One Thousand Questions Carved into a Maple Tree and Two Unblooming Flowers next to a Japanese Red Pine

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One Thousand Questions Carved into a Maple Tree and Two Unblooming Flowers next to a Japanese Red Pine

by FranzSan

Summary

Kaede Akamatsu is a girl who wants to make others happy, it's what she lives for, and she's been blessed with a talent that can make it so.
Chihiro Fujisaki is one of those people, and he's determined to pay the Ultimate Pianist back for bringing him back from the brink of despair.
Thankfully he has three whole years to do so, though high school is never easy, especially during Hope's Peak's Ultimate Talent Development Plan.
The First Performance and Encounter

For Kaede Akamatsu, it was just another show. That wasn't necessarily a bad thing. For Kaede, a normal show often ended with thunderous applause, almost a given considering that she could play the piano like no one else. Watching this blonde haired girl with purple eyes preform was to see the art of music taken to its uppermost high. Her music entered the senses and took them on journeys, like tonight for example. She played "Clair de Lune" and the images of moonlight dancing on water played as if a movie projector shined on the big screen.

Because of her talent, no one was surprised to hear that she had been accepted by Hope's Peak Academy as a part of their Ultimate Talent Development Plan, a massive 48 student program that was meant to prepare the brightest of the bright for their futures. With that invite, her future was hers to lose.

But for Kaede Akamatsu, the joy she received from playing the piano came from the smiling faces she would see in the audience. Applause was nice, playing her favorite instrument as well as her favorite genre (classical) was sweeter, but for her, nothing was sweeter than seeing people smile afterwards. Those smiles were her sigh that she had made someone's life a little better. The fact that her music could make others happier, maybe for only a little bit, hopefully for a long time, made every single hour of practice worth it.

No one at that moment needed to be cheered up more than a boy who was sitting in the third to front row.

He certainly didn't look like a boy, with the small frame, big round hazel eyes, and especially because of the dress he was wearing. But this boy, who looked like a child despite the fact that he was actually around two weeks older than the rather maturely built girl performing on stage, though he didn't know in the moment.

As mentioned earlier, this boy truly needed something to smile about, especially because, despite being accepted into Hope's Peak as the Ultimate Programmer, there was very little else positive going on in his life. He had pretended to be a girl for the last few years of his life in order to avoid harassment over how weak he was, but it only served to enhance his inferiority complex, his closest companion was a computer A.I. that he had got him accepted into Hope's Peak in the first place, and worst of all, his parents had separated.

He knew it was his fault, despite what his father tried to tell him afterwards. He knew that his mother couldn't handle the combination of a husband with very little confidence in himself (he had actually apologized for "only" getting seats that weren't directly in front of the stage) and a son who was forcing himself to pretend to be a girl. It was no surprise, he thought, that she needed to get away from such a group of weaklings. Men needed to be strong, or at least, that's what he was taught by bullies, so why not be a girl and allow yourself to be weak?

Today, this light-brown haired boy was happy for the first time since he had finished his Alter Ego Project, and it was all thanks to Kaede. As she played the music he could feel his spirit, weighted down by years of self-loathing, begin to raise. As she continued, it felt lighter and lighter, until the grand finale when it began to soar. Tears of happiness began to flow from his face as she went from song to song, time had slowed as he found himself in awe of this girl known as a "Piano Freak." But for him, he had laid eyes on a "Piano Angel" who had taken his battered and bruised soul and made it feel like nothing bad had ever happened to it.

For Kaede Akamatsu, it was enough for her to know she had made her audience happy.
But little did she know that on this day, she saved someone's life.

When he woke up today, the boy was honestly contemplating suicide rather then continue living his lie, but knowing that Kaede Akamatsu was going to be attending Hope's Peak made him realize that he had to keep going.

Chihiro Fujisaki couldn't die if he wanted to thank the person who had saved his life.

