

Mitsuru was surprised to see a message from Rias, of all people, on her interdimensional phone. She was included in the default contact list; but that was mainly just in case they needed her for something. She was not the sociable sort. She had fraternized somewhat with Venelana but they mostly focused on business. It was a short and simple request to be summoned so they could talk about something.

Mitsuru had no reason to decline the request. She reached across the table and inserted Rias' card into the Sledgehammer, summoning her from the other world. She was still wearing her uniform. The look on her face spoke to a sense of shock that it had even worked. Mitsuru has always been so prickly with her.

"This is the first time you've ever visited me," Mitsuru noted. Never once did her eyes drift upwards from her work on the bench.

Rias rounded the table to get a closer look, "I like to think that we're friends. You were the one who introduced me to my fiancé after all."

"Hm. How did your 'meeting' go? I hope you didn't kill him."

Rias blushed, "We didn't do anything like that. It was a talk between club members. But he did bring something up that I thought was interesting."

"From the tone of your voice, it sounds like he made you promise not to tell me."

Rias shrugged, "I had my fingers crossed."

"Typical devil..."

"He said you were very concerned for his health, asking him to become a devil."

Mitsuru sighed, "I thought you would have agreed. Doesn't he need to be a devil to marry you?"

"Not necessarily. Though the other clans would surely go white in the face at the prospect of a half-devil inheriting our house. He expressed some hesitation in becoming one, and I agreed. To make such a big decision so quickly doesn't seem right. He will become my Rook if he desires to be one."

"Just to clarify. I'm always worried about him. I wouldn't want my best friend to get hurt because I roped him into being a superhero for me."

Rias smirked, "Oh? But wouldn't you like to be more than just friends?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Be honest with yourself. You want to be his girlfriend too, but you feel that you don't have the confidence or anything to offer him versus girls like me."

Mitsuru rolled her eyes. Indeed – Rias was the type of girl that only a horny light novel author could invent. Huge, gravity defying honkers that looked fake but weren't, perfect curves, a big butt, and a pretty face that was completely flawless. Next to her, Mitsuru looked like a teenage boy in glasses. Rias projected a bad self esteem field around her person at all times. As much as Mitsuru wished she was resistant to being envious, she was not.

She knew that it was possible to change these things. The full bounty of the infinite multiverse was on the doorstep – somewhere out there was a method to change her body to be better or more to her liking. The real question was what you thought of her.

“Hypothetically, if I were interested in being his girlfriend - that would be extremely embarrassing. I can’t do the things that you do and seduce anyone.”

“It is embarrassing,” Rias insisted. All of her natural confidence and seductive wiles weren’t really natural at all. It was something that had sprouted from years of being the apple of every devil’s eye. She had learned to handle them with condescension, to misdirect their compliments and present herself as aloof. Rias *hated* going to devil parties and being beset on all sides by men looking for a bride.

“But you make it look easy.”

Rias looked down to the complex electrical component that Mitsuru was soldering while speaking with her; “You make *that* look easy. But if I said it was impossible to do, you’d disagree.”

Mitsuru paused. Rias had made a good point. Things that looked impossible to others were simple to some. The image of herself with a body like Rias just seemed wrong. “So? Should I turn myself into a bombshell girl like you? I fail to see how that helps.”

“I’m not saying you should turn into a girl like me – I’m sure he likes you plenty as you are. But a little confidence will go a long way.”

Rias looked Mitsuru up and down, past the long white lab coat and into the core of her being. She was wearing a pair of black short and steel-toed boots, and a shirt that was three sizes too big, exposing a large part of her neck and collarbone. A pair of big, round glasses reflected the harsh lighting of the laboratory and obscured her eyes from sight.

“Come here. Let me give you some pointers.”

Mitsuru sighed and turned her soldering tool off. She stepped aside and beneath the taller girl, holding out her arms. Rias reached down and removed the lab coat from her shoulders, revealing a clearer look at her body. Rias understood that humans seldom boasted bodies as nice as hers, but even devils came in all shapes and sizes. Sona Sitri had a body closer to the norm. Sometimes she envied the ease with which she could blend in to a crowd.

Mitsuru was closer to Sona than her.

“We have to use your natural ‘weapons’ to win this battle. Trying to become someone you’re not will only make things harder, and it’s better to be authentic with someone you care about.”

“I never said I wanted to be his girlfriend,” Mitsuru snarked. It was unconvincing to both of them.

“Really? It seems to me like he’s taken care of you for a long time, and you want to get even closer with him because of that.”

Mitsuru locked her lips tight and refused to speak any further. Rias had already started to coordinate a plan in her head. She removed the large spectacles from her nose and placed them on the bench, seeing her face clearly for the first time. Mitsuru had beautiful brown eyes and naturally pretty lashes. A basic amount of makeup would make her presentable for any kind of occasion, even formal ones.

