

KUMAMIRU BIYORI

Episode 2

THE FATEFUL TRANSFER STUDENT





Today's Horoscope

A few days before Episode 1, on a morning when the cherry blossoms were in bloom.

Morning at Kogetsudo. In the back of the shop, Monaka's parents are making spring-themed wagashi. At the front, Monaka opens a book decorated with stars and moons.

"Today, you may have an unexpected encounter that feels like fate. Treasure every new connection."

Monaka stares at the words. "We're getting a transfer student in our class today."

"Oh? Maybe it really is fate." Her mother smiles, and Monaka smiles too, looking a little embarrassed.



Meet Miruku, the Transfer Student

Morning homeroom. A girl stands beside the teacher.

"I'm Miruku. I'll be joining your class starting today. It's nice to meet you."

A quiet voice. A graceful bow.

A murmur ripples through the classroom. "Isn't she cute?" "Think that's her seat?"

The boys, especially, cannot seem to settle down.

Without appearing to notice any of it, Miruku makes her way to her seat. Monaka watches her closely.



A Natural for Karuta?

During break, Monaka, a member of the competitive karuta club, studies Miruku as if she were scouting a player.

Her posture is perfectly straight. Her steps are quiet, with nothing wasted in her movements. Even when someone speaks to her, she never loses her own pace.

Monaka opens a small notebook. "Posture: good. Footwork: good. Stays calm..." She writes it all down and gives a small nod.

"This is it... She'd be perfect for competitive karuta!"

They have not even spoken yet, but Monaka's curiosity keeps growing.



Playing It Cool?!

Then the boys begin coming up to Miruku one after another.

"Want me to show you around?" "Thanks, but I'd like to look around on my own a little longer."

"Want to have lunch together?" "I brought my own lunch."

"Are you free after school?" "I haven't decided yet."

Miruku answers every question with a smile, yet she has not agreed to a single thing.

Monaka's eyes light up. "She accepts the attention, but she doesn't give an answer right away... That's the romance move: playing it cool!"

Of course, Miruku is not trying to do anything of the sort.



You Dropped This

After Miruku walks away, something falls near her feet: a small handkerchief patterned with cherry blossoms.

Monaka picks it up and hurries after her. "Miruku, you dropped this." "Oh, I did. Thanks."

"I'm Monaka." "I know. Monaka, right?"

"You remembered?" "Mm-hm. Because your name sounds sweet."

"That's funny coming from someone named Miruku."

They look at each other and laugh softly.



Tasting the Seasons

At lunchtime, they open their lunches beside the school's nature pond.

Monaka holds out a monaka sweet. "Here. This is from my family's shop, Kogetsudo."

"Monaka is giving me monaka?" "Yes. This monaka is the one you can eat." They both laugh.

"You know, I think wagashi are like tasting the seasons." "The seasons?"

"Spring is cherry blossoms; summer, green maple leaves; autumn, the moon; and winter, snow. Wagashi shape the seasons not only with flavor, but also with form, color, and name."

"You really love wagashi, don't you?" Hearing Miruku say that makes Monaka feel a little happy.



My Favorite Pairing

"By the way, Miruku, do you know the TV show 'Today, I Become the Moon'?" "No."

"What? Then let me explain!" Monaka leans forward eagerly.

"My favorite pairing is Azushio: Azuki Shimizu and Toshio Sato!" "Oh."

"Toshio gets so close, but then backs off at the crucial moment! Why pull back there? Come on, Toshio, make your move!"

"Are you always like this when you watch TV?" "But Toshio never pushes hard enough!"

Miruku laughs. "Rooting for them sounds exhausting." "It really is." This time, they both laugh together.



Want to Come After School?

The final homeroom of the day is over. Even so, Monaka still has something to say, and something she has wanted to find out since morning.

"I'm in the competitive karuta club. Miruku, do you want to come to the club room after school?"

"Competitive karuta?" "Yeah. I think you'd probably be good at it."

"Why?" Monaka smiles. "You'll see when we get there."

"Okay. I'll come."



At the Far End of the Second Floor

The two of them make their way to the school's second building.

Monaka climbs the stairs to the second floor without hesitation and stops at the western end of the hall.

"This is the competitive karuta club, the club I belong to."

A wooden sign hangs beside the entrance. Beyond the open doorway, a tatami room stretches out before them.

"Come in. I'll show you how competitive karuta works."

Miruku gives a small nod and follows Monaka inside.



A Fate Match

Monaka sits on the tatami and places one card in front of herself and another in front of an imaginary opponent.

"Sometimes, at the very end, there is one card left in each player's territory."

"Whichever card is read first decides the match. We call that unmeisen, a fate match."

Monaka is still explaining when Miruku's hand moves before she can think.

Straight toward the card in front of Monaka.



I Want to Try

Miruku studies the card she has taken. Across from her, one card still remains.

"If I take a card from my opponent's territory... can I send one of my own cards over?"

"Right. That leaves your territory empty, so you win."

A spark lights in Miruku's eyes. "I want to try competitive karuta too."

"Really?" Monaka's face lights up.

"Then here. You can borrow this until tomorrow." Monaka gently slides a guide to the Hundred Poets and their kimariji (the identifying syllables for each card) toward Miruku.



Are We Friends Now?

It is time to go home. At the roundabout near the school gate, their paths part.

"See you tomorrow." "Yeah. See you tomorrow."

Miruku gives a small nod and walks straight down the road in the evening light.

Monaka stays there for a little while, watching her go.

They only met today. And yet, Monaka already wishes they could have stayed together a little longer.

"So... does this mean we're friends now?" Monaka smiles to herself and starts down her own road home.

COLOPHON

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