

break up with your girlfriend

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by [elmundomyfriend](#)

Summary

Maki is not dating Tall Idol Takada-chan. She has never dated Tall Idol Takada-chan, and does not intend to date Tall Idol Takada-chan. When she is mistaken for Takada's secret girlfriend by an irresponsible, infuriating young reporter, she is determined to set things straight before her reputation is destroyed.

The news doesn't make it far out of the tabloids, so Maki doesn't catch wind of it until a few days later. She's walking out of a convenience store carrying a cheap bunch of roses, a wilted onigiri and a bottle of 100plus when she's mobbed by a small group of girls. They're still in their high school uniforms, and hover in front of her for several moments before one dares to speak.

"Aren't you Zenin?" one of them asks boldly. She has long, pigtailed hair tied with ribbons. Every muscle in her body is coiled right as if to prevent her from shaking, and her small hands are clenched into fists. Her friends cluster behind her, egging her on. "We saw you go into the store."

"Yes?" says Maki. "What's this about?" Maki will never get used to being addressed by her surname, but since keeping it in her pen name, she's had to shake off her discomfort and answer to it. She wonders if the girls are fans, though they don't look like the sort to read niche political commentary. Still, Maki reminds herself that she hardly looks the sort, either, and prepares herself to smile for a photo.

The girl screws her face up, bows her head and screams: "Please break up with Takada-chan!"

Maki's brain short-circuits. "Who?"

"Takada-chan!" the girl squeaks. "Your girlfriend!"

Despite what the roses she carries would suggest, Maki is single. Painfully so, if Panda is to be believed, but either way, she thinks she ought to know if she had a girlfriend to break up with. Still- she furrows her brow. The name does sound familiar. Takada-chan...

Maki snaps her fingers. "Oh, do you mean Nobuko?"

This proves to be too much for the girl. She breaks into a sob. "There's no need to flaunt it!" she wails, before turning on her heel and running away. Her friends stare at Maki for a moment, as if working themselves up to glare, before running after her.

Maki stands at the convenience store entrance, her mouth falling open. "What the hell was that?" A damp breeze rustles her flowers and she shivers, stirred into motion. Holding her purchases close, she starts off towards home, wondering what to make of the encounter.

As always, she does what she does whenever she's been wrongfully accused. She calls her sister. And, when her call rings through to voicemail, she calls again.

Mai picks up just before Maki runs out of patience. "What?"

"Why was I just yelled at by a bunch of high school girls?"

"Hell if I know," says Mai, sounding bored. "Did you yell first?"

“They asked me to break up with ‘Takada-chan’. As in, your best friend Takada Nobuko.” Maki barks out a laugh. “Do you know what they meant?” She has an inkling, but wants to hear Mai say it.

“Oh.” Mai has the decency to sound abashed. “I guess this has to do with those articles.”

“*Which articles?*” Maki hisses. She’s being eyed by another group of young girls as she crosses the road, and she picks up her pace. “Mai, what the hell is going on?”

“You’re going to want to congratulate me, first,” Mai drawls. “I asked Nobuko to be my girlfriend and she said yes.”

“Congratulations,” says Maki. “How long?”

“About a month, now,” replies Mai without a hint of apology in her voice. “Though, I guess, the press have known for a day or so.”

“That explains it, then.” Maki is used to being mistaken for Mai, just as Mai is used to being mistaken for Maki. She’s prepared to write the incident off and get on with her day, when Mai clears her throat.

“Ah, not quite,” Mai says delicately. “You see, the thing is...”

Maki goes home and Googles ‘Takada girlfriend.’ The first site that pops up appears to be the one that broke the news. It bears the headline: *EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT TAKADA-CHAN’S MYSTERIOUS NEW GIRLFRIEND*. Maki goes into an incognito browser and opens the link.