Rias found even more things to envy. Her complexion was surprisingly clean, in fact, it was flawless. There was not a blemish or spot to be found; which defied reason given the messy conditions she worked in. She was cute to the bone. Cute. Cute. Cute. That meant that she needed to use her ‘cuteness’ to squeeze her crush’s heart!

“You’re very pretty, Mitsuru.”

“You’re just saying that to be nice.”

“I’d never lie to a friend. I think that all you need to do is show hubby your best side. Some new clothes and glasses... you could fire a cupid’s arrow right into his heart!”

“I don’t have time to go shopping for a new wardrobe,” Mitsuru replied.

Rias wasn’t going to back down that easily, “All you need is one afternoon. Once you know what you like and what sizes are appropriate, you can simply order things online and have them delivered.”

“And!” Mitsuru cracked, “I never said that I *wanted* to look good for him! He’s a big dummy. We’re just childhood friends, that’s all.”

“Childhood friends? That’s a classic romance starting point,” Rias observed pointedly. “You can deny it all you want – but when you see him smile, or when he does something nice for you, your heart starts dancing in your chest. You’re scared of changing your relationship with him. And...”

“And?”

Rias had tried to avoid mentioning this to her, but there really was no getting around it. Mitsuru was going to find out eventually regardless. She took a deep breath and came out with it, “You two get married in the anime...”

Mitsuru froze perfectly still – as if someone had pressed the pause button on her remote control.

“...I’m not saying that *our* version of *your* story perfectly matches this world, I wasn’t there on the TV we watched together. But you were the one who calibrated the cards – you were the one who specified which of those stories we had been influenced by. I spoke with the other girls, and they all told me the same thing. Chun-Li, Motoko, all of them.”

“I... I would never!” Mitsuru grumbled, “Do you have any idea how silly that sounds? If I really cared about him that much, why would I have given him this harem to start with?”

Rias wasn’t sure of how to answer that; “I don’t know. What I do know is that every version of *you*, from every anime, manga or novel – they’re all similar. Someone with an unflinching dedication to doing the right thing, even at the expense of her own feelings. Maybe you thought that you’d move on if you saw him with someone else, or that the fate of the world was more important than finally getting what you wanted.”

Mitsuru bowed her head and tried to hide the expression on her face. Rias had cut right through her reasoning like a chainsaw. Trying to stick the pieces back together was a waste of time. She’d ploughed ahead with her plan knowing full well that you would find yourself entangled with women who weren’t her. It pained her to do so, but in a perfect world you wouldn’t have to fight in the first place.

Rias placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder, “I *want* to do this for you, Mitsuru. You were the one who made the impossible possible. You were the one who turned my silly fantasy into a reality. To meet a man who I’d fallen in love with, and one who was everything that I had hoped he would be. I owe you this. We all do.”

Was it possible to build a future where you could all be happy? That was something that Mitsuru had wrestled with time and time again. This was what she always did. Always pulling you along into her

plans, only to think about the consequences after the fact. She knew that you were selfless enough to fight for Earth, even without the incentive of 'hot anime wives' waiting on the other side. How long could she take advantage of your friendship before she started asking for too much?

"I... I felt bad," Rias continued, "Because I knew how long you'd been together. When I learned that polygamy wasn't accepted on this planet, I realised how much you'd sacrificed to make this happen. The most important thing. The way you felt. Those precious emotions are worth more than gold. So, let me be selfish please. Let me help you."

Mitsuru released a shuddering breath and met her aqua eyes once more, "I won't make any promises. But if it's really that important to you..."

"Thank you, Mitsuru-chan."

"Chan?"

Rias tilted her head, "Oh, would you prefer Sensei?"

"No. Chan is fine."

"I'd be honoured to have a fellow wife as brilliant as you, all of us would."

Mitsuru slapped her hand away, "Okay! Okay! Step back a second there, you damn devil. I never said anything about marriage! We have a world to save first!"

Rias giggled, "I almost forgot! But that means you have to look good doing it!"

Mitsuru checked her watch and considered how much progress she had made. Maintaining a decent work-life balance would improve her efficiency, which she kept meticulous track of using a spreadsheet on her phone. Inputting the 'progress' against the time invested, she could see the graph trending downwards. Mitsuru reached out and grabbed her glasses. She couldn't see anything with them.

"I guess I can spare a few hours. But we'd better make it quick."

"Thank you so much! I can teleport us there. Much quicker than catching a bus."

"Just make sure nobody sees us." The two women stepped into a glowing magic circle and sunk into the ground, out of sight.

For the first time in a long time, the garage was empty.