





have never even smiled at me until today...

The senpai from the drama club

I've been acknowledged...

This applause... Those smiling faces...

...are for my performance today!



Only the stage!

The stage is my existence!

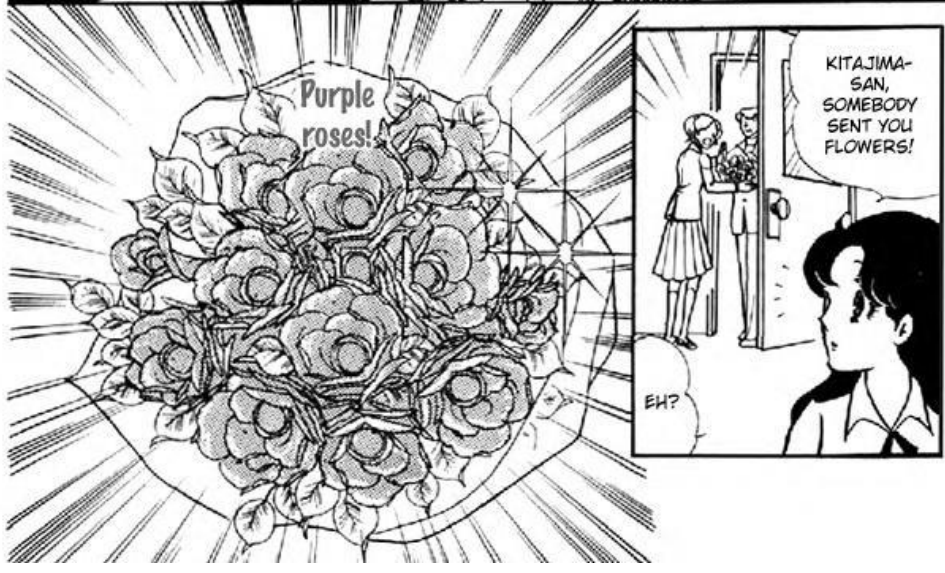
Ah, I love acting so much!

I'm so happy to act again!

It's the only thing that keeps me alive...



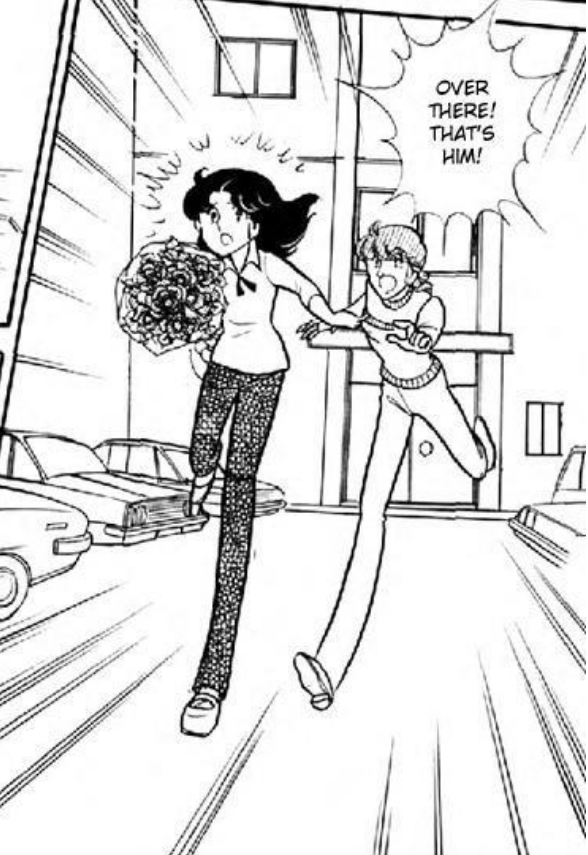
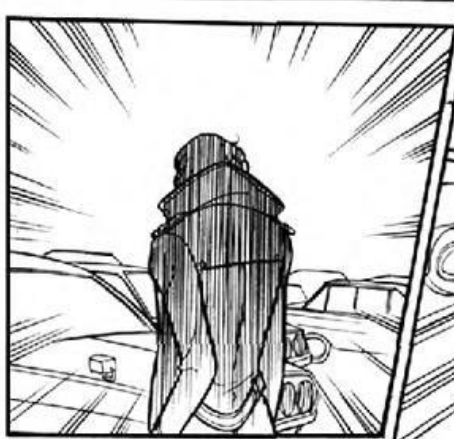
I've revealed another path for myself!



Purple roses!

KITAJIMA-SAN, SOMEBODY SENT YOU FLOWERS!

