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BONUS MANGA 166
PLEASE BE OUR GOD OF WISDOM.

BUILDING: UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL, OUTPATIENT ENTRANCE

CHAPTER 1: “ONE EYE, ONE LEG”
OKAY, THANKS.

...MM.

OH.

IT'S TIME?
OH! IWANAGA-SAN, I WAS JUST THINKING I SHOULD GO OUT TO WAKE YOU.

BUT YOU'RE AS PUNCTUAL AS EVER.

I'M MORE RESPONSIBLE THAN I LOOK.
SHE'S A YEAR OLDER THAN HE IS, AND SHE'S GRADUATING COLLEGE THIS YEAR. SHE FOUND A JOB IN ANOTHER PREFECTURE.

I WONDER IF THAT'S WHY THEY'RE SPLITTING UP.

I'M SORRY, I JUST CAN'T BELIEVE IT.

ONE MORE THING.

REALLY? EVEN THOUGH THEY WERE ENGAGED?!

I COULDN'T GET ANY DETAILS, BUT I THINK IT'S TRUE.

ANYWAY, KURÔ-KUN IS VISITING TODAY, SO GOOD LUCK.
HM.

“GOOD LUCK”? WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?

IT WAS TWO YEARS AGO THAT I MET THE YOUNG MAN CALLED KURO SAKURAGAWA.

COME ON, HURRY!

WAIT, ONII-CHAN!

AH...

WAHH

I WAS 15.
GASP

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

Uh!

SORRY.

YOU'RE A LIFE SAVER.

Uh.

Hi.

THANK YOU.
I guess some people could die from that.

Yeah...

In that case, I hope that you will forever remember me as the woman who saved your life.

Come on, it wasn't that big a deal.

Okay.

I'll remember.
HE WAS 20 YEARS OLD AT THE TIME.

THAT WAS KURO SAKURAGAWA.

SCRAWNY AND OBLIVIOUS, THEY SEEM TO SPEND THEIR WHOLE LIVES MUNCHING AWAY ON GRASS, ETERNALLY OBTUSE.

BUT THEY HAVE A STRANGE WAY OF MAKING YOU FEEL THEIR VITALITY.

HE'S LIKE A GOAT.
THAT'S RIGHT. YOU MUST NEVER UNDERESTIMATE A GOAT. THEY'RE NATURALLY NIMBLE. AND, SOME BREEDS OF GOAT ARE EQUIPPED WITH TWO RIGID, ONI-LIKE HORNS. THEY LIVE EFFORTLESSLY IN THEIR ENVIRONS, BE IT HIGHLANDS OR WILD PLAINS.

COULD IT BE? ...HORNS OF REMARKABLE SHARPNESS.

UM...

KURō-KUN, WHAT ARE YOU DOING? YOU OUGHT TO BE ASHAMED.

COULD THIS BE WHAT THEY CALL "LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT"?
I saw.

Um... she saved me. Saki-san!

You are so oblivious.

I can't believe you.

Thank you.

Sorry for the trouble.
OH, IT'S POSSIBLE SHE'S HIS LITTLE SISTER...

...WHY ARE YOU APOLOGIZING?

IS SHE HIS BIG SISTER?

A RELATIVE?

HIS COUSIN IS HOSPITALIZED HERE, SO HE COMES TO VISIT HER OFTEN.

HIS NAME IS KURO SAKURAGAWA-KUN.

HE'S A SECOND-YEAR AT H UNIVERSITY'S LAW SCHOOL.

INTIMATING?

SHE SEEMED AWFULLY ENERGETIC FOR A LONG-TERM PATIENT. NO, MORE THAN ENERGETIC, HER PRESENCE WAS ACTUALLY INTIMIDATING.

NO, SHE'S NOT HIS COUSIN.

OH.

SHE COULD BE HIS COUSIN? IS SHE A TALL WOMAN?

GASP
THE GIRL WHO'S ALWAYS WITH HIM IS SAKI-SAN. SHE'S A YEAR OLDER THAN HE IS, BUT SHE'S HIS...

AND I HEARD THAT WHEN SHE WENT OFF TO COLLEGE, KURÔ-KUN DECIDED HE HAD TO GO TO THE SAME ONE.

SORRY, KOTOKO-CHAN, BUT I THINK KURÔ-KUN IS OUT OF YOUR REACH.

HE'S SO GOOD-LOOKING, AND SO FRIENDLY, EVEN SOME OF THE NURSES HAVE APPROACHED HIM.

BUT HE'S ALWAYS TALKING ABOUT HIS GIRLFRIEND WITH A HAPPY LOOK ON HIS FACE.

WELL ISN'T THAT DELIGHTFUL.
...and whisk him away before things can get awkward.

Whenever he's talking to a nurse, she'll butt in on the conversation with a smile on her face...

The girlfriend doesn't help, either.

Are you saying I don't have a chance?

She seems really possessive, so I think she's the one in the relationship who's really head over heels.

She didn't used to come with him.

But ever since she got wind that the nurses were after him, she's been joining him on all his visits.

If she's Kuro-kun's type, I'm not sure he'll ever see you as a prospect.

Stranger things have happened, so there's no need to give up entirely.
I'd watch him, but I could never bring myself to talk to him. I would see him at the hospital two or three times a month.
Kuren-kun and Saki-san...

...are getting married as soon as they graduate.

And, then, almost two years after our first encounter...

I heard they’ve already introduced each other to their parents.

They’re going to have the engagement ceremony soon!

It was inevitable...
DO YOU THINK KURÔ-SAN BROKE UP WITH HIS GIRLFRIEND?

HE CAME ALONE TODAY?
Actually, come to think of it, I don't think he's mentioned his girlfriend since February or so.

I'm not sure he's talked much at all.

And today I learned that my diagnosis was correct.

But... it's about time I actually talk to him.

It's difficult to judge whether this is my chance or not.
Hello. It's been a while.

Umm...
ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO, AT THIS HOSPITAL.

HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN THE FACE OF THE WOMAN WHO SAVED YOUR LIFE?

AND YOU ARE?

UNfortunately, I DON’T THINK I’VE BEEN IN ANY LIFE-THREATENING DANGER FOR ABOUT TEN YEARS NOW.

Hmm...

You said you’d remember.

But that girl wasn’t wearing a beret.

When I fell over backwards and almost hit my head!

OH!

You identify girls by their headwear?

Then remember it now.

Sorry. I’m not good at remembering girls’ faces.

Besides, if I did remember any girls, it would make Saki mad.
It means "Child of the harp, old as the rocks."

I'm full of energy.

I recently turned 17.

My name is Kotoko Iwanaga.

You won't forget, since I hear you've broken up with Saki-san...

In-deed.

Okay. I won't forget this time.
AND YOU'VE BEEN COMING TO SEE HER FOR AT LEAST THREE YEARS.

SUCH AS, YOUR NAME IS KURO SAKURAGAWA, YOU'RE NOW 22 YEARS OLD, YOU HAVE A COUSIN WHO HAS BEEN STAYING IN THIS HOSPITAL,

I'M FRIENDS WITH ALL THE NURSES, AND I'VE DONE THEM A LOT OF FAVORS.

I'VE BEEN COMING TO THIS HOSPITAL FOR CLOSE TO SEVEN YEARS NOW.

SUDDENLY I'M NOT SO SURE ABOUT THE PRIVACY POLICIES AT THIS HOSPITAL.

IT IS DUBIOUS, ISN'T IT?

IS THAT HOW IT IS?

I'M TOLD THAT THEY ARE UNDER NO OBLIGATION TO EXTEND THOSE POLICIES TO VISITORS.
NOBODY’S EVER KEPT IN THE HOSPITAL FOR ANYTHING PLEASANT.

YOU DON’T WANT TO KNOW.

BUT THEY NEVER TOLD ME THE NAME OF YOUR COUSIN, OR WHY SHE’S HERE OR ANY OF THAT SORT OF INFORMATION.

THAT’S WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DON’T THINK BEFORE MAKING UNNECESSARY SMALL TALK WITH YOUNG NURSES.

AT ANY RATE, NOW YOU’RE OFFICIALLY ON THE MARKET.

THEY TELL ME YOU AND SAKI-SAN BROKE UP AT THE BEGINNING OF SPRING.

THEY REALLY DON’T RESPECT MY PRIVACY.

...WOULD YOU MIND GETTING TO THE POINT?

WOULDN’T YOU LIKE TO GET A FRESH START BY MEETING SOMEONE NEW?
WON'T YOU DATE ME WITH MARRIAGE IN MIND?
I've had a crush on you for two years.

I've been waiting for this moment.

You're more direct than you seem.

But two years? That's very persistent of you.
BUT IN THE EYES OF THE LAW, DATING A MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRL...

YOU HAVE A SHORT FUSE, DON'T YOU?

DO YOU HAVE THE MEMORY OF A CHICKEN OR SOMETHING?!

I TOLD YOU, I'M 17! I'M IN HIGH SCHOOL!

NEXT YEAR, I'M GOING TO TAKE THE ENTRANCE EXAM TO GET INTO YOUR COLLEGE!

