

This is a translation of an excerpt from 告白劇 by Yoru Sumino

It has been numbered to accompany the source also provided on this page

1. You gotta shoot him through the head.

That single phrase and what should have been an inconsequential night was pulled forth from my memories.

When was that? I can't recall, it was often held in the same place with similar faces.

Whenever it was, snacks, empty cans, and a slice of leftover pizza would've been scattered on the table. Besides the table, the bed and sofa at Hibiki's house often overran with drunk friends too. He didn't show it, but I bet it probably annoyed him a little.

2. That night, I finished my part-time job at the pub where I worked at the time and visited Hibiki's, although after midnight. Back then, we would often hang out at his house as a second home to party or after our part time jobs, etc. When I opened the unlocked door, I smelled the usual scent. I wonder what I should call it, not really the smell of Hibiki's place. That complex smell of the breath of someone sleeping, some fabric softener, and food mixed.

3. I haven't smelled it at all since I started working. Is this what Chizuru means when she says, "It smells like a dream?" In a room about 160 square feet, Hibiki was watching some band's live stream at a moderate volume, while Chizuru slept unabashed on the bed, wearing her usual leather jacket. Hibiki and Chizuru didn't see each other as the opposite sex. We all knew what their relationship was.

"How was work Karin? Go ahead and grab you something from the fridge."

"Thank ya"

I opened the kitchen fridge and grabbed a beer before sitting on the floor. I went to toast, but Hibiki warmed up the leftover pizza for me in the microwave before I could say a word. He also threw a blanket over a restless Chizuru's legs while it ran.

4. "Mai and Taiga were just here, but they have 1st period tomorrow so they went home. I heard Chizuru only slept two hours because of yesterday's homework, so she's burnt out." While eating warm pizza, I asked about how the drinking party went.

As I shared some of the little interesting stories that happened at my job, we stopped meeting every day, just us two dudes, to talk.

We had a mutual hobby. After finishing my junk food dinner, I turned on the TV and game console, being careful of the sound. I chose a zombie-type shooting game that Hibiki bought to check out while it was on sale. I don't think it was Resident Evil, but I forget the name.

5. While we were blasting enemies for a minute and continuing our search, I got totally scared, just like the creators planned, by one of the threatening scenes that were of course in the game. My yelp probably woke her up.

"Oh, you're having a friendly gaming date."

I look back at the sleepy voice I heard behind me. Chizuru was up, combing her hair with her fingers. I whipped back around to the screen.

"Sounds like you're still asleep to me."

"I'd hate to compete with her in love triangle."

I keep shooting the zombies in front of me while also listening to Hibiki banter.

6. "You two wouldn't be charging forward so easily if I were a zombie. I'd be too tough."

I laughed at the voice behind me, imagining Chizuru siding with fallen zombies.

"When that happens I'll put a bullet between your eyes, Chizuru."

"Hey. I'll bite your head off first, Karin."

"I'll look you right in the eye solemnly and bear the responsibility of making sure to kill you."

"OK, then I'll gouge out your eyes Hibiki. Better think of a cure! You'll regret it when you turn into a zombie."

Hibiki responded to Chizuru's imaginary threat like he was discussing something in class.

"In reality, I think if it were me, I'd conceal my condition and pick people off one by one. Although I think Chizuru would get shot saying 'I'm a zombie!' and jumping out in front of everyone."

It was weird because his flat tone did not fit the ridiculous subject.

"Why do only you get to be reasonable, Hibiki? I'm not a total goof."

"Why would only I be reasonable? You keep your base personality as a zombie."

“Alright, then if Hibiki’s behavior changes then I’ll work with Karin and we’ll shoot you through the head with one shot.”

“One shot even though there’s two of you? Don’t leave it to Karin. You fight too, Chizuru.”

“...Shut up!”