Eventually, the new semester rolled around and the Ultimate Talent Development Plan began. As a part of said program, the students would have to live on campus for the majority of the semester. The 47 selected students would be separated into two groups of sixteen as well as one group of fifteen, and Chihiro was put in class A-1. He shared this classroom with an optimistic lucky student, the biggest pop idol in Japan, a baseball star who looked like he wanted to be anywhere but a baseball field, a tremendously scary gang leader, a very strict moral compass, a fanfic creator who honestly looked like a hamster, a rather mysterious poker player, an incredibly strong martial artist, a swimmer who seemed sweet, if a little air-headed, a rude affluent progeny, an always fidgeting writing prodigy, a clairvoyant who had been held back several years and lived in his own reality, a pair of sisters who were so radically different that you'd be forgiven for dropping your jaw when you learned they were twins, and to top it all off, a detective who happened to be the Headmaster's daughter.

Kaede wouldn't be in Chihiro's class, she was placed in class V-3 with fifteen other students (including another Ultimate Detective ironically).

It did hurt, if he had to be honest, that she wasn't in his class, but why should he complain? After all, Kaede didn't know him from Adam, even though she had helped him, it wasn't like she did something specifically for him, it was a performance after all. All this meant was that he would have to wait in order to thank her.

Thanks in part to a loose tree branch, he didn't have to wait for long.

It was right after class, every one was heading back to their rooms but Chihiro wanted some time to collect his thoughts and maybe do some homework. And it was a nice April Spring day, so why do finish his work under a tree, maybe see a cute bird or two, and then go his dorm room, call his dad around the time he got off work, and of course, talk to Alter Ego. As he was going under the tree, a branch snapped off and the Ultimate Programmer realized too late that it was right above him. His legs froze as the branch got closer and closer...

But thankfully someone managed to tackle him before the worst to come to pass.

"A-Are you okay!?
"

As he got his wits back, Chihiro looked up at the concerned voice. And wouldn't you know it, there she was. Lovely purple eyes, shoulder-length blonde hair with a single strand sticking up, it would have been a miracle if he hadn't recognized Kaede Akamatsu.

But now wasn't the time to celebrate, she had asked him a question. Was he okay? He felt fine, if a bit rattled by almost getting hit in the head. But his body was ultimately okay, so he should have let her know "Yes, I'm okay. Thank you for saving me." But something of greater concern popped into his mind, the fact that her knee had been scraped.

"Y-You're hurt..." the little programmer panted out.
Kaede looked down at her knee before returning her eyes to the boy she had just saved. "This? Don't worry about this, I'm more concerned about you."

"B-But it's not alright." Tears began to well up in his hazel eyes. "Y-You got hurt because of me."

"Don't say that," Kaede reassured him "if I didn't do anything you would have gotten hurt."

"B-But..." Chihiro's tears began to pour down his cheeks "I-It's only the first day and I-I already got somebody hurt. I-I couldn't help myself and you got injured because of that..." He covered his eyes with his sleeve, both to stem the tide of tears as well as to hide his ever growing shame. "I-I'm sorry for being weak, I'm sorry for getting you hurt..."

"Please stop saying that."

"H-Huh?" Chihiro quietly murmured as he lifted his eyes from his sleeve in order to look at Kaede. Her eyes gleamed with concern as she smiled warmly at him.

"You didn't get me hurt, I got hurt protecting you. There's a big difference between those. And besides, I only got my knee scraped, if that landed on you, you could have died. So please stop blaming yourself, I hate seeing people sad."

Chihiro pondered her words carefully before replying "I-I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset you..."

Kaede sighed. "You don't have to apologies." Soon a bright smile lit up her face as she decided that the mood needed to be brightened "Lets start over, my name's Kaede Akamatsu, it's nice to meet you."

"C-Chihiro Fujisaki, i-i-it's nice to meet you to." Despite her friendliness, Chihiro still found it hard to look her in the eyes after what happened.

"You're the Ultimate Programmer, right?"

This knocked Chihiro out of his worries, if only a little and he looked up at her with surprise. "Y-Yes. Y-You actually remembered my talent?"

"Oh course I would!" Kaede continued to smile brightly "I made extra sure to study everyone's student profiles before I got here!"

"Really?"

"My goal is to make as many friends as I can in the three years I'm here, so it's important to know as much as I can."