HOW RUDE OF ME! THAT DOESN'T HAPPEN TOO OFTEN.

TAP

PFET

Ha ha!
IT'S JUST, IF A HIGH SCHOOL GIRL IS TELLING ME SHE LIKES ME, MAYBE I'M NOT SO WASHED UP AFTER ALL.

I HAVEN'T FELT THIS GOOD IN A LONG TIME.

I'M KIDDING. THAT MADE ME KINDA HAPPY.

WE EVEN HAD A LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIP FOR A WHILE, AND WE MADE IT WORK. I'D DATED HER SINCE HIGH SCHOOL.

WAS IT THAT BAD WHEN SAKI-SAN DUMPED YOU?

BUT SHE IS THE ONE WHO BROKE UP WITH YOU, RIGHT?

IT WASN'T HER FAULT.
I'd met her parents, and we planned to have our engagement ceremony sometime next year.

And then we broke up. I felt like I'd been hit by an avalanche.

I know why it happened, but there's so much I can't believe in anymore.

There was nothing I could do.

What, specifically, happened to drag you to such depths of shameful tragedy?

I don't think I'll be ready for another relationship for a long time.
SAKI-SAN AND I TOOK A TRIP TO KYOTO AT THE END OF THE YEAR.

THE PLAN WAS TO WELCOME THE NEW YEAR THERE AND MAKE OUR FIRST TEMPLE VISIT BEFORE THE NIGHT WAS UP.

ANYWAY,

WE WERE WALKING TOGETHER ALONG THE KAMO RIVER TO THE CHIME OF THE BELLS RINGING IN THE NEW YEAR WHEN...

I'M SORRY, WHAT ERA DID YOU COME FROM?

VACATIONING TOGETHER BEFORE MARRIAGE!

HOW IMMORAL!!

NYOOP

SPLISH
THAT'S WHEN A KAPPA SHOWED UP, RIGHT THERE IN FRONT OF US.

YOU'RE SURE IT WASN'T A GATARÔ OR A SUIKO OR A HYÔSUBE?

YOU MEAN THE CREATURES THAT ARE SAID TO SHOW UP NEAR WATER?

YEAH, ONE OF THOSE.
But it was some kind of life-form that moved and breathed.

The one thing I know for sure is that it wasn’t human, and it wasn’t an animal.

It was a fearsome thing—something with a presence that, once recognized, would make you believe the unbelievable.

The one we met smelled like mud, and looked like it was about to drag us to the bottom of the river and drain us of our bodily fluids.

And the next day, they found a drowned body in that same area.

It was ruled an accident, but they still don’t know the cause of death.

They’re quite trendy these days and they can give you recommendations on good sushi or Ebisen.
SAKI-SAN DOESN'T BELIEVE IN GHOSTS OR SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHS, LET ALONE SUPERNATURAL MONSTERS.

I DIDN'T THINK ANYTHING COULD SCARE HER.

BUT ONE LOOK AT IT, AND SHE STARTED SHAKING IN FEAR,

AND SHE CLUNG TO ME.

SO? WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

SPARE ME THE MUSHY STUFF. IT DOES NOTHING TO ENHANCE THE STORY.

SHE'S NEVER EVEN HELD ME THAT TIGHT IN BED.

I MEAN, I LOVE THAT SHE'S NOT NEEDY, THOUGH.
AND, IN A VOICE THAT SHOOK WITH FEAR, THE COWARD SCREAMED AND RAN OFF LIKE A SCARED RABBIT.

WITHOUT GIVING HER A SECOND GLANCE,

LATER, SHE TOLD ME SHE DIDN'T REALIZE THAT I WAS THAT KIND OF MAN.

THINGS GOT AWKWARD AFTER THAT. SAKI-SAN FOUND A JOB, AND SINCE SHE WAS GOING TO MOVE AWAY IN MARCH, THE SUBJECT OF ENDING THINGS BETWEEN US CAME UP.

IT'S JUST ONE OF THOSE THINGS. IT HAPPENS.

BUT THE RUNNING OFF PART IS THE FACT OF THE MATTER.

WELL, IT WAS A KAPPA.
WHO CARES WHAT HAPPENS TO THAT HEARTLESS WOMAN? IF YOU DON'T, THEN I'M JUST SOME CRAZY COLLEGE KID WHO BLAMES HIS BREAKUP ON A KAPPA. I DON'T CARE IF YOU BELIEVE ME OR NOT.

SHE'S NOT SO HEARTLESS THAT SHE DESERVES TO HAVE A KAPPA RUIN HER LIFE.

WHO CARES WHAT HAPPENS TO THAT HEARTLESS WOMAN?

OR MAYBE A COLLEGE KID WHO LOST HIS MIND FROM THE SHOCK OF THE BREAKUP.

Either way, I doubt I'm worthy to be your boyfriend.

I DON'T CARE IF YOU BELIEVE ME OR NOT.

IF YOU DON'T, THEN I'M JUST SOME CRAZY COLLEGE KID WHO BLAMES HIS BREAKUP ON A KAPPA.
YOU WEREN'T VERY CLEAR ABOUT THE SUBJECT OF YOUR SENTENCES.

WHICH ONE OF YOU WAS THE COWARD THAT RAN AND LEFT SAKI-SAN BEHIND?
HE SAW YOU NEXT TO SAKI-SAN, GOT SCARED, AND RAN AWAY.

YOU DIDN’T RUN—THE KAPPA DID.

I FEEL SORRY FOR HIM.

FROM HIS POINT OF VIEW, HE’S A VERY UNLUCKY KAPPA.

RUNNING INTO YOU IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT.

THEY’RE INTELLIGENT CREATURES, SO HE WOULD HAVE KNOWN EXACTLY WHAT HE WAS AFRAID OF.
"I didn't know that you were that kind of man."

That's what she said...

Saki-san saw that horrid Yokai run away at the sight of you. She got spooked. She wondered what it meant.

...Isn't that right?

There's no such thing as Kappa.

What detail is that?

You're wrong about one fundamental detail.
I WAS LYING.

I WOULDN'T TELL SOME RANDOM LITTLE GIRL THE TRUE STORY OF MY HEARTBREAK.

BUT YOU JUST SAID YOU SAW ONE.

OF COURSE NOT.

ISN'T THERE?

IF YOU STILL THINK THEY EXIST, THERE'S THE PSYCHIATRIC WARD. GO GET YOUR HEAD EXAMINED.

SORRY.

THEY ALREADY SEE ME ONCE A MONTH.

THWAM

Fip

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.

OH.

THEN I RECOMMEND THEY KEEP SEEING YOU.
I'VE ONLY EVER HAD ONE INTERVIEW WITH A KAPPA.

BUT I AM WELL ACQUAINTED WITH MANY OF THEIR KIND.

THIS CONVERSATION ISN'T OVER.

THEM MAY NOT BE AS FAMOUS AS KAPPA,

BUT THEY'RE IN THE SHADOWS OF THE AZALEAS, IN THE TOPS OF THE FLOWERING DOGWOOD TREES...

THEY'RE ALL OVER THIS TOWN, EVEN THIS HOSPITAL...

HAS YOKAI, MONSTERS, SPECTRES, DEMONS...

...WATCHING US IN SECRET.

...LURKING IN ITS HALLS.
HOW CAN YOU BE SO SURE THESE THINGS EXIST?

WHO ARE YOU?

BUT THEY EXIST EVERYWHERE.

THAT THING IS DIFFERENT.

... IS TERRIFYING.

MOST OF THEM ARE HARMLESS.

AND WHEN THEY SEE YOU, THEY WHISPER TO ME.
MOST OF THEM DON'T HAVE MUCH INTELLECT. AND SO THEY NEEDED SOMEONE TO LEND THEM WISDOM AND POWER, TO MEDIATE AND SETTLE DISPUTES. THEY TOOK ME DEEP INTO THE MOUNTAINS AND THEY ASKED ME... THEY KIDNAPPED ME FOR ABOUT TWO WEEKS WHEN I WAS 11.

"PLEASE, BE OUR GOD OF WISDOM."

GOD OF WISDOM?

AND SO THEY NEEDED SOMEONE TO LEND THEM WISDOM AND POWER, MOST OF THEM DON'T HAVE MUCH INTELLECT.

YES.
"YES, I WILL,
I SAID.

MY 11-YEAR-OLD SELF ANSWERED THEM.

IN EXCHANGE, THEY HELP ME, TOO.

IN FACT, I'VE OFTEN HAD TO RACK MY BRAINS ESPECIALLY HARD WHEN SOLVING THEIR TROUBLE WITH HUMANS.

SINCE THEN, WHENEVER A DISPUTE OR A PROBLEM WOULD ARISE AMONG THEM,

THEY WOULD COME FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY TO CONSULT WITH ME, LOOKING FOR MEDIATION OR SOLUTIONS.
...they let me know, and I use that to earn favors with the nurses.

If an IV comes out by mistake, or another patient's condition takes a sudden turn...

If I fall asleep, they wake me up in time for my checkup.

