

Unplugged

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by [aleethebee \(aleebee\)](#)

Summary

"So what if she wasn't the infallible and serious girl wonder society wanted her to be. On @channel, you were just a name and some text. For Kurisu, that anonymity was a blessing."

Kurisu hadn't woken up that day with the intention of meeting the love of her life. Had she known the circumstances in which they would meet, perhaps she would have ditched @channel altogether.

i. anonymity

Chapter Summary

Kurisu starts an argument. Okabe finishes it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Kurisu couldn't believe what she was about to do.

It's stupid, her brain chirped, and she was bound to agree. *Sixteen-year-old geniuses* don't *argue with trolls online*.

She ought to keep scrolling. That was what she was here for, wasn't it? @channel was just a harmless distraction from the bleak, exhausting, eternal slump that was university life. Sure, it was riddled with memelords – their words, not hers – and she was lucky if she ever saw a genuinely interesting post get replies that went beyond “*that's cool, now tits plz?*”

Occasionally she would chip in with a bloated comment on the science channel rebutting someone's inane theory on the potential for telepathy, but for the most part, she was a lurker right down to the very marrow. And she intended to keep it that way.

But today wasn't an average day. Her father's sour mood has permeated the air and her mother's flowers were starting to wilt, making quite the sad sight from the urn of which they guarded. She was tired, unfathomably so, but her head wouldn't quit with all the noise and anxiety and voices from her most recent lecture. The pressure of tomorrow's essay was building to a fever pitch. Kurisu needed release, fast, and if it means she had to hurt some twenty-one-year-old frat boy's feelings online in order to get it – then, well, so be it.

The post that had garnered her ire was, at first glance, a blinding wall of text riddled with big words and even bigger misconceptions. She read it once, then twice, then vowed one last time because she was Kurisu Makise, damn it, a university student at sixteen and already well on her way to being the youngest ever to graduate with a neuroscience degree, and like *hell* she was going to let herself get hung up on a post fighting to prove *time-travel* of all things.

KuriGohan: *Are you stupid?*

Her eyes sought out the username responsible for this flaccid argument. Madscientist1? Really? They couldn't net the madscientist handle, so they had to tack on a number like some

thirteen-year-old newbie to the internet? Not that madscientist would have been any better. She supposed the topic *did* make more sense when pinned to a user like so.

Am I being too mean? she thought as she stared at her work-in-progress rebuttal. But then she thought – *it's the internet. They're going to call me a bitch and move on with their life. Why should I care?*

So, she started typing.

Her fingers were a blur across the keyboard. Madscientist1's original post consistently brought up the multiverse theory. Their main point was that skipping through time would be possible if we thought of time not as a straight line and more like a sandwich of infinite layers. (Again – their words. Not hers.) They waffled on about how reality had the potential to have many different existing facets, all of which could take place at the exact same time, here and now, piled on top of each other like some great cosmic burger of possibilities. It wasn't important, but she felt the need to note that they also compared this theory to the branching routes of a dating sim visual novel. Typical.

Kurusu had three reasons why this hypothesis rubbed the wrong way:

1. It was a seriously worded scientific essay with sandwich, burger & eroge game comparisons littered throughout.
2. Madscientist1 seemed obsessed with the phrase *furthermore*. Furthermore this, furthermore that, furthermore “reality is just god's personal porn game of which there is no escape” and *this is a disgrace to my @channel feed Mr. Mad Scientist One*.
3. Time-travel is not possible. End of discussion.

By the time the click-clacking of her keyboard had faded into nothingness, Kurisu was staring back at her own wall of text, this one perfectly punctuated and purged of any flaws. A small part of herself was proud in the admittedly empty achievement. An even larger part was ashamed. And rightfully so. She had just spent a full hour rebutting what was most likely a gag post on a site famous for hosting the dregs of society. Anonymity could be both a blessing and a curse; @channel was out to prove that it was most definitely a curse.

And yet that was what had lured Kurisu in. Sometimes she wanted nothing more than to go back to when things were simple. When there was no fame attached to her name; when her father didn't look at her like he would at a cockroach begging to be crushed; when her mother was alive and well.

Kurusu couldn't revisit the past. That much was certain. And the present looked up to her with so much expectation and praise that even thinking about it summoned a swirling pit in her stomach. But there was something she *could* do and that was hiding behind her nerdy username to pretend, if only for a short while, that she was just a normal girl who liked watching trolls bait other trolls and laughing at memes on occasion. So what if she wasn't the infallible and serious girl wonder society wanted her to be. On @channel, you were just a name and some text. For Kurisu, that anonymity was a blessing.

In the dark, stale air of her room, Kurisu jolted. Her mouse hovered over the send button. The only light was the light from her computer screen, a blaring and washed out yellow that

reflected @channel's plain 2004-era chat-board design. She sighed, the fight all but leaving her system. If nothing else, her rant at Madscentist1 had aired her many grievances over the topic of time-travel. There was no point in focusing on pseudoscience that actively worked against the laws of physics. She pressed send and shoved back in her chair, already thinking about tomorrow's looming essay and how she really should've spent that last hour working on it. She was famous among her lecturers for barely scraping by deadlines. Kurisu blamed performance anxiety.

She was thinking of flicking Maho a quick message when a small *bing* on the @channel tab trilled to life. Kurisu blinked. It was either the latest post on her favourite science meme board or a message that had her username tagged. She bet on the latter.

Sure enough, Madscentist1's name flashed in all its red comic sans glory. Kurisu couldn't resist rolling her eyes. To reply that fast, he was either firing off a list of expletives or telling her to chill the fuck out and indulge some fantasy in her life. The last guy she'd fought with had said just that. *"Do you have to be such a buzzkill? I'm not saying it's a definite fact. Just that it's possible. Live a little, why don't you. Science never would have gotten this far without a bit of imagination."*

Kurisu had been willing to admit that they had a point. Then she'd read their username: queefbelcher69. And any argument they could have possibly concocted died alongside their dignity.

Opening up the notification, Kurisu steeled her heart and scrolled down. What she saw betrayed what she'd expected.

Madscentist1: *Have I struck a nerve?*

"What?" Too late. Kurisu bit down on her lip, hard. *Stupid.* Her father had an early morning lecture at the university. It was already 2am, a realization that turned her blood cold. As the deafening silence resumed, thick and softly punctured by the distant snores of Shouichi, Kurisu felt her heart resume and renewed heat pool through her veins. Good. So he hadn't heard. She resolved to be extra quiet and scooted closer on her chair.

The logical part of her brain begged that she either get some sleep or be a productive, timely university student for once in her life – but for as logical as Kurisu could be, that fact did not stand true when it came to picking her arguments. As soon as her pride was affronted, she had to fight back, even if it was in something as silly or inconsequential as an online debate over time-travel.

KuriGohan: *You haven't struck anything. I'm simply debasing your idiotic argument. Which, by the way, you have yet to answer my initial question: are you stupid?*

Madscientist1: *I'm no fool. I've merely pointed out a pivotal flaw in how we view time.*

KuriGohan: *And your solution to that was to compare time to cheeseburgers and dating sims?*

Madscientist1: *You see a childish metaphor. I see a simplified comparison for all the sheeple out there.*

KuriGohan: *oh my god*

Madscientist1: *Think about it. How many scientific essays do you read that alienate the common crowd? Science has gathered a reputation for being elitist at best and discriminatory at worst. I'm trying to bring grand ideas and loaded concepts down to a more understandable level. Comparing time to a burger might seem pathetic to you, but to me, I see it as an easy way to break down a complicated subject for someone uninitiated in the field.*

KuriGohan: *Okay. But consider this: time-travel isn't a science.*

Madscientist1: *It is too.*

KuriGohan: *It most certainly is not.*

Madscientist1: *The mechanics of time-travel are rooted in science just as everything else in our reality is.*

KuriGohan: *See, that's the thing. You talk like we've already got some time-travel taxi on the go. We aren't jumping into big blue police boxes and gallivanting across the universe. It's a tantalizing idea, sure, but it's simply beyond the reaches of scientific plausibility. Your*

simplified “explanations” do nothing to help the scientific community when all you’re fighting for is a science fiction concept disproved years ago.

Madscientist1: *Ha. They warned me there would be naysayers.*

KuriGohan: *Excuse me? Naysayers?*

Madscientist1: *Disbelievers. Slanderers. Haters. People like you with so closed a mind that you can barely muster the faith to reach out and grasp what is so obviously right in front of you.*

KuriGohan: *I know what naysayers means. You’re just starting to sound like a cultist and frankly, I don’t have time for that. I have an essay due in less than 24 hours. Why am I even talking to you?*

Kurisu rubbed at her face. The artificial computer light was starting to burn her eyes. She guessed that was inevitable after seven hours of non-stop scrolling through the interwebs. Okay, so maybe she did have a slight problem. Regardless, she was about at her limit with Madscientist1’s pointless ideology. He prattled on like some wannabe cult leader bent on having her ‘see the light.’ She was about to log off and roll into bed (where she’d probably wind up going through the @channel app because yay, insomnia) when one last notif coaxed both a sigh and a reluctant click.

Madscientist1: *You like Doctor Who?*

For the second time that night, Madscientist1 surprised her.

@channel was a Japanese anonymous messaging board, similar to its American equivalent 4chan or – to a lesser extent – Reddit. If she wanted to entrench herself in English memes and lopsided scientific discussion, she’d just use those sites. Which she did, admittedly. But as a Japanese woman living the American life at what was one of the whitest universities in the country, by the end of the day she’d had her fill of English culture. In a weird way, @channel was an important connection to home. It kept her Japanese fresh, her memes even fresher (oh god help her she was becoming one of *them*, the memelords) and it reminded her that America wasn’t forever. *This* (the dark bedroom, her brooding father, the sad urn and its dead flowers on the high-reaching bookshelf) wasn’t permanent.

All this to say that in her sleep-deprived state, Kurisu hadn't been expecting Doctor Who to be brought up because *what?*

It wasn't as if the show didn't have a dedicated following in Japan. It did. In fact, it was more popular over there now than ever. But it was still only a niche interest, rarely – if ever – brought up in @channel unless as a recommendation to someone seeking foreign science fiction TV shows or movies.

KuriGohan: *You know Doctor Who?*

Madscientist1: *Obviously.*

KuriGohan: *Oh. Okay... Well. Yeah, I've seen a few episodes.*

That was an understatement.

KuriGohan: *Who's your favourite Doctor?*

Madscientist1: *Is it a cop-out to say ... all of them?*

For some reason, in what could only be attributed to her coffee-infused, sleep-deprived state, Kurisu laughed.

KuriGohan: *It's about the most generic question you get asked when you bring up Doctor Who, so if you really were a fan, you'd have picked a favourite.*

Madscientist1: *Ah, a gatekeeper. No casuals allowed, is that it? I'd have hoped for better from you, KuriGohan.*

KuriGohan: *says the guy who compares time to cheeseburgers and eroges!!*

Madscientist1: *You're really hung up on that, aren't you?*

KuriGohan: *It's a disgrace to everything I stand for; so yes. I am.*

KuriGohan: *Wait a minute. I just remembered – I was leaving!*

Madscientist1: *And yet you still refuse to log off. Interesting.*

Madscientist1: *One might begin to think you're enjoying this conversation.*

KuriGohan: *Ew. No.*

KuriGohan: *I'm just tired. And bored. And procrastinating on this dumb 2000-word essay that's due tomorrow, so I gotta procrastinate even more until the eventual panic of my approaching deadline boots my ass into survival mode. You're a good distraction until that happens.*

queefbelcher69: *can you guys take this to dms? you keep bumping this post up on my feed and it's getting super annoying.*

Ah. Queefbelcher69. Her mortal enemy.

Madscientist1: *Shut it, queefbelcher.*

Finally Madscientist1 said something she could get behind.

KuriGohan: *Just block the post if it's that much of a pain, Queef.*

queefbelcher69: *i'm just saying. have some consideration for your fellow @channelers.*

And just like that, Queef had opened the flood-gates. Suddenly Madscientist1's thread surged with replies.

