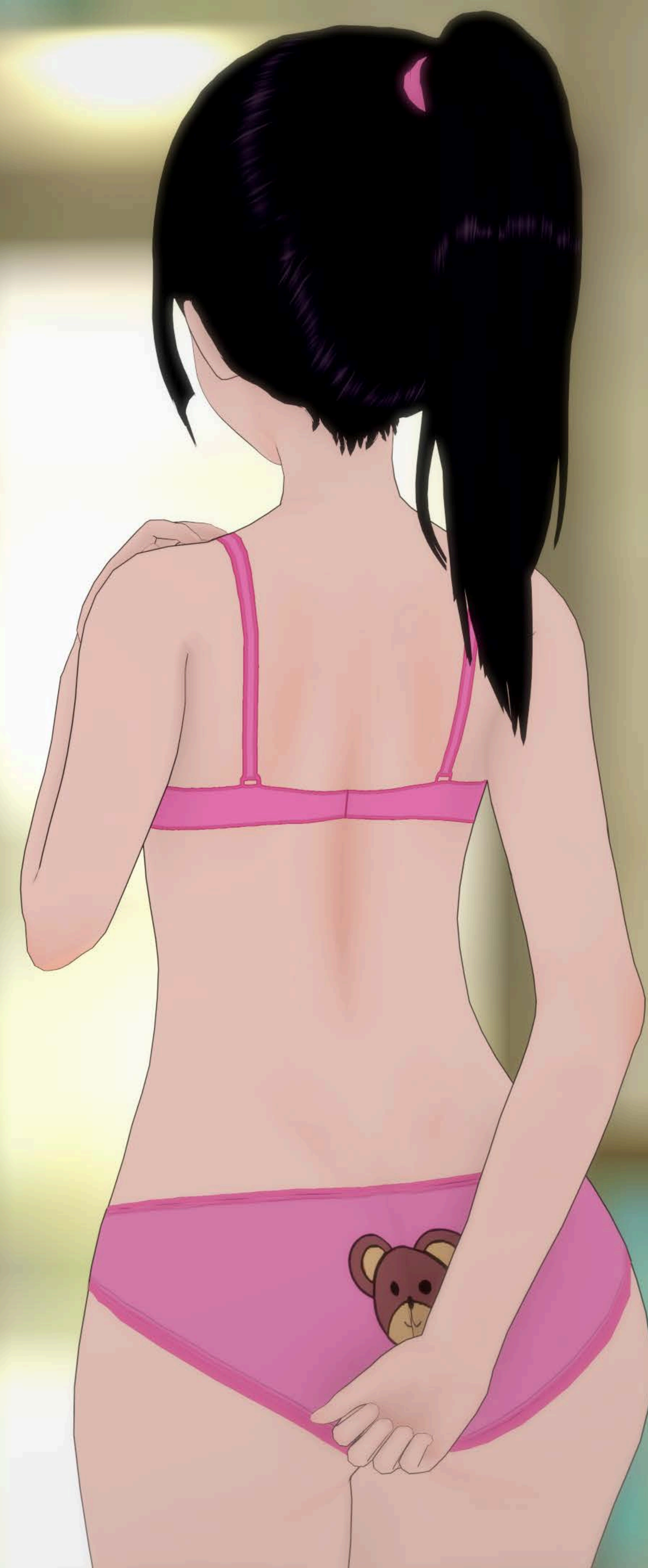


RUNAWAY

CHAPTER-12

BY IZUMISAN



NOW SQUEEZE THE BALLS.

THERE'S NO NEED TO
OVERREACT. DIDN'T I TELL YOU THAT
I INJECTED CREAM INSIDE.

Store Room

YUCK, WHAT IS THIS...
IT LOOKS SO DISGUSTING.





ARGH... I DON'T WANT IT.
JUST SEND ME THE MONEY
YOU PROMISED.

MMM! THE VIDEO CAME OUT
REALLY WELL. ARE YOU SURE YOU
DON'T WANT IT TOO?

HOLD YOUR HORSES, GIRL...
I'M SENDING IT. JUST GIVE ME A MINUTE!

HUH... IS.... IS IT REALLY 50% ?

WOW, I DIDN'T EXPECT THOSE
TOKENS TO BE WORTH THIS MUCH! IT'S
ALMOST DOUBLE WHAT CLARA GAVE ME.