So you can look it up in the newspaper's July, six years ago.

A fifth-grade girl named Kotoko Iwanaga went missing from this city.

They even released a picture of me.

One week later, the police went public with the investigation.

Indeed. Kinda hard to believe...

Police held for kidnap. Missing girl.
Then, one week later, at dawn...

The girl was discovered on a bench in a city park, dozing off like nothing had ever happened.

The details were withheld out of consideration for her privacy.

And it wasn’t front-page news, but you’ll surely find it in some of the local papers, where they wrote the following...

“When the girl was discovered, her left leg was severed, and her right eye had been removed.”
OF COURSE, THE PERPETRATOR WAS NEVER CAUGHT.

SINCE THEN, I HAVE BEEN THEIR GOD OF WISDOM.
It's time.

We'll continue this another day.
BEep

CAUTION.
DOORS
ARE
CLOSING.

M-

MMM...
I was out of my wits with fear—I was afraid he might eat you!

Are you hurt, my lady? He did you no harm, I hope?

I haven’t been rejected yet, all right?

And he rejected our most noble lady? His insolence knows no bounds.

What can you possibly see in that pungent, terrifying monstrosity?

Don’t worry. He didn’t lay a finger on me, unfortunately.
YOU'RE ALL SO SCARED OF HIM. WHAT EXACTLY DOES HE LOOK LIKE TO YOU?

DONT EXPECT ANY PRAISE FOR JUDGING A BOOK BY ITS COVER, OR FOR FINDING FAULT IN THE OBJECT OF ANOTHER PERSON'S AFFECTION.

BUT TO ME, KURO-SAN FALLS INTO THE CATEGORY OF "HOTTIE."

SOMETHING DREADFUL TERRIBLE ... FOUL-SMELLING!

THAT'S NOT VERY SPECIFIC, IS IT?

REEKING OF BLOOD!

HE MAY NOT FIT THE DEFINITION IN ANY OF YOUR EYES...
NO, I STILL HAVE SCADS OF ATTACHMENT TO THIS WORLD. I WOULD PREFER TO STAY.

OH, ARE YOU READY TO GO TO NIRVANA?

...UM, PLEASE DON'T TELL ME THAT SOME SCOUNDREL HAS TAKEN YOUR LEFT EYE AS WELL?

I DO HOPE YOU WILL VANQUISH HIM STRAIGHTAWAY.

BUT THAT RAPSCALLION REFUSES TO LEAVE THE LIBRARY, SO I MUST ALWAYS BE ON MY GUARD.

THAT'S NOT WHAT I WOULD EXPECT FROM SOMEONE LIKE YOU.

I COULDN'T POSSIBLY PASS ON UNTIL I'VE ATTAINED MY GREATEST AMBITION OF READING EVERY HARLEQUIN NOVEL IN EXISTENCE.

YES, ABOUT THAT...

I MAY HAVE IT CLEARED UP BY TOMORROW.

IF I CAN GET KURO-SAN TO HELP, IT WON'T EVEN BE THAT HARD.
AT THE VERY LEAST, I'VE PIQUED HIS INTEREST.

WHETHER HE BELIEVES ME OR NOT, HE KNOWS BETTER THAN ANYONE THAT I'M NOT NORMAL.

BUT HE DIDN'T SEEM TO BELIEVE YOUR STORY, MY LADY.

THAT THING?

NOW IT'S UP TO HIM.

THE KOJIKI, WHICH IS SAID TO BE JAPAN'S OLDEST PIECE OF LITERATURE, MAKES MENTION OF A GOD BY THE NAME OF KUEBIKO.
He has one leg and cannot walk.

But he is a god of wisdom who knows much about the world.

And those who have only one eye have sometimes been treated as gods or something very near.

Because he only has one leg, he has been associated with scarecrows.

There are many instances where, as an offering to the gods, a person was consecrated by having one of their eyes damaged, setting them up as a link between gods and men.

And throughout the world, gods of the forge have been described as having one eye or one leg.

More than a few sources describe this condition as a requirement for godhood.
IT'S NOT A CLEAN CUT.

BUT IT'S LIKE IT'S BEEN CAUTERIZED WITH SOME SORT OF ACID.

WHAT'S THIS SCAR?

MANY TRADITIONS HAVE GODS WITH ONLY ONE EYE OR ONE LEG.

HER RIGHT EYE HAS BEEN TAKEN OUT, TOO.

BUT THERE'S NO PUS OR SWELLING. IT'S ALMOST COMPLETELY HEALED.

THERE'S NO NEED TO OPEN IT UP AND RE-TREAT IT.

IT'S NOT CLEAR CUT, BUT IT'S LIKE IT'S BEEN CRUTERIZED WITH SOME SORT OF ACID.
KOTOKO-CHAN, WHY DIDN’T YOU COME HOME FOR TWO WEEKS?

WHAT HAPPENED TO THIS GIRL?

NYOOP? WAS THERE SOMEONE WITH YOU?

THAT’S NOT A BAD TRADE.

SO THEY TOOK MY LEFT LEG AND MY RIGHT EYE... TO MAKE ME INTO A GOD?
I DON'T REALLY REMEMBER.

Yeah.

FROM NOW ON, WE WANT YOU TO COME ONCE A WEEK SO WE CAN EXAMINE YOUR EYE AND YOUR LEG.

WE'LL ALSO CHECK ON YOUR PROSTHETICS, AND WE WANT YOU TO GO TO COUNSELING IN CASE YOU REMEMBER SOMETHING.

CONGRATULATIONS, THIS IS YOUR LAST DAY OF PHYSICAL THERAPY.
YOUR PARENTS ARE WORRIED ABOUT YOU. THEY SAY WHEN IT'S RAINING, YOU'LL FALL ASLEEP ANYWHERE.

AND DON'T GO SLEEPING IN WEIRD PLACES AGAIN, OKAY?

WELL, SEE YOU NEXT TIME. IT'S RAINING, SO WATCH YOUR STEP.

OH.

THAT'S NOT VERY CONVINCING.

BUT IT'S VERY YOU, IWANAGA-SAN.

WELL, THEY DO SAY A CHILD WELL-SLEPT IS A CHILD WELL-KEPT.

AND DON'T THEY ALSO SAY GOOD THINGS COME TO THOSE WHO SLEEP?
I FIGURED YOU WOULD START BY SEARCHING THE INTERNET TO SEE IF WHAT I SAID WAS TRUE.

IT WAS SIMPLE TO DEDUCE.

I FIGURED YOU WOULD START BY SEARCHING THE INTERNET TO SEE IF WHAT I SAID WAS TRUE.

I'M SURPRISED YOU KNEW I WAS HERE.

HELLO.

HAVE YOU FINISHED YOUR RESEARCH?

LOOKS LIKE THINGS ARE GOING JUST AS I PREDICTED.
IN ADDITION, THE CASE WAS UNSOLVED. PUT IT ALL TOGETHER, AND THAT MEANS YOU WON'T GET A LOT OF HITS.

BUT THE INCIDENT WAS SIX YEARS AGO, THE VICTIM WAS A MINOR, AND SHE DIDN'T DIE.

FURTHERMORE, INTERNET ARTICLES ARE UNRELIABLE.

ONE THING THE INTERNET WILL TELL YOU IS THE DATE OF THE INCIDENT,

SO FINDING THE PRINTED ARTICLES AT THE LIBRARY WOULDN'T TAKE THAT MUCH EFFORT.

A PRUDENT INDIVIDUAL WOULD WANT TO CHECK THE ACTUAL NEWSPAPER ARTICLES TO BE SURE.

WELL?

WHAT DID YOU FIND?

ONE HOUR AGO

HE WAS IN THE LIBRARY.

...LET'S GO WITH THAT.

NICE WORK!

AND, AFTER ESTIMATING THE TIME YOU WOULD NEED TO FINISH YOUR RESEARCH AND LEAVE THE BUILDING, I GATHERED THAT YOU WOULD BE COMING OUT RIGHT ABOUT NOW.
I'm ashamed to say it, but other than losing my right eye, my face hasn't changed since grade school.

It's a fact that a girl named Kotoko Iwanaga suffered a horrific incident six years ago.

And the picture they released to the public looked just like you.

It doesn't prove that you've become a god to every monster or yokai.

But that's all.

But if it is a delusion, then I'm just a girl who was kidnapped by some deviant, and lost her mind from the shock of his abuse.

No, it doesn't.

I may have imagined the whole thing.
YOU'RE FREE TO BELIEVE WHAT YOU WANT.

BUT I MAY BE THE ONLY PERSON IN THIS WHOLE WORLD WHO CAN UNDERSTAND YOU.

THEY WERE EITHER SACRIFICED IN ORDER TO CONNECT THE GODS TO MEN, OR THEY WERE MADE INTO ORACLES WHO HEAR THE VOICE OF GOD.

IT IS SOMETIMES BELIEVED "...THAT PEOPLE MISSING AN EYE AND A LEG WERE SACRIFICED TO THE GODS.