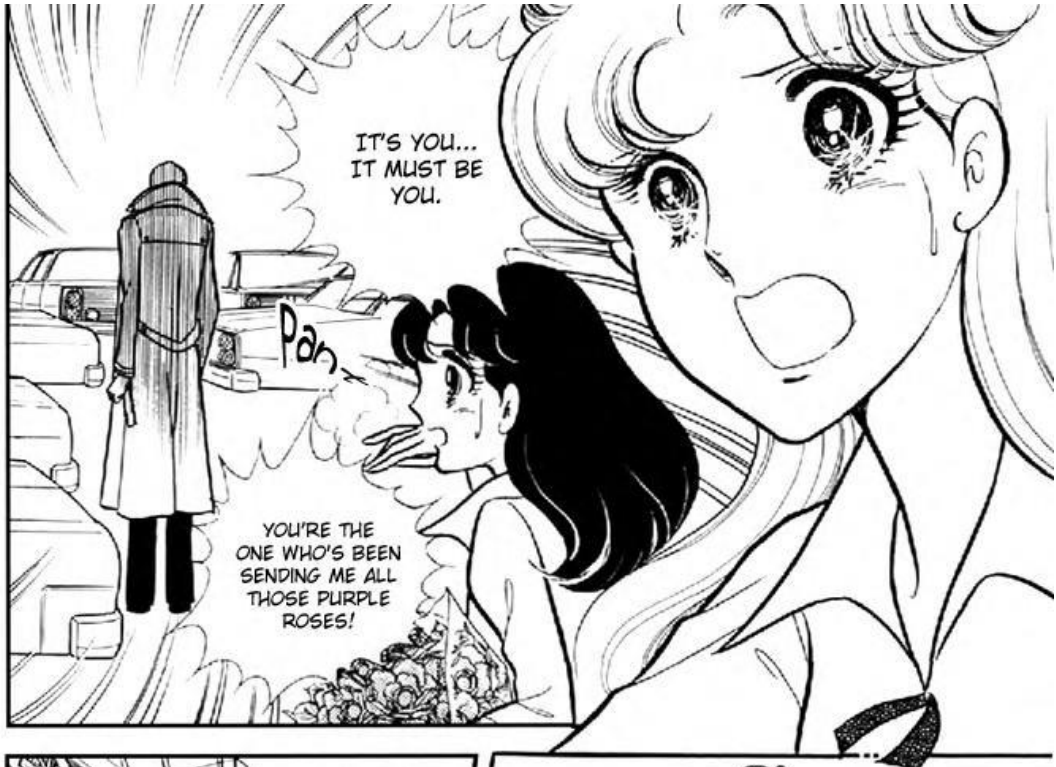
EH?







