

遙か先

Far away

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This is an after story for HELLO WORLD.
It contains spoilers from the movie.

1)

A bright light bounces off of the school's windows. Piercing the ground, this light burns the concrete, heating up the city of Kyoto. Summer has begun.

The end of June, three weeks has passed since the Fireworks Festival in Uji and the summer vacation in Nishiki High School is just around the corner as well.

The students in the school were already feeling it. Since Nishiki High School is among the better schools, even during summer vacation there are many learning programs and supplementary classes, leaving almost no free time during the holiday. However, even with such circumstances, the word "Summer Vacation" has a great effect on teens. Even though the students' hearts were filled with various expectations, about to start dancing at any time, they were still a part of an elite school, and they had to show self-control on the outside. The sentence written on the Library Committee's whiteboard showed that as well:

"No sexual activities!"

Katagaki Naomi was frowning. In the last Library Committee meeting before the summer vacation, the President wrote it to the "Warnings for Summer Vacation". Obviously there are no school rules like that and he knows it's just a joke. If it was Naomi a little while ago, he wouldn't care the slightest about it. However, the Naomi of the present felt like this sentence was directed towards him personally. A month ago, Naomi had started dating with Ichigyou Ruri.

On the day of the Secondhand Book Fair in June, Naomi confessed his feelings to her. She gave him an answer and their relationship has awkwardly started. And, after that.

(After that...)

He recalled those events in his heart.

There are things he will never forget. There are things that he never wants to forget. The days of adventure, that created "This World" where Naomi and Ruri are alive, cannot be replaced by anything. And then...

Someone special, who he can never meet with again.

That person taught him many things. Guided him even though he couldn't do anything. Joined forces, betrayed each other, beat him, forgave him and finally kept in his heart.

That person, was Naomi's "Sensei" [teacher].

Suddenly, I was about to burst into tears. But I have to endure it, I can't cry during a committee meeting. I would be yelled at again for being a weakling. I remember Sensei's last words, which I keep repeating in my head for myself.

I... have to be happy.

I promised to him.

Naomi has already prepared for it. In his bag was his key to happiness. It's a beautifully wrapped present for Ruri that he chose after searching for an hour at Books Ogaki's Takashimaya Store.

He couldn't have chosen better. She surely will be happy. He just needs to give it to her, however four days have passed since then.

He glance over to Ruri, who is sitting next to him.

Naomi was grinding his teeth. He really doesn't know what could be the best timing to give it to her.

He just bought it as a normal present so specials days like her birthday are out of question. Naomi's mind was fighting with itself.

On one side, he thought it's weird to give her a present without any reason, but on the other side, they are lovers so it's perfectly normal, he thought. But he couldn't trust that encouraging self, since that's the first time he's dated a girl.

But, the packaging won't last much longer if it's being carried every day. Let's give it to her today, after the meeting is over! ... thought Naomi when he looked at Ruri next to him, writing down in her notes: "No sexual activities!"

A God of this World could rewrite the whiteboard with only moving his fingers, he thought. But unfortunately, Naomi wasn't the God of this World.

2)

When the meeting is over, everyone leaves their seats. Many of them, as usual, gathered around Kadenokouji Misuzu. This was also a familiar sight. Her friend, Maro-san (nickname) started organizing them in a line as a manager.

Today's theme was "Let's do something together in the summer vacation with Kadenokouji Misuzu". The boys did their best to get her to make some promises. Maro-san, to prevent 'fans' getting too close to the 'actress', draws a line.

Naomi never approached that circle. That's only natural, as he's already chosen someone else. He has a lover in the same committee. In front of her, I can't participate in such an idol event. Just imagining it, made me almost die of fear. Driven by the feeling of being in a tiger cage, Naomi restlessly looking around.

But there's no sign of her. He looks around in the room one more time, and he sees her back as she's just leaving the room. She, who isn't affected by anything around her, hasn't changed ever since she started going out with Naomi. I went after her in a hurry, but someone pulled me back by my bag.