IS THAT IT?
LET'S JUST SAY IF I GO MISSING, THE FIRST THING PEOPLE THINK IS KIDNAPPING—THAT'S THE KIND OF MANSION I GREW UP IN.

IF YOU MARRY ME, THE LAND AND THE HOUSE COME WITH ME.

THE WAY YOU TALK, I CAN'T TELL IF YOU WERE RAISED IN POLITE SOCIETY OR NOT.

I'VE JUST GORGED MYSELF ON A DELIGHTFUL TEA LUNCH OF KYOTO HEIRLOOM VEGETABLES.

WHAT KIND OF A NAIVE ROMANTIC ARE YOU?

NO, I DON'T WANT TO DATE YOU FOR PROFIT.

I CAN GET YOU A JOB, TOO.
THEN YOU ADMIT I'M YOUR TYPE?

ARE YOU SURE YOU SHOULD BE SAYING THIS?

SHOULDN'T YOU AT LEAST GET SOMETHING OUT OF IT?

NO.

A LIBRARIAN'S COMING.

WHAT'S THE MATTER?

BUT...

SOMETHING'S OFF.

OH, UH.

POOF

MY LADY!

THERE YOU GO AGAIN... OH! WAIT, KUROSA—
The protective barrier around the library has been broken! There's going to be chaos, help us, please...

Kuro-san, you can't scare them like that.

My lady! Why?! I told you time and again to give up on that thing!

I didn't do anything.

I'll show you a real fight and erase all your doubts.

Anyway, if the barrier's down, that means trouble. We'd better hurry.

Come on, Kuro-san.
TOMORROW'S PAPERS MIGHT HAVE AN ARTICLE ABOUT A ONE-EYED, ONE-LEGGED GIRL WHO WAS SLAUGHTERED AT THE LIBRARY.

THE YOKAI IN THE LIBRARY IS VERY CRUEL AND VICIOUS.

WOULD YOU EVER BE ABLE TO ESCAPE THE GUILT?

A GIRL WHO CONFESSED HER LOVE TO YOU—ALTHOUGH SHE MAY NOT BE YOUR TYPE—COULD MEET HER TRAGIC END.

AND SHOULD THAT HAPPEN, YOU MAY BE THE ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS OF THE REAL KILLER...
AND I JUST THOUGHT OF SOMETHING.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S "CONVENTIONAL" AT TIMES LIKE THIS!

THANKS SO MUCH FOR YOUR HELP.

BUT I'M NOT QUITE SATISFIED WITH THIS MANNER OF CARRIAGE.

I ONLY USE THE CANE BECAUSE MY MOTHER AND FATHER WORRY.

YES.

BUT I CAN WALK JUST FINE ON MY PROSTHETIC LEG. I CAN RUN 50 METERS IN UNDER TEN SECONDS.

AND I JUST THOUGHT OF SOMETHING.

IF YOU CAUGHT ME WHEN I WAS ABOUT TO FALL OVER, DOESN'T THAT MEAN YOU ACTUALLY HAVE PRETTY GOOD LEG STRENGTH?
YOUR LONG-LEGGED SPRINT IS ENORMOUSLY HELPFUL.

I DON'T BUY IT.

I WAS MERELY Hoping you would help me if you could.

THAT'S PRACTICALLY THE SAME THING.

I WOULDN'T DREAM OF IT.

ARE YOU SURE You'RE NOT JUST TAKING ADVANTAGE OF ME?

BUT I HAVE TO BE CAREFUL WHEN CLIMBING STAIRS—THEY'RE HARD ON My PROSTHESIS.
MY LADY... YYY!

YIPE! YOU REALLY BROUGHT HIM WITH YOU?!

CALM DOWN, KURÔ-SAN.

THAT'S THE GHOST OF A FALLEN WARRIOR.

AND IN THE END, THE VILLAIN ATE THROUGH THE BARRIER!

THE CREATURE IS TOO FEROCIOUS! IT'S BEYOND OUR CONTROL!

OH, NEVER MIND! IT'S TERRIBLE!
ALL RIGHT, THAT'S ENOUGH.
IN THE WORLDS OF MAN AND SPIRIT, ORDER MUST BE MAINTAINED.

I CANNOT ALLOW ANYONE TO DISREGARD THE LAWS OF REA...

...SON...

LUNGE
OKAY, YOU INSULTED IT! NOW WHAT?

THIS WAS UNEXPECTED.

That's sorry excuse for a yokai was supposed to take one look at you and recoil in terror long enough for me to effortlessly contain it.

But apparently it's in such a frenzy it can't make out its surroundings.

And I assure you, it hurts me to objectify you so on our first date.

My feelings were true.

So you wanted me for my body?

If words won't reach it, we use force.

A magic charm or a sutra?

Do you have a plan?
IS THIS REALLY THE TIME?

IT HAS A HIGHER DEGREE OF PHYSICAL CONTACT.

YES.

I KNEW THIS WOULD BE A BETTER WAY TO CARRY ME.

WE’VE MADE IT EXCESSIVELY ANGRY.

GOOD POINT. THIS IS NOT IDEAL.
PLEASE PUT ME DOWN.

WE'LL BEAT A TACTICAL RE...TREAT...

TO STOP YOU FROM GETTING US BOTH KILLED.

YOU'LL HAVE AMPLIFIED OPPORTUNITY TO DO DIRTY THINGS TO ME LATER.

WHAT ARE YOU...

KURO-SAN!

RUN!
HOW CAN YOU BE SO INDIFFERENT?! DON'T YOU CARE THAT YOU'RE IN DANGER?!

THEN...

...AND NOW.

YOU HAVE THAT UNCONCERNED LOOK ON YOUR FACE...

CHOMP
I was sure you of all people would have been able to guess.
YEAH.

THOUGHT SO.

LOOKS LIKE MY MEAT DOESN'T AGREE WITH HIM.
WHAT ARE YOU?
KURÔ-SAN.

THOSE THINGS ASK YOU FOR WISDOM. CAN'T YOU GET THEM TO TELL YOU?

NO ONE LIKES TO TALK ABOUT THE THINGS THAT TRULY FRIGHTEN THEM.

...TRUE. WELL, TO BORROW YOUR WORDS...
WHEN I WAS 11 YEARS OLD, I GORGED MYSELF ON TWO DIFFERENT KINDS OF YOKAI MEAT.
CHAPTER 2:
"RUMORS OF THE STEEL LADY"
VISITING YOUR COUSIN AGAIN TODAY?

THOSE ARE PRETTY.
IS IT YOUR EXCELLENT DEDUCTIVE SKILLS? OR DID YOUR YOKAI FRIENDS TELL YOU WHERE TO FIND ME?

I'M HERE FOR MY EYE AND LEG EXAMS.

YOUR TIMING IS IMPECCABLE AS ALWAYS.

IT'S JUST A COINCIDENCE.

AFTER OUR ADVENTURE THE OTHER DAY, YOU ARE ALL THE SPECTRES CAN TALK ABOUT.
“He’s actually a world-class yokai gourmand! He’s gonna cook us up and enjoy every last bite!”

They say.

This is the thanks I get for helping them.

Your powers are the problem.

I did drag you into that mess…

What? Are you worried about me?
A nice, shapely hand with long fingers.

Not too much meat. A little bony. High marks for that.

Since then, all my injuries heal instantly.

I ate mermaid meat when I was 11.
I've lost fingers, been burned pretty badly,

but I don't have a single scar.

But as far as "ageless" goes, you don't look 11.

Since ancient times, it has been believed that eating mermaid flesh would bestow ageless immortality.

The legend of Yao Bikuni who lived hundreds of years after eating mermaid flesh is famous all across Japan.
IT'S POSSIBLE THAT I WILL STOP AGING AFTER A CERTAIN POINT.

I THINK THE OTHER YOKAI MEAT I ATE AT THE TIME NULLIFIED SOME OF THE EFFECTS.

I DO GROW AS I GET OLDER, SO I GUESS THE IMMORTALITY'S NOT AGELESS AFTER ALL.

...YOU SAID YOU ATE TWO TYPES OF YOKAI. WHAT WAS THE OTHER ONE?

...I NEED TO GET GOING. OR I'LL BE LATE FOR MY VISIT.
YOU CAN STILL SAY THAT AFTER EVERYTHING I'VE TOLD YOU?

VERY WELL. I SUSPECT WE'LL BE SEEING EACH OTHER FREQUENTLY FOR A LONG TIME TO COME.

I'M SURE I'LL HAVE AMPLE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK YOU ABOUT YOURSELF.

IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE. OUTWARDLY, YOU ARE THE VERY PICTURE OF NAIVETÉ.

“I DIDN'T KNOW THAT YOU WERE THAT KIND OF MAN,” SHE SAID.

IT MUST HAVE BEEN AN UNFORTUNATE INCIDENT FOR SAKI-SAN AS WELL.

AND I’M SURE IT'S WHY YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH SAKI-SAN ENDED IN RUIN.

I DO FIND IT SOMEWHAT UNSETTLING.
But for my part, having you by my side is a welcome development, both romantically.

And for solving yokai problems.

...I have no doubt that negotiations and mediation will be much easier.