The site is typical of an online gossip rag. Emblazoned in flashing letters was the publication name: *SIX EYES PRESS*. This, too, sounds vaguely familiar, but Maki is arrested by the featured images before she can give it much thought.

The first photo is grainy, as if taken from a great distance. Nobuko has Mai pushed up against a tree and appears to be kissing her senseless. *Good for them*, Maki almost thinks, before she sees the next photo.

It’s her. Not *her* as in the face she and Mai share, but *her*, a professional headshot taken straight from her website’s masthead. In it, she’s wearing her glasses and staring intensely into the camera, no hint of a smile gracing her face. It’s a photo meant to intimidate, but somebody’s edited a light pink blush onto her cheeks and graphic hearts around her head. The caption reads: *the babe who’s stolen takada-chan’s heart!* Maki feels a muscle jump in her jaw.

She scrolls. The piece seems to be less of an article and more of a mishmash of photographs and short captions in the style of a listicle. There are more photos of Maki- some of her from her college Aikido tournaments, some of her giving speeches at various rallies, and, to her horror, some pulled from Panda and Inumaki's social media pages. The captions range from *she's a baddie who could kick your ass* to *she fights for your rights and looks good doing it* to *takada-chan must like 'em smart!*

Maki's least favourite among them all are three photos grouped together to reference an outdated meme; one of her holding a dog (which is likely from Panda's Instagram), one of her knocking an opponent to the ground in her aikido-gi, and one of her as a toddler- where had they found that photo? - with chocolate cake smeared all over her face. The caption proclaims: *she protecc, she attacc, but most importantly, she snacc.*

The article is written by one Kugisaki Nobara. Maki gnashes her teeth and calls in a favour.

Five minutes later, she receives a text message with Kugisaki Nobara's personal phone number, email, and home address. Maki chooses the least creepy of the three and sends Kugisaki an email.

Kugisaki,

Good evening. I hope this email finds you well.

It is my understanding that you recently wrote a speculative article about the rumoured girlfriend of one Takada Nobuko. In that article, you featured images of me and details about my personal and professional life. I am uncertain as to how you obtained some of these images, as many of them have been taken from private social media accounts and, possibly, family archives.

I must demand that you take down that article immediately or prepare to face legal action. Not only am I uncomfortable with being featured in your publication, the premise of your article is untrue, as I am not in a relationship with Takada Nobuko.

Kindest regards,

Zenin Maki

The response comes immediately.

Hello!

I am currently out of office. I am reachable on Venmo at @kugisaki.nailedit. Higher deposits will be given higher priority.

Maki is afraid that her teeth will wear down to nubs before she gets hold of Kugisaki. Now that she thinks about it, a few strange things have happened recently. There have been more spam calls to her office phone than ever, people have stopped and stared on the street, and she's received a series of follow and friend requests on all her social media accounts. The website's tip line has also been flooded, though Maki hasn't gotten around to looking at it yet. She had thought- hoped- that her articles were finally getting some recognition and she was finally breaking through.

It seems that's not the case, though. Maki curses herself twofold: once for getting her hopes up, and once for not realising what was going on. She's only grateful that she hasn't been hounded by journalists or paparazzi, yet, though she supposes her address is difficult to find, and she doesn't leave home enough to have an established schedule. But it's early days yet. She doesn't doubt that she'll be dealing with them soon.

She calls Mai again. This time, Mai picks up on the first ring.

"You read it?"

"Yes," Maki snaps. "What the hell?"

"I know," sighs Mai. "Journalists these days!"

"Why aren't you doing anything about this?" demands Maki. "Shouldn't Nobuko have a team to field this sort of thing?"

Mai sighs, the sound rattling through Maki's phone speakers. "They're still working on an official coming-out statement. She's going to give it on a talk show this Friday."

"It's *Monday!*"

"Just bear with it for the week, okay? You barely leave the house as it is. What's it to you?" says Mai with a sniff. "This is a really hard time for me and Nobuko, you know. What with being forcibly outed and all."

