

KEI TSUKIMURA PRESENTS

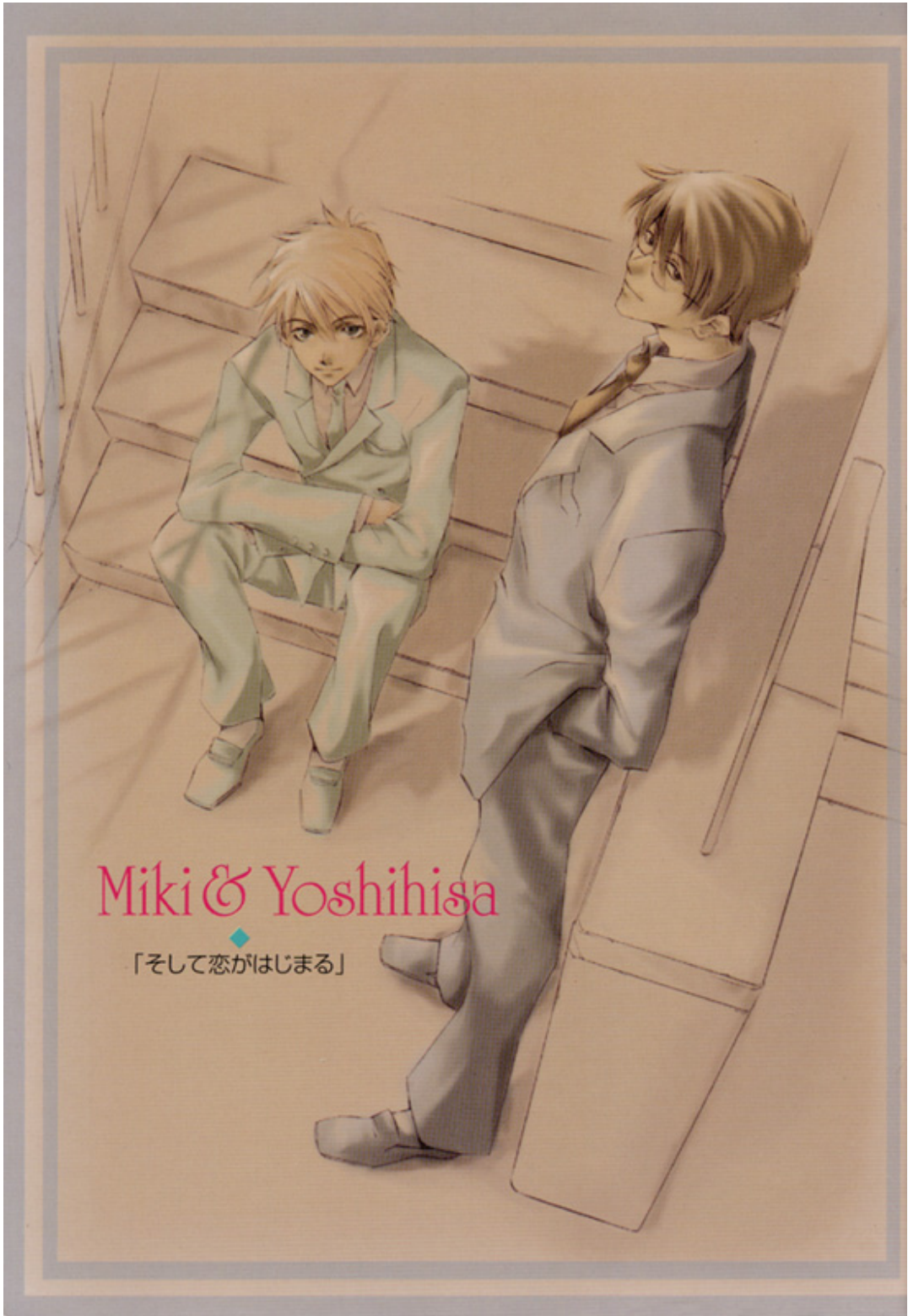
月村奎

イラスト ◆ 夢花李

そして恋が"はじまる

so love begins

キャラ文庫



Miki & Yoshihisa

◆
「そして恋がはじまる」

With Asami leading him, Miki exchanged his second kiss with Asami since their initial one a month ago. For some unknown reason, this kiss was completely different from the first one; it was a much more passionate kiss.