7. After I laughed at Chizuru’s childish comeback, my phone vibrated on the floor.

It was a message from Hanao, who was various levels of friend to everyone, that said “Still partying?” Seems he was free after his club drinking party dispersed.

Hanao met up with us and we raised our glasses again.

At the time, we had the physical fortitude and the brazenness to throw away tomorrow for it.

8. “Once you become a working adult, you won’t be able to mess around into the wee hours of the morning like this.”

The morning sun pierced through the gaps in the curtain. Squinting my eyes, I worried about a future I couldn’t imagine, willingly, one that was sure to come someday. I suppose everything will change someday, so they say. It’s been ten years, and I never thought I’d still be discussing the same issues. I didn’t think I’d become a fallible creature.

9. “When you remember your school days, you dream of the smell and stuff too, huh?”

“They sell a romantic scent like that anywhere?”

“Nope. It’s a scent you feel directly with your brain, not smell with your nose. GG.”

We dropped the last enemy and ended the battle. I messaged Chizuru “Bathroom break,” put down the controller and took off my headphones.

I exited the small but fully equipped gaming room... and also noticed I had never taken off my necktie, because I’d cut it so close to when I promised I’d be home.

I quickly changed into my loungewear and headed to the bathroom again. After taking care of business, I stopped in at the kitchen and returned to the battlefield with a frosty can of beer in hand.

10. When I put on my headphones and called out, she responded immediately. I used my controller and waited to be matched with my opponent. Once enemies and allies were assembled, a firefight in a field far more beautiful than reality began.

Left. Right. What about the shadows of the buildings? How's the weapon I'm holding? I scramble to communicate via my headset, moving my hands to continue taking steps toward victory. I whined about making the wrong inputs; to be honest I was a little salty. My partner was too, okay, so let's call it even. I relaxed and was able to play.

This must be the only advantage of being a married couple that goes on lots of separate business trips. I thought about that in the house without my wife. While she entertained guests elsewhere, I was free to enjoy gaming to my heart's content.

11. "Karin, you drinking?" While I was falling from the sky with my parachute, she was alerted by the gulping sound my throat made.

"I'm finished with work today, so it's time to relax."

"Relaxing during battle, how careless."

I landed in the field. Immediately I looked for enemies and collected weapons and items. After the second game, the time-out came from Chizuru. I drank my beer with my headphones on, opening the newspaper website I subscribed to on my phone.

12. Chizuru's return to the battlefield was heralded by the snap of a can tab opening and gulping sounds.

"It's a Lemon Sour Cocktail." She then explained her equipment loadout to me, even though I didn't ask. The instant I took up my controller again, like right as the fight was about to begin, I received another announcement.

"So, I got engaged..."

"You announce that NOW? Well, congrats." I was surprised. But I was able to give her my congratulations reflexively.

"Thanks"

13. "Marriage, huh?" Chizuru is getting married? While digesting that reality, I thought maybe it was best the announcement was sudden. I was able to congratulate my friend first, without mixing in the anxiety that bubbled up when I thought it over. I couldn't help but picture the face of a different friend who wasn't on the call. I'd often heard in movies and other stuff the huge emotional ups and downs could kill. I tried my best to feign a calm conversation while continuing to gaze at the screen.

"First marriage?"

"Yes of course it's the first time, at least remember that much!"

“I’m joking. Who’s your partner?”

“A coworker. They started working at my office a year after me.”

“Does me not knowing them mean this is a shotgun wedding?”

“We’ve been going out for about a year. I didn’t tell anyone because even I had just announced that I got a boyfriend, the conversations about it would be endless.”

14. “Well, I didn’t ask either.” We continued to fully report on how the battlefield was developing, separate from our friendly conversation.

“You havin’ a wedding ceremony?”

“Plan to. We’re still just at the engagement stage, so including the wedding and family registration and ceremony, it’s maybe about a year away.”