This statement surprised Chihiro. "That's a pretty lofty goal, or I should say, it would have been for me if I had it..."

"Have you made any yet?" Kaede asked with concern.

"No..." Chihiro quietly said as his eyes grew downcast.

"Then I'll be your first!"

"W-What?"

"I'll be the first, but nowhere near the only, friend you'll make!"
Chihiro had no idea how to take this. He had spent the last few years of his life feeling miserable, and here comes this girl, seemingly out of the blue, who had saved his life twice and asked to be his friend as if it was the most casual thing in the world. "B-But, y-you don't even know me, and we're not even in the same class. P-Please don't get me wrong I'm grateful that you want to be my friend, but..."

He took his time before saying his next few words, because as harsh as they were, he knew they were all too true.

"...I'm not worth the effort."

Chihiro's eyes stared off into the distance once again. It wouldn't have surprised him if she left without another word after what he had said.

But Kaede didn't leave. In fact, she seemed to be considering everything he had just said before beginning her reply. "It's true that I don't know you that well, and that we're in separate classes, but that last thing you said was complete nonsense."

Chihiro's eyes slowly lifted back to meet Kaede's gaze as she continued. "Getting to know you is especially worth the effort, especially because, and I hope this doesn't come across as rude, you have a lot of self-esteem issues, don't you?"

She didn't even know the half of it, but rather then say that, Chihiro simply nodded.

"You look like you need a friend, and there's no way I could abandon someone in need, especially when I haven't seen them smile yet."

"Smile?"

Kaede nodded and clasped her hands together. "Whenever I can help someone smile, it makes me happy knowing I was able to make their lives a little better. And, honestly, you look like you would have a wonderful smile."

There she went again, saying such sweet things to him as if it was the most normal thing in the world, but without a hint of malice and phoniness. Chihiro's heart increased its rhythm as he struggled to find his next set of words. "T-That's..."

But in this case, actions spoke louder than words, and he decided that the best course of action would be to show her this smile that she desired to see. His eyes watered, his cheeks grew red, and he smiled the best he could. "T-Thank you."

"See, I knew you had a wonderful smile. You should show it more."

"Thank you for making me feel better, and for saving me."

"You don't have to thank me for that, I'd do it again in a heartbeat." Kaede then sheepishly turned to her knee "I should probably get this taken care of before it gets infected. Luckily there's an Ultimate Nurse on campus."

Chihiro didn't want her to leave, but he wasn't going to force her to stay, especially because of her scraped knee. "I'll try to make it up to you one day."

"You really don't need to, but if you don't find anyone to hang out with tomorrow, you could always join my group at lunch. That's how you can make it up to me, okay?"
This time, Chihiro nodded his head with excitement. "Okay!"

Kaede rose to her feet while helping Chihiro to his. "It was nice to meet you, I hope to get to know you better in the next three years."

"I-I do to."

Kaede sprinted off in the direction of the nurse's office, waving goodbye one last time. Chihiro waved back.

Friend. On one hand, Chihiro was happy to have made his first friend that wasn't his dad or an A.I., especially because said friend was absolutely sweet and seemed to genuinely care about him. On the other hand, there was a small and selfish part of him that couldn't help but wonder "Maybe we can be more?" But this feeling was likely just his emotions going into overdrive, after all, he barely interacted with people throughout middle school and even in grade school, and now he was going to have romantic feeling for a girl he just met? Still, the slightest selfish hope sang in his heart of the Ultimate Pianist left his sight.

Rather than sit under the tree, Chihiro decided to go to the dorm rooms, which were thankfully divided by class and not on gender because that would have caused problems no matter where he ended up. As he entered his second floor room, he plopped down on his bed and stared at the ceiling. He had no idea what was in store for the next three years, but he wasn't thinking about the next three years, because his present was better then it had ever been before.

Kaede Akamatsu had now saved his life twice, and Chihiro was determined to make it up to her.
Lunch Time and Degenerate Males

Chapter Notes

It's been a month since I published this and for that I apologize. On another note, instead of being prompt based, I'm going to focus on having this just be it's own story. While my main focus is going to be on "Galactic Melancholy" I do want to keep working on this, especially because it's currently the only Chihiro/Kaede shipping fic on the site so far. I can't promise to upload this frequently, but I'm going to try to keep myself on a once-within-every-two-weeks schedule.

