

I wiped the sweat off my forehead as I opened the door to LeBlanc and let Sumire in. "That was a good run," I said. "I might be in a lot better shape now, but I'm still clearly no match for an athlete."

"You kept up pretty well, all things considered," Sumire said. "You haven't spent most of your life going to hours-long practice sessions."

"For sure," I nodded. "I'll tell you what, I was *not* running 5Ks during the Urban Legend incident, and I got an earful from Reimu the next day as I lay on her floor with every muscle in my body screaming at me in agony. That's really what motivated me to get in shape."

We looked up at Sojiro, as well as Futaba who was helping him behind the counter. "You two look like you've been working hard."

"Just out for a morning run on our day off," I said. "She invited me."

Sumire smiled. "Good morning, Futaba."

"Hey there," Futaba replied. "You saw my invitation to study for midterms?"

"That's why we're here, yes," Sumire said.

"Cool. I got the textbooks and homework copies all stacked upstairs. We got a table set up there, too." Futaba looked at the stairs. "You can just go right up. We'll get some coffee and curry going, right Sojiro?"

Sojiro chuckled. "Well, I have customers to serve, so I'll leave it all to you."

"Roger that!" Futaba busily gathered ingredients while we made ourselves at home.

Sumire looked around. "It just doesn't feel the same without Ren here."

"Yeah, can't believe it's only been a week since Reimu and Tenshi were here, too," I said.

"I got the gist of it from Futaba, but..."

"Long story for another time," I said. "Let's just say it was a crazy night full of paint, goons, and other Metaverse shenanigans."

"If I'd known that was going on, I would have dropped everything to come help, and I would have called the others."

"Eh, I mean, we got a pretty tight crew together to resolve things, all things considered," I shrugged. "Also, the cat was pretty fluffy."

"That's what Futaba said." Sumire pulled over a chair to the table and took a seat. I took a seat opposite her. We pulled out our bags and got our respective coursework out. I would just silently get through my college homework while Sumire and Futaba studied, although I offered to help wherever I could.

I scanned some of Sumire's papers. "Sheesh, this stuff looks pretty advanced. You're just a second-year, but I wasn't seeing this stuff until near the end of my third."

"Shujin has pretty strict requirements for athletes on a scholarship, on top of already being an elite prep school," Sumire said. "I was also always the more 'bookish' one between me and Kasumi, so I always got slightly better grades."

I played with a pencil. I kept debating with myself whether or not to reveal that Kasumi was alive, ferrying souls across the Sanzu while her useless aunt napped under the tree with Eiki standing over her with an anger vein on her forehead, but I kept refraining from doing so.

Revealing that Akechi was still alive was already pushing it.

"I mean, I remember something my dad once told me: everyone is great at different things, so don't feel inadequate about not measuring up to someone else in one category, since you're likely way better than them at something else." I looked at her snack. "Like your cooking. I know you personally think it's nothing special, but I know several people who wish they had your skills."

"I've always been good at making tasty, healthy meals for my gym practice," Sumire said.

"Actually, I prepare most of my own food, because convenience food is just so unhealthy."

"I know what you mean," I said. "I used to practically live off instant yakisoba and other junk, but when I actually flipped the wrapper around and read the nutrition label, my glasses fell off my face, that's how much my eyes popped out, seeing all that fat and sodium and not much else in those things. I couldn't go back after that, and I've never felt happier or healthier. Heck, I learned to cook on the side and serve up healthy meals to my parents and brother, since none of us were eating too well."

"It's nice to hear those healthy habits became, well, habits."

"I mean, I didn't set out to become a super-fit Superstar or anything, I was just done with feeling like sludge anytime I exerted myself. I can take on more ambitious occult investigations now, or at least I could if Makoto wasn't such a big crybaby around ghosts."

"Then don't invite her," Sumire suggested earnestly.

"But it's funny!" We both laughed, just imagining someone as serious and straight-laced as Makoto getting super-spooped by so much as a witch's cackle acted out poorly by an overworked C-List idol.

I idly looked out the window. "Wonder what he's up to now."

"Ren? Oh, we talk on the phone almost every day, he's doing great. He's crushing all of his classes, since he already knows most of the material from his time at Shujin. He's also back

with his old friends and on the debate club. He was offered a full ride to the University of Tokyo once he graduates, and a job with Yoshida-sama.”

“Just like that? Dang, I came within a hair of missing out on my scholarship, and still needed some help from Haru to make sure I wasn’t mired in debt.” I thought for a moment. “Speaking of which, what’s your college plan?”

“I mean... well, I was going to keep gymnastics going as long as I can, but my long term plan was to study sports medicine and nutrition. I’m not really going to be as flexible at forty as I am now, after all.”

“Yeah, me personally, I wasn’t too sure what I wanted to do for a while either,” I said. “But, considering how well my social media accounts are doing, along with all the new attention I’m getting, plus my quick wits and reflexes I built up from spell card duels and other Gensokyo nonsense, I’m gonna try my hand at entertainment. I even have a spot on a talk show coming up at the end of the month.”

“My father’s talk show?”

“Let’s just say I asked politely,” I smiled.

“I’m sure you did.” We got started on our homework. Futaba came up a few minutes later with coffee and food, and we spent the morning going over all the midterm material. Sumire felt much more confident after the study session. Afterwards, I asked my new Origami app to suggest a place to go eat, and we hung out, just us three young ladies on a lazy Sunday afternoon.