Lisa4458: *hi honeys! lookin for a good time? dm me! nudes and feet pics available for a very special price ...*

Atrophy_Rising: *Cool theory dude.*

cognitive.dissonance: *This doesn't belong on @science. Someone tag a mod? We're a channel specifically for the latest in scientific discoveries and fostering genuine discussion, NOT for proposing half-baked meme theories about pseudosciences.*

Sochi: *Mod here. Sorry for the porn-bot, @channel's had a recent surge of those. Gonna close this thread due to conversation getting out of hand. If you have any disputes, feel free to message either me or another mod of the @channel science board as listed in the sidebar. Have a good day.*

And just like that, it was over.

Kurisu deflated in her chair, mind racing at a million miles per minute. What had just happened? She'd argued with a stranger online, not a wholly uncommon occurrence, but that argument had turned into an oddly ... She didn't want to say pleasant conversation, even though she had laughed at one point; the man - and she was certain he was a man now, her women's intuition declared it so - had been so out of this world, even for a run-of-the-mill troll, that she couldn't help but allow herself to be strung along. Just another historical moment to add to the @channel history books. Embarrassment turned her cheeks into smouldering cups of hot coal.

Before she could even take a deep breath to compose herself, another notification had sprung to life on her screen.

Don't do it, her logic said. Think of sleep. Think of the essay.

She did not.

It was a direct message from Mads scientist1. Predictable.

Mads scientist1: *So the thread might be dead, but our argument is far from over.*

KuriGohan: *Who gave you permission to private message me? Get out. Shoo.*

Mads scientist1: *the queef guy had a good point. What better place to have a battle of wits than here, 1v1, mano a mano?*

KuriGohan: *First of all, the queef guy's "good points" are immediately invalidated by the fact that he is known as the queef guy.*

KuriGohan: *Secondly, I'm not having a ... battle of wits with you. I made my stance quite clear on your theory. There's nothing left to prove. I've won.*

Mads scientist1: *And what if I said I could disprove you? What then?*

KuriGohan: *If you can prove me wrong then go right ahead! You know, everyone always says I'm so close-minded. I'm not. If you really have the secret to time-travel right here and now, prove it to me. If I see it, I'll believe it. Go on. I'm waiting.*

Mads scientist1: *You know it's not that simple.*

KuriGohan: *Of course it's not.*

KuriGohan: *Anyway. I'm tired. I need to sleep.*

KuriGohan: *Catch you later, I guess.*

Madscientist1: *Catch me later?*

KuriGohan: *Oh. It's American slang. It means see you soon ... or something.*

KuriGohan: *I'm too tired for this. It's hard to be bilingual at 2 o'clock in the morning.*

Madscientist1: *Ah. You're American. That explains a lot.*

KuriGohan: *Shut up. I'm not American, I'm Japanese.*

KuriGohan: *I just grew up in America. And I attend an American university. And my mum was half American - oh shit. I really am an American, huh?*

Madscientist1: *It would appear so, weird assistant of mine.*

KuriGohan: *Hey. If anyone here is weird, it's you. And I am NOT your assistant.*

Madscientist1: *Whatever you say, assistant.*

Kurisu's next reply was the knife emoji.

KuriGohan: *Okay, for real now, I gotta go. I'll see you later. Maybe.*

KuriGohan: *If you send any dick pics, I will find you, and I will kill you.*

KuriGohan: *Nice meeting you, I suppose. I don't think 'nice' is the right word but it will have to do.*

Kurisu didn't wait to see what his reply was. If she had learned anything from tonight's foray into the deep dark pits of @channel, it was that she was way too easily sucked into people's conversational orbits. She slammed all tabs shut and pushed back on her chair so that it spun across to her bed, from which she ungracefully flopped and rolled onto her back. She'd been too tired to shut her computer off, so the fuzzy light cast a blue sheen across her walls and illuminated various posters of brain anatomy and neurotransmitters.

She wouldn't think of Madscientist1 again until her next session of @channel. As soon as she'd logged out, KuriGohan had died, and Kurisu Makise – American girl genius, upcoming neuroscientist, the shining light of Viktor Chondria University – had descended to take her place. *There isn't anything wrong with that*, she thought as the foggy weight of sleep sent clouds to cover her consciousness; after all, @channel wasn't real life. It was a break, a game, a distraction, nothing more and nothing less.

(Little did she know that the mysterious Madscientist1 would eventually know her by her real name – and that she'd come to know him as her boyfriend.)

Chapter End Notes

It hit me that next year, I'm going to university to major in creative writing and Japanese.

That's all well and good, but
ohmygodihaventwrittenanythinginforeverimsooutofpracticesendhelpplease.

And thus, Unplugged was born.

In all seriousness, thank you so much for reading the first chapter. This is my first time writing in quite a long while, so I do apologize for my rustiness. I've been intending to write a Steins;Gate fanfiction since when I first became obsessed with the series back in 2012, so a mere seven years later and I'm finally getting around to it. I swear, time moves at a turtle's pace for me.

I hope you enjoyed the start of what I intend to be a fairly long-running fic centred around the awkward online interactions of one mad scientist and his furiously stubborn assistant. Where will they go from here? If you're keen to find out, consider throwing me a kudos and a bookmark. Comments also never fail to put a smile on my face. So don't be shy, come say hi!

Either way, I'll see you in the next chapter!

ii. names

Chapter Summary

in which okabe introduces hououin and kurisu digs her own grave.

Chapter Notes

Just a quick note. The @channel I've written here is very fictionalized. I cheated a tad and decided to make it more of a blend between Reddit and 4chan. It's a messy concoction of a site. Definitely a chaotic-evil on the alignment chart.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Okabe couldn't remember the first time he'd ventured into @channel's deep, dark depths.

He had probably been around ten years old and on the hunt for porn. With parents as prickly as his, he'd been forced to get creative with his search queries, and thus the anonymous instant messaging board had shone like a bright star amidst a sea of depravity. His mother might have been cleverer than most middle-aged helicopter moms, but she was still a fifty-year-old woman who declared Okabe a computer genius when his solution to all technology-related problems was to simply press the restart button. While she had figured out how to look at the search history, he doubted that she'd be working out the meaning of 'NSFW' anytime soon.

Thus, @channel's NSFW board was technically where it all began.

As the years flashed by, Okabe's frequent trips to @channel became less about leering at boobs and more to do with the fact that the site was a host for so many sub-channels. From programming in-jokes to political discussions and the latest in scientific discoveries, there was quite literally something for everybody if you were willing to swim through porn bots, clowns and national security threats to get to it. By the time he was a spotty teenager perched precariously on the edge of seventeen, the madscientist1 handle had built up a hefty collection of likes, comments and posts spread out across several years and over many different topics. Unlike his newly appointed American assistant, however, this was something Okabe thought to be proud of.

@channel was a key part of Okabe's ritual nowadays. After an energy-sapping day at school (fighting the organization and powers that be really did leave little time for homework), he'd plunk himself down in front of his overheating Windows XP, the dying wheeze of its fans the only puncture in a lonely, quiet room, and he'd do what all other men did upon selling their

soul to the dregs of the internet underworld: he'd scroll, a mindless channel surfing zombie with no other end goal in mind than reaching the end of the page, which he'd made sure was impossible by turning on *infinite scrolling*. He really was his own worst enemy.

On this particular day, however, he couldn't stop his gaze from flicking to his open message window. After KuriGohan had left in a whirlwind of confusingly sleepy messages, he'd sent a few of his own to jibe her on, hoping just a tiny bit that in the morning she'd promptly reply telling him to *fuck off*. He couldn't fathom why or how their conversation had taken such a turn. His initial post was half inane rambling, half a serious rant regarding society's close-mindedness around confronting and tackling the plausibility of time-travel. How else would great discoveries ever be made unless geniuses (like yours truly) took to the front-line (in this case, @channel) and fought for what was so obviously a necessary cause? KuriGohan was just like the rest of them: a self-proclaimed 'realist' content with preserving her reputation and unwilling to venture out on a limb.

It was pathetic.

And still, he waited.

Okabe had to wonder why he even cared.

"Tuturu!" The door slammed open, spilling warm yellow light into his ramshackle box of a room. Okabe instinctively spun around on his chair; shoulders squared as if to guard any innocent souls from the sin on his screen. He was lucky that this time, said sin was a cute video of a cat chasing its own tail, but years of paranoia and an annoyingly nosy mother meant his reflexes never failed to kick in when he needed them most. "Earth to Okarin! I bring snacks!" True to her word, two heavy grocery bags weighed down her hands. With a bright, oblivious smile, Mayuri skipped her way in, dropping one bag on his desk and flopping unceremoniously down on the bean cushion she claimed as her own.

Okabe relaxed, half-turning in his chair so he could keep both @channel and Mayuri in his sights. "How many times must I tell you? It's Hououin Kyouma. And you can't just barge into my room whenever you damn well please."

"I thought hostages didn't need an invitation?" Mayuri replied, eyes so big and doughy it was hard to *truly* be mad. Okabe could count on one hand the number of times his childhood friend had genuinely upset him, and most of those times were from when they were toddlers who couldn't agree on what game to play. It was a war of which he'd long ago won, and a game that continued to this day – though many would argue it was less a game now that they were older and more a delusion.

"Be that as it may," he rumbled, voice thick from disuse, "the Organization has eyes and ears everywhere. Maybe even within these walls. You'd do well to exercise a modicum of caution."

She giggled, a sound as soft and high as the morning warbles of birdsong. "Oh, Okarin. You're so silly. Eat some food. I got your favorite: Dr Pepper *and* soy ramen."

Okabe peeked into the plastic bag and sighed. “Soy ramen? Again? Have you no consideration for the palette?”

“Aw.” Mayuri blinked, disappointment scrawled clear and vivid across her face. She had her own ramen bowl balanced on one knee. “But Mayushii thought it was your fave ...” She hung her head and scooped a generous amount of noodles into her mouth for dramatic effect. Okabe didn’t have the heart to say no, he’d only eaten it because she kept buying the damn thing and that the very thought of soy now was enough to make his stomach turn.

Curse his good conscience. With a resigned sigh, Okabe pulled out the steaming takeaway bowl and, waving his chopsticks, said, “ah, you see, that was a test. You caught me. Soy ramen is, indeed, the most esteemed of all ramen. Good work, Mayuri.”

His mother often commented that Mayuri had him wrapped around her little finger. Perhaps she was right. The girl was smiling now, disappointment forgotten; with an out-of-tune humming that never failed to add a splatter of colour to his room, she tore into her school-bag, found the manga she wanted to read, and made herself at home.

It didn’t matter how many times Okabe lectured her. Mayuri had no concept of personal space, at least not when she was around him. There were constant rumours regarding whether they were a *thing* or not. It didn’t help that Mayuri was very hands-on when it came to showing affection. She’d toss her hands around his neck and press uncomfortably close, or force-feed him at school like some overcompensating, worrywart of a girlfriend. It was frankly a bit of a pain, especially considering Mayuri was rather popular and had a vast array of friends to call her own. Okabe had nothing and no-one; he preferred to keep it that way.

“I thought you were going to hang out with Katsumi today?” Okabe grumbled as he swirled his chopsticks through the goopy, sticky mess.

“We did! I got a bunch of new fabrics for my cosplay. We’re gonna tag-team Hilda and Mockingjay at next month’s MagiCon, so I’m super excited to start on my outfit.”

“Hilda and Mockingjay?” He couldn’t keep the amusement from his voice. “Remind me who they are again.”

Mayuri puffed out her cheeks. “Okarin!”

“Hououin Kyouma.”

She ignored him. “You should know this by now. Magical Shooting Star Miracle Girl is the best magical girl anime ever.”

“You said that about the last one. What was it ... Magic Pom Pom Pomeranians?”

“Pomodoro,” she corrected with an indignant huff.

“Well, that makes about even less sense.”

“Just you wait, Okarin. I’ll make a fan out of you yet.”

“Debatable. I have more important things to do with my time. Being a mad scientist is a thankless and isolating job, yet here I am, a brave soul charging onward into fields unknown. If I don’t do it, who will? KuriGohan? I think not.”

He didn’t know why their name popped into his head. Of all people to linger in his brain, it had to be that insulting @channeler who practically oozed scorn from across the sea.

Mayuri tilted her head, the tail-end of a noodle hanging off her lip. “Kuri ... huh? Oh! Like Dragon Ball Z?”

That caught Okabe’s interest. “Dragon Ball Z?” he mused.