Before today, getting up for an alarm clock was the worst thing imaginable for Chihiro. The burdens that held him down made getting up a herculean effort. Today was different. Today, he had a reason to get out of bed. After getting dressed, collecting his backpack, and carefully placing Alter Ego into it, he left his room and headed off towards class.

Class today was about the same as the first day, Kiyotaka had focused on the Professor Kizakura’s instructions with the intensity of a bomb defuser, while the others were much less intense. In fact, at least two of them (Mondo and Junko) were outright asleep. Chihiro, meanwhile, was trying his best to pay attention, but the Kaede bug was constantly biting the back of his mind, like a friendly mosquito transferring good vibes as opposed to sucking blood (Not like Chihiro would have been bothered by a mosquito, after all, it probably has a little mosquito family to take care of).

Eventually, the first half of class ended and lunch time had begun. Walking up to the lunch hall was, in of itself, a task all its own, because on top of there being nearly fifty Ultimate students, there were also thousands of students in the school’s Reserve Course, an expensive program for those without talents. Being around that many people during a lunch rush was an almost claustrophobic experience, but Chihiro had to keep calm. Someone was waiting for him, hopefully.

Thankfully, despite everyone wearing essentially the same uniform, Kaede was an easy person to spot, seated at a table with two other girls on the other side, one with short red hair and a tired face, the other had two long ponytails wrapped and an additional green ribbon on the back of her head and was having an energetic conversation with the Ultimate Pianist. Chihiro steeled himself with a deep breath before walking over to the table, where, thankfully, he was recognized.

“Chihiro! I’m glad to see you’re here.” The blonde girl’s tone was quite comforting to the hazel eyed boy’s ears.

He then replied with a sheepish, but comfortable “I-I said I would…”

The girl with the green ribbon leaned in curiously “Do I know you?”

“Oh, I-I’m Chihiro Fujisaki, I’m in a different class.” The boy replied nervously.

“Oh, you’re the girl Kaede told us about!” She said excitedly. “Himiko wake up! We have a guest!”

“Nyeh, I’ll say hi later...” The red haired girl mentioned sheepishly while she rested her face against her hand.
“Himiko! Don’t be rude!”

Kaede waved her hands nervously in an attempt to calm the girl down. “Tenko, just let her be for now.” She turned her attention to Chihiro “Come on, join us.”

“O-Okay.”

The programmer took a seat next to Kaede, who then motioned to the other two girls. “Chihiro, this is Tenko Chabashira and Himiko Yumeno from my class.”

The Ultimate Programmer gave a little bow and said “It’s nice to meet you.”

“Likewise,” Tenko responded “it’s always so nice to meet girls from other classes.”

To this Himiko had her own response “Specifically girls.”

“What do you mean specifically?” Chihiro asked.

Kaede began to lightly pull at her ahoge as she muttered “Oh here we go…”

“Yes, I specifically mean girls!” Tenko pronounced passionately “Degenerate males aren’t allowed in our inner circle!”

Chihiro nervously responded by asking “Degenerate males?”

“She essentially means all of them.” Himiko piped in.

Tenko proudly proclaimed “Kaede knows that to, that’s why we’re the only ones here.”

To this Kaede responded “I invited everyone in our class though. They were all busy.”

Tenko sighed “I must say, I feel jealous of you Chihiro.”

“Me?”

“You’ve got nine girls in your class and class B-2 has eight girls amongst fifteen students. Our class is equal when it comes to girls and degenerate males.”

Himiko piped in once again “But we have a robot in our class. So it’s technically eight girls, seven boys and a robot.”

Tenko let out a joyful cry before pulling the red haired girl into a hug. “Himiko! You’re so brilliant!”

“Nyeh! You should ask permission before hugging!”

As the two girls discussed hug ethics, Kaede turned to Chihiro and whispered “These are only two of the students in my class, and yes, it only gets more interesting from here.”

“Th-They seem nice at least.”