As Naomi looked back, a girl was smiling with a shining face.

"Katagaki-kun"

Kadenokouji Misuzu put her hand near her mouth, indicating that she wants to tell Naomi something in secret, but he didn't have the courage to put there his ear. He could feel the other boys' and the manager's line of sight on his back. Kadenokouji Misuzu was waiting in that secret talk pose for a while, until she gave up, and said it in normal volume, her hand still being near her mouth.

"Katagaki-kun, is that true..."

"Eeeh"

"That Katagaki-kun and Ruri-rin"

"..... What do you mean?"

"..... Katagaki Ruri-rin?"

Kadenokouji Misuzu made a dazzling face, as she's about to reach this world's truth.

"Katagaki Ruri-rin!"

"What!? It's not like that! I don't know what are you talking about, but definitely it's not like that!"

"Hmm, Ichigyou Naomi!"

"Nyaaaaaaa" shouts Misuzu at the top of her lungs. Naomi's face turned red and ran away.

He was thinking if he had authority over this world, he would have flew Misuzu away to around Mount Kurama, but Naomi didn't have such authority.

3)

Ichigyou Ruri was reading a book at the bus stop. The bus went out just after Naomi caught up to her. The two got on without talking to each other. The bus is crowded as usual, sitting together is impossible, and they couldn't even stand next to each other.

It can't be helped, they grabbed the handles and started reading, their backs facing each other. Naomi however only after 3 pages, couldn't concentrate on the text anymore and let out a sigh.

She really hasn't changed even after getting in a relationship.

In a good or bad way, but Ichigyou Ruri is exactly the same as before they started dating. She talks normally. They talk about the books they read and give each other book recommendations. But there's no sign of getting any closer to her. Eating lunch together or doing anything that lovers do aren't even talked about. In these situations, even though they haven't even tried to hide it, no one thought that Naomi and Ruri would be dating. How did Kadenokouji Misuzu figure it out, he wondered. Maybe because she's a big fan of the "Demon Love" series.

"Let's get off"

In surprise, Naomi raised his head. Before he knew it, the bus has arrived under the Great Torii of Jingu. Naomi followed Ruri in a hurry.

4)

They sit facing each other in the Kyoto Prefectural Library, close to the Heian Shrine. While summer vacation has started on paper, there were still supplementary classes and a lot of homework to complete. Their desire to read books was set aside, as they both study silently. But Naomi wasn't able to concentrate. The task that he had to face wasn't in Math or Literature.

"Ichigyou... san"

He whispered in a nervous voice. There's a distance, making it impossible to think of them as lovers.

"Do you have plans for tomorrow? If you are free, then maybe..."

Before he could finish the sentence, she took out her phone. Just a while ago, she wasn't even able to properly hold her phone, but now, even if clumsily, she can do basic tasks on it. When she decides to do something, her concentration really is something else, Naomi thought.

"I'm not free since a while ago"

Saying that, she showed her phone's screen. In the WIZ talk, the name "Kadenokouji Misuzu" is seen.

"I was invited by her"

"Ah, if you already have plans, don't worry. It's fine!"

"Sorry"

Ruri bowed politely and returned to studying, but suddenly her phone started vibrating. She looks at the message, and then turns to Naomi.

"We will meet in the morning, so in the afternoon is okay"

Naomi was confused. Don't people usually spend a whole day with their friends? Will Kadenokouji Misuzu be there in the afternoon too? He was thinking about it, but he couldn't miss this opportunity. He agrees on the following afternoon and writes it on the calendar. He looks down to his feet... and the present's wrapping peeks out of the bag. I felt like the present was saying "I wish I was given to her right now" but this requires preparation. He thought he can't just give it without a reason, and so, Naomi closed the bag.

