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English translation by Evie Cooper, 2026/10/09. The original Japanese text is copyrighted by Aka Akasaka and may be found on the *Weekly Young Jump* website.

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Note: For translation errors, please send email to *wec@evievm.pubvm.org*!

Preface

“45510” is a story that was posted on Young Jump back in 2023, and it tells the story of a former idol in a band called B-Komachi studying the private life of one of her bandmates, whose name is Ai. In the closed context of the story, her last name (and the name of the speaker) is not revealed, nor what happens to her.

The Japanese “idol industry” as it is known is *very* hard on young girls and is often cited (quite correctly) as exploitative; girls are forced to play a fake persona and are criticized by their managers and fans should they let slip too many “real facts” about their life. Once idols “age out” of being who they once were, many seek to expunge their past from the internet. This is one such story.

This story would later be the basis for a manga series named *Oshi no Ko*, which would later evolve into an anime of the same name; the opening for that anime show was produced by a duo named YOASOBI and is aptly named *Idol.*

This story is the first incarnation of the Oshi no Ko narrative saga.

To me, your translator, this story is of particular narrative impact as it mirrors parts of my own experience. I adapted this story and combined it with the narrative of a videogame when I produced a Commander Keen fanfiction.

I hope you find this story as impactful as I did.

The Story of Ai

“Idols are objects of worship, you know? They sparkle through the magic of lies... lies are the most exquisite form of love, no?”

1

In the grand database that is the internet, a wide variety of texts, images, videos, and whatnot can be found from the last 20 or 30 so years; they all remain today as an archive of the past.

However, if a server stops working, a site's hosting gets terminated, or someone chooses to delete their account, it is not uncommon for things to disappear from this digital world forever.

What is too late will never come back.

I understand that there are some things that cannot be retrieved once they are gone.

“Ah...”

“I don't remember,” the voice leaks out. Do people often raise their voices when they encounter evil spirits? Usually, those feelings move slowly, and often one's heart flutters for just a moment...

What they met was a demon, a legendary idol who left the entertainment industry 16 years ago. Some fans kept an archive of her live streams, all kept against the rules; she had meant for it to be scrubbed from existence, but sometimes even the grandest attempts of *damnatio memoriae* fail.

“Wow, I miss you. You know, us fans kept you in our hearts for decades, right?”

Here, take a look at the summary section of the original video. The date of the video was right in the middle of B-Komachi's peak of popularity; it appeared to be a copy of a livestream from around the time when Ai returned from her hiatus, all to great fanfare and fan love.

While livestreaming idols is pretty commonplace today, it wasn't so common back then; the initiative that kicked it all off was something that the legendary Saito had come up as an idea on a whim a few years and carried out a few times. Once he did that, the floodgates opened...

“I,” too, recall having ran a few livestreams of myself eons ago. I don't... really remember what we talked about. If an archive *did* exist, I could just check it, but all of that data is likely gone -- the streaming service I aired on was slow to adapt

to the widespread adoption of smartphones; everyone went to other services and eventually they put themselves on ice of a lack of fresh faces... even if you could somehow log into the site, you probably wouldn't be able to find the data. In other words, this video was something that the fans of the time saved.

I slowly moved the mouse to the center of the screen and hesitated for a moment. I felt like playing this video would bring back those feelings I felt so long ago...

2

I absolutely hated “Ai.”

For me, at least, the activities with B-Komachi were by no means just mere fun. Of course, after entering the entertainment industry myself, I met many celebrities and had dinner with all manner of people that I admired; it was fun appearing on TV and attracting attention -- I was treated like a celebrity wherever I went because I was with them. However, with that being said, those parts that I did enjoy were those private moments with whoever famous person I was with; I'm not really so sure I enjoyed the public-facing activities of the B-Komachi group myself.

Day in and day out, I was swamped with rehearsals and lessons; I travelled all over the country of Japan for various events and live shows, yet I had no time for sightseeing; I missed out on things like school trips and all sorts of important cultural festivals we have every year.

