuggling close to her.

"Yes.", the brunette whispered, gazing up into Mireille's eyes. They were smiling as much as hers.

Kirika leaned in for a soft kiss. "Yes."

Singing a song you don't know can be awkward, but is all the more rewarding if it turns out well.