“Ahhh... well, congrats. I’m sure your fiancé has his own circumstances, so if it seems like you can fit me in, shoot me an invite.” I spent most of my attention controlling my words to sound calm, so I couldn’t concentrate completely. There was no way I could stay alive in that situation. Slight input mistakes piled up swiftly and I was killed.

“Of course I’ll invite you.”

What came next really made me wish I had focused on the game. And yet...

“But I do have something I wanted to ask you about that.”

15. Chizuru’s words gave me a terrible sense of foreboding. I knew there absolutely was no way she wanted information on how to put together a budget. We’d been friends long enough for me to know that. An impossible image, like having a gun pointed at me in real life, surged forth.

“About Hibiki.”

I wasn’t superhuman enough to survive having my life threatened in two worlds. I was swiftly shot down and set down my controller. I took a swig of beer to calm down, making a slightly louder gulp, as if to make her think I wasn’t hesitating but rather my mouth was full.

“About Hibiki?” I played dumb, hoping. I was closer to a spy twisting their body to avoid infrared sensors than a battling soldier.

16. “Yeah, you know, Hibiki... I know you’ll probably think I’m crazy. I can’t dance around it forever, so how about I just say it? He...” The hesitation was only obvious from her tone. There was a brief pause. “...likes me.”

“Does this mean you’ve asked him?”

“No. But I’ve got reason to believe it. It’s been a long time.” Was she talking about the 11 years or so they’d shared, or that she came to that conclusion a long time ago.

“So, I’m not wrong?”

It seemed like she had put the controller down on her side of the call a while ago too. Jokes and banter aside, I didn’t want to lie to my friend when she was serious. I resigned myself to my fate.

“...It’s not exactly like I heard it from him. But I think so.”

“Right?”

17. I heard a loud exhale. It wasn’t a sigh. She wasn’t a rude person like that.

“So, what did you want advice about?”

“I don’t want to put Hibiki through seeing me as a new bride.”

Immediately after hearing Chizuru’s answer, two feelings welled up inside me. One that said, “Neither of you are kids,” and one that said, “I don’t want to see that either.” If I had to choose, to be frank, the second was stronger. “You’re already in your 30s,” is what I say to myself, but there was no self-awareness, or anything else of it to be found. I didn’t come to terms with it, turn a blind eye to it, or do it every day because I wanted to. “I guess it’s not as simple as ‘Just don’t invite him?’”

“I can’t do that. If I don’t invite Hibiki then I can’t invite any of my friends. But, since both me and my fiancé each have our ideas on what we want, we can’t do a ceremony with just us or our families.”

“Yeah, he could refuse to come to the ceremony, couldn’t he.”

“Then should I say to my friend, that I know likes me, ‘Could you come see me find happiness with someone else, please?’”

18. “There’s no...” I started to say and shut up.

After a short silence, she gave me a serious apology first, “My bad.”

Both of us may have matured, even if just bit by bit.

“What are you gonna do.”

The first thing to come to my mind was to have the ceremony when Hibiki is busy with work, in a place far away enough where he couldn’t make a day trip. No, if it’s for Hibiki’s precious

friend, then he'd come no matter where or when. Even hide his feelings completely. And Chizuru wouldn't consult me if this could be solved by just changing the time or place. After the sound of a deep breath, which conveyed her intentions more than words, Chizuru answered.

"I'm thinking I should get Hibiki to confess to me."

19. I never thought I'd hear a statement like that, usually confessions start with the *confessor*. I got the basic intent and goal, but ended up blurting out "What do you mean by that". It was like a deep-seated habit.

"Then there'll be a reason to not invite him, a reason it'll be alright for him to not come. If we can be open about our feelings to each other, then there's a reason not to invite him to the ceremony. So, I want to be confessed to and turn him down. I don't get the feeling he'll simply say what he's kept quiet about for so long of course, so if you're willing, I'd like you to help, Karin."

"What, that's the worst plan ever. There has to be a smoother solution."

"It won't work any other way."