-From "Last Love"



Chara Novels

So Love Begins

By: Kei Tsukimura
Illustrations: Sumomo Yumeka

Translator: Artemis
Editor: Sanaaki

A Mochi*Mochi Project

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So Love Begins

Chapter 1

The one skill that Miki Tamura in his seventeen years had learned to master was that of reading other people's feelings. While it's not to say that he had superhuman powers, but more that he was better able to discern what people may be thinking because of his heightened sensitivity to the behavior and mood of others.

As golden ginkgo leaves fluttered around the passageway where Miki and Sayaka Ishikawa stood, he could pretty much guess from the uncomfortable look in her eyes why she had called him out. She wanted to break up with him. This was not the first time this had happened. Miki was fairly well liked, but once girls started to date him they sensed that something was severely lacking in that overly accommodating demeanor of his.

It hadn't even been one month since Sayaka first approached him to go out with her. It was naturally difficult for her to begin that kind of talk with that hanging over her head.

Miki disliked this kind of awkward silence more than anything. It made him uncomfortable to see nothing going on. As if it were his fault that there was nothing to say or do. He pondered for a second and broke the silence in an offhanded manner.

"How did you do on your midterms?"

Sayaka replied skeptically to the abrupt question, “I didn’t do so well in math, but I think everything else went ok.”

“Oh? Everything was pretty bad for me.”

Miki gave Sayaka a troubled smile. Actually he had taken top marks in his class for the third course, but a lie usually sped up the process.

“I don’t know if I can do this. I don’t think I’m the type that can handle love and school at the same time.”

Studying his expression, she cautiously brought up the subject, “Did your grades drop because you’re going out with me...?”

Sayaka put on a remorseful expression. She wanted to break up with him, but she couldn’t bear to hurt her pride. Girls were so difficult to deal with. Miki had to think quickly to appease the two conflicting emotions.

“Well, if it were someone that I didn’t care about, it’d be fine. Anything serious and my thoughts would be filled with only that.”

Her pride should be ok with that for now.

“If my grades were to continue to drop, I’d also feel bad about making you feel responsible for it, Ishikawa.”

Just a casual indication for her to suggest that they break up. Sure enough, Sayaka took the bait.

“I see. I wouldn’t want that to happen to you because of me... I guess it’d be best for us to distance ourselves a little.”

The talk ended without much of a mishap.

“So we’ll just be friends from now on.”

Sayaka returned to her classroom, leaving those pretty, little words for Miki. Miki also returned to his classroom, feeling more relieved than dejected since he was able to respond with the reactions that she wanted from him.

Iida and Yamamoto were eating lunch when they noticed Miki's return and roused a round of teasing from their friends.

“Miki, so Ishikawa called you out?”

“Must be nice to be so lovey-dovey during lunch.”

Miki gave a weak smile to those words that were mixed with just a tinge of envy and replied, “It wasn't lovey-dovey, I was dumped.” Although there was no need for Miki to tell everyone this, he knew that the news would gratify them. Consider it a special service.

Just as he expected, one by one they all became incited.

“What's with that? Didn't you two just start going out?”

“But I was dumped. That's ok though. Now that I know that I don't do well with girls, I'll just run to the guys!” Miki declared, jokingly wrapping his arms around Iida's back.

“Quit it. I'd rather date a nasty-ass girl than to have a guy touch me.”

Their friends bursted out into laughter as they watched Miki get snubbed by his foul-mouthed childhood friend. Miki clicked his tongue childishly and threw himself onto a chair.

“Anyway, Miki, don't get down about it.”

“Now that even you’ve gotten dumped, we can help cheer you up!”

“Yeah! We’re gonna have a cheering-up party for Miki! Let’s stop by Mickey D’s when we get out of school!”

His good-natured friends were joking around, but at the same time trying to console him.

“We have cram school today. We’ll be late if we stop there.” Iida, who went to the same cram school as Miki, twirled his chopsticks as he interjected his remark. Today of all days was their monthly mock exam. Miki also wished to avoid being late if possible. However, he could never refuse an invitation from his friends.