NO... NO, THAT'S NOT
WHAT I MEANT. I BELIEVE YOU.

OKAY, CHECK NOW! I'VE SENT IT.

YEAH... DO YOU THINK I'M
TRICKING YOU? IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME,
I CAN SEND YOU A SCREENSHOT OF THE
TOKEN CONVERSION IF YOU WANT.

THAT'S GOOD THEN.
ALRIGHT, WE'RE DONE HERE.
I'M LEAVING NOW.

HUH... YOU'RE LEAVING...
WHAT ABOUT ALL THIS MESS?

LIGH... AND THIS...
THIS THING?

WHA- WHAT DO YOU MEAN...
I DON'T WANT THIS.

COME ON, I GAVE YOU 50%.
AND YOU CAN'T EVEN CLEAN THIS UP.

YOU CAN KEEP THIS.
I THINK YOU REALLY NEED IT.

DO YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW
WHAT YOU WERE DOING IN THE BATHROOM?
HAHA... YOU'RE LUCKY NO ONE WAS AROUND.

OH, REALLY? THEN WHAT ABOUT
THE SOUND YOU WERE MAKING.
WHATEVER. IT'S YOURS NOW. KEEP IT,
THROW IT, YOUR CHOICE.

NO... I... I WASN'T DOING
ANYTHING. YOU'VE GOT THE WRONG IDEA.



FUCK... I'M ALREADY QUITE LATE.
CLARA MUST HAVE ALREADY COME
TO PICK ME UP. BUT I CAN'T LEAVE IT
HERE LIKE THIS...

AHH, LET'S CLEAN IT UP AND
PUT IT IN THE BAG WITH THESE STOCKINGS.
I'LL THROW THEM OUTSIDE SOMEWHERE..

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HE ASKED ME TO COME 30 MINUTES LATE, BUT IT'S BEEN ALMOST AN HOUR NOW AND HE STILL HASN'T COME OUT YET.

YES, NOW THERE ARE ONLY
A FEW STUDENTS LEFT FROM THE
OTHER ACTIVITY GROUP.

JUST GETTING EVERYTHING
SET FOR TOMORROW'S PARTY!

HAHA... YOU DON'T NEED TO
KNOW, IT'S JUST GIRLS STUFF.

YOU'VE INVITED ALL
THOSE SENIORS I MENTIONED.

OH, DON'T WORRY, I'LL SEND
AN INVITATION TO THE REMAINING ONES.
BUT SINCE YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANY CHEERLEADER
PRACTICE TODAY, WHAT WERE YOU DOING IN THE
ACTIVITY HALL FOR SO LONG?

HUH, WHAT IS IT?

*SHE'S ALREADY LEFT.
HER DAD CAME TO PICK HER UP EARLY.*

*NO, SHE TEXTED THAT
SHE'S BUSY IN A MEETING AND WON'T
MAKE IT. LOOKS LIKE I'LL HAVE TO TAKE
THE METRO HOME AGAIN TODAY.*

*THANKS, BUT IT'S FINE.
NOW THIS HAS BECOME A DAILY
OCCURRENCE. DON'T WORRY I'LL JUST
TAKE THE METRO.*

*HAHA... ALRIGHT,
AND WHERE'S JULIA?*

*AH, WHAT ABOUT YOU?
IS YOUR MOM COMING TO PICK YOU UP?*

*HMM, YOU CAN WAIT...
MY PRACTICE SESSION IS ABOUT TO END.
BETTY IS COMING TO PICK ME UP, SO WE
COULD DROP YOU OFF TOO.*



HEY JACK!



OH, IT'S CLARA.

YEAH, BUT WHAT IS SHE
DOING HERE AT THIS TIME?

CLARA? I THINK I'VE HEARD
THIS NAME BEFORE. WAIT, IS SHE
THE ONE MIA LIVES WITH?



SAME HERE. HOW'S YOUR PRACTICE GOING?

HEY! IT'S NICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN.

AS USUAL. YOU SAY, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE AT THIS TIME?

HAHA... DON'T YOU KNOW I PICK UP MIA EVERY DAY.



YEAH, BECAUSE YOU GUYS HAD EXTRA CLASSES TODAY, RIGHT? MIA TOLD ME SHE'D BE LATE.

I KNOW, BUT YOU'RE SO LATE TODAY.

EXTRA CLASSES? THERE WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO BE ANY TODAY.