Maki takes a deep breath. "You're not the one who's been outed," she says, as evenly as she can. "Not yet, anyways. Do you know how important my image is?"

"Hello? I'm dating an idol. Of course I-"

"Not image in general," Maki interrupts with as much patience as she can muster. "*My* image. I'm a political journalist. I'm young, I'm a woman, and I don't write for an established newspaper. I don't come from a hallowed institute. I barely get taken seriously, and now I'm getting tangled up in tabloids and a dating scandal." She eases her glasses off her nose and massages her forehead. "Look, Mai. I've worked really hard to get to where I am, and I work hard every day to get my voice out and be listened to. This is going to make things really difficult for me."

She hears a sniff on the other end of the line and realises, with horror, that Mai must be holding back angry tears.

“You really don’t think about anyone but yourself, do you,” Mai spits, even as her voice shakes and she audibly sniffles. “It’s all you, you, you and your *stupid* career. I still live at home. You know that. You know what everything going public will do.”

“That’s not fair, Mai,” Maki protests, but Mai won’t stop.

“You know how it is at home! That’s why you left, isn’t it? I... I’ve been here all this time. I don’t know what to do or where to go. I thought I had more time, and I know it’s bad, here, but I don’t know how to leave. I’m not as brave as you. I just need more *time!*”

She breaks off as she cries. It’s loud and wet and reaches across the distance between them, and Maki feels six years old again, reaching out to comfort her sister. Her fingertips ghost over the empty space in front of her, where her sister’s shoulder should be.

“Can’t you do something for me, for once? Please?” Mai sobs. “Just until the end of the week. Please, Maki. Please.”

Maki has never heard her sister beg for anything. She gives in with grace.

The next person Maki calls is Uncle Satoru.

“Six Eyes Press, you say?” he asks, a hint of a laugh clinging to his voice as always.

“Yes,” Maki says impatiently. “And one Kugisaki Nobara. I need the article taken down.”

“Done.” “What?”

“Look for it,” Satoru sings. “It’s gone. Wiped from the internet forever. Annihilated, if you will.”

Maki reloads the tab and an error message pops up on the screen, telling her the webpage no longer exists. “How-”

Satoru shushes her, and she bristles. “Let me keep my secrets,” he says cheerily. “Why did you want that article removed, anyways?” He chuckles lightly, and Maki is glad she can’t see his smug face.

“Didn’t you look at it?” she asks. “It’s an idol dating scandal. They think I’m the girlfriend.”

Satoru stops chuckling. “Eh?”

“It’s Takada-chan,” Maki grumbles. “They got a photo of her kissing, uh, someone, and thought it was me.”

“Oh,” says Satoru. There’s a rare moment of silence. “In that case, I doubt removing the article will do much. These things tend to migrate to Twitter. Instagram, too, and Tiktok, if

you're unlucky." There's a faint sound of typing, and then a gasp. "Maki, my distant relative, my favourite niece, whatever you do, don't look at what's trending on Twitter."

Maki has Twitter open before her uncle can draw another breath. She sees it immediately- the number one trending topic in Japan. #Takamaki. "What the hell?" she hisses.

"Surprisingly, I don't see much homophobia," says Satoru mildly. "That's a first, but I guess they've been calling her a- what was it?- *gay icon* for years, now. Her fanbase seems mostly supportive. Ooh!" He breaks off as music trickles across the phone lines. It sounds like Nicki Minaj. "There are even little video edits of you two."

Maki sees them. She sees the photo edits, too, much like the ones in Kugisaki Nobara's article. There's her with cat ears, her with heart eyes, her with- *oh, God, are those nudes?* Upon closer scrutiny, she realises they're edited, and quite badly, but they bring her back to the sickening reality of the situation. She Googles Zenin Maki, and playfulcloud.com doesn't come up. Neither do her freelance articles, or her staff features, or journalistic accolades. Her browser is flooded with tabloid articles and social media posts and YouTube opinion videos. She wants to cry. Six years of eking out her career alone, reduced to nothing in a moment.