Above all... above all else, the mere presence of Ai, the person behind this here video, cast a shadow over all of my activities. Most of the popularity of the B-Komachi group's popularity was sustained by Ai herself: even during various live performances, Ai was fixed there in the center -- all of the other group members were essentially like backup dancers meant to cast the spotlight on her. Management blatantly favored Ai, and every project revolved around her.

Of course, I understood it all.

We, well, we wouldn't have made it big without Ai. Without her, the rest of those B-Komachi members would've just remained nothing more than underground idols and would've never achieved that level of spotlight on their own.

Even so, one's emotions often refuse to accept that. Seeing her receive so much favoritism... it's impossible to not feel hatred welling up. B-Komachi started out as a rag-tag group of middle-school-aged models pretending to be something big from some small, struggling modelling agency. While groups consisting of relatively young members were a big trend at the time, girls in their more formative years underwent drastic changes in their appearance and demeanor. In most cases, those young idols lost their sheen of pre-adulthood innocence and grew up to become “ordinary” women. I even hear that when evaluating the potential of a young idol,

the appearance of the parents is sometimes checked. “What kind of face would they grow up to have?” Isn't that outrageous? What a twisted industry, upholding a cruel story.

It distills looksism to its absolute essence and is ruthlessly meritocratic... with no regard for the pains of the idols themselves. It can be said that many of the members of this race, myself included, fell victim to that cruelty.

Back when I was working as a model for a fashion magazine aimed at middle school girls, I was beautiful -- the kind of girl that you could show off anywhere without a shred of embarrassment. But, as I entered high school and eventually adulthood, that round face -- my once most charming feature -- gradually began to work against me. They were supposed to be marketed for their youthful looks, but, instead, they transformed into someone stocky and unrefined. In many ways, it was... a... failure in personal development, almost.

I've heard such comments from other people, sometimes even fans, on several occasions as well.

I envied Ai.

It seemed to me that she hadn't changed at all from start to finish as she grew up. She had a mature-looking face from the very beginning, but a touch of childlike innocence that remained with her to the end.

I was jealous, to say the least.

It wasn't just me -- I'm sure every member of B-Komachi felt the same way! On the surface, they all tried to get along... but, those feelings of jealousy must've seeped through -- and, I think that Ai understood that and was aware of it, too. There was clearly a barrier between me and the other members. We worked together for years, but I don't think that we ever spoke the truth or revealed our true feelings to one another.

Ai was always so non-chalant about it all and never revealed her true feelings. We went out a few times for a meal at the beginning of our being together, but we didn't really socialize outside of that. Eventually, frustrations started to boil over, and some members even began to harass Ai. Stealing her makeup, spreading all sorts of outrageous rumors -- true or false -- about Ai among the other members... That employee, and that's what we all were, was fired immediately. President Saito acted swiftly and ruthlessly; immediately after the matter came to light, a statement was issued and the contract was immediately terminated. I wasn't even allowed to hold a graduation concert for her; everyone resigned themselves to the president's blatant favoritism for Ai. For me, though, there was no other choice but to continue performing as a “backup dancer” for Ai as part of B-Komachi.

“Fuck it all.” That was the thought with which I continued my activity here. I didn't anchor my heart to anything, I just held my breath and pressed the play button.

3

“Uh, can you hear me?”

It was Ai's voice.

Ai's voice. Not other description of it is needed.

It felt like a hurricane was blowing through my stomach; this was the thing that was once the one-and-only to me.

“Is my microphone volume too low? I see, okay, uhh, everyone turn up your volume!”

The same old droll remark, she said that every time and her microphone pre-amp was miscalibrated every time she streamed; it was a ploy to get everyone's attention. Really, those idols had absolutely no qualms about inconveniencing others; there's a certain boldness to it, as if to say that unconvincing others is, itself, a vital form of communication. That's right, that's what Ai was like. The world at her fingertips, her fans at her every beck and call.

Ai looked so beautiful on the screen. I had wondered in the back of my mind if the passage of more than a decade, and the memories associated with it, had somehow idealized the image of her in my head to make her more beautiful than she was in reality; this turned out to be false, of course. To anyone that saw her, Ai was *undeniably* beautiful. I was, back then, hyper-aware that Ai (or so I wanted to believe) was being driven by the preconceptions of youth that her fans seemed to hold.

