

Soulmates

Von Tukuyomi

Kapitel 1: Of all the things that can go wrong

Anita King was used to sleep less than seven hours most of the time. It hardly bothered her, though she tended to feel a significant lack of enthusiasm to exercise at school whenever she did. Not that it mattered, really. She didn't go to school for that. She would occasionally drink an extra bottle of milk to make up for it, and everything would be fine.

Anita King hadn't had any problems with her lack of sleep for as long as she could remember.

But she had never expected her body to exact its revenge on her on the single special day on which punctuality mattered the most.

"Crap, I overslept!", the young girl cried in surprise as she practically leapt out of bed, flinging her blanket across the room in the process. With her hair ruffled and unruly, and her eyes wide in shock, she stared at her alarm clock, which hadn't made a single peep so far. In fact, it wasn't even set to do so.

Glaring at the clock and trying to resist the urge to smash the useless frog-resembling device, which she had bought only a few days earlier, she took a deep breath, not bothering to remind herself that it was herself who had forgotten to set the timer the previous night. She should have known better.

She had wanted to be prepared and take her time, but glancing at the hands of her clock once more to make sure, she saw that her day was about to go to hell right after it had begun.

She quickly changed into a simple pair of dark blue shorts and a beige long-sleeved shirt, cursing her bad luck that had granted her no time to look for something nicer to wear. She would have opted for paper clothes, but the thought of having to spend the entire day in those made her cringe. It was bad enough that they wore them on missions, but the cool looks and usual distraction from their itching nature made up for it.

Now fully clothed, Anita brushed past the curtain dividing the room she shared with her older sister Michelle. The bed was empty and the sheets in order, confirming Anita's suspicions. So she had been awake longer than her, and still hadn't bothered

to wake her even though she knew Anita's plans for today. Anita wondered what she had done to deserve such a family.

"Mi-nee!", the short girl shouted as she stomped down the stairs with unrestrained emphasis. She immediately spotted the oldest sister in the kitchenette, with her back turned to her.

"Good morning!", Michelle chirped unabashedly, not bothering to turn around to meet her younger sister's eyes. Her hands were busy to manage the pots and pans on the stove, which demanded her undivided attention.

"Why-", Anita was about to launch into a full force rant when she stopped dead at the sight of the kitchen utensils. She descended the stairs to their end and went over to Michelle curiously.

"Why didn't you wake me?", she asked in a much quieter tone now, assuming a completely non-threatening stance.

"You looked so peaceful sleeping, I couldn't bring myself to wake you.", Michelle answered with an overdramatic look on her face. Her right hand turned off one of the heater plates. The rice was perfectly cooked.

"And we all know how you can get in the morning.", another voice cut in, and Anita spun around to see Nenene on the stairs, still clad in her grey-striped pajamas. Not that Anita had needed to see her to know who this voice belonged to. Only one person ever talked to her like that.

Anita was about to counter, but Nenene's bemused smirk halted her. "My, is that what you're going to wear?", the older woman asked with a scandalized look on her face.

"What..." Anita immediately looked down at herself. She had only bought these clothes the other day, and they were freshly washed and ironed. It was true they probably looked a bit plain, and if she had had more time she would have picked something nicer to wear, but under these circumstances...

Suddenly a realization hit her and she immediately turned to Michelle angrily. "You told her!"

Michelle grinned, but lifted her arms in defense. "I wouldn't dare." Then without another word she redirected her attention to the stove.

"But how-", the girl mumbled as she scanned the living room until her eyes caught sight of yet another person.

It was Maggie, who had been sitting passively on the couch so far. She was in a crouching position, reading a book as usual. Anita didn't see her face, but Maggie's trembling hands were a dead give-away.

With one swift motion, the redhead flung a piece of paper at the book, effectively

ripping it from Maggie's grasp. Now with her face revealed, Maggie looked like a deer caught in the headlights.

"Busted.", Nenene commented dryly.

"Anita, I...", Maggie said, at a loss of words. She hated to make her sister angry, and was ashamed of herself as she thought back to the incident that had made her tell Nenene about Anita's special day. She had been too weak.

A firm smack on the head quickly brought her out of her thoughts, and when she looked up at Anita, she saw that the anger had already subsided, making way for simple annoyance.

"Don't be so hard on her.", Nenene said, lazily flopping down on the couch beside Maggie. "I made her tell me." At the sight of Nenene's dirty and overtly suggestive smile accompanied by a fierce blush on Maggie's cheeks, Anita decided to give it up.

Walking back over to Michelle, she saw that now rice, omelet, fried fish and steamed mushrooms were all ready and set beside Anita's favourite large lunch box.

"Will you take it from here?", Michelle asked and smiled gently, already knowing the answer.

Anita simply nodded gratefully, and gave her older sister a hug.

"Thank you, Mi-nee. You're the only one I can trust in this household.", she mumbled, causing Michelle to smile even more.

"I'll go look for some nice clothes for you.", the blonde said and went upstairs as Anita turned her attention towards arranging the bento.

"The kid is so energetic in the morning.", Nenene mumbled while stifling a yawn. Maggie, who had recovered her protection in the form of a book, remained silent. Nenene sensed her body stiffening, however. It was challenging her.