“You’ll be treating me of course?” Miki showed no sign that he felt cram school was more important than hamburgers and even smiled as he replied enthusiastically.

After a little fun with his friends, Miki ran through the darkened town towards his cram school in a dead sprint.

A bakery, travel agency and a real estate office. Then a dental office and a law consulting office. Miki’s cram school was located on the third floor of this building full of various shops and businesses.

With just thirty or so meters left until he reached the classroom, Miki glanced at his watch. He clicked his tongue and slowed his pace. The second class had already started. It would have been alright if it had been a normal day, but since it was an exam day, he couldn’t enter and interrupt everyone. He would have to wait until the next class.

Miki went out to the vending machines to buy a can of hot coffee and then circled around to the stairs outside of the building. He had always used this emergency staircase, which was out of eyeshot from the alleyway, as his rest spot. As he sat down on a metal step, he felt its coldness permeate through his school uniform. It was too chilly to be wearing just his school blazer. It was the time of year where he wished he had brought a jacket.

Pulling the tab of the can of coffee, Miki looked up at the brightly-lit hallway on the third floor. Everyone was probably grappling over English problems right now in the still classroom.

Iida had skipped Miki's "cheering-up party" and had gone on ahead to cram school. Stubbornly taking life at his own stride, Iida never cared to go along with friends just because they were friends, always making his own affairs top priority. But that didn't cause any discord between him and the others. Rather, that no-nonsense personality of his earned the trust of those around him.

Miki's personality was almost the complete opposite. He would end up worrying about everyone else's feelings and reactions, never considering what it was that he wanted to do. Even now, he spared no thought for his own consequences of missing the exams. He was only worried about how he wasted the costly tuition fees that his parents had paid and how troubled they would be if they found out that he had skipped.

"It'd be bad if they found out about this too," Miki thought as he pulled out a box of Mild Seven and clumsily lit his lighter. Smoking wasn't something he did out of his own will either. It was only something he had tried as a result of hanging around his friends.

When he had lit his third cigarette, sounds of footsteps came echoing on the cold staircase. Miki dropped the freshly lit cigarette onto the step and extinguished it with his shoe.

Within the dim darkness was the figure of a tall man in a suit. The intelligent-looking face that matched the steel-framed glasses he wore was one that Miki had seen several times before. He seemed to be a salaryman employed in the building.

The man slowed his step in slight surprise at the sight of the crouched student hiding in the dimness of the staircase. As he tried to pass Miki, his foot hit the coffee can that had been left on the step.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” the man apologized in a low, pleasant voice as he bent down to pick up the can.

It was hard to tell from the cheerful look of Miki’s eyes, but he was surprisingly nervous around strangers. He hastily rose up from the step, nervous from the imposing presence of the adult in close proximity.

“Oh, it’s alright. It’s empty anyway.”

“So it is.”

After shaking the can to confirm it, the man bent down to pick up the snuffed cigarette at his foot and dropped it into the empty can.

Did he suspect that he was the one who had been smoking?

Miki raised his head fearfully, but he was met with a pair of hooded, double-lidded eyes¹ smiling gently behind the pair of glasses.

¹ Double eyelids are emphasized here because they open up the eye, giving an alert, friendly appearance. Asian cultures tend to focus more on the double-versus-single-eyelid look because double eyelids are considered more attractive.



“Are you not cold out here?” the man asked politely.

Miki smiled back and shook his head. “I’m fine.”

“How nice to be young. I’ll just throw this out since I’m on my way.” The man left him a soft smile and climbed the steps with can in hand.

Just when Miki’s eyes went to follow the well-defined back, he faintly heard a chime from the third floor signaling the end of the exam.

“Welcome back.”

Miki’s mother sat at the kitchen table typing on her laptop when she noticed Miki’s presence and smiled softly as though woken from a dream.

“You came back at a good time. How do you evenly distribute this again?”

His mother worked as a lecturer for a cooking class. Lately she had been typing things up to make menu cards for the class, but she still wasn’t able to use the laptop very well.

“Where’s Mana-chan?”

Miki thought it would be best to ask his older sister who was a writer for a living, but his mother frowned and shrugged her shoulders.

“She wouldn’t help. She went off all annoyed and wouldn’t tell me how to do it.”