What Chihiro didn’t mention was the fact that Tenko’s self admitted dislike of “degenerate” males sent a chill up his spine. He remembered Tenko’s talent as the Ultimate Aikido Master, and he made a mental note to never reveal the truth in front of her.

Thankfully, lunch went smoothly. Tenko discussed her self-invented Neo Aikido while Himiko talked about magic and how it was real. Chihiro, despite being a boy of science, decided to nod
along with what she was saying. And while he enjoyed meeting two more people, he mostly enjoyed
Kaede’s presence. Lunch would eventually end and Tenko and Himiko would get a head start on the
way to the class V-3. The Ultimate Pianist and Programmer, on the other hand, decided to take a
slower approach by walking through the halls as Kaede walked Chihiro to his class.

“Y-You didn’t have to do this.” Chihiro said nervously. “I’d hate for you to be late.”

“Nonsense,” Kaede responded “there’s plenty of time before class starts. And besides, it’s nice to just
talk to people one on one.”

“How’s your knee?”

Kaede gave the boy a thumbs up “A ok! It was just scrapped, but Mikan helped make sure it didn’t
get infected.”

Chihiro breathed a sigh of relief “Thank goodness. I was scared for a second.”

“How’s your knee?” She asked in a surprised tone.

“Well, I was worried about it getting infected, and sometimes infections can get serious and-”
Chihiro stopped himself before regretfully replying “S-Sorry.”

“Don’t apologize. I appreciate the thought, but I’m tougher than I look. It’ll take a lot more than a
scraped knee to take out Kaede Akamatsu.”

Chihiro smiled at the pianist’s optimism “Right.”

“Oh yeah, I almost forgot!” Kaede stopped, reached into her backpack, pulled out a flier and handed
it to Chihiro.

“What is this?”

“It’s an invitation to my recital tomorrow.” Kaede answered with a bright smile.

This brought a touch of joy to Chihiro’s next words “Really!?”

“Of course. I’d love to see everyone there, even if I know everyone can’t make it.” The second half
of her sentence contained slight hints of nervousness.

Passionately, Chihiro responded “I’ll definitely be there!”

“Great! I’ll see you there!” Kaede skipped away to class, hopefully making it before the bell rang.
Chihiro, meanwhile, went back to class with cheer in his heart, provided once again, unknowingly,
by the Ultimate Pianist. With a recital coming up, it was admittedly a bit difficult to pay attention in
class, but nonetheless, the rest of his day would be spent daydreaming of the joy to come.

Unknowingly, a certain fashionista had taken note of the brightness of his smile, and was already
planning on bringing rain clouds.
Junko Enoshima, the SHSL Bully

Chapter Notes

So...the once every two weeks thing has clearly failed, so I'll just operate on a once every time I feel like uploading schedule. I can never follow my own schedule when I set one, so I'll just focus on not having one at all.

Chihiro couldn't help but be a little bouncy in his chair. I mean, after all, the girl of his dreams hadn't forgotten about him after the events of the day before. And on top of that, he was going to get a chance to watch Kaede Akamatsu, the Ultimate Pianist, in her element. Yes, he was invited with other people, but it didn't matter as long as he could hear her beautiful music once again. The mere thought brought back memories of the first concert he witnessed, he could still remember every note, but he knew, deep down, that hearing them again would be like listening to them anew.

Granted this had a drawback in real life, as he was so focused on Kaede's music that he completely forgot that he was in the middle of class. There were more than a few times where he got called on to answer a question and he didn't answer immediately. You'd think a programmer would be a bit quicker to answer math problems, but Kaede Akamatsu had that effect on him. After a long, long class, the final bell of the day rang and he quickly gathered his stuff and shoved it into his backpack, though he took extra precautions with his laptop, as Alter Ego wouldn't appreciate being handled carelessly. Chihiro exited from the classroom and scurried down the hallway, every step he took felt like a skip as he unintentionally began to match his steps to the notes he could remember.

This was interrupted when he tripped on something. Or, to be more specific, someone.

"Hey! You gotta watch were you're going! These shoes cost more than-Oh, well look at you! You're that programmer chick from my class!"