“Yeah. Like ...” She cupped her hands. “Kame.” Shoved them forward. “Hame.” And with a shout, “HA!”

Okabe stared at his young charge, expression blank.

“It’s a Dragon Ball Z thing,” Mayuri supplied, furrowing her brow as if she couldn’t fathom how the reference could go over his head. It hadn’t; he just wasn’t expecting Mayuri to act the whole thing out. “Kuri reminds me of Kuririn, one of the side-characters.”

“In other words, it’s something only an otaku would know,” Okabe said.

“Don’t act like you’re not one,” Mayuri whined. “You used to watch RaiNet with me all the time.”

Of course, Okabe knew what Kamehameha and Dragon Ball Z was. He’d spent more than his fair share of time in the meme and anime channels. It hadn’t clicked, however, that KuriGohan’s name was a direct reference to something so ... nerdy. He chuckled to himself, a plan welling up in his mind,

No longer paying attention to the girl slouched over his bean cushion, he spun back around to @channel and, fingers flying, began to type.

Madscientist1: *Well, well, well.*

Mere seconds later, a *bing*.

KuriGohan: *Woah. No dick pic? I’m shook.*

KuriGohan: *Very well. I’ll bite. What do you want?*

Madscientist1: *The hostility. Is that any way to treat your master?*

KuriGohan: *If you call yourself ‘my master’ again, I will legally be obliged to kill you.*

Another knife emoji.

KuriGohan: *Don’t test me, Mad Scientist One.*

Madscientist1: *I assure you, I meant it in only the most wholesome of ways.*

Madscientist1: *You are my assistant after all.*

Madscientist1: *What? Were you thinking something ... dirty?*

Madscientist1: *How scandalous, KuriGohan. Or should I say: Kuririn. Why don’t you just tack on Kamehameha at the end there? You might as well embrace your inner weeb.*

KuriGohan: *That’s your big reveal?*

KuriGohan: *You finally got the reference in my name?*

KuriGohan: *Congratulations. I’d send you a cookie but, you know, stranger danger and all.*

Madscientist1: *You’re not the least bit ashamed that your handle is something that ...*

KuriGohan: *Say it.*

KuriGohan: *I dare you.*

He responded with a simple smiley-face.

KuriGohan: *You know what, I don’t have to take this from you.*

KuriGohan: *Madscientist1. What kind of name is that?*

KuriGohan: *Don’t tell me you’re actually a mad scientist. Please. Don’t.*

Madscientist1: *What do you have against mad scientists anyway? All the greats had a touch of madness. Science is nothing without it.*

KuriGohan: *Says the mad scientist on @channel. Uh-huh. Whatever helps you sleep at night, bud.*

Madscientist1: *You’re here too.*

KuriGohan: ...

KuriGohan: *Touché.*

For the first time in what felt like forever – or what may have been his first time at all – Okabe laughed.

Not the mad-scientist chortle that he loved to crow when flustered or out of his depth; not the deep inhale he'd give when Mayuri did something exasperating, or when he'd see a terrible meme and comment 'LOL' even though he really wasn't 'laughing out loud,' far from it in fact. It was low-key depressing at that moment to realize he hadn't *really* laughed lately, the short, clipped kind that welled up from your stomach on its own accord and spilled from your lips before you could hope to swallow it down.

It was such a rough, callous sound that Mayuri's head whipped up from her manga and she stared, eyes big as saucers. "Oh no, are you choking?" she asked. The mere possibility seemed to rile her up into a frenzy. "Should I go get your mom? Or an ambulance?"

"What? No. I just ... read something online." *Something that wasn't even very funny*, he reflected.

"On your site thingy?" Mayuri was intrigued now, her prior panic forgotten. He often wondered at the girl's ability to root herself in the present. She never seemed to look back, or forward for that matter. She was like a puppy trapped in human form. "I thought you said @channer-"

"@channel, grasshopper."

"@channel was a," and she splayed open her hands, folding down one finger each time she listed off a word. Cesspool, hell and garbage mound were among the list.

"I'm aware what I said," Okabe replied, turning back to his screen and finding no other message from KuriGohan. The disappointment was confusing. Why did he have such a need to continue this stunted conversation? She – no, they, most likely he because it's @channel and per the saying by its most frequent residents, "girls don't exist here," – barraged him with insults and exuded a pompous air that reminded him of a teacher with a stick permanently lodged up their ass. That was without even mentioning their fervent opposition to his time-travel theory.

Mayuri's eyes were beginning to feel like hot coals burning into his side. Okabe cleared his throat. "You do realize that I don't partake in this site of my own volition. It's merely an act, a façade, a necessary evil in order to infiltrate the Organization and promote sabotage from within."

He didn't try to explain why shady government officials would be lurking @channel of all places, but that was the great thing about Mayuri – she didn't ask. She just accepted his

words with a smile and a nod. He was about to return to his conversation with KuriGohan when Mayuri, ever the persistent one, had one final note to add.

“It’s just nice. Hearing you laugh like that. Sometimes you look so sad, Okarin, and it makes me sad too.”

He said nothing.

What was there to say?

Okabe looked back to his screen. A lump had lodged itself in his throat.

Madscientist1: *So ... how did you go on your essay?*

KuriGohan did not reply.

Later that night, once he’d walked Mayuri home and after a few hours of working on his latest gadget, a toy gun with the potential to function as a TV remote, Okabe had returned to his desk in a tired and unshaven slump. Whilst school demanded an early start, he figured there was time to spare on some more mindless scrolling.

There was another aspect to his later-than-usual @channeling that he wasn’t quite ready to admit, namely because he hardly understood it yet himself. But the longer he waited, the less likely it seemed, and so Okabe was left feeling strangely empty for a reason he could not fathom.

He was just about to call it a night – at 3am, no less – when the familiar *bing* wormed its way into his ears.

KuriGohan: *Sorry. You caught me when I was going to a lecture.*

KuriGohan : *Anyway, the essay went well.*

KuriGohan: *I was freaking out over nothing. I scored top marks again, so turns out procrastination is the key to getting good grades.*

KuriGohan: *By the way, if you’re 12, don’t listen to me. I refuse to be responsible for yet another essay-anxious disaster. Procrastinating is never fun. Do your homework.*

Madscientist1: *Rude. I’m not 12.*

KuriGohan: *Ugh. So you are a 30-year-old basement dweller?*

Madscientist1: *I'm nothing of the sort. I'll have you know I turn seventeen next month. If anyone here is the virgin dwelling in their mother's basement, it's you.*

KuriGohan: *Me? No way. In case you've already forgotten, I go to university.*

Madscientist1: *Like being a university student means you're not a virgin. Or a basement squatter.*

KuriGohan : *I didn't mean I wasn't a virgin, idiot! Just that I don't live in a basement.*

KuriGohan: *Wait. Shut up. Forget you ever saw that.*

KuriGohan: *I neither confirm nor deny my virginity.*

KuriGohan: *I'm just making this worse for myself, aren't I?*

Madscientist1: *There, there, assistant. There's always a pillow to practice on.*

KuriGohan: *You're disgusting, you know that.*

Madscientist1: *I'm not the one who brought it up.*

KuriGohan: *Yet you're carrying it on. Pervert.*

There was an unspoken question hanging between them. *Why are we still talking?* And neither could provide the answer. To an outsider, their exchange would have looked unpleasant, riddled with subtle jabs and barely masked insults, but to Okabe the conversation felt charged, maybe even a tad playful.

And that meant something.

Mayuri would always be his best friend. That much was certain. But she was, well, for lack of a better word – *Mayuri*. He'd tease her and she would return with a Mayuri-approved trademark smile, or he'd ramble on about some new gadget or technological advancement and she'd look up from her knitting, swallow a giggle and marvel at just how excited it had made him. Their relationship was quiet, comforting, routine. He expected nothing less and Mayuri wanted nothing more.

It felt nice, however, to talk to someone different; someone who wasn't afraid to lash out and gave as good as they got. Even if they were a stranger of questionable gender and age, the constant stream of unfiltered *talk* filled a hole in his heart that he hadn't realized existed.

Madscientist1: *Kuririn? Calling me a pervert? That's rich.*

KuriGohan: *Don't.*

Madscientist1: *Don't what, call you a pervert? Double standards much.*

KuriGohan: *Well, that too, but also don't call me Kuririn.*

Madscientist1: *Aha! So you are ashamed!*

KuriGohan: *I'm not ashamed. It just feels weird. It makes me think of a balding middle-aged man and I am none of those things.*

Madscientist1: *Fine. I have a deal for you.*

KuriGohan: *Oh no. Here it comes.*

KuriGohan: *The inevitable ...*

KuriGohan: *The inescapable ...*

Madscientist1: *I'm not going to ask for feet pics.*

Madscientist1: *Or anything else, for that matter.*

Madscientist1: *I just thought we could do a trade. A tit for tat, so to speak.*

Madscientist1: *You give me your name and I'll give you mine.*

KuriGohan: *How about no? We literally just met yesterday. You could be a serial killer for all I know.*

Madscientist1: *And what? I'm going to hunt you down by your first name alone?*

Madscientist1: *Here. Let me make it easier for you. My name is Hououin Kyouma.*

Okay, so it wasn't *really*, but that was the beauty of the internet. He could be whatever he wanted to be. If Mayuri refused to use the Hououin alias because of how much more cutesy 'Okarin' sounded, then KuriGohan would have no choice but to acknowledge him as *the* mad scientist Kyouma, no Okabe attached. Of course, the same would apply to her; she could go by any persona, pluck a name out of thin air, and he'd have no choice but to accept it as truth. It wasn't as if they would ever come to know the real person behind the screen, so what harm was there in having a bit of fun in the meanwhile?

Instead of awe at his totally original and inspired name, however, KuriGohan reacted with ire.

KuriGohan: *Seriously? Hououin Kyouma? Like hell that's your real name.*

KuriGohan: *It sounds like a hairball my cat would cough up.*

KuriGohan: *No offence. Not that you can take any. Because it's not your real name.*

Okabe's nostrils flared. It was evidently her turn to strike a nerve.

Madscientist1: *I should have known you would be jealous. Not everyone is as blessed with a name such as mine. It's okay, my dear Kuririn. You are forgiven.*

KuriGohan: *I told you, don't call me Kuririn!*

Madscientist1: *Poor, poor Kuririn. I'd cry too if that were my name.*

KuriGohan: *Stop it!!*

Madscientist1: *If only there were some way to make me stop ...*

For a full minute, there was only silence. Okabe's stomach tightened, the thought of having pushed too far encroaching on his mind; they were still only strangers, after all, and she had no obligation to put up with his incessant bullshit. It was a miracle she had stuck around for as long as she had, all things considered.

He was just beginning to embrace the fact that she must have tired of their game when finally, her reply came through, stark and to the point.

KuriGohan: *Christina.*

KuriGohan: *That's my real name.*

And for the second time that night, he laughed.

Madscientist1: *lol*

KuriGohan: *Don't lol me. What the hell? What's there to lol.*

Madscientist1: *It's just ... very American.*

Madscientist1: *Don't worry though. It suits you.*

KuriGohan: *Like I was looking for validation from you, of all people. Mad Scientist One.*

Madscientist1: *Hey. That's Hououin Kyouma to you.*

KuriGohan: *No, it's really not.*

Madscientist1: *Such flagrant disrespect, Christina.*

Madscientist1: *Is that any way to treat your fellow lab member?*

KuriGohan: *I take it back. Don't call me Christina. I don't know how you've done it but congratulations, it sounds creepy coming from you.*

Madscientist1: *Uh-uh. No takebacks, Christina. You've made your bed. Now you're bound to lie in it.*

KuriGohan: *Mad Scientist One.*

Madscientist1: *Assistant.*

KuriGohan: *Pervert.*

Madscientist1: *Virgin.*

KuriGohan: *Okay, I'm leaving. I've got more important things to do than bicker with you. Shouldn't you be in bed anyway? It's nearly 4am over there.*

Madscientist1: *A mad scientist has no need for this "sleep" you speak of.*

KuriGohan: *--*

KuriGohan: *Alright. Gotta go. Talk to you later.*

KuriGohan: *Maybe. I'm not committing so. Don't hold your breath.*

The very next morning, Christina messaged first.