Readiness, determination, realism, I don't want to use showy words like that between friends. But her voice, it had that air about it.

20. "It must be a one hundred percent 'all my fault' plan, where if by chance, when this plan is found out by someone, when someone finds out why Hibiki didn't come to the ceremony, everyone will criticize me. After all, it's all my fault, trying to forcefully yank out the feelings my friend doesn't show on the surface, to crush them." She must have agonized over it in silence. I could feel it in how her voice trembled.

"What about the 'asking Hibiki' route?"

"Even if I do that, it's not like he'll admit it."

"Yeah."

A goofy image of Hibiki cynically processing the information bubbled up in my mind.

And Chizuru, like a child, said "grrrrr." seemingly vexed.

"If you're facing this head on, you've no choice but to make him say it." There seemed to be any number of other ways to avoid inviting him to the wedding ceremony. Even so, Chizuru said it was her fault, so I thought I had *no right* to deny her, having left their mismatched feelings alone up till now. More than anything I wanted them to settle this too.

21. He's held onto those unrequited feelings up till now, they won't fade by chance naturally when his crush marries. It'd certainly be tough to watch him continue hiding it with all his might too. I pray they find common ground neatly and would like to have Hibiki move on, no matter what form that takes. I didn't want a future where we all continued to hang out, while closing our eyes and hiding our hearts. Yet I was tongue-tied, still worried about whether it was okay to help her with this.

"I've decided"

"What"

"I have to hit him with a headshot." There must have been countless nights like that. And, despite that, specific images and sounds immediately popped into my head.

"Oh, we're back to that conversation."

"What?"

22. "You weren't talking about that? It's fine, I just happened to remember something."

Surely everyone will gather the various shards of memory they hold onto, and finally those days will arrive. It's okay if Chizuru just happened to say a phrase reminded me of those days. I had made my decision. I wanted a relationship where we could pick up the shards of that time when Chizuru and Hibiki were not afraid of troubling each other.

"Gotcha. Well first let's talk about it soon."

"Thank you, really."

"But don't cry while we're in a heated discussion because you don't know what to do."

*Bzzzt.* The game chat connection cut. I called back but there was no response, later I got a *Line* message that said, "I leave setting the date for the strategy meeting to you." She's such a kid! I messed with her tear ducts again, that I know she doesn't like being touched. I'm no better.

23. I remember learning this author's famous phrase in college: "People can't affect others, and cannot be affected by others," or something like that. I remembered it suddenly after turning 30, and thought it was a lie. Since we met, we've affected each other. More trivially, this gaming hobby was not a result of our parents or siblings. It started when we were invited to play by Hibiki. Even if researchers of that author were to tell me in class "That's not what that saying means," am I supposed to know that?

Chizuru had decided where we would meet, but I was the one who made it *the* place to be during our job-hunting days, because it was comparatively less crowded than other chain cafes.

On Saturday, one week after Chizuru petitioned me for help, I got off at a train station I rarely use and headed down to the restaurant she picked.

24. I stopped a worker at the entrance -which had lost its stench of cigarette smoke at some point- and told her my name. She must have been a college student working part-time. The short girl guided me politely to the reservable meeting room inside. I lightly knocked and opened the door, not waiting for a response. The first thing I saw was the top of Chizuru's head. She was sitting in the seat in front of me and for some reason was talking to the cream-colored walls. I greeted her with a wave when she turned around. I sat down at an open seat, setting my bag beside me. I started silently reading the opened menu on the table.

25. "Yeah, it's easier if you're in the frame of mind of 'of course you don't know.' Because I believe it's what you're good at updating, Kuraya. Although there are also some mistakes." Chizuru laughed like she was teasing someone on the other side of a phone call. I gathered that she was encouraging someone. Chizuru already had a drink on the table in front of her. I got up quietly and left the room. I asked a passing waiter for a coffee float. When I returned, Chizuru had just finished putting the wireless earbuds she'd been wearing in their case. I noticed Chizuru was in a suit, a sight I hadn't laid eyes on since the first half of my twenties.