Murmur

They're all afraid of you, so if you're helping me...

Two birds, one stone!
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT?

ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE NOT BEING TOO LOGICAL ABOUT THIS?

THE SPECTRES FEAR KURO-SAN, SO THEY KEEP THEIR DISTANCE.

BUT HE'S FORCED TO LIVE IN CONSTANT FEAR OF RUINED RELATIONSHIPS, AND HOLDING ON TO A SECRET HE CAN NEVER REVEAL.

DOESN'T THAT EAT AWAY AT HIS HEART?

UNLIKE ME, HE CAN HAVE A NORMAL LIFE IF HE WANTS TO.

IF WE COULD JUST IGNORE THE FACT THAT MY APPEARANCE DOESN'T MATCH WHAT APPEALS TO YOU, THIS WOULD ALL BE SOLVED HANDILY.

THAT'S NOT THE ONLY PROBLEM, AND YOU KNOW IT.
And with you by my side, there won't be any major upsets.

Most of their problems can be solved through consultation.

You never said Yokai extermination was a requirement for this relationship.

Sometimes things don't work out.

What happened the other day wasn't a major upset?

It was rather unfortunate for that cow that it couldn't see you.

But it's very rare for a specter to see you—part human, part Yokai—

And not be filled with dread.
IT WOULD BE QUITE THE MONSTER WHO DOESN'T FIND YOU FRIGHTENING.

APPROXIMATELY TWO AND A HALF YEARS LATER.
AND SHE

"TALENT?!
I'M TALKING
ABOUT HER
RACK!

WHAT KIND
OF TALENT?! I'M TALKING
ABOUT HER
RACK!

A CERTAIN
INCIDENT
HAPPENED
IN THE
DISTANT
CITY OF
MAKURAZAKA.

THIS
NEW PART-
TIMER—
SHE IS
SMOKING
HOT!

AND SHE
HAS REAL
"TALENT"
!

IT'S
HUGE...
SMASH

CRASH

IN THAT TOWN,

THERE WERE WHISPERS OF A STEEL LADY.
I'm only responsible for bringing you here. You can give your testimony to the detective.

Come on, lady!

Thank you. We'll take it from here.

So your name's Saki-san?

Thank you.

Saki-san, wait!

Tell me your number!!
WAS THAT YUMIHARR-SAN FROM THE TRAFFIC DIVISION?

AHHH!!

AH!

BAAH

WHEN I FIRST SAW HER, I THOUGHT SHE WAS A MODEL BEING POLICE CHIEF FOR A DAY.

I CAN SEE WHY—SHE'S TALL, HAS A NICE FIGURE, AND A GORGEOUS FACE.

SHE'S A POPULAR ONE.

GET TO WORK!

I HEARD THAT SHE CAN'T GET OVER HER OLD BOYFRIEND...

WHAT A SHAME.

AND SHE DOESN'T HAVE A BOYFRIEND?

OH, WHAT'S THAT ABOUT? I HAVE TO KNOW!
I SHOULD BE BETTER THAN THIS!

IT'S BEEN TWO AND A HALF YEARS SINCE I BROKE UP WITH KURO-KUN AND CAME TO WORK HERE.

AND I'M ALMOST 25 YEARS OLD...

I'M THE ONE WHO DUMPED HIM, BUT I STILL CAN'T GET OVER HIM?

BOFF
I asked you to get some yakiniku with me the other day.

And you told me that eating beef makes you ill because it reminds you of an ex— you said the breakup with him was terrible—

And then you turned me down.

Yo, Yumihara.

* A Korean dish of marinated beef shortrib.

...why did you order the galbi* meal?

So, Yumihara...

I remember that, Terada-san.

Yes.

**
Okay, how about I just sushi? Found a good place.

Okay, how about sushi?

If possible, I would prefer to keep this training out of my private life.

So can I invite you out for yakiniku again?

I realized that I can't stay stuck in the past, so I'm making a positive effort to overcome it.

Just what happened that was so traumatic?

I don't eat seafood much. It reminds me of my old boyfriend, too.
I know we’re off the clock, but do you really think that the station is an appropriate place to ask a junior officer about her heartbreak?

But if he turned down a catch like you, he can’t be that great a guy.

I introduced him to my parents and we were planning our engagement ceremony.

Both of our families were in favor of having the wedding as soon as we graduated college.

I broke up with him.

And I still feel bad about having to do that to him.

Our plan was to be married by now.

He’s still not a great guy, right? That’s why you broke up with him.

But...
IF WE HADN'T BROKEN UP, WE WOULD BE.

BUT I HAD TO END IT.

YOU LOOK ME IN THE EYE AND TELL ME THESE THINGS IN ALL SERIOUSNESS—HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO REACT?

WITH KINDNESS.

I'M MERELY STATING FACTS.

...I DIDN'T COME HERE TO ASK YOU OUT.

AND I'M NOT HERE TO HURT YOUR FEELINGS.
DENIED IT LITTER. HE STRID HE WHS MIS-TAKEN. HE WHS AGITATED. HE HAD JUST BEEN RESCUED FROM HIS SUBMERGED CAR.

THE DRIVER "THOUGHT HE SAW A DOG IN FRONT OF HIS CAR, SO HE SWERVED, BROKE THROUGH THE GUARDRAIL, AND DROVE INTO THE RIVER."

I WANTED TO TALK ABOUT THE CAUSE.

YOU HANDLED THE ACCIDENT BY THE RIVER THREE DAYS AGO, RIGHT?

...THAT'S WHAT'S IN THE REPORT.

I UNDERSTAND HE TOLD A DIFFERENT STORY AT FIRST.

THEN IT'S TRUE.

WHAT IS?

HE WAS AGITATED. HE HAD JUST BEEN RESCUED FROM HIS SUBMERGED CAR.
A woman carrying a two-meter steel girder...

"...with a short, frilly, red and black dress..."

A big ribbon on her head...

"...and no face, suddenly appearing in front of his car, causing him to panic and swerve into the river."

He also included her large breasts as one of her distinguishing features.

Yes, that about sums it up.

It's true, that's what he said.
MAYBE THE DRIVER CHANGED HIS STORY FROM A FACELESS WOMAN TO A DOG BECAUSE HE THOUGHT NO ONE WOULD BELIEVE HIM.

BUT THE FEAR IN HIS EYES...

TERADA-SAN.

IS "STEEL LADY NANASE"...

WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR?
I wonder if the owner of this car is here to find Steel Lady Nanase.

A pin-up photo of Karin Nanase!

Yes. It's in the recent gossip.

So you've heard the urban legend, Yumihara?

Yes, isn't she...

...The idol who died here in Makurazaka early this year?

Have you heard of Karin Nanase?

You don't know?
IT WAS THAT BIG-BUSTED IDOL.

BUT IN LATE JANUARY, THEY FOUND A BODY UNDER A FALLEN STEEL GIRDER AT THE CONSTRUCTION SITE NEAR THE HOTEL.

SO SHE CAME TO MAKURAZAKA AND HOLED UP IN A HOTEL TO GET AWAY FROM THEM.

I HADN'T HEARD OF HER UNTIL THE ACCIDENT, BUT APPARENTLY SHE WAS VERY POPULAR.

BUT...

SOME UNSAVORY RUMORS HAD THE MEDIA IN AN UPROAR.

WELL, NOW THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT HER AGAIN.

BUT ONCE THEY DETERMINED IT WAS AN ACCIDENT, EVERYONE STOPPED TALKING ABOUT HER.

OUR LITTLE TOWN DID ATTRACT AN AwFUL LOT OF REPORTERS.
They’ve seen her. So they think it was suicide? The theory that she killed herself because of all the slander and libel was pretty convincing.

She appears every night in Makurazaka City. She wears a costume from her idol days, and carries in one hand the steel beam that crushed her. The faceless ghost of Karin Nanase!!
It's what all her middle- and high-school friends are talking about.

They named her "Steel Lady Nanase" after the steel beam she wields. She's going viral on the internet too.

"Steel Lady Nanase" is a catchy name.

It's okay.

Her face was brutally crushed by that steel beam. Maybe that's why her ghost has no face, like it's been smashed in.
SHE CRAWLED OUT FROM UNDER THAT STEEL GIRDER AND WAS REBORN.

BECAUSE SHE CARRIES A STEEL BEAM THAT LOOKS TOO BIG FOR HER SLENDR, FEMININE PHYSIQUE, SHE WAS GIVEN THE NICKNAME STEEL LADY NANASE.

MAYBE IT’S THE EVER-SO-SLIGHTLY UNNATURAL RING TO IT THAT MAKES IT STICK IN YOUR MEMORY.

IT MAKES FOR AN INTERESTING STORY, BUT IT’S NOTHING MORE THAN A RUMOR.

MORE OF A GHOST STORY THAN AN URBAN LEGEND.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

IS THERE SOME GHOST OR PHANTOM NAMED STEEL LADY NANASE WANDERING OUR STREETS?
ONCE THAT OCCURRED TO HIM, HE DENIED IT ALL AND STARTED GIVING A MORE BELIEVABLE EXCUSE.