Chapter End Notes

kurisu: i've only had mad scientist one for a day and a half but if anything ever happened to him, i'd kill everybody in this room and then myself

It really is tough jumping back into writing after such a long-winded break. I'm forcing myself to power on through though. Sometimes you just have to write, whether proud of

the outcome or not, and at the very least I'm enjoying the dialogue exchanges between these two nerds!

As per usual, comments make my day! If you have the time, it would be an honour to spare one. I hope you enjoyed this chapter. Have a lovely day!

iii. chad

Chapter Summary

American Chads exist. Kurisu craves death. Okabe begrudgingly finds himself as the voice of reason.

Chapter Notes

I apologize for the delay in this chapter. I've had so many university forms to fill out. It's been a stressful start to the holidays. I sincerely hope that this chapter was worth the wait! Hopefully updates will be quicker from here on out.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

KuriGohan: *Do you ever just.*

KuriGohan: *Want to commit murder.*

KuriGohan: *because I am this close to pulling out a knife and stabbing a bitch.*

HououinKyouma: *Well good morning to you too, assistant.*

KuriGohan: *What the hell.*

KuriGohan: *Your name. Why change it?*

KuriGohan: *Or am I hallucinating.*

KuriGohan: *i've had one hour's sleep and five cups of coffee so tbh that is a very real possibility.*

KuriGohan: *also don't call me assistant. Gerk.*

KuriGohan: **assistant*

KuriGohan: **jerk*

KuriGohan: *Kill me*

“Who ya texting?”

Alarm struck Kurisu like a bolt of white lightning. In retrospect, she must have looked like a greasy teenager caught watching anime porn, because the way she flipped her phone screen around and hunched protectively over her desk was nothing short of suspicious. (No sleep and an overdose of caffeine tended to make you look like one of two things: a walking zombie, or a crack addict. Kurisu was blessed with the gift of looking like both.)

Normally Kurisu would be embarrassed at her obvious disregard for the lecture, but of all the people to catch her messing around during class, of course it had to be *Chad*, name sadly legit, with his slimy smirk and tangled, unwashed hair that reeked sourly of oil.

Chad was the object of her murderous intent. While Kurisu didn't consider herself obliged to violence, she would happily make an exception for him.

“No offence,” Chad scoffed, which sent alarm bells firing between her synapses because whenever Chad started a sentence with *no offence*, offence was guaranteed. “But if you want to look at porn during class, you're gonna have to be a lil' more subtle than that. So what're we watching, eh? Let me see.”

Kurisu's grip tightened around her phone. Chad leaned in close, closer, close enough that she could catch a whiff of his trademark petrol-smelling aftershave and see a wad of cabbage wedged between his teeth. “I'm not watching anything,” she retorted with a not-so-subtle scoot away. “I'm just taking notes, Chad. Can you leave me alone?”

“Alright, alright. Christ. Go back to your *study notes*. I won't peek.” Chad seemed to think her sharp “leave me alone” translated to “stay a little longer, why don't you?” in girl-talk. Predictably he remained hunkered down in the seat beside her. Kurisu scooted even further away, then turned back to her phone.

A slew of messages from Madscientist1 – no, HououinKyouma now, wow he had a sensitive ego – piled up on her screen.

HououinKyouma: *Yeah, I changed it. Did you know @channel has a change your name button, KuriGohan? You should try it sometime.*

HououinKyouma: *Maybe you'll finally start recognizing me for who I truly am – Hououin Kyouma, mad scientist extraordinaire, the man who will bring this ruined world down on its knees.*

HououinKyouma: *Anyway, what's this about murder.*

HououinKyouma: *If I must be the voice of reason, I ask that you please not kill anyone.*

HououinKyouma: *It'd be pretty difficult to use this site from behind a jail cell.*

HououinKyouma: *Silent for five minutes and counting... I guess you really went through with it, huh?*

HououinKyouma: *Well, if worse comes to worse, there's always prison pen pals. I'll write to you from here.*

Despite her situation, Kurisu cracked a smile. It had been two weeks since she and Madscientist1 had argued and began messaging one another. @channel had originally begun as a textboard, so with its recent introduction of private messaging and forum-orientated features, the services were more than a little broken and out of place. It was an awkward, clunky way of communicating with someone, so she had to wonder just why they kept returning to their same instant message window, ribbing and jibing the other as if that was all they knew how to do.

There hadn't been a day when she'd gone without saying something to him, whether that be ranting about her day at university, debating some type of inane pseudoscience, or listening tiredly in turn to his ramblings about the gadgets and devices he tinkered with. Slowly but surely, their daily interactions had become the new normal.

(Not that she was expecting it to last. Madscientist1 or Hououin Kyouma or whatever his name was – he was just a distraction. A casual, harmless distraction that would eventually fizzle out into nothingness. Kurisu knew that. She wasn't an idiot.)

KuriGohan: *It's code red.*

KuriGohan: *He's right beside me and he stinks.*

HououinKyouma: *Murdering someone because they smell bad. How very classist of you.*

KuriGohan: *that's not the only reason! Okay, so. You remember the other day how I went off about that guy who was trying to convince me to come to his party?*

HououinKyouma: *You "went off" about it for a solid hour, so yes. I do remember.*

KuriGohan: *ha ha, Mad Scientist One. You would've too if you were in my situation.*

HououinKyouma: *Hey! It's Hououin Kyouma now. Don't tell me I have to correct you too.*

KuriGohan: *Whatever you say, Mad Scientist One.*

KuriGohan: *Anyway.*

KuriGohan: *It's the same guy as then. We're in all the same classes, so it's not like I can just walk away.*

KuriGohan: *He always sits next to me and tries to flirt.*

KuriGohan: *Just now, he asked if I was looking at porn on my phone and if he could – and I quote – "let him see."*

KuriGohan: *He's a creep! and I'm stuck with him!*

KuriGohan: *hence my growing urge to commit murder.*

HououinKyouma: *Why don't you just tell him straight-up to back off?*

KuriGohan: *believe me, I've tried. He either gets the hint and doesn't care, or he's the most oblivious man on earth.*

KuriGohan: *I think he thinks I'm playing hard to get. Which I'm not.*

KuriGohan: *he uses an aftershave called 'Masculine Musk: An alluring scent for only the manliest of men.' He whips it out in front of me like five times a day. Trust me, Chad, it's not gonna work.*

HououinKyouma: *He sounds like fun at parties.*

HououinKyouma: *You should report him. He's obviously making you uncomfortable. Let the faculty deal with it.*

HououinKyouma: *Or better yet. Humiliate him.*

HououinKyouma: *A man loathes one thing more than rejection.*

HououinKyouma: *And that thing is a public rejection.*

HououinKyouma: *You don't have to be loud about it. Simply changing seats as soon as he sits next to you would be enough to turn heads.*

HououinKyouma: *Embarrass him enough that he would never think of chasing after you again.*

HououinKyouma: *And anyway, he obviously has one thing in his mind. A man's patience can only last so long. He'll give up as soon as it seems like the challenge far outweighs the reward.*

KuriGohan: *So, my options are a) be a snitch, b) cause a scene or c) wait it out?*

HououinKyouma: *You make it sound like they aren't all sensible courses of action.*

HououinKyouma: *It's good advice. Unfortunately, American men named Chad exist. As unfair as it may be – and loathe as I might feel to say this – murder isn't exactly a viable option here.*

HououinKyouma: *Wow, assistant, don't I give good advice? That'll be 5,000 yen, please.*

It was good advice. Advice she'd already thought of, granted, but it was good, nonetheless. The only thing that stopped her from acting upon it was her father.

She knew Chad's parents were part of the faculty that her father, professionally known as Dr. Nakabachi, was a member of. Though Shouichi's reputation within had wavered as of late due to his more obsessive scientific stances, he was still a respected figure with many close ties both in and out of Viktor Chondria university.

Keep your head down and don't do anything foolish, her father had told her, the night before she was due to start university. *My work is renowned by the faculty and the board of this school. I can't have my daughter tarnishing the good name of Makise.*

She'd done her best to live by his terms. Shouichi barely acknowledged her during school or class hours, though to be fair he hardly paid attention to her at home either. She supposed this was a good thing. If Shouichi had nothing to say, then it meant she'd done nothing to earn his ire. That would change should she cause a stir with Chad.

Madscientist's words offered some comfort, at least. *A man's patience can only last so long. He'll give up as soon as it seems like the challenge far outweighs the reward.* It was unfair that simply waiting it out was her best and only option – but there were many things in life that were unfair, and so Kurisu chose to see it as just another obstacle she ought to overcome. Taking a deep breath through her nose, she resumed her rapid-fire texting.

KuriGohan: *You're right. That was good advice.*

KuriGohan: *Not good enough to be worth 5,000 yen though.*

KuriGohan: *I'm calmer now. Thanks for listening.*

HououinKyouuma: *Anytime.*

KuriGohan: *God though. If only you could see this guy! He's the textbook definition of a sleazeball.*

HououinKyouuma: *Right down to the aftershave, I take it.*

KuriGohan: *I don't know why he's so determined to get in my pants. He has a left hand. He should use it.*

HououinKyouuma: *And just like that, Pervert Christina strikes again.*

HououinKyouuma: *You know what, you and American Chad might be perfect for each other.*

HououinKyouuma: *He can bring out your wild perverted side, and you can teach him basic personal hygiene.*

KuriGohan: *I would rather eat dirt.*

KuriGohan: *And I'm not a pervert. I'm just pointing out the obvious.*

KuriGohan: *what's so attractive about a girl who obviously isn't interested. I don't get it.*

HououinKyouma: *It's the tsundere effect.*

KuriGohan: *The what effect?*

HououinKyouma: *The tsundere effect. Oh come on, don't act like you don't know the word.*

KuriGohan: *Sorry. I don't watch anime. :)*

HououinKyouma: *Okay, KuriGohan.*

KuriGohan: *Zip it, Mad Scientist One.*

HououinKyouma: *It's HOUOUIN KYOUMA!*

“Oh, Japanese?”

A whiff of petrol signalled the renewed interest of Chad. This time Kurisu allowed her phone screen to remain open. The adrenaline from all that caffeine she'd chugged had somewhat worn off, leaving in its place an eerie calm she would rather attribute to a coffee-hangover than the effect of the conversation she'd just had with Mads scientist.

“Yeah?” she quipped.

“You're Japanese? Like, you speak and read Japanese?”

Oh, how I long for sweet death at this moment.

“I'm Japanese,” she deadpanned.

Chad laughed. His dry lips split to reveal yellow teeth, cracked and stained, and the smile brought with it soured breath.

“No kidding! Why didn't you say so? I just thought you were half Chinese or something.”

Just like that, her murderous desire was renewed.

“I love Japanese culture. Watch a lot of anime myself. Say, maybe you could come back to my place and –”

“Hey! Makise.”

And like an angel descending from the heavens, Maho entered the scene.

The lecture went quiet. Heads turned to the door, where a tiny woman stood illuminated by the morning light. Marching forward, head held high and posture unusually straight, Maho grabbed Kurisu by her arm and motioned to jerk her up. “Sorry, teach,” she called to the professor, “Dr Leskinen, Kurisu and I have urgent project-related business to take care of. I'm sure you'll understand.”

Kurisu allowed herself to be pulled along. Walking next to Maho, it was hard not to feel like a giant; the woman was her senior, yet her tiny stature meant she resembled a child as opposed to a serious neuroscientist. Once they'd escaped the lecture hall, Maho released Kurisu's hand and rocked back on her heels, sighing.

"Sorry to drag you like that. I figured it'd look more real if I charged in acting super urgent."

"Please, don't be," Kurisu laughed. "You just saved me from the worst lecture of my life. So, what's the situation? Is there a glitch with Amadeus again?"

"There is no situation," said Maho. "Who wouldn't want to be rescued from sitting through one of Dr Milesworth's drawn-out lectures? Though it looks like I got you out of more than that."

"Chad," Kurisu simply replied.

Maho snorted. "Well aren't I just a knight in shining armour."

"You have no idea."

As they walked through the campus, Maho happily prattling on about all the new responses Amadeus had adapted to and learned, Kurisu once again pulled out her phone and glanced at the @channel conversation.