HUH? ARE YOU SURE?

HMM, SO THAT
MEANS SHE LIED TO ME.

YEAH... YOU KNOW WE'RE IN THE SAME
CLASS. IF THERE WAS AN EXTRA CLASS,
I WOULD OBVIOUSLY KNOW.

WHY DID MIA LIE ABOUT THE
EXTRA CLASSES TO HER? AFTER
CLASS FINISHED, SHE SAID SHE WAS
GOING STRAIGHT HOME.

NO, SHE SPECIFICALLY
MENTIONED EXTRA CLASSES...
ARGH, THIS GIRL... LET HER
GET HERE NOW.

UHM, MAYBE SHE
SAID SOMETHING ELSE.

CLARA SEEMS REALLY ANGRY.
WHERE COULD SHE BE RIGHT NOW?
AHH, SHE'S MY FRIEND. I NEED TO
DO SOMETHING.

HOLD ON, SORRY TO CUT IN,
BUT IT SEEMS THERE'S SOME CONFUSION.
MIA DIDN'T LIE ABOUT THE EXTRA CLASSES.

YES, MY NAME IS ALICE.
I'M MIA'S FRIEND, AND WE'RE
IN THE SAME CLASS.

WHO ARE YOU?
ARE YOU IN THE SAME CLASS AS HER?

OH, SO SHE'S THE ONE WHO
MET AUNT AT THE MALL THAT DAY.

OH, I DIDN'T KNOW THAT, BUT THE ARTS CLASS ENDED QUITE A WHILE AGO.

YEAH, YOU SAID YOU WERE DISCUSSING SOMETHING ABOUT TOMORROW'S PARTY WITH OTHER GIRLS. WAIT SO, DOES THIS MEAN MIA IS ALSO COMING TO THE PARTY?

ACTUALLY, THERE WAS ONE... UMM... MIA JOINED THE ARTS GROUP, SO SHE WAS IN THAT CLASS.

HUH... YEAH, AFTER THAT SHE WAS WITH US. REMEMBER I TOLD YOU EARLIER I WAS IN THE ACTIVITY HALL WITH OTHER GIRLS.

UM... YES, SHE SAID SHE WANTS TO COME TOO, HAHA... BUT SHE IS'NT CONFIRMED YET.

BUT JACK JUST SAID THERE WEREN'T ANY EXTRA CLASSES TODAY.

HMM, SO WHERE IS SHE NOW?



MIA CHATTING WITH OTHER GIRLS ABOUT TOMORROW'S PARTY? THAT CAN'T BE TRUE... THIS GIRL IS DEFINITELY LYING.

ACTUALLY, WHEN WE WERE HEADING OUT, SHE SAID SHE NEEDED TO GO TO THE BATHROOM. DON'T KNOW WHY SHE STILL HASN'T COME OUT. WAIT, I'LL TEXT HER NOW.

ANYWAY, THIS IS A GOOD OPPORTUNITY TO SEND MIA TO THAT PARTY. I JUST NEED TO PLAY ALONG.



AT THE SAME TIME...





WAS I REALLY MOANING THAT LOUDLY?
FUCK... WHAT IS WRONG WITH ME...

BUT THANK GOODNESS I WAS ABLE
TO ESCAPE JUST IN TIME. OTHERWISE, DON'T
KNOW WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF SHE
FOUND OUT I'M NOT REALLY A GIRL.

I SHOULDN'T OVERTHINK THIS.
WHAT'S DONE IS DONE. I JUST NEED TO STAY
AWAY FROM SUCH THINGS FROM NOW ON.

AT LAST, IT WAS ALL WORTH IT.
NOW I'VE GOT ENOUGH MONEY TO BUY A
BEAUTIFUL RING FOR EMMA. CAN'T WAIT
TO SEE HOW SHE'LL REACT.