Miki put down his bag and sat in front of the table.

“I think it was one of the function keys. Here, you hold down this key and press F1. Then you hit enter.”

“Oh, I see! Thanks.”

Miki's mother was smartly dressed and pretty; much more so than most women her age. Perhaps it was due to the fact that she worked as an instructor and had to deal with people all the time. She received a lot of good encouragement from her young students, took care to keep her wardrobe and make-up up-to-date, and had appointments at the hair salon once a week to keep her hair looking soft and radiant.

“You must be hungry now. I'll go warm up dinner.”

She faced the sink, rolling her shoulders to loosen the stiffness in them. Miki knew very well that his mother was feeling tired. Re-heating dinner each time a family member returned from working overtime or from cram school was surprisingly laborious.

“It's ok, I can do it myself,” Miki said as he stood up and pulled out a chair for his mother. “Why don't you keep working on your menu cards? I'll help you again if there's anything else you don't understand.”

“Really? Thanks. Sometimes I wish that you had been born first, Miki.”

His mother nodded her head towards the eldest daughter's room on the second floor, where her daughter worked on and off at her own pace. Just when Miki finished his dinner, his father returned.

“Welcome home. Have you eaten yet?”

“Not yet.”

While listening to his parents' conversation, Miki warmed up his father's portion of the cabbage rolls and placed a cold can of beer for him on the dining table.

It looked like his mother still wanted to work on her menu cards some more. Knowing that his father hated eating alone, Miki took a carton of yogurt from the

refrigerator and casually sat down to take his mother's place as his father's conversation partner.

"Dad, the English translation that you taught me yesterday was right. It just came up by chance. It really helped me."

"See. I haven't forgotten much of my foreign languages."

His father, who once worked in Los Angeles, was proficient in English and also strong in science and mathematics. However, he also had an annoying tendency to go off on a million tangents when asked a single question, as usual of people with superior academic backgrounds.

His mother and sister loathed it when his father went off on one of his long-winded stories, so Miki usually tried to circumvent it by asking him to teach him various random phrases.

"Oh, Miki. Do you want to go fishing with me next Sunday? Some of my co-workers went black bass fishing and said they got quite a catch."

"Oh, really? Great! Sounds fun!" replied Miki enthusiastically as he poured the beer into his father's glass. Truthfully speaking, he didn't really like fishing, but he wanted to make his father happy and ended up playing the role of a good son.

"You're already a junior in high school. Quit hanging onto Papa's hand. It's not normal for a kid your age to want to go fishing," jeered Manaka as she entered the dining room. "It feels like one of those big, happy families that you see on old TV dramas."

Their mother sighed from the kitchen table, astounded at her words.

Manaka was older than Miki by nine years and strikingly beautiful, like an iris protruding from a pool of water. Her personality was also striking, bluntly saying anything that came to mind.

She lay out on the couch on her stomach and changed the channel on the television as she sneered at Miki.

“You’re too old to be still playing with Papa. Go get a girlfriend or something.”

Miki grumbled to himself that he was just dumped today.

“What about you? Why don’t you stop writing those trash-like novels of yours and find a guy I can marry you off to?”

“It’s not trash-like; it’s trashy,” Manaka corrected her father.

Manaka wrote erotic romance novels for women. If Miki were in her position he’d never be able to face their parents, but his fearless sister was just fine with the family knowing the kind of novels that she wrote.

“Miki, get me a yogurt too, would you?”

“Don’t boss your brother around. Go and get it yourself.”

“Why not? Mama, you’re always getting Miki to help you with this and that.”

“That’s just Miki taking the initiative and helping me out himself.”

“Same difference. Anyway it’s only natural for a boy taken in as a stray to serve the family’s young mistress.”

“I can’t believe you, Manaka.”

Both parents gave her a look of reproach, but Miki didn’t really hate his sister’s offhanded jokes.

“Shall I add more sugar to better suit your tastes, Milady?” Miki inquired in a serious manner, which caused both mother and sister to burst into laughter.

It had been twelve years since Miki was left to this family, a distant relative of his. It was a happy family, probably one he’d never experience with his real family. He really loved his warm, generous parents and his sarcastic, but good-humored sister. Miki had no complaints; it was a happy life.