Leaning over to Maggie, she made sure to snake one arm around Maggie neck while bringing her mouth dangerously close to touching the taller woman's ear.

"Make me some coffee?", she asked in the sultriest voice she could muster so early in the morning, and watched Maggie's face redden with obvious satisfaction.

For a moment the bestselling author played with the idea of clinging to the other woman to see if she would struggle free, but her brain needed coffee. Badly. So she watched Maggie hurry away, taking a note in her mind to tease the shy woman more often.

While Maggie took a large cup from the cupboard right above the spot where Anita was just giving her creation the finishing touches, she couldn't help but stop to regard her small sister's bento in all its glory.

Anita needed a few moments to realize that Maggie's shadow above her wasn't moving anymore, but when she did, she let out an embarrassed squeak and quickly covered the bento with her body.

"Don't look, Ma-nee!"

Maggie, caught red-handed, looked down and mumbled a quick apology and ruffled Anita's hair gently before she occupied herself with the coffee machine.

"What're you doing so secretively?", Nenene, who had watched them, asked as she came over to see for herself.

She knew, of course, exactly what Anita was doing and normally wouldn't have bothered to stand up for that, but being able to tease Anita when she was in such a mood was a rarity, and it would be a waste not to seize the opportunity.

With one hand, Anita tried to shield the bento, while the other tried feebly to keep unwanted people, namely Nenene, away.

"Wow, a heart shape on the rice...that's so unlike you!", Nenene suddenly said and Anita realized that her efforts had been in vain. It had already been bad enough for her older sister to see it, but Nenene too...

Judging from the grin plastered onto the author's face, Anita had the feeling that she wasn't going to live this down anytime soon.

"Maggie, why don't you ever do something like this for me?", Nenene asked as innocently as she could manage, while hugging the dark-haired woman from behind. Which, in turn, caused Maggie to blush even more, if that was at all possible. But she also smiled, because she knew that Nenene being in such a good mood could only mean one thing: Things were going well for the author, and Maggie could imagine that she had a lot of ideas. The very thought caused her heart to flutter in anticipation. She couldn't wait to get her hand on Nenene's next book.

"Cut it out, you two. I'm busy here.", Anita grumbled in half-hearted annoyance, elbowing her way past the strange couple. Taking out two sets of chopsticks from a drawer and putting it above the finished meal, she finally closed the lid of the box with a sigh of relief.

A quick glance at the clock told her that she didn't have much time left before leaving, so she hurriedly started for the bathroom to wash her face and brush her teeth. Just before she went through the door however, she turned back around to face Maggie and Nenene with a threatening glint in her eyes.

"And don't you dare touching it!", was all she said before she closed the bathroom door behind her with emphasizing force.

"You'd think she kept her diary in there." Nenene was the first to comment on Anita's

overly secretive behaviour.

"It's a special day for her.", Maggie offered, subtly freeing herself from the smaller woman's grasp under the pretense of preparing the coffee.

"Still, she's acting as though the world depended on it.", Nenene said with a wave of her hand. She didn't get this kid. What was there to be anxious about?

"To her, it does.", Michelle interjected, coming back down from upstairs with Anita's clothes on her arm.

"I guess.", Nenene complied, yawning again while scratching her head, which was currently surrounded by a mop of tousled hair. She didn't care, right then.

"Anyway, I've got a lot of work to do.", she said as she made her way upstairs again. "Maggie, bring the coffee up once it's ready."

Maggie gave an affirmative grunt and already took sugar from the cupboard. She knew Nenene liked her coffee best not too hot and with two sugar cubes. It was something she had found out by herself, making coffee for the author every single morning. Of course, Nenene would have never told her that, but Maggie had used to watch her taking the first sip, judging from the author's initial expression whether the coffee was good or bad.

"Mi-nee! My clothes!", Anita called from the bathroom, her voice sounding hectic.

Michelle promptly replied by entering their relatively small (for a household consisting of four people, at least) bathroom, handing Anita a pair of neat black trousers and a white shirt with cuffed sleeves, which altogether didn't look overly formal, but not too recklessly casual either.

When Anita stepped out of the bathroom, washed and newly dressed, she was almost a little disappointed to see that Nenene had already gone back to her room instead of commenting on the new clothes. She could have needed a little honest input, even though it was unwelcome most of the time.

"You look good.", Maggie said and extended her hand to ruffle Anita's hair as she always used to do. However, as she saw the neatly styled mop of red, she refrained from doing so, doing her best to smile encouragingly instead. Anita didn't notice, but was thankful that at least everyone seemed to be cheering for her.

"Have a nice day.", Michelle behind Anita said with her sweetest of smiles as she gently pushed the hesitating smaller girl towards the door, where her bag with a still lukewarm lunch box, among other things inside, stood.

Anita picked it up and slung the shoulder strap over her head, deciding it was too late to turn back now. Today was the day.

"Well...I-I'll be going now.", Anita said with as much resolve as she could muster, and

quickly stepped through the door without waiting for an answer.