5)

On the enrollment board there is a wooden sign with red letters. In the ALLTALE Center, the Head of the Center, Senko Tsunehisa was leaning back in his chair, gazing at that sign, which will never be turned over again. He has been looking at that sign for a few years now and got used to its unchanged state, with the familiar text on it. After that big incident, Katagaki Naomi, the ALLTALE Center's Main Director of System Control, has disappeared.

It was an unprecedented event that took place here in Kyoto. A mysterious kitsune men army flooded the city, originating from the quantum storage, the ALLTALE. A huge monster destroyed the building of Kyoto Station and took down the Kyoto Tower. After all of them disappeared, the ALLTALE itself did too, as if it all was just a dream.

A few months has passed since then, and Seiko is now dealing with the aftermath of the events. The question of responsibility was naturally brought up, but no one knew what exactly happened in the first place. The investigation is still ongoing, so Senko's innocence is yet to be cleared, but at least he's still able to work in his private room in the ALLTALE Center.

Just after the incident.

Senko found a letter in Naomi's private room inside the Center. What was left behind was a short confession, an apology and words of gratitude.

Since it was only a small paper, no details were mentioned in that confession. He only sketched a figure in it. It was really simple, like a graffiti. But Naomi knew Senko would understand it even only from that.

What the figure shown was a reasoning for the observed phenomenon.

This world.

How the world should be.

Senko was sitting in his chair, his thoughts being somewhere else.

When thinking about science, usually conclusion comes first and only

then the logic behind it. Even now. Every calculation and proof is yet to come, but he had a good feeling about it.

It seems like Naomi won't be seen ever again.

No one knows where he is now. But he must be far away. It's not just about the distance, but that place is isolated from here.

Like a "Different World". Like a "New Universe".

He was thinking Naomi must have went to a place like that. If so, then they could never meet again.

But at the same time, he knew.

Science and technology made humans do the impossible.

A hunch and knowledge both existed inside his mind. But that isn't weird. The figure Naomi left behind is the key for the future. We just need to grab it and climb one more step. We are already on the edge of this world.

The day will come when we leave here. "Upwards", "downwards", maybe "in a direction we don't even know of yet".

There's no logic, no calculation, no proof yet. It's unknown how far it is to reach the goal. Maybe it won't happen while he's working here. Maybe not even while he's alive. Maybe he won't be able to reach anything by himself. But, that's alright.

Because Naomi is there, on the other side.

If it's not possible alone, then from the both sides.

Surely, the day when they will meet will come.

Senko smiled alone and left the control room desk. Upon trying to leave the room, an electric fence stopped him.

"Please do your job"

Shuu Li said with a cold face. Leaving no other choice to Senko, he grabbed a tool that was hidden in the room and mounted on a hover bike with four propellers, then flew above the fence and ran away.

Li's angry voice could be heard from behind making him think, "...it's a very quiet propeller."

6)

Ichigyou Ruri made a weird face as she looked into the mirror. Her belly button was out.

It was a trap. Kadenokouji Misuzu wanted to come shopping together, so they came all the way to Kawaramachi, but Misuzu couldn't find anything and now Ruri is somehow stuck in Marui's fitting room.

"You will be the cutest in the world!"

Screamed Misuzu, running all over the Kyoto Marui's Ladies' Fashion floor, picking up colorful clothes one after another. Ruri almost never comes to Marui. There aren't many bookstores. There is Takashimaya the other side with Books Ogaki so she doesn't need Marui. No, there's an old antiquarian bookshop with art books. While it's a bit far-fetched, it's still a good opportunity. She wants to go there as soon as possible and hide her shoulders and her belly button.

"How's it? ~"

Misuzu jumps out from the curtains.

"Not good.." Ruri shakes her head.

"It's okay....."

"D... Don't open it!"

Even with that request, the curtains were opened. Ruri immediately crossed her arms, at least protecting her belly button. The clothes showed too much and she didn't want to expose it publicly.