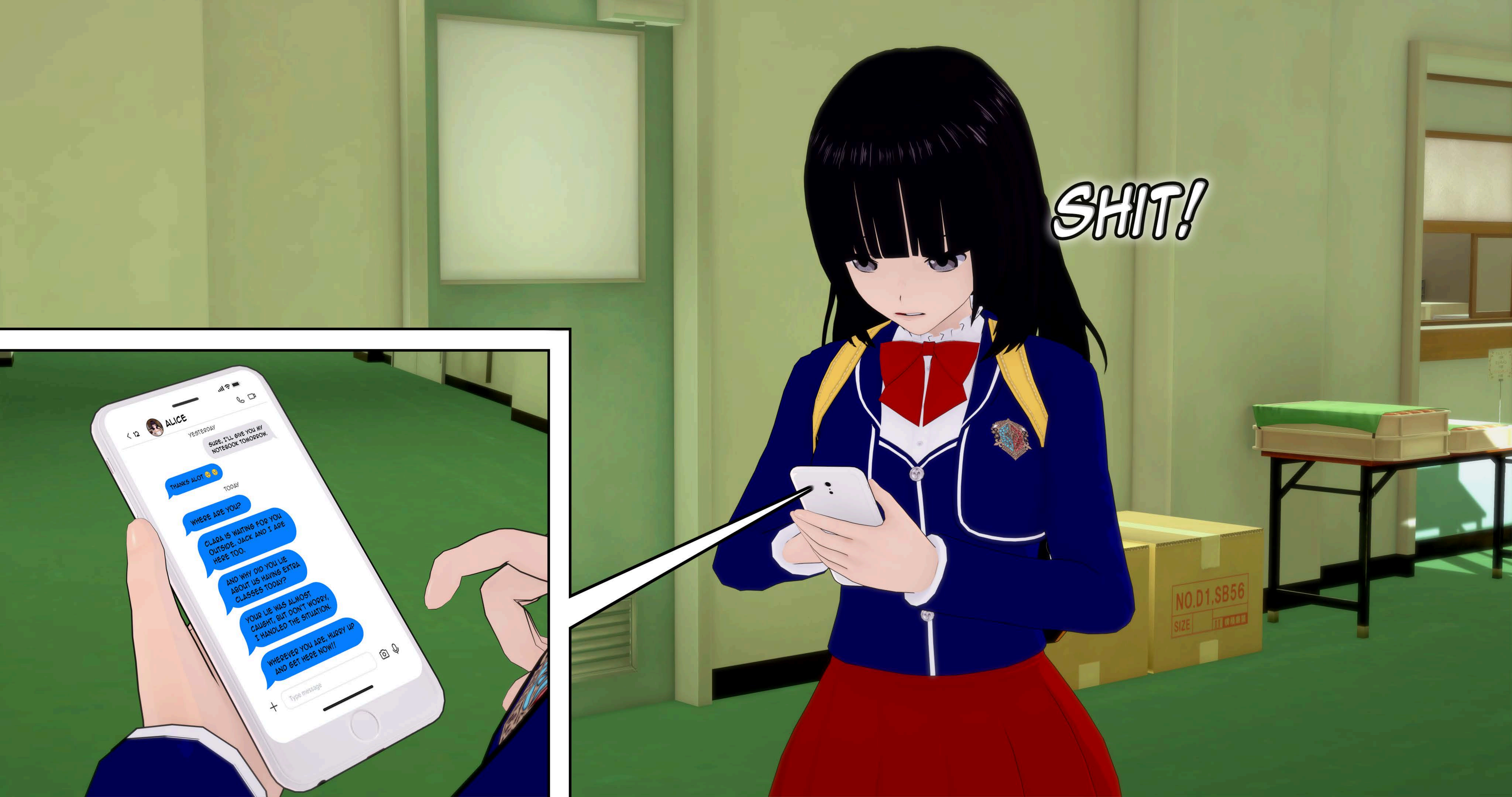
BUZZZ...

BUZZZZ...

HMM, ALICE'S TEXT...
WHAT COULD IT BE THIS TIME?



SHIT!



AUNT HAD TOLD ME THAT SHE MET MIA'S FRIEND AT THE MALL. SO, IT WAS YOU? YOU ALSO ASKED AUNT FOR PERMISSION TO TAKE MIA TO THE PARTY, RIGHT?

HMM, I FEEL LIKE SHE REALLY WANTS TO GO TO THE PARTY, SO IT'S FINE, SHE CAN DEFINITELY JOIN YOU.

AND JACK, YOU KNOW HER SISTER GAVE HER RESPONSIBILITY TO ME, SO PLEASE TAKE GOOD CARE OF HER AT THE PARTY.

YEAH ... BUT I THINK MIA DON'T WANTS TO...

DON'T WORRY... LEAVE IT ON ME. SHE WON'T HAVE ANY PROBLEM THERE.