“What should I talk about? I haven't really prepared anything... the boss just told me to go have a casual chat. But, what exactly am I supposed to do for a casual chat? Oh, right! Comments! Should I just read everyone's comments?”

The comment section of the livestream was not preserved in the uploaded video; I had no idea what sort of comments were reaching Ai.

The sound of her voice fell out of the speakers like snow falling from the sky.

> “Kyo nani tabeta? Nani mo tabe tenai. Fuko no burado? Yuni-Roda yo! Sukinahon toka aru? Naisho. Asobiniikuara doko? Himitsu!”

“What did I eat today? Nothing. The brand of my clothes? Uniqlo. What's my favorite book? That's a secret! Where do I go to hang out? That's a secret too!”

Ai's answers were, occasionally, laced with secrets. I don't really understand (and didn't understand then) where the line was drawn between what could be answered and what was considered confidential; neither did she, apparently. I mean, really, you ought to just tell them what kind of books you like. I recall that she had always been so secretive. No matter what she asked, she would hastily dodge the question; to a fan, this might come across as mysterious (and a mystery to be solved, at that).

“What foods do you dislike?”

Ai was at a loss for an answer. “Hmm...” she said, casting his gaze upward; she continued speaking without looking back at the camera.

“Nothing in particular, though I'm really not a fan of plain white rice.”

“Yeah, right,” I thought to myself. After all, it was Ai who cleaned the tray of her on-location bento boxes more neatly than anyone else... she even took home any leftovers; I've seen her clean her plate of plain white race time and time again! Those idols probably think that giving some kind of eccentric answer is the way to go -- it was true to Ai's character, too. “It's not that I dislike the taste, it's just... well, you know... you know how white rice is so soft? Sometimes there's grit or sand in it? That crunchy texture? I can't stand that!”

Well, normally, sand doesn't get in your rice. However, what was being said did have a touch of reality to it; the idea that one might suddenly encounter a foreign object is enough to strike fear into any human... one might even say it's part of human instinct to have such a fear.

“You know, I worry about what I'd do if there were glass or something mixed in with the white rice. It must hurt, right? So, it's not whether or not I like it, it's more really like... I'm scared? Yeah. White rice scares me, so I don't really like it. Well, I'll eat it if it's served to me, but I'll be bracing myself a little.”

Ai wore a calm, faint smile as the light shined out of the computer monitor. If anything, Ai was always smiling -- this was just business as usual. To me, Ai's smile always seemed like a blank expression. Always.

“Do you have any desire to get married?”

“No, I don't.”

This time, the answer was immediate and stern. She looked off from the camera for a moment, and continued.

“I don't know, though. I just can't picture myself getting married at all. Everyone says so readily and easily that they'd like to marry me, but I wonder how much they really mean it. I can sorta understand wanting to be close to someone you

really like, but what makes you want to get married? I wonder if it's a way of showing affection? Like, expressing a desire to want to be together forever? Maybe? Hmm, I see. I think I might kinda get it now."

I felt like there was a slight opening in Ai's expression, the real her shining through in that moment. It was a question born out of pure curiosity, as if the thought in someone's head wanted to be fine-tuned, and so they submitted the question for her to see.

"But I find myself wanting to be together all the time with someone sometimes; I think I'm starting to understand that desire a little, but only recently though."

That sudden hint made my blood run cold. Even I retained a shred of the instinct of an idol: a sensitive smell tuned to the smell of something burning.

"My cousin's kid is just so adorable, I find myself wanting to stand by their side all the time!"

The comments section at the time must've been abuzz with relief. Ai had never had any romantic relationships with the opposite sex come to light. None of us had any way of knowing about Ai's private life, either; this here was an archive of the past, so it's not like it was happening in real-time and was applicable to her in the present day... she'd surely have changed since then. Even knowing that this would be the only answer I would ever get, my spine chilled more.

"My type of guy? That's a secret! I mean, I could tell you, but wouldn't it be a bummer if you didn't fit the description? Hmm... I guess nevermind, then."

It seems that the stream that day centered on talk about love and romance. Ai's love life. I have to be honest, I was a little interested in it too, back then. I grabbed the volume knob of the headphone amplifier and turned it up a bit.