But the clothes in Misuzu's hands exposed even more. Can you even call these clothes? The term sleeve should be reintroduced to the designer of those.

The problem though wasn't limited only to how much they showed. The words "4800 yen" could be read on the tag. 4800 yen. It's 4800 yen. You can buy like 6 or 7 paperback books or even 2 hardcover books from that much. That's right, a new book just came out not long ago.

"Half... no, all of it! I'll pay you in full amount! Since I-, I'm working!"

Misuzu said it with blood in her eyes, as if she could read Ruri's mind. There's no way to buy such an expensive item for a classmate. Ruri

didn't understand what was the fun in it at all. People like Misuzu, who want to make others happy, are so rare.

Suddenly a face comes into her mind.

Clenching her teeth, she erased the image from her head.

Someone who wants to make others happy, someone, after repeating it in her mind, she suddenly stops it. She realized no matter how many times think about it, his true feelings won't be known.

Ruri looks at Misuzu's confused face.

It feels like she could understand her a bit more.

She thinks about other people more than herself.

It's a pleasant feeling. It makes her chest warm.

She hasn't known it until now and is still not used to it, it felt so strange. Maybe, if she wore that dress...

Would it make him happy?

Ruri turned around and looked in the mirror again. The dress, together with the shorts that Misuzu brought, is something that one can only see as loungewear. No way. After all, no way. No no, no way.

Ruri changed back to her uniform, and left Marui, dragging Misuzu with her.

Arriving at Takashimaya Store and entering Books Ogaki, finally she felt like she arrived home.

Turning at the corner, entering the store, once again she remembered someone else's face, other than herself.

7)

The summer sun was reflecting in the river. Along the Kamo River, Naomi wiped off the sweat from his neck.

He wished he could be in a cool place, but at the elite Nishiki High School, part-time jobs weren't allowed and students had empty pockets. He couldn't choose like a cafe to meet up with Ruri, so in the end the riverbed was the choice. That is to say, he planned to sit by the river from the beginning, but he wanted to make an excuse for himself.

They sit down together, though the space between them wasn't the smallest. Five minutes hasn't even passed, when they ran out of topics already. So Naomi had no choice, but to fulfill his goal.

He put his hand into the bag and grabbed her present.

Meanwhile, the stress that freezes his whole body has returned.

A gift is fear. Even if someone chooses something with great pain, what the other person thinks of it is unknown. If they get the wrong idea, that alone is enough to give out a bad impression. There's no guarantee of success nor failure, it's hit or miss, it's a gamble, like jumping to the Turtle Stepping Stones at the Koujin Bridge.

But.

That's fine, Naomi thought.

He grabs the present. Naomi already knows it. Every day is just the events of big jumps of unknown results. Even if you don't know what's about to come, even if it's painful, you have to keep jumping... Because that person taught Naomi that.

Naomi felt like hearing his voice again, filling him with nostalgia. He felt like he's running, speeding up, with all his strength he's about to jump. He noticed there was already a package in Ruri's hands. But he hasn't given it to her yet. The gift's package was still in his hand. The two packages looked similar, and if they looked at the ribbons on them, they both knew which shop they were bought at.

In wonder, he looked at her. She had a similar expression, when their eyes met.

After a little while, Naomi and Ruri started laughing.

That time, he realized it's okay.

From now on, even if there is darkness ahead of them, that they cannot see.

She's always going to be by his side.

They are jumping together.

He thought of how many times they can hold hands in the middle of the river.

They open each other's presents. The present Naomi gave was a soft colored book cover. Naomi wanted to buy something that would suit her when she reads, and he settled on this item.

What Ruri chose for him, was a very adorable bookmark shaped like of a crow's feather. Naomi thought he would use it forever. The fragile feather bookmark, if it's being taken care of, can be used for maybe even 10 years.

"Also..."

Ichigyou Ruri opened her mouth. She stares at the paper bag besides her with a worrying expression.