RUN

RUN



DID YOU TEXT HER?
WHAT DID SHE SAY?


ALRIGHT... AND WHAT ABOUT
YOU GUYS, AREN'T YOU LEAVING
FOR HOME?

HMM, HOW WILL YOU GO?
IS SOMEONE COMING TO PICK
YOU UP?

I NEED TO GO BACK
FOR PRACTICE. AND ALICE
WAS JUST LEAVING.

SHE DIDN'T REPLY, JUST
LEFT IT ON SEEN. I GUESS SHE
MUST BE ON HER WAY.

NO. USUALLY MY MOM PICKS
ME UP, BUT SHE'S BUSY TODAY, SO
I'LL JUST TAKE THE METRO.



OH, DON'T WORRY,
I'LL DROP YOU OFF.

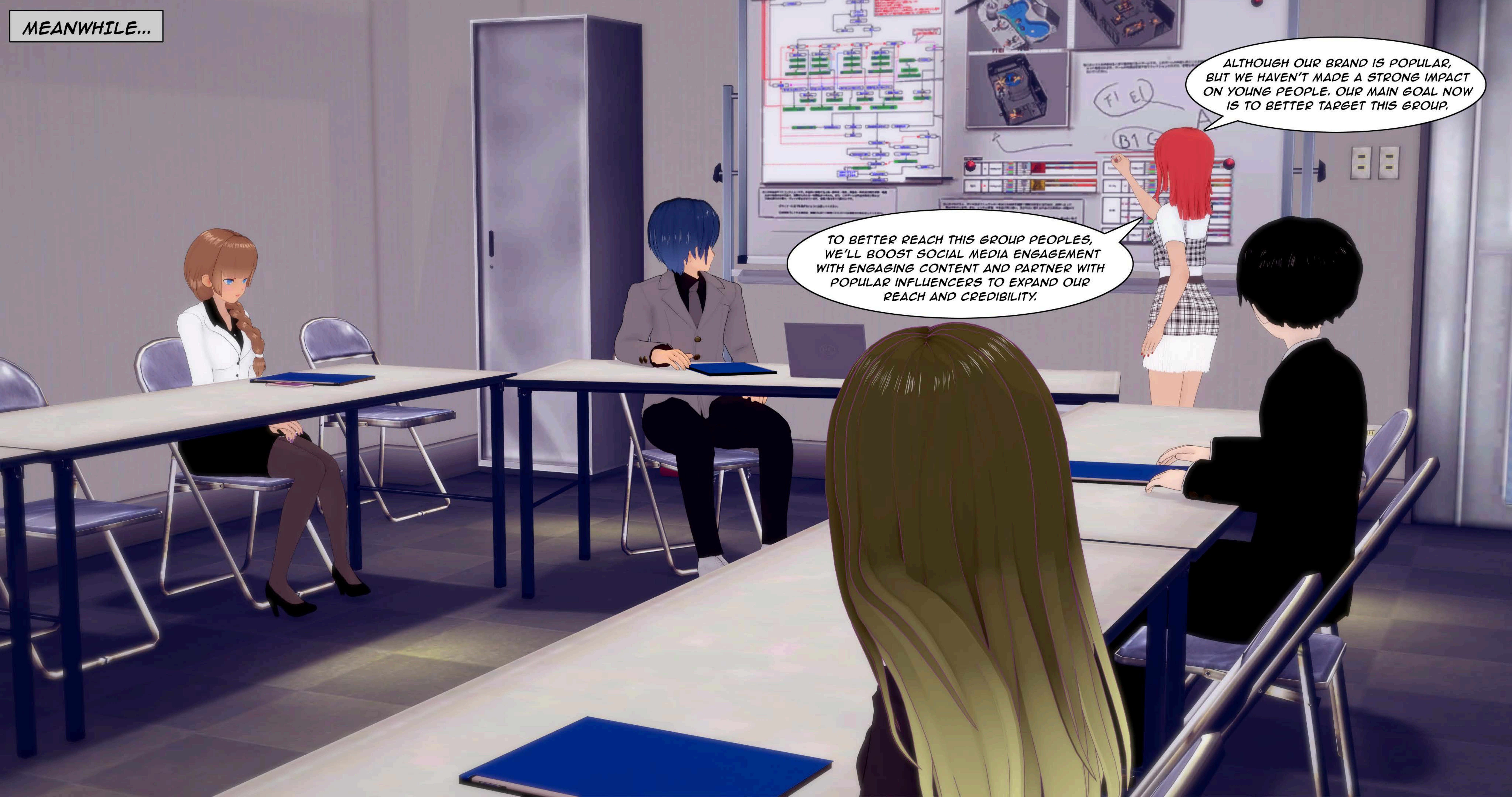
HUH, THANKS,
BUT IT'S FINE, I'LL JUST...