"Maki?" comes Satoru's voice, a little less irreverent. "Are you okay? Do you need me to come and check on you?"

"Are you even in Japan right now?" Maki says in a small voice, because, yes, she does want someone to comfort her, even if that someone is Gojou Satoru.

"Well, no," confesses Satoru, "I'm in Korea, but I can be on the next flight over and reach your apartment in the evening. Just say the word."

Maki knows that if she asks, her uncle will drop everything and come. She'd do the same for him, whether she admits it or not. Aside from Mai and Megumi, he's the only one in the family who still talks to her. Well- she and Mai have always had a difficult relationship, and Megumi hardly talks at all. Really, Satoru is the only one in the family who *wants* to talk to her. That counts for something. That means something. "No, don't worry about it," she says. "I'm fine."

Satoru makes a skeptical sound but does not push it. They hang up shortly after, and Maki goes to put her roses in a vase. She eats her onigiri, attempts to lose herself in a book, and goes to sleep at seven-thirty in the evening. There's nothing more she can do.

The next morning, Maki is deliberating between Weetabix and Crunchy Nut when her cousin Megumi comes by with a large gift basket and a case of champagne in tow.

“From Gojou,” he says by way of explanation. “He wanted to send flowers, too, but he couldn’t remember if you were allergic to pollen or not.” The gift basket is emblazoned with the phrase ‘MY CONDOLENCES’ in lime green.

“I’m not.” Maki lets him in and pours him a bowl of Crunchy Nut. “Why? He’s the one who helped me.”

“He feels guilty,” says Megumi flatly. “He should’ve screened the article first.”

“What do you- *Six Eyes Press*?” Maki gapes. “Of course he owns Six Eyes Press. Why do I even- ugh! Never mind,” she sighs. “Someone else would’ve done it, anyways.” She and Megumi sit opposite each other at Maki’s tiny kitchen island and eat cereal in silence. She’s always liked Megumi, and maybe envies him a little. They’re both at the outskirts of the family, but Megumi has always had Satoru and Tsumiki. Maki, meanwhile, is alone. No- she has Mai. Does that make it better or worse?

Megumi leaves after finishing his bowl of cereal and washing up in the sink. He mentions an exam he has to study for, and Maki wishes him luck. He pauses at the door.

“I know this sucks for you,” he says. “Come over tonight for dinner. We’re ordering ramen.”

“Okay.”

Megumi closes the door without another word. Maki hears his footsteps fade down the hall before turning and settling onto her sofa. She’s already queued up her articles for the week and corresponded with freelancers, and has decided to grant herself the rest of the week off. It’s the only way to lay low, after all, and she could do without monitoring the news for a little while.

Still- her curiosity gets the better of her. It’s been two days since Kugisaki Nobara’s piece. Could the buzz have died down?

Maki checks her socials and finds her hopes crushed. It seems the news has crawled its way up from the tabloids and into the bite-size range of two-minute reads from reputable newspapers. They’re zealous enough about their fact-checking to not include Maki in the headlines, thankfully, and nobody seems to have connected her to the Zenin news conglomerate yet, but she knows it’s only a matter of time. A cultural moment like this will never really fade- Maki can already visualise the thinkpieces. *Idol Culture and Queerness*. She shudders at the thought.

She gives it another day before a mid-range paper does a profile on her, and dares to hope: perhaps she’ll receive some recognition for her work. Perhaps she can turn this into something good. But Maki’s a realist. She knows that what they can find in her past is more sensational than any political piece she’s written.

Curiously, though, she doesn’t see any posts or articles from low-end papers or tabloids. She can see the gift basket out of the corner of her eye- it’s crammed with her favourite sweets and some truly ridiculous plushies, and she sends mental thanks to Uncle Satoru. He’s done his best, but even Gojou Satoru can’t take on the BBC. On short notice, that is.