She'd made a habit lately of not telling Mads scientist1 when she was leaving. She would just stop replying, or leave him on read, not with vindictive intention but the assumption that he wouldn't really care either way. They weren't *friends*; friends weren't online mystery strangers who you could never hope to meet in a lifetime. Truth be told, there wasn't a label that fit what Mads scientist1 was to her. She tended to settle on *distraction*, but the more they talked, the less likely that became.

Kurisu didn't know why but it only seemed appropriate that she at least say goodbye.

So, she did.

KuriGohan: *Update: I have escaped the Chad.*

KuriGohan: *An associate of mine came to my rescue.*

KuriGohan : *I think I believe in hope again.*

KuriGohan : *I'm going to go get some study done. I'll talk to you later.*

KuriGohan: *Let me know how Gadget Numero Whatever comes along. I've already forgotten the number rip. Was it 8? You seriously need to get a better naming system for these inventions.*

He mustn't have been online if the immediate lack of reply was any indication. Disappointment swirled like a cloud in her stomach.

KuriGohan: *See ya, Mad Scientist I. Or should I say... Kouhouin Hyoukma.*

Later that night, far across the distant sea in a country named for its rising sun, through the tangled knots of Akihabara and deep into the cramped suburbs, an audible yell could be heard down a typical street and from within a typical house:

“IT’S *HOUOUIN KYOUMA*, DAMN IT!”

The neighbour’s dog howled its sympathy.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading through the third chapter of Unplugged. To all the lovely, awesome commenters: I see you, and your comments are a big reason as to why I was finally able to sit down and write this chapter! You make my day! I'm glad people have enjoyed the story so far. I'll do my best to keep it coming!

Merry Christmas, everybody! And a Happy New Year!

iv. hostage

Chapter Summary

in which okabe can't catch a break and mayuri makes a new friend.

Chapter Notes

Hey, guys! Another slightly delayed chapter, oops? Work was kicking my butt over the holidays and uni prep was hardcore too, but thankfully the hard stuff is all done now and I'm back, alive and kicking! I had a bit of a tough time writing this chapter, but overall I'm happy with the end result and I made it extra long to make up for the long wait. Also, I've been so warmed by all your kind words! It really has been lighting up my day!

Enjoy and have a great rest of your week everybody! <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

HououinKyouma : *shjggfhhdgfdgdrzseg*

KuriGohan: *what*

HououinKyouma : *dfgdrgdrgszdrgsdgdfgszg ?????*

HououinKyouma: *bfcfbzdsge!!!!*

KuriGohan: *please.*

KuriGohan: *speak Japanese.*

KuriGohan: *I am Begging.*

KuriGohan: *I will literally take broken English over this.*

HououinKyouma: *HELLOFDGDFGRDR?!!!!????!!~`*

KuriGohan: *Are you having a stroke?*

KuriGohan: *keysmash wwwwww for yes or wwwwwwwww for no*

HououinKyouma: *WWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWW*

KuriGohan: *I'm gonna take that as a "please for the love of all things holy call an ambulance and save me from myself."*

KuriGohan: *Hate to break it to you but there's an entire ocean between us, so you're on your own with this one.*

HououinKyouma: *HELLO?????*

KuriGohan: *oh my god he speaks*

KuriGohan: *thank the heavens*

HououinKyouma: *he??? who r u calling he??*

HououinKyouma: *im not okarin, silly.*

KuriGohan : *okay ... kinda creepy, but I'll play along.*

KuriGohan: *Who are you then? His second personality?*

KuriGohan: *or, wait – his third?*

KuriGohan: *I'd estimate he has about seven so I mean it could be anyone's guess.*

HououinKyouma: *huh. no.*

HououinKyouma : *my name's mayuri!*

HououinKyouma : *i dont normally use okarin's computer bcuz he gets rlly mad if i do.*

HououinKyouma : *but i had the day off school today so i came around here to read his manga*

HououinKyouma : *and then i heard all this noise and miso is trying to sleep on the keyboard!!*

HououinKyouma : *and that's not allowed. okarin's room is off-limits to all cats named miso. it's on the sign hanging off his door.*

KuriGohan : *oh my god*

HououinKyouma : *so anyway. i'm like oh no!!*

HououinKyouma : *okarin's gonna be so mad!!*

HououinKyouma : *and i go to pull miso off but then the computer starts beeping and i think it's broken*

HououinKyouma : *but it's just you messaging me :)*

HououinKyouma : *so now im here :)*

HououinKyouma : *hi, nice to meet you! I'm mayuri!*

KuriGohan : *I have no words.*

KuriGohan : *Nevermind, I have a ton of words.*

KuriGohan : *Okarin – that's Mad Scientist One's real name?*

HououinKyouma : *welllll*

HououinKyouma : *it's my nickname for him.*

HououinKyouma : *he doesn't like it much but i think its very cute and fitting.*

KuriGohan : *You are so right, Mayuri.*

KuriGohan : *Keep it up.*

HououinKyouma : *aww*

HououinKyouma : *you're nice!!*

HououinKyouma : *are you the person okarin's always talking to?*

HououinKyouma : *you make him laugh a lot. it's nice :)*

KuriGohan : *well.*

KuriGohan : *we're not. alwaaaays talking.*

KuriGohan : *you're probably thinking of a different @channeler.*

HououinKyouma : *no no im sure its you!*

HououinKyouma : *kuririn!!*

HououinKyouma : *i know bcuz i love dbz.*

HououinKyouma : *he talks about you alllll the ti*

HououinKyouma : **time*

KuriGohan : *huh. really?*

HououinKyouma : *really really.*

HououinKyouma : *btw here's an old pic of me and miso.*

HououinKyouma sent an attachment

KuriGohan: *aww*

KuriGohan : *You're so cute, Mayuri.*

KuriGohan : *but you shouldn't be sending your pictures to some random on the internet you just met. I could be a creep for all you know.*

HououinKyouma : *it's okay! i trust you :) I wouldn't send my pic to anyone I didn't trust.*

HououinKyouma : *and anyway, a friend of okarin is a friend of mayuri's!*

KuriGohan : *You're way too cute to be hanging around a guy like Mad Scientist One, you know that?*

KuriGohan : *We've never met, but something tells me he showers every third day and uses "repel for the organization" as an excuse.*

KuriGohan : *Please tell me I'm wrong.*

HououinKyouma : *Woah : 0*

HououinKyouma : *You know him so well*

KuriGohan : *ouch*

HououinKyouma : *oh! did you hurt yourself?*

KuriGohan : *no, no, I'm fine, hon.*

KuriGohan : *don't mind me.*

KuriGohan : *so ... so, what, are you his girlfriend?*

HououinKyouma : *omg no!!*

HououinKyouma : *that would be so weird*

KuriGohan : *Sorry. I should know better than to think that guy is getting some.*

HououinKyouma : *getting some?*

KuriGohan : *Pretend you didn't hear that.*

KuriGohan : *This is just ... a lot to take in.*

KuriGohan : *You're his little sister then? You must be close if you're hanging out in his room.*

HououinKyouma : *hmmm*

HououinKyouma : *i know!*

HououinKyouma : *guess :)*

HououinKyouma : *i bet you'll never get it.*

KuriGohan : *guess?*

HououinKyouma : *yeah it'll be a game!*

KuriGohan : *Haha, alright then!*

KuriGohan : *Let's see ...*

KuriGohan : *Niece?*

HououinKyouma : *nope.*

KuriGohan : *Cousin?*

HououinKyouma : *Guess again : 0*

KuriGohan : *Hmmm. An unrelated friend?*

HououinKyouma : *oooo getting warmer!!*

KuriGohan : *Mad Scientist One has friends?*

KuriGohan : *Now I gotta know!*

HououinKyouma : *hehe. I'll just tell you then.*

HououinKyouma : *im his ...*

HououinKyouma : *(drum roll please)*

HououinKyouma : *.....*

HououinKyouma : *HOSTAGE! : D*

...

KuriGohan: *His what?*

The first thing Okabe saw, upon opening the door to his inner sanctum, was cat fur.

Lots and *lots* of cat fur.

For a good few blinks of a second, he wasn't sure how to react. Miso's white fur stuck out like a blaze of sunlight in his shadow laden room; shreds of white on the carpet, his bed, his sofa and -

Mayuri swiveled around on his chair and held up her hands, dough-eyes wide and pleading. "I can explain!"

Of course she could *explain*. He could too just by taking in his fur-covered room. Mayuri had once again cared nothing for the most important rule of all. *No cats named Miso allowed beyond this point – NO EXCEPTIONS, MAYURI.*

(He'd made sure to add the "no exceptions, Mayuri," to his door's sign in big, glaring red kanji, though evidently it had not worked.)

That wasn't the only pressing matter on his mind though. The cat hair? Reversible. Sure, it'd take a good few hours vacuuming and purging every nook and cranny, but it could be done. He'd had to pick up more strands of fur in his life than he'd ever like to admit.

What Mayuri had seen on his computer, however? Now *that* was irreversible. *That* was not a problem to be cured by a vacuum and some hard-manual labor.

He could almost see it now; Mayuri's wide, innocent eyes forever stained by the likes of Lisa4458's foot photos and daddymushroomhead's constant insistence on reacting to every post with a gif pulled straight out of a hentai.

"Now don't be mad," Mayuri whined, "I know I'm not supposed to leave the door open, but I forgot, and Miso got in! Then he was all over your computer and I *know* how much it means to you, so I tried to save it, but then Kuririn messaged and she was so nice and I've never spoken to someone online before--"

Kuririn?

Oh. KuriGohan.

God damn it -

Somehow, he almost found himself wishing she'd found a trademarked Lisa foot pic instead.

"You're not mad?" hedged Mayuri.

"Mad? No."

Her relief was palatable.

In his most monotone voice, he then said, "I'm furious."

"Really?"

Okabe pinched the bridge of his nose and swallowed down a sigh. Patience. Right. He had to conjure patience. And more than anything else, he had to not sneeze because *why oh why did his mother insist on that overgrown rat when she'd known just how bad his allergies could be.*

That was not patience.

That was anger.

(That was the opposite of what he was going for.)

Okabe tapped his finger against the wood of his desk. The continued chat log between KuriGohan and Mayuri glowered at him behind the harsh white glow of @channel's homepage, but he chose to ignore it in favor of scowling at a very petulant Mayuri hunkered down on her bean cushion.

"Repeat after me, grasshopper."

"Repeat after me, grasshopper," complied Mayuri.

Okabe's brow twitched. "No, no, not that –"

"No, no, not that."

"Mayuri Shiina."

The stern yet steady growl in his voice made her pout even harder, if such an act were possible. She hugged her manga closer to her chest and replied with a solemn, "yes?"

Truth be told, he was never very good at scolding his young charge. Per his mother's constant crowing of, "she has you wrapped around her pinky finger, that girl." It was easy to be stern, even playfully harsh, with her, but loathe as he was to admit it, discipline did not come naturally. He drummed his fingers a few more times, making sure to avoid even a glimpse at the computer screen staring back at him. This was different to when she'd napped with Miso on his bed, or spilled her ramen all over his sofa; this could have jeopardized his entire mission at large, alerted the Organization to his presence, exposed one (1) sassy assistant to his true unspeakable nature –

(Oh no. Baby photos. Had Mayuri sent any baby photos? He'd die if she sent any baby photos.)

He settled on a low, "do you have any idea what you've done?"

He hadn't the faintest clue either, but it seemed like a good start.

"I'm sorry," she whined again, bowing her head, "I know I made a big mistake."

"Not *just* a big mistake," Okabe rumbled. "The Organization is constantly on the hunt for a weak point. They have their bugs spread throughout Japan, lying in wait amid every computer and cellphone in the country. And today you could have exposed yourself and everything we hold dear to them."

"But I didn't say anything bad! I just talked to Kuririn." Turning away, she added with a tiny huff, "I don't know why it's such a big deal."

His fingers ceased in their drumming. A pocket of frustration bubbled up in his chest, stirred by Mayuri's incessant pout and the stream of text lingering in the corners of his vision. The

temptation to just abandon this conversation and remedy any damage done was strong, nearly overpowering, but there was also a shard of fear, pointed and sharp, pressing against his throat like a lump. It was a big deal because –

(Patience, Okabe. What would Hououin Kyouma do?)