HEY, IT'S ALRIGHT... YOU'RE MIA'S FRIEND,
I CAN DO THIS MUCH. I'M SURE SHE'LL BE
HAPPY TOO. LET'S JUST WAIT FOR HER.



AHH~ HERE SHE IS!

MEANWHILE...



TO BETTER REACH THIS GROUP PEOPLES, WE'LL BOOST SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT WITH ENGAGING CONTENT AND PARTNER WITH POPULAR INFLUENCERS TO EXPAND OUR REACH AND CREDIBILITY.

ALTHOUGH OUR BRAND IS POPULAR, BUT WE HAVEN'T MADE A STRONG IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE. OUR MAIN GOAL NOW IS TO BETTER TARGET THIS GROUP.

IT'S BEEN SO MANY DAYS SINCE I'VE HEARD HIS VOICE. IS HE REALLY THAT BUSY THAT HE DOESN'T EVEN HAVE TIME FOR A SINGLE CALL? EVEN HIS REPLIES TO TEXTS ARE COMING LATE NOW.

I REALLY LIKE THIS IDEA. INSTEAD OF PARTNERING WITH POPULAR INFLUENCERS, I SUGGEST WE LOOK FOR FRESH FACES. POPULAR INFLUENCERS OFTEN COLLABORATE WITH MULTIPLE BRANDS SIMULTANEOUSLY. NEW FACES BRING A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE AND AUTHENTICITY THAT RESONATES WELL WITH YOUNGER AUDIENCES, WHICH COULD HELP BUILD LONG-TERM BRAND LOYALTY.

ARE DISTANCES GROWING BETWEEN US? NO, IT'S NOT LIKE THAT. HE DID TEXT SAYING HE'S PLANNING A SURPRISE FOR ME. MAYBE THAT'S WHY HE'S SO BUSY.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THIS, MR. RAMOS?

I AGREE WITH YOUR POINT, IT'S A SMART MOVE FOR CONNECTING WITH YOUNGER AUDIENCES.

EMMA, WOULD YOU LIKE TO ADD ANYTHING?

HUH... OH, SORRY.
WHAT DID YOU SAY?