Lying back against the sofa, she maps out the path the news will take before Takada's press release at the end of the week. Takada's success as a J-pop idol is no small thing, but she's hardly an international figure- she's among the better-known idols in Japan but hasn't made it to the international stage. Had this been a heterosexual dating scandal, Maki is willing to bet it would die down within the month. But now? Once the news gets to the West it is certain to snowball. This will be great for Takada's career. Internationally, Maki has little to worry about. Takada is enough of an unknown that much of the news will be focused on her, and as long as Western tabloids do their reporting before Maki's connection to the Zenin group is revealed, all will be well. But should the two incidents converge... Well. Maki has already been disinherited. All she has left to lose is her reputation as a journalist, and lose it she will.

She thinks about Mai for a moment- eventually, it will come out that it was her, not Maki, who had been kissing Takada. But Mai works a normal office job for a Zenin subsidiary and is trying her hand at beauty blogging. If anything, this will be good for her career, and allow her to cut ties with the Zenins for once and for all. Why would Mai not want that? Why is she so willing to foist responsibility onto Maki?

Maki huffs and sits up. She realises that, while Megumi had invited her over for dinner, he hadn't specified the time. She knows he's an indifferent texter at best opts to call him instead, but hears the phone ring from the kitchen island. He has thirteen missed calls from 'Yellow Hoodie Jock', a string of texts from 'Ginger From Maths' and an email from Satoru with the headline: YOU WON'T BELIEVE THIS! CAT PLAYS BEETHOVEN'S FIFTH SYMPHONY. Maki sighs and is about to leave for Megumi's apartment when his phone lights up with a text.

Yellow Hoodie Jock: hi! this is fushi's roommate :)

Yellow Hoodie Jock: sorry he left his phone behind!

Yellow Hoodie Jock: he wants to know if you can bring it over tonight?

Yellow Hoodie Jock: if it isn't too much trouble

Yellow Hoodie Jock: his password is 200303 btw

Maki unlocks Megumi's phone and shoots off a quick reply: *sure*. She then sends a thumbs-up emoji in response to Yellow Hoodie Jock's effusive thanks, and locks the phone again. When she picks her own phone back up, she sees that she's gotten an email. She almost ignores it, trusting her out-of-office message to tide her through the week, before she sees the sender name. Kugisaki Nobara.

Maki rushes to her desk and checks her email on her laptop. Some things have to be seen as big as possible.

Zenin,

What the hell just happened? My article was just pulled and I'm willing to bet it has something to do with you. Did you sic your fancy lawyers on my poor boss? Am I being sued? Couldn't you have at least waited for a response or something? Also, what the hell do you take me for? I'm not an idiot; it's clearly you in the photo and it's pointless to deny it. Now, if you want to make an official statement about being or not being Takada-chan's girlfriend, that's another thing. Feel free to get in touch about that.

Anyways, the article is down, but neither I nor my boss can do anything about the information now that it's in the public domain. Maybe try to threaten stan twitter with legal action or something, idk.

- Kugisaki Nobara <3

Maki wants to reach through the screen and throttle Kugisaki Nobara, cutesy heart included. In the absence of Kugisaki Nobara, however, she squeezes a stress ball until her knuckles pop. "Damn nosey journalists," she seethes, knowing very well she belongs to their numbers. She, however, uncovers corruption and human rights violations. Kugisaki Nobara writes celebrity fluff listicles with dubious bases in fact. Maki is inclined to delete the email and dismiss the woman altogether.