There was no mistaking Junko Enoshima, the Ultimate Fashionista. Her bleached blonde hair tied up in pigtails and even she made her normal school outfit her own. Granted it was mostly for how indecently she wore it, but still, her light blue eyes instantly made contact with his and Chihiro felt a sense of fear crawling up his spine.

He did try to hide this nervousness, replying back "Y-Yeah, I am...H-How did you get ahead of me?"

"Jeez you're daft. I skipped class in the middle of it." The casualness of her response left Chihiro confused.

"Oh. I-I didn't see you..."

She flashed a peace sign and gave a huge grin. "Well of course you didn't. Your head was on cloud nine. You probably couldn't even see your own hand in front of you."

Ok, while that last part was clearly exaggerated, he also knew she was right. His attention span today was subpar at best, and for good reason. But still, behind her grin, Chihiro couldn't help but feel like there was a bit of malice behind it.
"I'm sorry for bumping into you. I'll try to be more careful next time."

Her grin dropped like a rock "More careful!? You got a scratch on my shoe! Do you have any idea how long I took to pick these out and you ruined them!"

Chihiro took a step back as he could instantly feel his eyes watering. "S-Sorry. I-I swear I didn't mean to-"

"Meh, it's fine." Chihiro's mind rattled as Junko once again seemed to switch her behavior on a dime. "But, if we're going to be even..."

"E-Even?"

Her grin returned, but the sinister vibes were clear and present this time around. "I just need to scratch your laptop."

"N-No!"

"What the hell did you say to me!?"

Yes, what did he say? Chihiro was normally a complete pushover when it came to caving into other people's demands. But when Alter Ego was the subject, that wasn't the case. As odd as it would sound, Alter Ego was his baby, he spent so long crafting every bit of him that he grew to consider it beyond it's code. Chihiro, at the tender age of 15, was already a parent, and no parent was going to sit by and see their child hurt.

"Y-You heard me! I'm not letting you touch them!"

She tilted her eyebrow in confusion. "Them? Kid you're head's even more screwed up than min-I mean Hifumi's."

"L-Look, I'll pay you back for the shoes, but you're not touching my laptop!"

Junko seemed perplexed by the programmer's sudden burst of bravery, but this wouldn't last for long..."You know what's funny?"

"W-What?"

Her eyes darkened. "You're making it out like you have a choice."

This was a clear red flag that whatever she had in store, Chihiro needed to leave ASAP. He should run to his room and lock the door for however long it took for Junko to calm down from her tranquil fury, a task that wouldn't be easy for two reasons. One, he shared a class with her. And two...

...someone else had stuck their hands in his backpack and pulled out his laptop.

"W-What!?"

"Nice job sis! Looks like you do have your uses!"

Mukuro Ikusaba, Junko's twin sister and, far more terrifyingly, the Ultimate Soldier. The oddly plain looking black haired girl was now standing over Chihiro with a cold, emotionless look in her light purple eyes...almost the same color of Kaede's but with nowhere near the same amount of warmth. The fear in Chihiro's heart had grown into pure, unaltered terror as Mukuro tossed his pride and joy into Junko's hands.
"Give them back!" Chihiro reached for the laptop, but was halted when Mukuro grabbed his arms and halted his movements.

"Oooh! It's so shiny and clean! It's clear you've put so much time and care into this little thing! Imagine the despair if I dropped it." The idea of breaking Chihiro's treasured brought a sick euphoria to the pigtailed prima donna's face.

"P-Please don't!" His watering eyes had evolved into uncontrollable tears as Junko began to raise the laptop above her head. No matter how hard he pulled, he couldn't break Mukuro's grip.

"I hope you've got insurance on this cause you're going to ne-"

This time, it was Junko who got cut off mid-sentence. This time, another blonde girl (one who happened to have purple eyes) snatched the laptop out of her hands. Junko turned to see who had the nerve to take what she had stolen...

...and was met with a hard slap to the face, courtesy of Kaede Akamatsu.

"K-Kaede?" Chihiro responded. His voice had been shot from is cries of fear and despair, but the sight of her brought back a twine of hope.