(Laugh?)

(Probably.)

(His patented mad-scientist laugh was his failsafe method of escaping any conversation.)

It was a big deal because he was *embarrassed*, but Okabe would rather commit seppuku than ever admit that, even to himself.

He spun back to his computer, shoulders dripping from exhaustion. “KuriGohan is not your average denizen of the internet,” he finally supplied. “I’ve been keeping tabs on her for as little as three weeks now. I have strong reason to believe she is a spy for the Organization, sent to wheedle her way into my life and foster ruin.”

“No way!” He didn’t like the genuine trace of disbelief in Mayuri’s voice. “You think she’s one of them?”

Okabe sighed. “Look around, grasshopper.” He waved his hand at the mess that was once his room. “Destruction. Like the ancient ruins of Valhalla. Because of your careless actions today, she may have won the battle, but rest assured I will not allow her to win the war.”

“Okarin!”

“Hououin Kyouma.”

“*Okabe.*”

He shot her a glare. “What?”

Mayuri was wearing a rare, stern expression, one that momentarily startled him from his alternate persona. She usually played along with his breathless spiels, not interrupted them. “Don’t lie to me,” she said with a small jut of her chin. “You *like* her. It’s so obvious.”

Like KuriGohan?

Okay.

Now he could laugh.

It burst from his lips in a vibrant boom; the mad scientist laugh so rehearsed and well-used that he could summon upon its voice nearly every time he felt the need. Which was often, he had to admit. Mayuri watched on, a frown so deeply set into her lips it looked as though it might become a permanent fixture of her face. When finally, the bubbling of his laughter

quelled to a trickle, and then a stop, he pushed back against his computer chair and folded his hands behind his head. “I’m disappointed, Mayuri. I never took you for a sympathizer.”

“You’re just upset ‘cause you know it’s true.”

Okabe snorted. “How could I like someone I’ve never even met? It’s not like I have a picture of her either. Or him. See? We know nothing about each other.”

“She knows a lot about you,” said Mayuri. She leaned forward, the sternness in her face melting into a look of disappointment all her own. “Okarin! Did you know she thinks you only shower every third day? And she’s right! That’s no way to impress a girl!”

The tables had suddenly turned. Why was he not surprised?

KuriGohan chose that moment to message. She could not have had better timing.

KuriGohan: *Hello???*

KuriGohan: *Hey. Creeper.*

KuriGohan: *(Sorry if you’re still there, Mayuri. I mean Wannabe Dr Jekyll. Not you, sweetie.)*

Well, weren’t they just the best of friends after only five minutes?

“We’ll resume this conversation later,” he growled, scooting closer to his desk and hunching over the keyboard. A tuft of cat fur sprouted up like grass between almost every key. *An issue that will have to wait until tomorrow*, he thought with a begrudging wrinkle of his nose.

Mayuri poked out her tongue, but again, that could wait until *after* his conversation with KuriGohan.

Priorities.

First, though, he scrolled up. If he had to go into damage-control mode, he’d at least need to know what damage had been done.

KuriGohan: *His what?*

HououinKyouma : *his hostage :)*

KuriGohan : *Mayuri.*

KuriGohan : *answer me honestly.*

KuriGohan : *do you need help?*

HououinKyouma : *huh?*

KuriGohan: *I should've known he was that kind of guy.*

HououinKyouma : *what kind of guy?*

KuriGohan : *Do you at least know the address of the house he's keeping you in? Or even the prefecture? Because I can call the police and try to get you some help.*

HououinKyouma : *omg no!!*

HououinKyouma : *no silly.*

HououinKyouma : *i'm his hostage 'cause i wanna be!*

KuriGohan : *...huh?*

HououinKyouma : *yeah :)*

HououinKyouma : *i can come and go as i want.*

HououinKyouma : *and he has lots of cool manga here so i come a lot!!*

KuriGohan : *...Seriously?*

HououinKyouma: *seriously :)*

HououinKyouma: *oh no i think he's home!!*

HououinKyouma: *i gotta go!!*

HououinKyouma: *see you, kuririn!*

KuriGohan: *Wait!*

KuriGohan: *Hold on a sec, you can't just say something like that then leave!*

KuriGohan: *Mayuri?*

KuriGohan: *What have I gotten myself into.*

It could be worse.

There were no embarrassing baby pics, so that was a start.

“See? I didn't say anything bad.”

He hadn't even noticed Mayuri appearing to stand beside him. He instinctively jolted forward to shield the screen with his arms. “Hey! What's the rule about this computer?”

Her shoulders drooped in a heavy sigh. “No Mayuris or Misos or mothers allowed.”

He tilted his head in the direction of her bean cushion. “Back to your side of the room. Now.”

“Aw. You’re such a grouch today, Okarin.” But she complied, dragging her feet until she could dramatically collapse into the plush folds of her chair.

“It’s Hououin Kyouma,” he yelled after her. But he had more important matters to press.

KuriGohan: *Hello????*

HououinKyouma: *Speaking.*

KuriGohan: *Oh great. It’s you.*

HououinKyouma: *Is that any way to speak to your lab leader?*

KuriGohan: *Kidnappers don’t deserve respect.*

KuriGohan: *Which, by the way, if you don’t explain that whole “hostage” thing right now I WILL find out where you live and I WILL sick the police onto your ass.*

HououinKyouma: *Is that so? I didn’t realize you could track my IP through an anonymous messaging board.*

KuriGohan: *Trust me. I’ll find a way.*

HououinKyouma: *Again with the threats. I’ve raised you well, assistant.*

KuriGohan: *Stop calling me that, weirdo!!!*

KuriGohan: *Anyway. Is Mayuri okay?*

HououinKyouma: *Of course she is. She’s reading manga on her bean cushion.*

HououinKyouma: *What do you think I am? A monster?*

HououinKyouma: *I treat my hostages quite well, thank you very much.*

KuriGohan: *Ha ha. Very funny.*

KuriGohan: *Anyway?? Explanation??*

KuriGohan: *I’m waiting.*

HououinKyouma: *You’re oddly incessant, aren’t you?*

KuriGohan: *Who wouldn’t be after hearing something like that!*

HououinKyouma: *Calm down. It’s as she said.*

HououinKyouma: *She wants to be.*

HououinKyouma: *And she can come and go as she pleases.*

HououinKyouma: *I don't recall making this your business, assistant.*

KuriGohan: *Wow.*

KuriGohan: *It's obvious she spends way too much time around you and your idiotic delusions.*

KuriGohan: *That girl is much too sweet to be putting up with your bullshit.*

HououinKyouma: *Alas, Mayuri always has been a bit different.*

HououinKyouma: *Perhaps that's why you get along so well.*

KuriGohan: *We're the different ones?*

KuriGohan: *Yeah. Okay. Whatever helps you sleep at night, bud.*

HououinKyouma: *I sleep quite well already, thanks.*

KuriGohan: *Sure you do.*

HououinKyouma *sent a link.*

KuriGohan: *Hey!! Don't change the subject.*

HououinKyouma: *It's the new SERN particle accelerator. They're talking about it on the science channel. I thought you might be interested.*

KuriGohan: *--*

HououinKyouma: *That was an awful long pause just to type an emoji.*

HououinKyouma: *So predictable. You're reading it right now, aren't you?*

KuriGohan: *Whatever. This isn't over, Mad Scientist One.*

HououinKyouma: *Of course it isn't. It never is.*

Night bled into the streets of Akihabara. A solemn full moon hung low in the sky, its pallid light swamped by the artificial glow of the streetlamps and blaring neon signs. A chill haunted the air, bitter in its bite, and Mayuri shuddered deeper into her wooly overcoat, tucking her kitten themed mittens beneath her armpits.

They made quite a pair – Mayuri nearly drowning in thick cotton and winter-guarded fluff, Okabe in but a coffee stained, short-sleeved white shirt and dark pants. Mad scientists cared

not for chilly nights or extravagant clothes. He was a man of complex mind and fashionable simplicity. Not even the harshest of blizzards could change that.

“I still don’t get why we have to go *now*,” Mayuri said. “Couldn’t it wait until tomorrow? It’s so cold!”

“If only karma deigned to work that way, Mayuri,” Okabe replied with a resigned shrug. “Punishment demands equal opportunity. How would it be fair if this dinner was only on your terms?”

“I guess I understand.” She didn’t, but she complained no further.

There was method behind his madness for choosing now, of all times, to visit MayQueen NyanNyan. The first was that after 9pm, they served the best (and he did not use *best* lightly) omelet rice known to man. A simple dish at first glance, but every bit as difficult to master as RaiNet, the infamous card game their famous maid Faris partook in.

That led to the second reason – Faris NyanNyan.

“Good evening, Meowsters!”

As soon as the door hedged the bell signaling a customer’s arrival, Faris pounced up every bit as cat-like as the café’s theme, adorned in all the frills and fluff that constituted Akihabara’s love for moe culture. Her pupils dilated upon seeing Okabe with an unusually dejected Mayuri (again, not at all unlike a real cat); straightening up, she trilled, “well, well, well, if it isn’t Kyouma, come from down on high to bring information on the Organization’s next plan of attack. Spring it on me, soldier! I’m ready for anything you can throw at me!”

Okabe couldn’t remember when Faris had become involved in their little game. He had a vague recollection of his first time visiting the maid café, dragged along by a elementary school aged Mayuri with a love for all things cute; he’d probably felt out of his element and called upon his Hououin Kyouma persona when confronted with social interaction from maids, no less, and he could almost recall a very young Faris joining in, edging him on until it almost felt like there *was* an Organization, and that he did have an ally, even in such an unlikely place.

She’d been apart of these walls for as long as he could remember. And he’d been coming with Mayuri hot on his heels ever since.

“Unfortunately, I’m loathe to say this is not a business call,” Okabe rumbled, sharply plucking Mayuri by the scruff of her scarf and pulling her close. “I’m simply taking what *this* tiny one owes me.”

“Tiny one?” Mayuri’s protest fell on deaf ears.

“Mayuri’s in trouble?” Faris pulled back and waved them further inside, a glint of curiosity alighting in her eyes as she allowed the game to briefly drop. “What did you do this time? Don’t tell me it was a Miso-related incident again.”

“Okarin’s just mad because I talked to his online girlfriend.”

And *that* was the last thing he wanted.

Faris locked onto that piece of information like a sharpshooter homing in on their kill.

“Ohoho. Is that so?”

“It most definitely is not,” Okabe spluttered.

“How curious.” She waved them to an empty table and, unable to keep the sly smile off her lips, said, “I’ll be back with your menus, meowsters. Kyouma. Think carefully about if there’s anything you’d like to tell me.” With a deep bow and a wink only he could see, she was gone.

Okabe scowled and returned his attention to Mayuri, happily humming along to the cheery j-pop tunes blasting over the speakers. “I hope you know that’ll cost you extra.”

Her cheer shattered into a thousand fragments. “Really?”

Okabe poured himself some tea and, with a lamenting breath, shook his head ruefully. “I don’t make life’s cruel, cruel rules, Mayuri. I merely enforce them.”

Mayuri collapsed against the table. “You’re gonna take all my pocket money at this rate.”

“Ouch!”

The smack of a menu hit his head hard. “Not cool, Kyouma,” said Faris with an exaggerated huff. “Taking a girl’s money like that. I feel sorry for your girlfriend!”

“She’s not.” He paused. Rubbed the smarting spot at the back of his head. Composed himself. Remembered KuriGohan’s snippy comments and steadied the voice in his throat. “She’s not my girlfriend. I have better things to worry about than such trivial pursuits. Why are you both so obsessed with this person anyway? You,” he pointed at Mayuri, “barely spoke to her beyond five minutes and you,” he shifted his finger to Faris, “don’t even know who we’re talking about.”

Faris placed the menu down before them and whipped out her notepad, pointedly avoiding his gaze. “What can I say? You’re always so busy fighting the Organization.” She grinned. “I didn’t think you had it in you.”

“That’s because I don’t have it in me.”

Mayuri giggled.

Okabe reeled back. “That’s not to say – I *do* but – flights of fancy are at the bottom of my list of priorities right now-”

“Aha!” Mayuri mimicked his earlier pointing. “So you do like her?”

“I didn’t say that, did I?” Okabe snapped.