"I think I'd prefer someone who doesn't get angry at me too much. I'm always messing something up, after all! I feel like someone that got hung up on the little details would be totally exhausted dealing with me. It wouldn't be fair to them, though, so I'd rather be with someone who isn't like that at all."

I remembered the blunder Ai made. It's not so much that she was missing some kind of "crucial piece" in her social life, but rather that she flat-out lacked the general social awareness needed to navigate the world. Indeed, quite a few idols have social developmental disorders, and Ai was a prime example of this. Ai, for instance, doesn't call anyone by their name; if I called her out for this, I myself would get accused of making some kind of mistake. I recall that I was frequently corrected for mispronouncing President Saito's name. The members jokingly said that Ai might not be able to distinguish between two similar people! In the world as Ai sees it, all humans are featureless: mere "Person A" or "Person B" archetypes

falling into clean categories, and she has no recognition of them as distinct individuals. I, sometimes, tend to view myself as nothing more than a playable character in a video game, a persona that I don to get by in the world; I often think about my own life as if it were happening to someone else. At least, that's the sort of thing that the gaming fans amongst the members of our group were talking about whilst they played those RPG games on their handheld game consoles. The talk of that, surprisingly, left quite an impression on me. I remember thinking that the thoughts like that which swirled 'round and around in my head might actually be true...

“The feeling of liking someone is probably built on a foundation of trust, if I had to guess. What was it called? Reciprocity? You know, like, how when you like someone, they like you back? I'm way too much of a coward, though, so I guess I find it kinda hard to really believe in the concept of love. I've never truly fallen in love with anyone, so I wouldn't know what it felt like.”

People can only judge others based on their own common sense. If you don't know the feeling of what it feels like to like someone, you can't believe in the concept of “liking” at all when someone else brings it up. This is something I realized after becoming an adult. It's like the people who cheat on their partners are the ones who, paradoxically, are the ones most likely to suspect their partner of cheating.

“It feels strange. I'm... not really good at talking about myself, and I'd hate to say something weird and have people end up hating me. But, it's not that I actually dislike talking about myself, even if it might seem like some kind of contradiction! I want y'all to know and accept everything about me, including the ugly and unpleasant parts, and tell me that it's okay...”

I felt like I was hearing something close to Ai's true feelings for the first time in my entire life. It was almost like a diary of sorts; Ai appeared to be conversing with the comments, but ultimately, it seemed as though she was talking to herself and trying to understand her own thoughts. I, too, have a recollection of that. When reading comments from your livestream viewers and talking about them, it tends to turn into a dialogue with oneself. For example, when trying to compensate for the limited information crammed into the brief sentence that is a comment, one inevitably ends up inserting oneself into it. Overwhelmed by the constant stream of comments, I often found the true conversation to land far-removed from my true feelings, yet I just moved onto the next topic anyways when I streamed. After all, streaming is about catering to your audience, so it's pretty common to say things that you don't actually mean. And yet, there are inevitably moments when you do not want to tell a lie.

“You know, the truth is...”

4

The recording of the stream ended abruptly; the video's title was *1*, and it appeared to be split out from another file that contained more (or perhaps there was a subsequent recording that was made elsewhere). I went to the uploader's page to look for more recordings, but there were none to be seen. Was it deleted, or was it just never posted in the first place? Enveloped in a lingering sense of unfulfillment, I clicked on an index page. Hoping to find some trace of Ai, I follow a trail of pages related to B-Komachi. I'd already seen nearly all of the B-Komachi-related videos on that site, and all of them had Ai wearing her “TV mask.”

Come to think of it...

Come to think of it, when B-Komachi first formed, back when everyone still got along, there was talk of creating a joint blog; we had the idea when we were all sitting at a fast-food restaurant in front of a train station... four kids, innocent and carefree... dreamed of a bright future.

In the end, it was decided that only the official account created by management would be operated, but that account was abandoned. If I recall correctly, Ai had also written some diary entries on that account a few times, and she did so out-of-character.

I pondered what the website that held the blog's address was, and it came to my mind. I proceeded to the login screen for the blog, the one that would allow me to see everything.