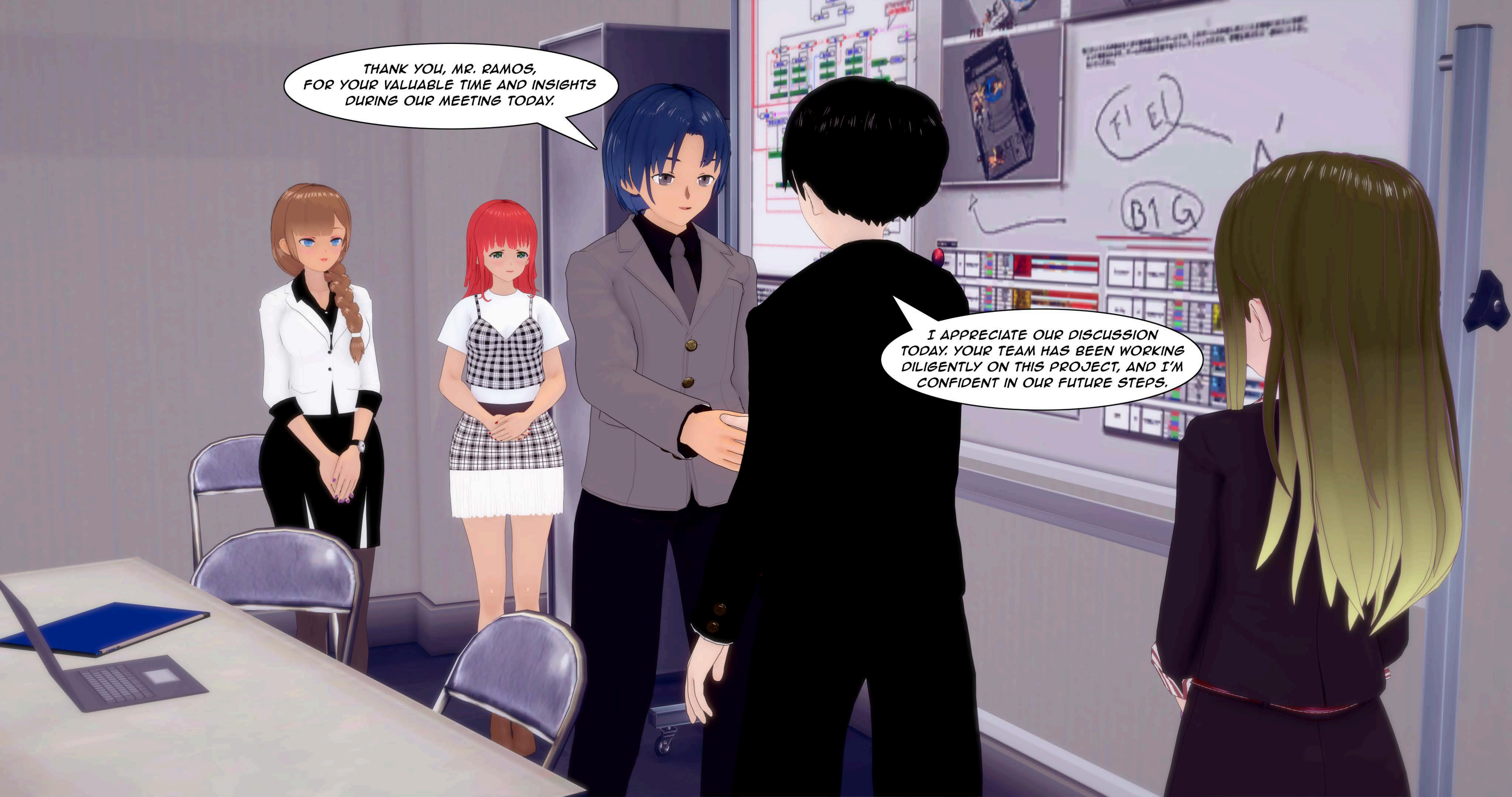
YOU ALRIGHT?

UM... YEAH, I'M FINE.



THANK YOU, MR. RAMOS,
FOR YOUR VALUABLE TIME AND INSIGHTS
DURING OUR MEETING TODAY.

I APPRECIATE OUR DISCUSSION
TODAY. YOUR TEAM HAS BEEN WORKING
DILIGENTLY ON THIS PROJECT, AND I'M
CONFIDENT IN OUR FUTURE STEPS.



THANK YOU, BOSS.
WE'RE GLAD OUR EFFORTS HAVE PAID
OFF. NOW I'D LIKE TO LEAVE, I NEED TO
SEND SOME IMPORTANT EMAILS.

YOU BOTH DID AN EXCELLENT JOB.
I'M SURE THEY'LL EXTEND OUR CONTRACT.

SURE, YOU CAN GO.
AND EMMA, COULD YOU PLEASE
STAY BACK FOR A MOMENT? I NEED
TO TALK TO YOU.



I'M SORRY, KEN. I KNOW MY INATTENTIVENESS GAVE THE WRONG IMPRESSION DURING TODAY'S MEETING.

REALLY, THEN WHAT DO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT?

HUH, NO... THERE'S NOTHING SERIOUS.

HAHA, YOU THOUGHT I STOPPED YOU FOR THAT? FORGET ABOUT THAT. IT'S NO BIG DEAL.

I'VE NOTICED YOU'VE SEEMED A BIT OFF LATELY. IS SOMETHING WRONG?



HOW DO YOU KNOW?

OH, RIGHT. I'M SO DUMB.

UM, YEAH... YOU ARE CORRECT. THAT'S THE ONLY THING. HAHA... BUT IT'S FINE, IT'S JUST A BIRTHDAY.

YOU'RE HIDING SOMETHING. LET ME GUESS, IS IT ABOUT YOUR BIRTHDAY TOMORROW?

HAHA... I HAVE ALL THE EMPLOYEES' DATA, REMEMBER?

I UNDERSTAND HOW IT FEELS WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE YOUR LOVED ONES AROUND ON YOUR BIRTHDAY. YOU MUST BE MISSING YOUR SISTER.