Before the argument could ramble on, Faris leaned down close, closer than any girl had ever been before, so close that the skin of her cheek nearly brushed his stubble. Fear was the first emotion to close in on his chest. Like a vice it sliced his stomach in two. He instinctively shifted back, catching a whiff of a creamy perfume as he did so, but Faris followed along, a sly expression donned upon her face.

To an outsider, it might look rather flirtatious.

To Okabe, it was a threat.

“Take it from me, Kyouma. Stubbornness can only get you so far. Sooner or later you’re going to have to try being genuine. Girls like that *way* more than the whole tsundere act you’ve got going on.”

“I’m not being a tsundere,” he grumbled. *If anything, KuriGohan is as tsundere as they come.*

Faris leaned in closer.

“I’m just trying to give you some friendly advice, meow. You don’t *have* to take it. But believe me when I say I really don’t want you to end up like some of the guys here. Put yourself out there for once.” She blinked and finally pulled back, allowing Okabe the room to breathe again. “So that’ll be one omurice, right?”

Dazed, Okabe could only nod.

“And that’ll be going on *your* tab, correct?”

“I...suppose so.”

“Purrfect!” She gave him a good old slap on the back. “Thanks for your continued support, meowsters! I’ll return with your food soon!”

Mayuri watched her go with wide, admiring eyes. “She’s so cool, Okarin.”

“Yeah,” he muttered, “and evil. Using her Cheshire Break on me like that – absolutely diabolical.”

She was right though. Maybe he was being stubborn, thereby preventing ... something from growing. Not romance. He was firmly rooted in the idea that such acts were beneath him. And besides, no matter what Mayuri or Faris said, nothing changed the fact that they’d never even seen each other’s faces, let alone knew if the person on the other end of the screen was real or not.

But he couldn’t run away from the fact that there was *something* there. What that something was, he didn’t know. There was no denying that something pulled him towards Christina, and maybe it was the same on her end too; their snide conversations, their scientific debates, his nicknames and her insults – the gears of fate were turning, their red strings crossing paths even with an entire ocean to keep them apart, and so perhaps this went beyond the realms of a random person he’d met online and just so happened to keep casually chatting with. Perhaps this was the poetic justice known as destiny.

Or maybe they were both masochists. That was also a possibility.

“Wait a minute. Did she say it was going on *my* tab?”

Mayuri blinked, the picture of innocence.

“That son of a-”

HououinKyouma: *Hey, so...*

KuriGohan: *So...?*

HououinKyouma: *Well. @channel isn't exactly the best place to have a conversation.*

KuriGohan: *You don't say.*

KuriGohan: *Alright, I'll bite. You have Line?*

HououinKyouma: *Huh?*

KuriGohan: *For the record, I'm not offering you my Line info because I like you or want to talk to you more or ... anything. I just want to keep my eye on you. You're fishy.*

KuriGohan: *And also @channel on mobile is actually literal hell.*

KuriGohan: *So yeah. Those are the only reasons.*

HououinKyouma: *Alright, Christina.*

HououinKyouma: *I'll add you on Line.*

KuriGohan: *Sounds good, Okarin.*

HououinKyouma: *Oh no.*

Chapter End Notes

okabe be like: please. end me now.

I'm trying to kick-start some light plot progression. We're slooowly getting there with these two nerds. As per usual, if you enjoyed, please don't forget to leave a kudos and a comment! I read each and every one and it really inspires me to keep on going. Thank you so much for your continued patience and I'm so glad people are enjoying this story so far! I'll do my best to keep working out the kinks and bringing in the chapters.

Also, who wants to see more Miso? He is a fluffy evil boi.

Until next time!

loss

Chapter Summary

kurisu loses. okabe finds.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

KuriGohan : *Hey*

KuriGohan : *Can we talk for a sec? when youre awake?*

KuriGohan : *there's something on my mind and idk who else to go to.*

KuriGohan : *Actually. You know what. Nevermind.*

KuriGohan : *im fine*

KuriGohan : *ignore this*

KuriGohan : *sorry*

KuriGohan : *im just being stupud*

KuriGohan : *so anyway, did you see the news about SERN building a supercollider?*

KuriGohan : *They say it'll blow the hadron colliders advancements right out of the water*

KuriGohan : *pretty big day for science, i guess*

Kurisu felt herself deflate. For once, her messages riddled with kanji mistakes and grammatical errors failed to bother her. The energy had left her limbs, and with it had vanished her will for any semblance of conversation with Mad Scientist One. In its place was a weighty headiness, amplified by the looming deadline of an assignment perched precariously atop the horizon.

One month ago, she'd done the unthinkable: a stranger, from the cesspool known as @channel, of all places, had somehow wormed his way into her head and sucked out any concern for her online privacy she had left. She'd given him her Line details, which felt like the internet equivalent of *come on over to my house, what's mine is yours*, and they'd struck up a familiar routine: bickering from behind the safe confines of their screen, occasionally sharing with each other the latest scientific advancements within the field and - even more frequently - arguing over which Star Trek iteration was the superior one.

It felt wrong to call him a stranger, after two months of horribly repetitive conversation. She knew far more about the inner workings of his life and, loath as she was to admit it, his *mind* that, if they weren't separated by an entire ocean, she'd be almost inclined to call him a friend. *Almost*. The truth of the matter was that she'd never even seen a picture of him, let alone heard his voice, and there was enough sketchiness surrounding his relationship with the poor, innocent Mayuri (who was far too naive to be anything other than painfully honest) that she kept her guard up, poised for him to strike, ready to retreat at the closest hint of disappointment.

Seriously. *Hostage*. The hell did that even mean? One month on and she was still confused.

Kurisu swallowed a sigh. Whatever. She was going to give herself a headache if she thought any harder about whatever those two had going on.

The darkness in her room was thick, save for the bright red digits on her alarm clock that cut through the night. 5:45am. She hadn't been able to sleep a wink, her eyes and fingers consumed in an endlessly mindless scroll of her @Channel feed, desperate for whatever distraction the dregs of the internet could offer her. She'd brushed past cat pics, porn, an entire thread that baited weebies into a battle royale for their waifus' honor, more porn, the latest breaking news in neuroscience, somehow even more porn (contributed by queefbelcher69 this time, yours truly, God fucking damn it-)

A notification sprung to life at the top of her phone.

HououinKyouma: *Well, if it isn't my favorite assistant, up well past her bedtime.*

The desire to leave his message unopened was strong. Line, unlike @channel, had the unfortunate feature of informing its participants when people had seen a message. She unconsciously chewed at her lip, a habit Kurisu had apparently picked up from her mother (as her dad oh so graciously liked to remind her with a scowl) and the memory, however brief, of the woman with hair as red as poppy made her heart contract *hard* within her chest. She clicked on the notification. The harsh white glow of the app's background burned her eyes.

HououinKyouma : *You think you can get out of talking with me that easily?*

Kurisu snorted. God, this idiot was so bad with words. Was he trying to threaten her into opening up to him? Somehow, she doubted that. His social awkwardness was off the charts. For as much as Maho gave her crap about having the social skills of a feral cat, at least she knew how to somewhat navigate the rocky avenues of conversation. Her fingers hovered over the touchpad, ready to snipe a response. Exhaustion hung like a fog across her brain, however, rendering any witty reply half-baked at best. Her phone fell to the bed. She brought her legs up to her chest, buried her face into her ankles, and tried to blink away the sharp sting of tears creeping in on the edge of her vision.

A few more loud notifications sent vibrations through her bedsheets. Kurisu refused to look. It took all her willpower to reign herself back under control. *Don't cry, you can't cry, you shouldn't cry*. Girl geniuses don't cry. That wasn't true, of course. At least, not for anyone who wasn't her.

When at last the sting in her eyes subsided, she picked up her phone and braved a peak.

HououinKyouma : *Assistant?*

HououinKyouma : *Ah. The silent treatment. The Organization's favorite tactic.*

HououinKyouma : *Well, never fear.*

HououinKyouma : *That's never worked on me.*

HououinKyouma : *They've used many a manipulative gambit on my dear colleagues. Jackson, bless his soul. My beloved Irene, she never stood a chance. Harry Styles. You didn't hear that from me.*

A smile. Kurisu smothered it before it had a chance to shine.

HououinKyouma : *My point is, you can ignore me all you like, but I'm hardened to their torture. I've been training for this moment all my life.*

HououinKyouma : *... Not that you ignoring me is torture.*

HououinKyouma : *Because it isn't.*

HououinKyouma : *That's my point.*

HououinKyouma : *...*

HououinKyouma : *You do understand that's my point, right?*

Ah. Right. Annoyance. His greatest weapon.

Damn, was she good at underestimating him.

KuriGohan : *ok are you done?*

KuriGohan : *because jeez. you are next level annoying*

KuriGohan : *please don't take that as a compliment*

HououinKyouma : *Well, well, well. Look who came crawling back.*

HououinKyouma : *Just as Hack;Gate (NAME TBD) predicted.*

KuriGohan : *Seriously? Still going with Hack;Gate?*

KuriGohan : *Look, Kyokuma, I can list about twenty names off the top of my head better than that one.*

KuriGohan : *...What even is Hack;Gate, anyway? I still don't know.*

HououinKyouma : *Hack;Gate (NAME TBD) will reveal itself unto you in due time, assistant.*

HououinKyouma : *Also, don't forget the (NAME TBD) part. That's pivotal.*

HououinKyouma : *Also also. It's Kyouma.*

HououinKyouma : *Why don't you know this by now?*

A long pause.

HououinKyouma : *You know this by now.*

And Kurisu laughed.

The sound was rough in her throat, and unfamiliar to her ears. She shook herself, a little surprised at the outburst so soon after nearly breaking down at the thought of *her*; cleared her throat and continued on.

KuriGohan : *Anyway. Did you see the supercollider stuff?*

HououinKyouma : *I did. But that's not what I'm concerned about.*

KuriGohan : *Huh? Concerned?*

HououinKyouma : *You said you wanted to talk about something when I'm next free. Well. I'm free. What do you want to talk about?*

KuriGohan : *Oh.*

KuriGohan : *It's nothing, really.*

KuriGohan : *Again. I was just being stupid.*

KuriGohan : *Having a moment.*

KuriGohan : *Whatever you want to call it.*

KuriGohan : *I'm fine now. Really.*

Kurisu Makise didn't have "moments." She was the sixteen-year-old shining star of Viktor Chondria, with an even brighter future laid out before her in the field of neuroscience. Crying was dumb. She didn't have anything to cry about. People cried because they wanted to *be* her, on track to get a degree at eighteen, money a promise that would never go unfulfilled. She had everything her dorky younger self had always wanted.

...Except *her*. Or *that*.

HououinKyouma : *Weird.*

HououinKyouma : *It's almost like I don't believe you.*

KuriGohan : *Yeah, well*

KuriGohan : *tbh neither do I*

KuriGohan : *but i don't want to talk about it anymore so*

KuriGohan : *put a pin in it. please.*

HououinKyouma : *Is that any way to speak with your lab supervisor?*

HououinKyouma : *As far as I'm concerned, your worries are mine.*

HououinKyouma : *I'd be a rather poor mad scientist if they weren't.*

Something akin to warmth spread flush across her chest. It was the closest he'd had ever come to sounding *kind*. Kurisu found herself caught off guard, for once robbed of any immediate reply, faced with a decision that seemed to carry the weight of the world: flick him off and walk away (so to speak), or let Mad Scientist One, of all people, know about how she truly felt. Her thumb hovered over the touchpad. Her heart pounded painfully in the chambers of her ears.

He ruined it, of course. Just as everyone usually did.

HououinKyouma : *And not because I actually care about you.*

HououinKyouma : *Don't take this the wrong way.*

HououinKyouma : *It's merely an ugly necessity of science.*

HououinKyouma : *Your distractions could compromise the result of our experiments.*

HououinKyouma : *I'd be loath to allow that to happen under my watch.*

Suddenly, that warmth became a heat, hot and sore and blazing upon her skin; her heartbeat a powerful thunder.

KuriGohan : *Wow.*

KuriGohan : *Really.*

KuriGohan : *You're a next-level jerk, you know that?*

KuriGohan : *I can't believe I even allowed myself*

KuriGohan : *for just a moment*

She stopped there; the sentence unfinished.