Mukuro, however, was not amused in the slightest. She tossed Chihiro to the floor and began to charge at Kaede, but a hand held out by Junko stopped her in her tracks. The fashionista calmly placed her hand on her now red cheek and stared at the pianist with a terrifyingly calm face.

Kaede, however, didn't budge. Instead, she carefully placed herself between the two and Chihiro, using her body to shield him in case things went to hell in a handbasket. While Junko's face was more than likely meant to intimidate, Kaede's determined look was a clear sign that she wasn't backing down.

The tense stand off ended when Junko quietly spoke. "You just made my shit list." She turned and motioned for Mukuro to follow her, and the soldier did so without a moment of hesitation.

With the duo gone, Kaede took a deep breath and turned to Chihiro, reaching down to him with an outstretched hand. "Are you okay?"

Chihiro took the hand and was brought back to his feet, though he was also clearly shaken by the events. "Yeah...I...I'm not hurt."

Kaede took another sigh of relief. "Thank goodness! I heard people arguing from down the hallway and I recognized your voice. I got here as soon as I could, and thankfully I got here in time."

"Are you okay? You...You slapped her..."

"I mean, my hand hurts a little, but otherwise I'm okay. Who were those jerks?"

Chihiro sheepishly looked to the floor. "They're my class mates. Junko Enoshima, the Ultimate Fashionista, and Mukuro Ikusaba, the Ultimate Soldier."

The pianist looked horrified "Classmates? You mean you have to spend every school day with them?" Chihiro nodded, though it seemed like Mukuro's title had gone right over her head. "That's not fair! You should tell the headmaster what happened!"

"N-No...It was my fault, I...I scratched her shoes by tripping over them...Junko wouldn't have been upset if I wasn't so clumsy..."
"That's no excuse! Scratched shoes isn't an excuse to bully someone!" Chihiro visibly winced at the shouting and Kaede took note. She kneeled down in front of him and handed over his laptop, complete with another warm and comforting smile. "I believe this belongs to you."

The hazel eyed boy smiled as he took the laptop and hugged it tightly. "Thank you so much! I know it might sound weird, but this laptop means a lot to me..."

"It's not weird at all. I'd be devastated if my piano was broken, so I understand completely."

Chihiro was going to ask if she considered her piano a child, but held back this little question. "I'm...I'm glad you were here..." The smile dropped from his face "But...after that...you'll probably never get along with her..."

Kaede sighed. "Well, no one in the world is beloved by everyone. That's just a fact. But that doesn't mean you have to feel bad about it."

"But I..."

"No buts." She patted Chihiro on the head. "You're my friend, and there no way I'd ever stand around and watch my friend be bullied."

Chihiro felt mixed feeling about this statement. On one hand, he felt overjoyed that Kaede cared enough about him to get into a fight with two people, including a soldier, just to protect him. But on the other hand...friends...

Still, this statement was enough to make him blush, and his eyes watered again, though for much happier reasons this time. "Thank you."

"You're welcome. By the way, do you think you'll still be able to make it to my recital? After what happened I wouldn't be shocked if you needed a few days to recover."

Chihiro was nearly offended by that last part, but he didn't show it. "Oh course I will! I wouldn't miss it for the world!"

Kaede smiled back. "Well, I don't want you to go alone with that creep and her lackey around, so I have an idea, I just need to know where your dorm is."

Chihiro tilted his head with Curiosity. "Why?"

"Let's just say I have an idea I like to call 'The Chihiro Protection Squad.'"

Curiosity turned to confusion. "The what?"

She responded with a wink. "You'll see."

What Chihiro wouldn't give to figure out how the pianist's mind worked. But at the same time, he felt happy she even considered this idea, especially because it had no intention other than to get him to the recital with minimal Junko interactions. "Okay, I'll tell you!"

"Awesome! I can't wait to see you there!" She then asked "Do you have any requests?"

"Requests?"

"Yeah! I'm taking requests, though if you don't want me to announce who the song is for that's be fine."
A song he'd love to hear her play?

Well, why not the song that made him fall in love in the first place?

"I'd love to hear 'Clair de Lune."

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