HMM, WHY DON'T YOU GO VISIT YOUR SISTER AND CELEBRATE YOUR BIRTHDAY WITH HER? IT WOULD BE NICE.



HUH, BUT I'VE ALREADY TAKEN ALL MY LEAVE EARLIER, SO HOW CAN I...

THANK YOU SO MUCH, KEN. I PROMISE I'LL COME BACK ON TIME.

IT'S ALRIGHT, THE WEEKEND IS COMING UP, AND IF THERE ARE ONE OR TWO EXTRA DAYS OFF, I'LL STILL MANAGE IT.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. JUST GO ENJOY YOUR DAY.

AFTER SOMETIME...

MY HOUSE IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER. ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T WANT TO COME IN FOR A BIT?

UHM... WE'D LOVE TO, BUT WE HAVE TO GO SOMEWHERE ELSE TOO. MAYBE ANOTHER DAY?

OF COURSE, NO PROBLEM. THANKS AGAIN FOR THE RIDE. SEE YOU LATER!

YEAH, SEE YOU SOON!

FEW MINUTES LATER...

IT'S NOT LIKE THAT. I DON'T REALLY INTERACT WITH THEM OUTSIDE OF CLASS.

HUH... WHO TOLD YOU THAT?

SEEMS LIKE YOU'VE REALLY MADE SOME CLOSE FRIENDS IN SCHOOL.

HMM, REALLY? THEN WHY WERE YOU CHATTING WITH THE GIRLS EVEN AFTER THE EXTRA CLASS?

ALICE TOLD ME YOUR EXTRA CLASS ENDED EARLY, THEN YOU WERE IN THE ACTIVITY HALL WITH HER. ISN'T THAT TRUE?

ALICE MUST HAVE MADE
UP THIS THING TO SAVE ME.

NO, I MEAN, YES, I WAS THERE.
I WAS JUST SURPRISED AT HOW
YOU DID KNOW.

OR IS THERE SOMETHING
YOU'RE HIDING FROM ME?

I KNOW YOU'RE FEELING A BIT HESITANT
ABOUT THE PARTY, BUT I REALLY THINK YOU
SHOULD GO. IT MIGHT EVEN HELP YOU FEEL MORE
CONFIDENT IN SOCIAL SITUATIONS.



DO YOU REALLY THINK I SHOULD GO?

HMM, FINE. BUT TOMORROW IS EMMA'S BIRTHDAY TOO.

YOU KNOW WELL THAT JACK IS KEN'S COUSIN AND HOW MUCH KEN HAS HELPED EMMA. I ALREADY TOLD JACK THAT YOU'D BE THERE, AND IT REALLY WOULDN'T LOOK GOOD IF YOU DIDN'T SHOW UP. IT'S JUST FOR A COUPLE OF HOURS, THAT'S IT.

YES, BUT IT'S NOT LIKE SHE'S COMING HERE. AS WE PLANNED LET'S GO BUY A LOVELY RING AND SEND IT TO HER BY COURIER.

IF I GO WITH HER, I WON'T BE ABLE TO USE ALL MY MONEY. SHE'LL DEFINITELY ASK WHERE I GOT IT FROM.

I'LL HAVE TO FIND ANOTHER WAY.



WHAT ABOUT THE APPOINTMENT
WITH DR. WILSON?

LMM... ACTUALLY, I WAS THINKING...
WE DON'T REALLY NEED TO GO TO
THE SHOP TO BUY A RING.

I MEAN, INSTEAD OF GOING TO THE
SHOP TO BUY A RING AND THEN SENDING IT BY
COURIER, IT'S BETTER IF I BUY A RING ONLINE
AND HAVE IT DELIVERED STRAIGHT TO HER PLACE.
IT'LL SAVE BOTH TIME AND MONEY.

I'VE ALREADY RESCHEDULED
THAT APPOINTMENT, SO WE HAVE
PLENTY OF TIME RIGHT NOW.

WHAT'S UP WITH YOU? YOU WERE SO
EXCITED EARLIER. NOW YOU DON'T WANT
TO GIFT A RING TO EMMA?



HMM, THAT MAKES SENSE.
OKAY, SINCE WE DON'T HAVE ANYTHING ELSE TO
DO RIGHT NOW, LET'S HEAD STRAIGHT HOME.

TO BE CONTINUED...