Still... When she thinks about it, between her and Kugisaki, who has more of a reach? Maki runs her own website- she can see the readership statistics, and they are not high. Yes, she is critically acclaimed, and yes, she writes freelance for big-name papers across the globe, but she has a sinking feeling that Kugisaki Nobara's listicle, which consists of more image than text, has received more hits than Maki's latest expose, nevermind that it is a magnum opus of investigative journalism and resulted from weeks, if not months of hard work. Maki receives death threats. Kugisaki Nobara probably gets swags from cosmetics companies and the occasional empty threat from people like Maki.

Who's winning, really?

Maki grits her teeth and fires off a response.

Kugisaki,

I am not dating Takada. I did not sic lawyers on your boss. I will not be giving you an official statement. Consider this email chain off the record.

Kind regards,

Zenin Maki

To her outrage, she receives a reply almost immediately.

Zenin,

Or what? You'll sue me?

- Kugisaki Nobara <3

Maki realises, with dawning horror, that “Kugisaki Nobara <3” seems to be Kugisaki’s programmed sign-off. What sort of a monster is she dealing with?

Kugisaki,

Yes.

Regards,

Z.M.

Maki is about to slam her laptop shut and go about her day when she receives yet another email from Kugisaki Nobara. It doesn’t have any text, only an attached screenshot of a tweet. The tweet says: “lets do it baby i know the law”. Maki speedruns through the seven stages of grief and settles on anger. She has unconsciously picked up the stress ball again, and only realises when the damn thing comes apart in her hand.

“Fucking hell,” Maki hisses, and tosses it in the bin. She pulls up a new Word document, compiles a few sources and taps out an article with the force of a thousand suns. She does not eat lunch. It’s bordering on evening when she hears back from her proofreader and publishes it on her website. With savage glee, she pastes the link into an email to Kugisaki Nobara and lets her anger dissipate.

Kugisaki,

Do as you wish, but do not be surprised if you are visited by my lawyers. In the meantime, you may find this illuminating.

playfulcloud.com/article/zeninmaki/the-decline-of-modern-pop-culture-reporting

- Maki

In her article, Maki has cited Kugisaki by name and referenced a number of her pieces. In fact, though it's a well-written article and offers a convincing argument, with the right perspective it can be read as a personal critique of Kugisaki's work. *Let's see how she likes it*, thinks Maki smugly. She closes her laptop and checks the time. She should leave soon to get to Megumi's for dinner. Realising she's still in her pajamas, she changes into jeans and a t-shirt before scooping her hair into her usual ponytail. She shrugs on a jacket and heads out to Megumi's apartment. Before she leaves, though, she makes sure to pull on a cap and a face mask. She doesn't want a repeat of yesterday's incident.

Megumi does not have a doorbell, so Maki raps sharply at his door. When she goes unanswered, she tries again, pulling down her face mask in case Megumi is peering through the peephole. There is no response. Maki checks the time on her phone. It's eight-thirty, like Megumi said, but a message pops up on her screen just as she's about to stow her phone away. It's from Megumi- or, rather, his roommate, whose phone Megumi has commandeered for the day.

Megumi's Roommate: Caught in the rain on my way home. Sorry. Will be back soon.

Megumi's Roommate: The door is unlocked, please let yourself in.

Megumi's Roommate: There's beer in the fridge if you like.

Maki shoots back a quick response and rattles the doorknob experimentally. It gives way easily, and Maki steps into Megumi's apartment. It's small, clean and orderly, and yet not what Maki had expected. Colourful movie posters are stuck to the walls, and while the furniture is basic and functional, there are cheery throws and pillows scattered about the living room that seem at odds with Megumi's entire personality. Maki chalks it down to his roommate, Yellow Hoodie Jock.

A head of orange hair is visible over the sofa. Megumi's roommate? The person turns- it's a girl with a sleek bob and an assessing glint in her eyes. "You must be Fushi's cousin," she says with a grin, rising to meet Maki. "Yuuji- uh, his roommate, went out with an umbrella to pick him up. They'll be back soon."

Maki shakes the proffered hand. "Oh! You must be Ginger From Maths?"