"I bought clothes. I thought I was able to escape to Takashimaya, but after, I was taken to OPA. I couldn't do anything against it."

"Huh? What kind of clothes?"

She frowned.

"Belly..."

"Belly?"

"Button"

"Button....."

Naomi was thinking. "Belly" and "button", together is "Belly button", right. So it's belly button, he assumes. Right? Belly button?

"Belly button.....?"

"I've decided" said Ruri. "Let's burn it!"

"Wait, wait, Ichugyou-san! Burning the clothes that you bought would be a waste."

"I can't call that clothing. It doesn't have the functionalities for it to be called that. It doesn't have enough cloth in it. It's just a scrap cloth."

"Even if it's just a scrap cloth, it's still an important resource for the Earth."

"What? No way, Katagaki-san. No way that you would like to see me wearing such shameful clothes."

Ruri's eyes shined in red.

However, Naomi was thinking that now can be a stepping stone of his life, so he jumped again.

"I... want to see it!"

Once Ruri understood his words, she turned red like she was boiling, and her mouth starting gasping like a goldfish. Naomi, without thinking, jumped again with all his strength.

"Because you are absolutely cute~"

Naomi's scream echoed in the heatwave of the riverbed.

Summer has begun.

In the endless blue sky, among the contrails, the midday moon was floating.

8)

He swept his eyes as tears were flowing out of them while he tried to erase the monitor with the code and specifications using a finger gesture. At first it was confusing, but he got used to it quickly. Probably because of the similar gesture inside the ALLTALE.

Naomi picked up his bag, greeted his lab colleagues and left the International Recording Organization's room.

He was walking on the public road, from the work area to the residential area, while measuring the time. His weakened muscles were recovering well, so the Moon Muscle-Weight Device (Moon Weight) could be installed soon, he thought.

When he woke up, everything changed.

While Naomi was asleep, the world was growing at a speed beyond his imagination. The first thing he had to do after he woke up was to fill that blank. Learn the social change, studying the advancements in science, and above all, he had to memorize all the new technologies in engineering quantum recording devices, his specialty.

He needed to know this in order to be able to work as a part of the team. However, the amount is too big and it takes Naomi a while to be able to live in "this era".

While walking, he looks up at the sky.

The universe is peaking thought the windows of the dome-shaped ceiling.

For Naomi, who still hasn't gotten used to it, it looks like he's in a fairy tale. In this sky country, different from any culture on the Earth, surrounded by technology so advanced it sounds magical. The difference in gravity and even the passage of time has all changed. In a far, far away place, like a sci-fi Palace of the Dragon King.

But, Naomi knew it.

Knew it from what he read, sci-fi is always connected to reality. No matter how far fetched, there is definitely part of reality in it.

"Katagaki-san"

He raises his head and sees a woman waiting at the end of the road.

The gentle warmth that flows through his chest slowly melts the boundaries between fairy tales and documentaries.

Naomi snapped his finger, so quiet that no one could hear it.

The world hasn't changed at all, it continues to exist.

The two of them go home next to each other on the Moon.

"What's that?"

Naomi looked at Ruri's bag. In the relatively large bag, a cloth with a pattern is seen.

"These clothes were forced onto me. I'll return them."

"Why?"

She stops and looks inside the bag.

"These are really cute clothes..."

Hearing that, Ichigyou Ruri turns to Naomi and starts laughing.

"Because I'm not a cute type of girl"

Naomi's face started twitching.

It can't be helped, but for the time being, he has to endure this information overload. He doesn't know anything about her. But it needs to be fixed as soon as possible. Maybe it's even more urgent than studying for work.

But now, he's completely helpless. Naomi gave up, scratched his head and looked away.

"..... You are a cute type"

Ruri was happy and held out her hand.

Naomi takes her hand, and they start walking again towards their house, their connected palms sharing the heat.