



# The Mask and the Melody

Ajk Ntn



Nijaki Hayame, a quiet student with spiky hair and observant eyes, stands calmly by the school vending machines. He watches as the beautiful but sharp-eyed Toki Shiraka, with her flowing black hair, intimidates a cowering freshman. Nijaki, hands in his pockets, steps forward with a determined look, ready to intervene.



The next morning, Nijaki stares in shock at his desk, covered in rotten, sun-dried fish, while the entire class erupts in laughter. Toki Shiraka leans back in her chair, a villainous smirk playing on her lips. Nijaki slams his fist on the desk, his face a mix of anger and humiliation as the teacher points them both towards the door.



In the dusty detention room, bathed in the warm, orange glow of the setting sun, Nijaki and Toki sit far apart. Nijaki, still fuming, glances over to see Toki engrossed in an old, worn diary. Her cruel expression has softened into a gentle, fragile smile as she reads, revealing a glimpse of vulnerability.



Toki, startled by Nijaki's gaze, snaps at him with a harsh glare, her previous softness vanishing. As the detention bell rings, she rushes out of the room in a blur of motion. In her haste, a worn, leather-bound diary slips unnoticed from her desk and tumbles onto the dusty floor.



Under the soft glow of his desk lamp, Nijaki carefully opens the dropped diary. Instead of the harsh words he expected, he finds pages filled with elegant handwriting. He reads lines of beautiful, poignant lyrics, each word flowing gracefully across the page, revealing a hidden artistic soul.



As Nijaki continues to read the diary's verses, a heartbreaking truth unfolds before his eyes. The lyrics paint a vivid picture of a lonely life: orphaned, raised by cruel foster parents who saw her as a burden. He realizes Toki's aggression is a shield, not a weapon, born from a deep sense of isolation.



The next day, Nijaki walks through the bustling school hallways, his face etched with disbelief and hurt. Posters with his photo and the words "BEWARE: STALKER" are plastered everywhere. Whispers and pointing fingers follow him, making the air feel thick and suffocating.



Nijaki stands before Toki, who crumples his heartfelt apology letter in her hand, her expression unreadable. Later, in detention again, Toki quietly admits she retrieved and read his letter. With a softer gaze, she tells him to come to her house tomorrow, leaving Nijaki stunned.



On a bright Saturday morning, Nijaki approaches Toki's small, aged house. Toki emerges, her eyes red-rimmed and holding a guitar, beckoning him. She leads him to a serene spot with two grave markers beneath a cherry blossom tree by a calm lake, where she tenderly places flowers and begins to sing a mournful, beautiful song.



With a heavy heart, Nijaki stands before Toki, his parents' impending move abroad casting a shadow over them. He gently tells her, "Wherever I am... I am yours. Take care. I'll be back soon," his voice filled with quiet promise. Toki says nothing, but tears stream down her face as he turns and walks away, leaving her alone by the graves.