The girl snorts. "What?" She raises a hand to her hair as if to reassure herself of its colour. "My hair is *auburn*, thank you very much. Why- oh, right." She rolls her eyes. "Megumi still has me saved as Ginger From Maths?"

Maki shrugs. "Yeah. Sorry. Didn't mean to offend you."

The girl shakes her head, flapping an airy hand. "*You* don't have to apologise. Megumi does. Yeah, I met him in a maths class, but that was, like, six years ago. You'd think he'd have changed by now."

Maki fishes Megumi's phone out and places it on a waiting counter. "That's him for you, I guess. I think I'm saved as 'Cousin With Glasses' or something." All of Megumi's recent texts had been from numbers saved under similar utilitarian nicknames, with the exception of 'Gojou Satoru (sensei)' and 'Fushiguro Tsumiki (sister)'.

"Sounds like something Fushi would do." The girl grins, her eyes raking over Maki's form. "They suit you, though. The glasses." A blush colours her cheeks, then, but she does not look away.

Maki pushes her glasses up her nose and grins right back. "Thanks. The orange suits you, too. You know, maybe he takes our best features into account when choosing contact names. Though that would be unkind to Yellow Hoodie Jock."

The girl laughs, then, raucous and loud, her head tilted back as her face lights with mirth. "No *way*! I've got to text Yuuji about that, he'll be so..." Her voice trails off as she peers at her phone screen. She taps at it, and the smile drains from her face. "Oh, my God."

"What happened?"

The shock on the girl's face morphs swiftly to rage. "Oh my *God*!" She scrolls feverishly before brandishing her phone at Maki. "I can't believe this!" She looks torn between wrath and glee. "Oh, this is getting good."

Maki goes cross-eyed trying to focus on the phone screen. She can see a block of text from a website, blurry but familiar- as the girl's hand stills, Maki recognises it as Playful Cloud. It's her most recent article, titled 'A Journalist By Any Other Name: The Decline of Modern Pop Culture Reporting'. Is the girl a fan? Has she recognised Maki? Maki would be happy to take a photo with her.

The girl takes Maki's silence for confusion. "Do you know what this is?"

"An article?"

"Listen! 'Journalists of Kugisaki's caliber are multiplying rapidly. They threaten to subsume the industry in the manner of The Great Wave off Kanagawa (image attached). Reputable institutions are but a humid breeding ground for this new generation's plague to infest.' What the hell?"

Maki winces. She had thought the line much cleverer in her hatred-fueled writing frenzy. Hearing it read back to her is embarrassing. Her proofreader must have been absent-minded when he scanned her draft. "Yikes?"

"She's ridiculous!" the girl snarls, before she starts laughing helplessly. "She didn't need to make it so personal. The article was taken down, anyways." She shoves her phone back in her pocket before offering Maki a sheepish smile. "Sorry, you must think I'm crazy."

Maki does, but Maki is also experiencing a sudden, chilling realisation. "Kugisaki Nobara?"

The girl looks at her strangely. “Yeah? Did Fushi- *oh*. Zenin Maki?” She jabs a finger at Maki, eyes blazing. “I knew you looked familiar! What the hell is this article about?”

“*This* article?” Maki bats Kugisaki’s hand away and jabs her own finger at the other girl, stepping towards her. “What about *your* article? You’ve- you’ve cast a stain on my career!”

“Who talks like that, you stuck up-”

“Stuck up? You tacky, lowbrow-”

“How dare you, you boring, talentless-”

“Uh, guys?” Maki and Kugisaki whip around to face the door. A man in a yellow hoodie- Yellow Hoodie Jock?- stands in the doorway with an uneasy smile on his face. Megumi stands half-concealed behind him.

“Maki. Kugisaki. So nice to have you over for dinner.”

Maki and Kugisaki realise simultaneously that Megumi has known all along. Yellow Hoodie Jock cannot stop them as they lunge towards him.

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