Once in the dim hall, with its bleak and grey concrete walls and equally simplistic stairs, and the door behind her tightly shut, she realized she was cut off. She was on her own now. Why her pounding heart and racing mind insisted to make such a big deal of this was beyond her.

Reminding herself of the time, she hurried down the stairs, skipping one stair with every step, but with her bag in mind deciding not to be too reckless.

However, as she reached the end of the hall and opened the entrance door, the warm sunlight that greeted her immediately brightened her mood.

The weather was unusually mild considering it was already autumn and the wind came across in a welcome soft breeze, which caused the branches of the trees to Anita's side to sway, but not strongly enough to lose the first few leaves that still successfully clung to it. Anita was glad she didn't take a jacket, because her long-sleeved shirt proved to be more than enough under the sun that shone down from the spotless sky completely unhindered.

She could already hear the newscasters on TV groaning about global warming and the shifting of seasons, but when it offered her such nice weather on a day like this, Anita couldn't bring herself to think that it was such a terrible thing.

Still, instead of taking her time and enjoying the weather on this calm morning, the girl immediately broke into a jog, determined to at least come not too late for what could become a very important day.

The way to the place Hisami and her had agreed on meeting at wasn't exactly far from Nenene's apartment, though Anita knew that it was a considerable way from Hisami's. Imagining the other girl to simply take a bike then, she decided not to worry over that fact too much. Not when she had so many other things on her mind already.

To reach her destination, Anita decided to skip on the beautiful avenue she usually preferred of taking, in order to take a shortcut to the park which lead along the rails and over a bridge. The sooner she got there, the better. Maybe Hisami wouldn't even be there yet, which would give Anita a little more time to mentally brace herself. She still had no idea what she was going to say or do. Maybe she should just relax and deal with it when the time came...

Anita couldn't help but think that she would mess things up either way. She just wasn't good with those things. At all.

Finally reaching the park, she noticed that it was still practically deserted. She could see a jogger in the distance, but other than that she was alone. Which wasn't particularly surprising, as it was still early on a Saturday morning.

Her feet traced the less-travelled path Hisami and her had walked two days earlier, leading her to the single bench at the side of a pond, which was hidden behind a large

and admittedly a little unruly bush, making it not the first spot to look for.

Curiously looking about, Anita walked over to the weather-worn bench and sat down, relieved that at least she wasn't late. Hisami wasn't there yet, though she expected the other girl to arrive at any minute, so she already took out the lunch box and placed it to her side. She couldn't wait to see Hisami's expression when she saw it. Would she be surprised? Happy? Confused?

Aside from this uncertainty, Anita had everything planned out. They would talk a little, then eat, and eventually come to the topic of Hisami's novel draft, which she had given her to read two days prior. Of course, Anita had read it on one go on the very same day, and was exited to tell Hisami her opinion about it. And then...then...Anita wouldn't know how to continue.

With a long sigh Anita leaned back on the bench, inwardly kicking herself. Of course it wasn't that easy. Maybe she should simply stop to think so much, fretting over every little thing as though she was about to meet someone for the first time.

Still, she could feel the rapid thumping in her chest. Her heart had been beating wildly ever since she had opened her eyes this morning, and it was only getting worse by the minute. She didn't know why she was so nervous, she had met with Hisami countless times before, but today was different. Today was special.

Laying her eyes on the slightly mist-covered lake in front of her, she spotted a duck family crossing it slowly, sending small ripples across the surface as they did. They didn't seem to have a single worry in the world.

The whole day still seemed so very ordinary. A perfectly calm, mild and uneventful day. But Anita had a feeling that it wouldn't stay like this for long.

And, as if to prove that feeling, Anita soon came face to face with the person she had anxiously waited for, who was in unexpected company of another.

"Hisa-chan.", Anita greeted her friend, who stood at the trunk of the nearest tree, as she stood up from the bench. She hadn't heard her friend arrive, and idly wondered how long Hisami had been standing by the tree without saying a word.

Anita smiled a little self-consciously, but her joy at seeing the other girl was rapidly diminished as she set her eyes on the other person.

"And Tooru-kun too." Anita acknowledged his presence with a short nod, unsure of what to think of the surprising set-up.

Okahara Tooru. It wasn't that she disliked the boy, but for him to show up today of all days, Anita couldn't help but feel a little wary. Something was off.

And what surprised her even more was the fact that both of them wore grim expressions, Hisami even more so than Tooru.

The boy was standing a little to the side, holding his bike to keep it from falling, which had probably served in bringing the both of them here.

"Anita...", Hisami said with a quivering voice, causing the girl in question to lock her eyes onto the other's. "I'm sorry."

The red-head opened her mouth slightly, but before she could think of anything to say, Hisami continued.

"I'm sorry about...today." Hisami looked around uncomfortably, too weak to look directly at the other girl. As she turned away she saw Anita's lunch box, and her expression immediately worsened.

"I know you wanted this to be a special day, but..." Helplessly, Hisami turned to Tooru, who simply stood with a blank expression, unsure of what to do. But seeing how Hisami was close to tears and seemingly unable to say it, Tooru decided to take over.

"Anita...there's something we need to tell you. It's important."