To trust you.

KuriGohan : *Whatever.*

KuriGohan : *I don't need you to care.*

KuriGohan : *I don't want you to care.*

KuriGohan : *so just drop it*

KuriGohan : *it's none of your business.*

She really was an idiot. An even bigger idiot than Houkyoin or whatever his dumb fake name was. Only idiots made friends with @channel trolls. Only idiots gave out their Line details to said internet trolls. And only the biggest idiots of all, the crowning overachievers of idiocy, let themselves think - even for a second - that those soulless basement dwellers of online forums had any decency left in them to really give a shit about their fellow human being.

"I need to get out more," Kurisu said, tone flat. If she wasn't careful, she was going to become just like the man on the other side of her screen, greasy and unwashed and nary a life outside her computer.

Maybe she was already there.

HououinKyouma : *I'm sorry.*

I'm sorry.

She tried to stare the words down.

They glared back, unapologetic.

HououinKyouma : *I'm not*

HououinKyouma : *the best at talking*

HououinKyouma : *Mayuri will tell you that*

HououinKyouma : *Not that it's an excuse*

HououinKyouma : *I've just upset her before too*

HououinKyouma : *So yes. I'm sorry.*

HououinKyouma : *That's not the case, just so you know. I do care.*

HououinKyouma : *You are my assistant, after all.*

HououinKyouma : *Of course I do.*

KuriGohan : *then why not just say that?*

KuriGohan : *why be a dick and say something like that?*

There was a long gap of nothing, punctuated by the heavy silence in the air. She could almost imagine he were in then room with her now, creepy though that might be, with his hands scrounged in his scruffy hair and his blank face buried into the fabric of a lab coat. It was hard, imagining someone you only had brief snippets of personality to go by - but it was also somehow a comfort, to think that she wasn't alone, even if her house was empty, and her bedroom a sight for sore eyes. Even if the person she was imagining right now sent poison flushing through her veins.

Even if the faceless person in her head was the last person she wanted to see right now.

HououinKyouma : *I was embarrassed.*

Kurisu couldn't help it. She squeezed her phone so hard her palm burned red.

HououinKyouma : *I don't know.*

HououinKyouma : *I have a habit of saying things I don't mean.*

HououinKyouma : *Especially when I'm scared.*

The great Hououin Kyouma, scared? From what, a little scrap of human empathy?

She could almost call the admission touching. *Almost.*

KuriGohan : *Seriously, dude, sometimes you feel like two subchannels away from turning into an incel.*

HououinKyouma : *What's an incel?*

KuriGohan : *American term.*

KuriGohan : *it's not a compliment.*

HououinKyouma : *You? Complimenting me?*

HououinKyouma : *I wouldn't dream.*

KuriGohan : *Good. You shouldn't.*

Somehow, even when he infuriated her, she found herself pulled back into his orbit. The fire in her chest calmed, tamped down to sizzling coals ready to roar back to life at the slightest inclination of an attack. She didn't want to continue this conversation. She didn't. But anything, *anything*, was a distraction from the reminder that today, August 22nd, was the seven-year anniversary of the day her world had come crashing down. She looked to the urn on her windowsill. Its guardian flowers were wilting, heads hung limp in death.

HououinKyouma : *I'm sorry. Really.*

HououinKyouma : *If you don't want to talk about it, I understand.*

HououinKyouma : *But ... I'm here. If you do.*

HououinKyouma : *From one mad scientist to another.*

KuriGohan : *Thanks. I guess.*

KuriGohan : *It was shitty, what you said*

KuriGohan : *but I guess I should remember you have about a 7 for your wisdom stat*

KuriGohan : *and a 5 in charisma*

KuriGohan : *if you were rolling a D20, you'd hit a natural 1 on pretty much all your responses*

KuriGohan : *So I shouldn't expect much*

KuriGohan : *You're not exactly a whizz at this whole talking online thing*

KuriGohan : *makes me wonder how much worse you are IRL*

HououinKyouma : *Ouch.*

HououinKyouma : *But fair.*

HououinKyouma : *I deserved that.*

KuriGohan : *Payback hurts.*

KuriGohan : *damn though*

KuriGohan : *does it feel good*

Should she tell him?

Again, her gaze flicked to the urn. She'd been meaning to replace the peonies before they dried out. She wasn't exactly the best at taking care of flowers. University (and, regrettably, @channel) consumed so much of her life that keeping anyone beyond herself alive was a responsibility she wanted no part in. But it hurt to watch the peonies her mother had loved so much go from flushed pink to a sickly paste of what they once were. It was almost like a haunting reminder of what had happened to her mom - the way she'd lost her color so quickly, so unfathomably.

Did it really matter if she told him what was up? He didn't know her any more than she knew him. It was easy to be honest if she hid behind the facade of KuriGohan - the girl who blended into the crowd as seamlessly as a fish into its school. To Hououin Whatshisface, she was an assistant - nothing more, nothing less.

KuriGohan : *It's my mom.*

No going back now.

KuriGohan : *She died 7 years ago.*

KuriGohan : *Today's the anniversary of that.*

KuriGohan : *lmao. anniversary*

KuriGohan : *--*

KuriGohan : *that feels like the wrong word*

KuriGohan : *like i should be celebrating*

KuriGohan : *I'm not*

KuriGohan : *I loved her a lot*

KuriGohan : *she was kinda my best friend*

KuriGohan : *but they*

KuriGohan : *that was seven years ago. what did i know*

KuriGohan : *I was just a dumb kid*

KuriGohan : *like I said*

KuriGohan : *I'm being stupid*

KuriGohan : *It really doesn't matter*

KuriGohan : *And it's not a big deal*

KuriGohan : *So yeah. That's it.*

Once she'd started, she couldn't stop. The dam was broken. Words flowed out from her fingertips, broken and sloppy, but raw and true. She felt that familiar sting behind her eyes, the prick of tears sharp as knives threatening to stab through her vision, and she wanted to hold them back, she did, but it had been so long since she'd allowed herself to talk freely about her mother. Now that she was on a roll, the momentum pushed down at her.

Newton's law of gravity was simple: mass attracts mass. The more mass, the stronger the attraction; the more distance, the weaker.

It felt good to let gravity do its thing for once.

KuriGohan : *What? Did I finally make you speechless, Okarin?*

HououinKyouma : *Hey.*

HououinKyouma : *Regardless of my previous transgressions.*

HououinKyouma : *It's still Hououin Kyouma to you.*

KuriGohan : *Ah. Right.*

KuriGohan : *Kyouin Hyokuma.*

KuriGohan : *My apologies. Really.*

HououinKyouma : *...I'll let this slide just this once.*

HououinKyouma : *Anyway. You're very good at deflecting, aren't you, Christina?*

HououinKyouma : *Maybe we're more alike than I once thought.*

KuriGohan : *Ew. You and me? Alike?*

KuriGohan : *No offense but I'd literally rather die.*

HououinKyouma : *Unfortunately for you, the Organization is incredibly fond of deflection. It's one of the more common weapons in their arsenal.*

KuriGohan : *Oh no. Here we go again.*

KuriGohan : *Back at it again with the Organization jumbo.*

HououinKyouma : *I'm sorry about your mom. I lost someone too, a long time ago.*

Kurisu stopped. Her prepared deflections fell dead upon her fingers.

HououinKyouma : *Mayuri's grandmother. Our families were close.*

HououinKyouma : *It felt like losing my own, in a way.*

HououinKyouma : *Not to say it's the same as losing a parent.*

HououinKyouma : *But I understand. Even if only a fraction.*

HououinKyouma : *Losing someone you love...*

HououinKyouma : *I wouldn't wish that upon anybody*

HououinKyouma : *Not my worst enemies*

HououinKyouma : *Not even the Organization.*

HououinKyouma : *And especially not you.*

HououinKyouma : *And you're, you know*

HououinKyouma : *not alone.*

HououinKyouma : *Christina? You there?*

She was. And she wasn't.

The tears came sharp and heavy, and they hurt, damn it, they hurt so badly. She was almost grateful for the pain. It tore through her head with the sharpened point of a knife.

No one had ever really said that to her before - that her pain was valid. That it sucked. Majorly. Because it did. There was no other word around it. It sucked, it hurt, and there was nothing and no one that could ever bring her mom back. That was the way of the world. The way of death.

But she wasn't alone.

He said she wasn't alone.

(He lied.)

Please, *please*, she didn't want to be alone.

KuriGohan : *I think that's the nicest thing you've ever said to me.*

KuriGohan : *I didn't know you had it in you.*

HououinKyouma : *Do you really think of me as some kind of monster?*

Kurisu thought long and hard about that question. Finally, she typed her candid response.

KuriGohan : *No.*

KuriGohan : *I think you're a weirdo, don't get me wrong.*

It felt good to use his own words against him.

KuriGohan : *I think you have a lot of hot takes, and by hot takes I mean bad takes. Really, really bad takes.*

KuriGohan : *And I think you're kinda my definition of cringe. Even if cringe culture is dead, it lives on in you.*

HououinKyouma : *I'm flattered.*

HououinKyouma : *You know, for someone hellbent on calling me every name under the sun, you sure are preachy.*

KuriGohan : *Give me a sec. I haven't gotten to the good stuff yet.*

KuriGohan : *Where was I ... oh yeah.*

KuriGohan : *You're socially inept, annoying, melodramatic, paranoid and even though we've never met IRL and probably never will, I can confidently say you need a shower.*

KuriGohan : *Please. Go have one.*

KuriGohan : *Soon.*

KuriGohan : *I beg.*

HououinKyouma : *It's to repel the Organization.*

KuriGohan : *And also any chance at getting a girlfriend -_-*

KuriGohan : *But underneath all that. I guess you're okay.*

KuriGohan : *You're not the worst guy I've ever met*

KuriGohan : *And ... you care. About Mayuri. About science.*

(About me.)

KuriGohan : *I guess I care a little about you too.*

KuriGohan : *Just a little*

KuriGohan : *like. the tiniest smidge of care? that's me to you*

KuriGohan : *Don't get ahead of yourself*

KuriGohan : *It means nothing*

KuriGohan : *Shut up.*

HououinKyouma : *For what it's worth*

HououinKyouma : *You're okay too, Christina.*

HououinKyouma : *Now. If I do recall.*

HououinKyouma *replied to KuriGohan*

KuriGohan : *You're socially inept, annoying, melodramatic, paranoid and even though we've never met IRL and probably never will, I can confidently say you need a shower.*

HououinKyouma : *Probably is not a strong word. Interesting choice.*

KuriGohan : *Don't you even dare think about it, pervert.*

She was glad he moved on quickly. Truth be told, she didn't want to linger on what they'd both just admitted to. Dwelling was a dangerous past-time. The heat in her cheeks was proof of that.

They bickered about anything and everything, well into the early hours of the morning.

Mom's peonies watched on.

mayunya started a group chat

mayunya added HououinKyouma and KuriGohan

mayunya sent a sticker

Mayunya : omggggg finally !!

mayunya sent a sticker

mayunya sent a sticker

mayunya sent a sticker

mayunya sent a sticker

mayunya sent a sticker

mayunya sent a sti--

Chapter End Notes

I want to thank everyone for all the amazing comments that have poured into my inbox over the past year and a half.

2020 was a tough time for all of us. For me, all my energy was consumed by university. But it meant so much to me that every so often, I'd receive the kindest review on this fanfiction. To know it was still being read and enjoyed by so many people. I never expected this kind of response. The Steins;Gate fandom is honestly so good.

I'll be honest. Your comments are the reason I was able to sit down today and write up this chapter, even if it did turn out more lackluster than I would have liked. I do hope you enjoy it regardless. And rest assured that I am not dead. I would also still very much like to keep this fanfic alive, though I can't promise the most frequent of updates during semesters.

Also, thank you to my amazing fiancée <3 She also encouraged me to write this chapter, and in general has always helped me with my confidence and overcoming my fears in relation to writing. I love her so much.

I'm so sorry for the long gap in between chapters 4 and 5. I'm even more sorry that this chapter is a bit more somber and sad compared to the others. But let me know what you

think and, again, thank you for being my highlight in a year that tried to tear me down.
Unplugged is back, and I'm going to try my damn hardest to keep it that way <3

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!