THE DRIVER THREE DAYS AGO HAD HEARD ABOUT STEEL LADY NANASE.

IT-IT WAS A WOMAN IN A WEIRD GETUP...!

BUT HE DIDN'T SEEM TO REALIZE THAT THAT'S WHAT HE SAW UNTIL HE WAS IN THE MIDDLE OF DESCRIBING THE ACCIDENT TO ME.

THE DRIVER THREE DAYS AGO HAD HEARD ABOUT STEEL LADY NANASE.

AND HE DIDN'T SEEM TO BE LYING?

WHETHER IT WAS A DOG OR A GHOST THAT JUMPED OUT AT HIM DOESN'T CHANGE THE OUTCOME, SO I DIDN'T PRESS FOR DETAILS.

...WHY IS TERADA-SAN PRYING INTO THIS INCIDENT?

AND I DETERMINED THAT GHOST STORIES DO NOT BELONG IN POLICE REPORTS.

I'M NOT TRYING TO ACCUSE YOU OF ANYTHING.

IN YOUR OWN OPINION, DID HE SEE A WOMAN WITH A STEEL BEAM? OR DIDN'T HE?
Mmmm... the ccaco.

THE TIRE TRACKS, EYES,

THE EERIE FEELING HANGING IN THE AIR—ALL OF THAT WAS REAL.

SOMETHING OTHERWORLDLY HAD BEEN THERE.

THE FEAR IN HIS EYES,

THE BIRD GAP GUARD RAIL.
HE SAW SOMETHING THAT DEFIED ALL REASON—THAT'S WHY HE LOST CONTROL OF THE STEERING WHEEL.

HE DID.

THEY WENT STRAIGHT TO THE POLICE BOX?

A FEW OFFICERS HAVE HAD PEOPLE COME INTO THEIR POLICE BOXES, SAYING THEY SAW OR WERE ALMOST ATTACKED BY A SUSPICIOUS PERSON THAT MATCHED THE STEEL LADY'S DESCRIPTION.

IT'S EVEN MORE UNUSUAL TO HEAR IT STRAIGHT FROM THE VICTIM, RATHER THAN HEARSAY FROM A THIRD PARTY.

IS STEEL LADY NANASE REALLY THAT EXTRAORDINARY?

THEY GENERALLY WRITE IT OFF AS A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY OR FIGMENTS OF THE IMAGINATION.

STORIES ABOUT GHOSTS DON'T USUALLY GET AS FAR AS THE POLICE STATION.
TERADA-SAN.

NONE OF THEM RESULTED IN ANY SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE, SO IT'S POSSIBLE...

...OF ATTEMPTED ASSAULT AND RANDOM ATTACKERS.

BUT ABOUT TWO WEEKS AGO, WE STARTED GETTING A LOT OF REPORTS...

...THEY WERE ALMOST ATTACKED BY A WOMAN WITH A STEEL BEAM, SO THEY MADE UP SOME OTHER STORY.

...THAT SOME ARE LIKE THE GUY IN YOUR ACCIDENT, AND COULDN'T ADMIT THAT...

DO YOU THINK THERE REALLY IS A STEEL LADY NAMASE...

...OUT THERE ATTACKING PEOPLE?
Hey, come on, now. Keep it down—you're making it sound like I've lost my mind.

I don't believe in ghosts, and even if they do exist, they're outside our jurisdiction.

Rumors are one thing, but when they start coming to the police about them, we have a problem.

But ghost or no, we should assume that people are actually witnessing someone who fits that description, and are being attacked.

It has to be the work of a living, breathing human.

That kind of thing isn't the work of ghosts.

So what you're saying...
THEY SAY THE LATE KARIN NANASE HAD A BUST MEASUREMENT OF OVER 100 CENTIMETERS.*

AND SHE MAY BE ENHANCING HER BREASTS WITH PADDING.

...IS THAT SOMEBODY SOMEWHERE IS WANDERING AROUND TOWN, BRANDISHING A STEEL GIRDER AND PRETENDING TO BE A DECEASED POP STAR?

*ABOUT 39IN.

YEAH, NOT MY TYPE, THOUGH.

THAT IS BIG.

ARE YOU TRYING TO INSINUATE THAT MY BREASTS ARE SMALL?

NO!

...THAT'S WHAT GETS ME.

IT'S A BIT ELABORATE FOR A PRANK OR A PLEASURE CRIME.

TO DRESS UP LIKE THAT AND SHOW UP IN RANDOM PLACES...
THE TESTIMONIES AND REPORTS OF DIRECT DAMAGE STARTED ABOUT TWO WEEKS AGO.

IT WAS ABOUT THEN THAT SHE SUDDENLY WENT VIRAL.

THERE WAS ENOUGH TIME BETWEEN THOSE EVENTS FOR HER TO GET READY.

AND APPARENTLY THAT'S ABOUT WHEN THEY GAVE HER THAT NICKNAME.

THE RUMORS OF STEEL LADY NANASE STARTED ABOUT TWO MONTHS AGO.

something that's more than just a prank.

IT WOULD HAVE TO BE FOR A PRETTY BIG REASON, WITH A PRETTY BIG GOAL BEHIND IT.

IF SOMEONE WERE TO GO TO THAT KIND OF TROUBLE,
...is it...侦探的直觉？

DO YOU HAVE ANY GUESSES AS TO WHY SOMEONE WOULD IM-PERSONATE A BUSTY GHOST?

AND THEN SHE STARTED MAKING HER MOVE.

NO.

BUT THERE IS SOMETHING OUT THERE.

CONSIDERING THE SITUATION, I HAVE TO TREAD CAREFULLY.

IT DOESN'T LOOK GOOD FOR A COP TO BE TAKING RUMORS TOO SERIOUSLY.
BUT... STEEL LADY NANASE IS REAL.

TERADASAN SENSES SOMETHING OMINOUS BEHIND THE STEEL LADY'S APPEARANCE—SOME BIG CRIME ABOUT TO TAKE PLACE.

THESE DAYS, IT'S EASY FOR A PROVINCIAL TOWN LIKE OURS TO TURN INTO A HOTBED FOR ORGANIZED CRIME.

SOMEBODY'S GOTTA PUT OUT FEELERS RIGHT NOW.

SHE'S NOT PLOTTING ANYTHING CRIMINAL.

SHE'S A REAL GHOST.

WHATEVER SHE'S UP TO, THE POLICE CAN'T STOP HER.

I'D APPRECIATE YOUR HELP.
There may be a pattern.

I'm marking a map with all the spots in town where Steel Lady Nanase has been sighted.

It's when they lurk about that you sense something sinister and ominous and get a feeling that something is about to happen.

Just casually ask around about the rumor's, see what you can find on the internet.

I'd like you to consider...

...the possibility that ghosts and yokai may actually exist in this world.
If it's the ghost of Karin Nanase threatening our citizens, we're going to have to exorcise her.

What's this, Yumiharą?

I didn't know you believed in that stuff.

You can investigate until you've burned yourself out, but nothing will come of it.

What is this about? If you don't want to help, just say so.

I know I'm asking a lot.

...I've never seen a ghost, but I have seen a yōkai.
But please, just be careful.

I will help.

No.

But I heard that you took that driver very seriously when you handled the accident.

So I thought you’d understand...

I’m probably wasting my breath.

You have to assume that some things in the world can’t be explained, or else those things will pull the rug out from under you.
I didn't believe it either, and that's why I had to break things off with my boyfriend.

...Was your boyfriend a yokai or a ghost or something?

Something better than that.

Or worse. ...I'm not sure.
Ugh... blegh!

SHOULD I GET YOU SOMETHING TO DRINK?

YOU REALLY DO GET SICK WHEN YOU EAT MEAT.
So please, be careful.

Anyway, Terada-san, there exist things beyond our understanding.

I can't put you to the trouble.

No, I'm fine.

You've convinced me that you had a complicated love life.

Yeah, I got it.

No, it just ended complicated...
I saw you! Yumi-hara-san!

Thanks, you too.

Good work today, Yumi-hara-san.

N... Really?!

Nothing happened.

What?!

In the cafeteria at lunch.

She's right!

But Terada-san's actually pretty shy. He's really pushing himself to talk to you, you know.

You may not be interested, Yumi-hara-san.
AND I BET HE HAS SOME NICE SAVINGS!

AT 34, HE'S ALREADY A SERGEANT AND A FIFTH-DEGREE BLACK BELT IN JUDO.

HE'S ROUGH AROUND THE EDGES AND A LITTLE SCARY-LOOKING, BUT HE'S ACTUALLY QUITE A GENTLEMAN.

AND HE HAS THAT BIG, STRONG BACK, LIKE A STONE WALL!

I'LL JUST BE GOING NOW. EXCUSE ME.

THAT DOESN'T CHANGE THE FACT THAT HE'S NOT MY TYPE.

TERADA-SAN IS A GENTLEMAN, AND A VERY GOOD DETECTIVE WITH SUPPORT FROM EVERYONE IN THE DEPARTMENT.