The email address I registered the account with was supposed to be my secondary email address. I didn't know what the password was... I knew it was numbers, and I think I knew them, but was it the 1 that came first, or the 55? After trying a few combinations, I arrived at the correct password.

45510

Takamine, Nino, Ai, Watanabe. The numbers corresponding to the initial letters of the founding members when typed using a phone flick-input-style Japanese kana keyboard.

There are 7 articles. The total number of visits to the site is 328. The latest page contained a notice about a relocation of the website to a different site. This is such an incredibly rare blog that even long-time fans might not know about it. The choice of blog service was poor, too; there's a cute avatar displayed next to the blog, giving it the distinct look of something created by an elementary or middle school student. Reading through it gave me a headache, like looking back on a shameful past.

The content of the articles was terrible, too. One of them was written like a self-introduction page (probably written without checking with the idol administration team) and it had chatter about favorite celebrities; it was written with an abundance of emoji. This is the page of a shitty brat who doesn't have a shred of professionalism. I let out a startled gasp as I jumped to the editing page, eager to delete the article. I clicked into the administrative editing page, but I found a private page there. I figured out who posted it from the tags; it's Ai.

I opened the preview screen, and read the text Ai wrote.

“Takamine, Nino-chan, and Watanabe”

The page brings back memories, doesn't it? I didn't think it was still around, either We really used to get along so well back in the beginning... things sure are tense with B-Komachi right now, aren't they? Well, it's my fault, though... Honestly, I feel really bad about it, and I kinda feel responsible. I'm serious!

It might be hard to ask you to trust me, but...

My desire to get along with everyone else in that group has never changed. I haven't been able to say it until now, but this is how I truly feel. Y'all'l probably all hate me, but... I don't hate you. If I could, for a moment, I would like to say that I'd like to do things the way I did back then. Sure, go ahead, make fun of me all you want, it's fine to get properly angry at hearing that. I mean, B-Komachi is kinda a joke nowadays. Don't hold back, say what's on your mind.

Look, if you found this blog and visited it because you missed the way we used to be, please let me know if we ever cross paths. Hey, Ai, call me a damn fool. I'll say “okay, I'm sorry for being a fool.”

I want to make up. There are things I've been meaning to tell everyone for the longest time. I want to properly tell everyone.

I didn't read to the end, I just went back a page, back to the editor. I clicked on the Delete button to delete the page that Ai wrote forever. May nobody ever read this text again.

This isn't right.

This isn't Ai.

Ai was someone who leaned on nobody; she was unconstrained, proudly solitary, and strong... she never harbored regret, and she is invincible... the absolute strongest. She was utterly one of a kind. Ai wouldn't write something that sounds like she was clinging to “friends” like those... it ain't Ai. It ain't who Ai is.

My love isn't like that.

There is no need for me to know which one is the real Ai. I looked off my monitor for a moment, and I pondered what the rest of that video was like if it had been saved by a fan. I definitely watched that stream at least once, when it aired live. After all... I watched every single one of Ai's streams.

Come to think of it, there was one time when Ai let her guard down and voiced her insecurities during a livestream. That's right, the episode about the white rice and the glass. That tied into the story about Ai's mother. At some point, Ai's mother threw a glass; when the glass inevitably broke, shards of the glass ended up in the white rice. From that moment on, Ai let words of weakness slip out like nobody had ever seen before. I wonder if the person who posted that video was just like me, someone who maybe didn't want to acknowledge that side of Ai... so, the video-saver cut the video off to prevent the reality of Ai's hurting soul from being remembered. After all, that person likely wanted to protect the idol within us. As such, it was erased from the great database that is the internet.

Forever, so that the past could never be rewound, and it would never be remembered. After a few minutes, I went to the administrative page of the blog and clicked the Delete button. That voice... Ai's voice in that video... that might've been a tinge of the only “SOS” she ever sent out. Nobody would ever see it again, or ever hear softly exclaim the pain she was in.

My face reflected in the window glass next to my PC.

It was the face of an unquestionable devotee.

It was the face of someone who revered Ai more than anyone else.



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File Number: 45510

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