26. "Chizuru's *not* wearing a leather jacket!" After I stated the obvious, half joking and half with real surprise, Chizuru turned toward me and showed her teeth.

"I said come *after* the meeting I planned with my client, didn't I?"

"What happened to you following the 'Church of the Leather Jacket?' Give up the faith?"

"I'm wearing it on my soul."

"Pretty sure you were wearing one normally last time we met. You wear one on your soul and one for the fashion?"

"What about you? I see you after half a year and the beard, as expected, feels off."

I stroked my exquisite beard. I started growing it about a year ago.

"Thanks to my beard, my clients easily remember me as the 'bearded salesman'."

"Something about it feels pompous, so ew."

“Stop just bad-mouthing it.”

27. The energy from our university days hadn't changed, even after not meeting for six months. Assuming our relationship was truly that amiable, then our simple once a month online gaming sessions might be one reason for it. Then there's also when Hibiki joins, or when I'm not there, and times when just us guys can come.

“...my beard is that weird?”

“You are worried about it! It's not actually weird, but because it makes you look rough, some people will stereotype you as “intimidating”, you know? It's better to just be mocked based on your personality, isn't it? Also, you have a wife, so it's fine not to be popular with ladies.”

Having received that flatly delivered opinion from my friend, there was a knock on the door, and my coffee float was brought in.

A waiter put spoons, straws, and paper napkins on the table for us. Chizuru immediately mixed in unprompted comments like “Trying to act cute in front of me?” I wanted to tell the waiter straight how baseless that thought was, but I couldn't take anyone thinking “this old dude tried to involve me in his love life,” so I waited for him to leave the room.

28. I tasted some of the ice cream in my float, “I've got a sweet tooth, as you know. Always guarana with you, huh Chizuru.”

“I mean it's pretty much only here and the Brazilian BBQ place that I run into this stuff.”

“I remember you and Hibiki used to always argue about that drink.”

“Yeah, that guy would always call it a ‘sugary cough syrup.’” Chizuru lowers the ends of her eyebrows and slurps the guarana through her straw. Her face made it easy to see the change in her mood. I ate a bite of ice cream too.

“Have you met with Hibiki recently? I got some casual drinks with him about two months ago.”

“I stayed at his house about two weeks ago.”

The answer was so over the top I couldn't even be surprised,

“You can't be serious.”

“Ah ah, I know what you want to say.”

29. What was with that worried voice? What kind of conversation did I come here to have, when I'd been so worried? After all, isn't there proper timing for this kind of thing? She must have read my expression, because she shook her head side-to-side furiously.

"I get it but let me make one excuse. FYI, there's nothing going on."

"Of course, like I would put up with being told about an affair right after a betrothal announcement. What, did you go to some all-night event together???"

Those two were also in a band together in university. I've been hearing stories about them often going to live events together since then. I couldn't play an instrument, nor did I like any music enough to go to a live venue. If we're talking festivals, I'd been with them only a few times.

"No, um, I drank together with some coworkers near his place and let the last train pass by, so after I asked if I could stay at his house. It's a big house, okay."

"You cannot be serious. You..."

30. It was easy to imagine both Chizuru contacting him and Hibiki letting her in. "There's no way you said, 'He likes me, but what should I do about it?' to me with that mouth. What the heck?" When I pointed out the obvious, Chizuru's face turned beet red. Like a grade-schooler, she hurled the stretched out straw wrapper in her hand, and the wrapper, hitting air resistance, landed pathetically on the table. But, and this might have been that bit of her that had grown up, apologized with a "Sorry" soon after.

"B...but you see"

"One time is a lot"

"You're not my mom."

"*Please* don't tell your mom you pushed your way drunk into the house of the guy who likes you."