I KNOW HE'S A GOOD MAN, BUT...
He's wimpy, a little younger than I am, a little shorter than I am. Simple... like a goat.

I'd take Kuro-kun's weak, scrawny back over a stone wall any day...

...but I can't.

As much as it pains me, I can't help but think about him.

I tried to forget about him...

It had never occurred to me that spectres and goblins and things from fairy tales would be a part of my real life.
OH, YOU HUMANS ARE FRIGHTFUL CREATURES.
YOU’LL EAT ANYTHING.
MAKE ANYTHING A PART OF YOU.

AND CREATE MONSTERS, LIKE YOU!
...KURO... KUN...?

HOW COULD I HAVE IMAGINED THAT MY FIANCE WAS A MONSTER?

OR THAT ONE DAY, I WOULD SINCERELY WONDER...

...IF I COULD GO ON WITH HIM.

SAKI-SAN.
IF ONLY WE HADN'T RUN INTO THAT KAPPA.

IF ONLY WE HADN'T GONE ON THAT TRIP TO KYOTO, MAYBE I WOULD STILL BE WITH KURO-KUN.

HOW LONG WILL I HAVE TO ENDURE THIS MISERY?

I LIVE IN CONSTANT DREAD, AND I'VE STARTED TO SENSE THEM ALL AROUND ME.

WHAT HAPPENED THAT DAY TWISTED THE WORLD I'D ALWAYS BELIEVED IN.

COME TO THINK OF IT...

HOW CAN I BE SO SELFISH?!

WHAT AM I...

IF SHE HAD DIED RIGHT BEFORE OUR TRIP TO KYOTO, WE WOULD HAVE CANCELED THE TRIP...

I HEARD HIS COUSIN EVENTUALLY PASSED AWAY.

...
I HAVE TO MAKE SURE HE DOESN'T GET IN TOO DEEP WITH THE STEEL LADY NANASE CASE.

I WOULD HATE TO SEE SOMEONE CLOSE TO ME GET AS WRAPPED UP IN THIS AS I DID.

ANYWAY...

I'D FEEL BAD LEAVING TERADA-SAN TO HIS OWN DEVICES.

SNIPPER

WAAAAH!

EVEN THIS HILL MAKES ME NERVOUS, AND I CLIMB IT EVERY DAY.
Why would you bring up such an oddly graphic analogy at a time like this?!

Yes...
This is nothing compared to the pain of being deflowered.
I don't know who you are or where you're from, but anyway, thank you for your help.

"Kids"...?

Wait... how old is she?

Kids, tell the strangest jokes these days.

It was the most painful experience of my life. What did you want me to compare it to?
I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE OR WHERE YOU'RE FROM.

MAYBE SHE'S IN MIDDLE SCHOOL... BUT SHE ACTS OLDER THAN ME.

SHE'S SO CUTE AND PETITE...

TWIRL

BUT, WHAT IS THIS MYSTICAL AURAL ABOUT HER?

BUT TAKE MY ADVICE...

FROM WHAT?

... AND RUN.
SHE’S ONE OF THOSE.

WHAT THEY CALL GHOSTS, MONSTERS, YOKAI, ETC.

...PLEASE RUN, YOU ARE NOT HALLUCINATING.

STEEL LADY...

NANASEP!
I DON'T THINK THAT'S THE PROBLEM.

AND THOSE LARGE BREASTS ARE REAL, TOO.

I KNOW.

I CAN SENSE IT IN THE AIR. SHE'S REAL.

GIVE ME A BREAK! I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF THIS!

Huh?
Hey! DASH?

I'm getting pretty tired of these things messing with my life.

I ran from the Kappa! Ran from Kuro-kun.

And now, I spend all my time moping.

KAPOW!

They shouldn't even exist!
TONIGHT IS THE NIGHT. I'M ENDING THIS.
SEE? I TOLD YOU TO RUN.

THIS IS INSANE.
WHOOSH

CLANG

KA-CLUNK

CREAK
What...?
IT DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE.

SO SHE LEFT.

BUT I DON'T THINK I CAN DEFEAT HER WITH FORCE...

SHE CAN TACKLE A SPIRIT? JUST WHO IS THIS GIRL?

DON'T TELL ME SHE'S NOT HUMAN EITHER?!
It's designed to come off when it's under too much pressure.

Don't worry. It's a prosth-etic.

Because if it stayed on, it could cause me even more pain.

Are you some kind of a yōkai, too?

I couldn't touch it. Why could you?

I don't know who you are or where you're from, but I admire your courage.

Please forget what happened here today.

Clunk

Let's say I'm somewhere in the middle.

Oh, no.
AND PLEASE KEEP MY PRESENCE HERE A SECRET. I WOULDN'T WANT TO GET INVOLVED WITH THE POLICE.

I WILL TAKE CARE OF STEEL LADY NANASE SOON.

THAT'S WHY I CAME HERE.

YOU CAN TELL ME ALL ABOUT IT AT THE STATION.

HOW CAN THIS BE?!!

DU-DUN

IT'S JUST DOWN THIS HILL.
The police already have reports of cases we believe to be connected to the Steel Lady. I can't just ignore this.

Traffic Officer Saki Yumihara...?

Are you... Saki-san?
YOUR HAIR IS SHORTER AND YOU'VE LOST SOME WEIGHT.

UHM.
I'M NOT SURE WHAT YOU MEAN BY THAT...

I am a saph-san, but...

OH! THAT'S WHY I DIDN'T RECOGNIZE YOU!

I MEAN, I WOULDN'T LET YOU DIE, BUT...

IF I'D KNOWN YOU WERE SAKI-SAN, I WOULDN'T HAVE HELPED!

OH!
NO, UM.
I want an explanation. One that makes sense.

Do you know me?

We have met once before, but this is the first time I've introduced myself.

I have no memory of ever meeting you.
MY NAME IS KOTOKO IWANAGA.

CURRENT GIRLFRIEND.

KURO SAKURAGAWASENPAI'S

BAM

YIPE!

TO BE CONTINUED IN VOLUME 2
I am Kyo Shirodaira, the one credited on the cover and frontispiece as writing the “story.” This is volume one. To those of you who know my name and those who don’t, thank you for picking up this book.

Now, this manga, known as *In/Spectre*, is the graphic novel version of the story I wrote as a novel in 2011, and published as *Invented Inference: Steel Lady Nanase*. At the time that I was writing the novel, I had no idea that it would become a manga.

And this time, I didn’t write any new scenarios or tweak the continuity like I often do with manga of my work; I just gave Chashiba Katase-sensei the book and said, “Don’t worry about my feelings at all, just draw whatever you think is interesting in whatever way you think it’s interesting. If possible, I’d prefer you don’t make it too serious.” It’s a pretty different relationship than what I usually have with a manga artist.

Because Chapter 1 was the first one, and we were just starting out, I did make some comments before it was drawn about some lines of dialogue and the story details, but other than that, I had no idea what was going on with it until it was published in the magazine. I just sat back and thought to myself, “Wow, I’m not doing anything, but this is really turning into a good manga. There are more good scenes than there were before.” Part of my lack of involvement comes from a fear that, since the story already exists as a published novel, if I were to get too involved, the manga would be constrained by the novel. I felt it would be a better manga if I left it to someone else’s interpretation and story sense.
As for the content of this particular volume, while the plot and dialogue are pretty much straight from the novel, there are scenes, expressions, and ideas everywhere that are unique to the manga, and it’s turning into something that will have different highlights from the novel, giving readers a different impression. In fact, an acquaintance of mine read Chapter 1 and said, “It’s so faithful to the novel, but so much more refreshing.”

Even the same scene with the same lines will have differences; maybe it’s because the humanity of the writer shows through. It’s scary.

Incidentally, the title makes reference to detective work, but there is nothing resembling a mystery story in this book; instead, we have yōkai and ghosts, and on top of that, it focuses on people with powers that aren’t really explained. So if anyone picked it up hoping for a mystery manga, and you’re getting mad and thinking, “Are you going to have any mystery in this at all?!”, then direct all your complaints to me, because it’s faithful to the original.

The story should become a little more of a “mystery” as it goes on (there are police officers in it, after all). When the novel was published, I got reviews from both camps, claiming that it was a mystery novel and that it wasn’t one. In regards to that, I hide behind my excuse of, “It’s made of the same substance as mystery.”

That’s really not very refreshing, is it?

Well, I hope you’ll read the next volume.

Kyo Shirodaira
THE TALE OF A KAPPA COMING AHOKE

BUT, MY OH MY, I HAD SUCH A FRIGHT BACK AT NEW YEAR'S.

SIGH.

Much obliged to you for bugin' volume one.

YO!

I'M THE KAMO RIVER KAPPA.

STORY, ART: CHASHIBA KATAHE

KOTOKO

I SIMPLY COULDN'T BELIEVE IT. WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO EAT TO TURN OUT LIKE THAT?

JUST WHAT IS THAT CREATURE?

IT'S DOWN-RIGHT SCARY!

SIGH... ANYWAY, HER LADYSHIP IS SO LOVELY.

I'LL JUST FORGET ALL ABOUT IT.

WHEW

WELL, WHATEVER. IT'S NONE OF MY BUSINESS.
I'd love to make her acquaintance someday.

But everyone says she listens to our problems, and she's smart, and nice.

I've never met her.

I'll ask her for help with that terrifyin' monster!

If I tell her I'm too scared to sleep, maybe she'll sing me a lullaby to help me feel better.

Okay, then!

Let's do it!

Guh haaa?!

Guh heh heh! Heh heh heh!

Maybe she'll stroke my head!
WHA-WH-WH-WH... WHAT IS HE DOIN', SITTIN' NEXT TO HER LADYSHIP?!!

DID YOU COME ALL THE WAY OUT HERE FROM KYOTO?

WHAT?! PARTNER ?!!

THAT MONSTER ?!

OH, THAT? SHOCKING, RIGHT?

INSISTED HE BE HER PARTNER.

OUR LADY PURSUED HIM RELENTLESSLY.

I DON'T WANT TO SEE OUR DEAR LADY SUCUMB TO THAT MONSTER'S POISONOUS FANGS!

ER...

SAY IT ISN'T SO!

WE TRIED TO STOP HER, TOO.

NO, NO! HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT?!

BUT SHE SAYS IT WAS LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.
AND WHY DOESN’T HE WANT TO GIVE HER ONE?! WHAT IS WRONG WITH HIM!

THEN YOU GO STOP HER, KAPPADON.

AHHH!

SHE’S PESTERIN’ HIM FOR A KISS!

SHE CAN’T! SHE CAN’T!

DON’T BE STUPID! I CAN’T GO MANO-A-MANO WITH THAT TERROR!

I WON’T ALLOW IT!!

BAM

KAPPADON?!

BUT THEN IT’S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE OUR LADY AND THAT THING END UP TOGETHER...
URK!?

THE KAPPA CLAN'S SECRET TECHNIQUE!! SHIRIKODAMA STEAL!!

HUMANS WHO loose their SHIRIKODAMA lose their WITS along WITH IT!

NO, I haven't. You're taking THIS WAY too fast.

HAVE YOU FINALLY DECIDED TO ADD YOURSELF TO MY FAMILY REGISTER?!

SORRY. SUDDENLY I JUST COULDN'T HOLD MYSELF UP.

THAT'S WEIRD. WHAT HAPPENED TO ME?

K... KURÔ-SAN?!
Kappa-don! You made it worse!

... NO.

Now, now! It's too late to deny it!

But it's true...

I'm telling you.

But it just doesn't make sense for an immortal to suddenly feel unwell.

It's nothing to be ashamed of. Go on, be honest.

Kappa-don! You made it worse!

What the heck?! Talk about horri-fyin'!

He's immortal, so his Shirikodama is trying to get back inside him.

Toss.

Ew! What in the—! This Shirikodama is movin'!

Disgus-tin'!

What is a Shirikodama anyway?!

See ya later!!

I'm goin' back to Kyoto!!

Oohh, the horror!

Oh.

I feel better.

Scram.

Thank you very much! I hope you'll read volume two.

Staff: Kuro Shima, Tonpu, Yutsu
Editors: O-Kawa, T-Aa (monochrome endpoint)
TRANSLATION NOTES

Japanese is a tricky language for most Westerners, and translation is often more art than science. For your edification and reading pleasure, here are notes on some of the places where we could have gone in a different direction in our translation of the work, or where a Japanese cultural reference is used.

Eating grass, page 12
There may be some significance to this observation that Kurô is like an herbivorous goat. In recent years, the Japanese word for "herbivore" has been applied to men who are low on carnal ("carnivorous") desires. In other words, Kurô doesn't actively seek out romantic relationships.

Oni, page 13
An oni is a creature from Japanese folklore. The word is often translated to "ogre", as oni do tend to be ugly man-eaters. Oni come in many shapes and sizes, but one thing they have in common is horns. Some have only one horn, but the most common depictions of oni have two, much like a goat. The word oni is also used to describe people who are tough, unsparing, and/or heartless.

Engagement ceremony, page 19
When a couple gets engaged in Japan, it is tradition to have a formal dinner during which the parents of the soon-to-be married couple exchange symbolic gifts. These gifts all represent things such as a long-lasting marriage, happiness, good fortune, etc. If Kurd and Saki are planning such a ceremony, it means both of their parents have agreed to the match, and there's little chance that either of them will back out.

Kotoko Iwanaga means..., page 24
Kotoko isn't necessarily assuming that Kurô would have any interest in what her name means, or that the meaning of her name will impress him in any way. Because the Japanese writing system uses ideographs (one symbol that represents a word or idea), the meaning of her name would tell him which characters to use to write it. She's basically telling him how to write or "spell" her name, in case he ever decides to look her up.

First temple visit, and the New Year’s Bell, page 32
In Japan, it’s a New Year’s tradition to visit a shrine or temple within the first three days of the new year, to express gratitude for the previous year and pray for a good new year. The New Year’s Bell is rung 108 times, around midnight on New Year’s Eve. One theory as to why this is, is that the number 108 represents the types of worldly desires that exist in the world, and hearing the bell ring can purify your heart of those worldly desires that had built up over the last year. However, the number of rings can vary from temple to temple, sometimes ringing more than 200 times.
As the reader may have guessed from the context, these are all supernatural water creatures, like the more well-known kappa. All of them live by rivers and interact with humans with varying degrees of hostility. As an expert in regard to all Japanese supernatural creatures, Kotoko wants to make sure she has all the details right.

Kotoko is referring to the fact that there is a popular chain of sushi restaurants called Kappa-Zushi, and a brand of shrimp flavored crackers which also bears the name of the aquatic creatures.

Kannon, or Guanyin, is a bodhisattva—one who has attained Nirvana but has come back to earth to help show others the way. She is also considered a goddess of mercy, including leading souls of the deceased toward the pure land. In other words, Kotoko is going to enlist her help to send this ghost to nirvana.

The translators confess that this is not a direct translation of this particular novel title, but such is the way of translating book and movie titles. The Japanese title of the book is Mushaburui LOVE, where mushaburui means “trembling with excitement or anticipation,” but this particular ghost would be attracted to the musha part, which means “warrior.” The translators chose to focus on that as the main point of the English title.

Here, Kotoko is accurately reciting the Japanese version of “good things come to those who wait”, which translates more literally to, “If you want good fortune, go to sleep and wait for it.” Unfortunately, the English version doesn’t include the part about sleep, so the translators had to tweak it a little.

More accurately, Kotoko states that she has eaten a kaiseki meal. Kaiseki is a very high-class Japanese cuisine, and usually consists of miso soup and three side dishes. When written with the Chinese characters that Kotoko used, it refers to a meal served in conjunction with a formal tea ceremony. In keeping with the high level of the meal, Kyoto heirloom vegetables, or kyō yasai, are expensive vegetables served mainly in upscale restaurants, and they are very nutritious.

A tanuki is a Japanese raccoon dog. While tanuki are normal, everyday animals, a baké-danuki (or “transforming tanuki”) is supernatural one capable of shapeshifting.

The word our tanuki friend uses here for “protective barrier” is kekkai, literally “bound world.” Often translated to “barrier,” a kekkai is a boundary marking off the border between the sacred and the profane. The area inside the barrier is supposed to be protected from harm.
Although Kotoko relates the significant parts of the tale, the reader may be interested in a slightly more detailed account of Yao Bikuni. There are regional differences to the story, but the gist of it is that a man was invited to dinner at a fisherman’s house and discovered by chance that the fisherman was serving mermaid meat. Repulsed at the idea, he didn’t eat the meat but wrapped it up and took it home to discard later. Either his daughter or his wife then ate the meat before he could warn her not to, and lived for centuries thereafter. After being widowed several times and losing all her friends, she became a nun and traveled the country, helping the poor.

Police boxes, page 119
Police boxes, loosely translated from kōban, are like miniature police stations, spread throughout the community, bringing the police close to the community so they can respond more readily to the citizens’ needs.

Pleasure crime, page 122
A “pleasure crime,” or yukaihan, is committed by someone who does it just to get a rise out of people, or for the fun of it.

Should I take her in, page 142
Specifically, Saki wonders if she should hodō Kotoko. The purpose of hodō, which means “guidance,” is to identify minors who are committing—or look like they might commit—a crime, and to provide guidance to prevent them from resorting to such behavior. Kotoko is suspicious because she is out late at night, when most good children would be at home.

The Kamo River Kappa, page 166
This kappa is a native of Kyoto, and although he used the standard Japanese dialect in the main story, here in the bonus manga, he speaks with a Kyoto dialect. The dialects from this region of Japan are often translated into an American Southern dialect. This is because people from this region are seen by the Japanese in a similar way as people from the American South are seen by residents of the United States—some are simple and humorous, while others are refined and proud.

Shirikodama, page 170
Translated roughly as “rear-end jewel,” a shirikodama is a mythical crystal believed to exist in humans’ anuses. According to legend, the reason kappa attack people is to obtain this jewel.