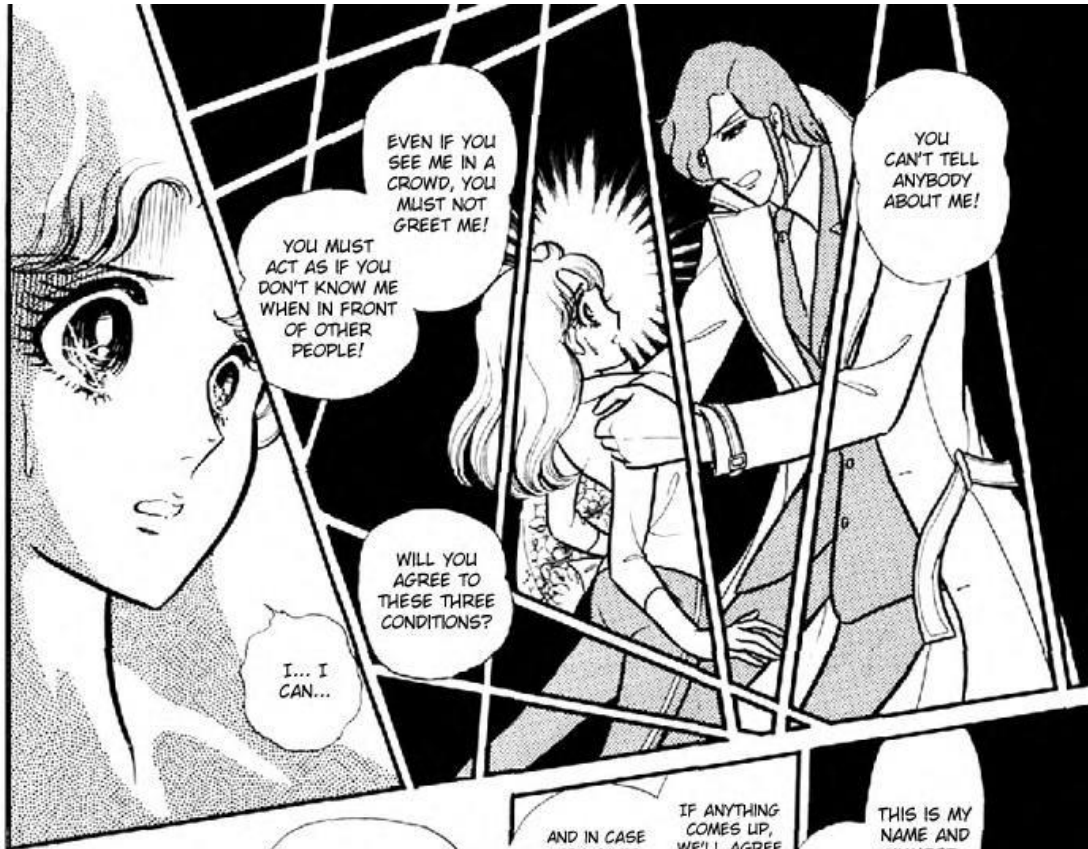












EVEN IF YOU SEE ME IN A CROWD, YOU MUST NOT GREET ME!

YOU CAN'T TELL ANYBODY ABOUT ME!

YOU MUST ACT AS IF YOU DON'T KNOW ME WHEN IN FRONT OF OTHER PEOPLE!

WILL YOU AGREE TO THESE THREE CONDITIONS?

I... I CAN...



I ALREADY KNOW MORE ABOUT YOU THAN YOU REALIZE.



AND IN CASE YOU CAN'T REACH ME, COORDINATE WITH ONE OF MY ASSISTANTS.

IF ANYTHING COMES UP, WE'LL AGREE ON A PLACE TO MEET.

UHM, THIS IS MY ADDRESS AND THE APARTMENT'S PHONE NUMBER ...

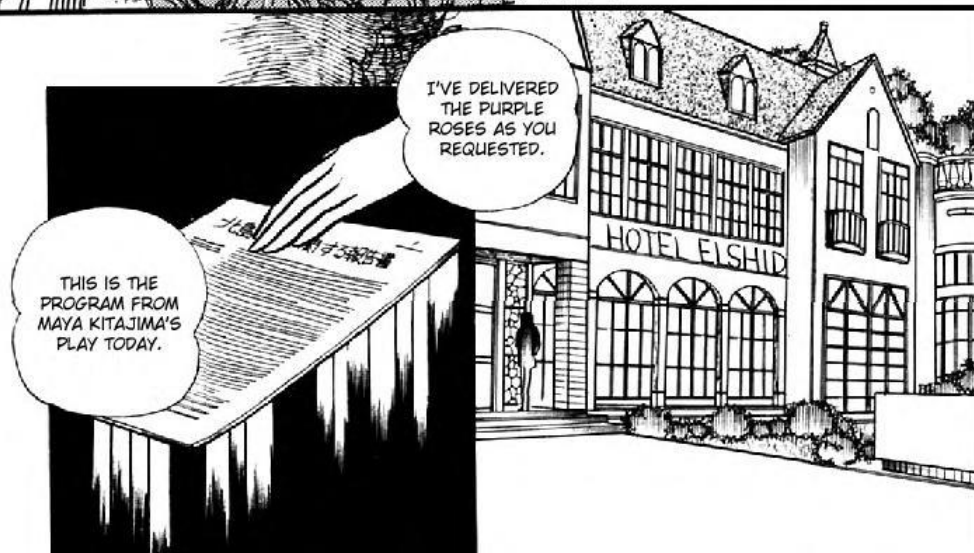
I MUST EXCUSE MYSELF NOW.



THIS IS MY NAME AND NUMBER.

REMEMBER, NOBODY MUST KNOW!







MAYA KITAJIMA'S PERFORMANCE WAS VERY SUCCESSFUL.

EVERY ONE OF THE BOARD OF ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS WHO WERE INVITED REACTED WITH FEVERED HURRAHS AND APPLAUSE.

SHE SEEMS TO HAVE REGAINED HER SELF-CONFIDENCE. NOW WOULD BE A GOOD TIME FOR HER RETURN TO THE STAGE.



BUT AYUMI HIMEKAWA IS STILL AHEAD OF HER.

I EXPECTED AS MUCH. SHE DID RECEIVE APPLAUSE AND HURRAHS IN THAT SCHOOL PLAY OF HERS.

SO... SHE'S REGAINED HER SELF-CONFIDENCE EH?



SHE BEGGED ME TO ACT AS THE "BRIDGE" BETWEEN YOU AND HER.

DON'T WORRY; I'VE KEPT YOUR SECRET SAFE.

IT WON'T BE A BOTHER TO YOU AT ALL.

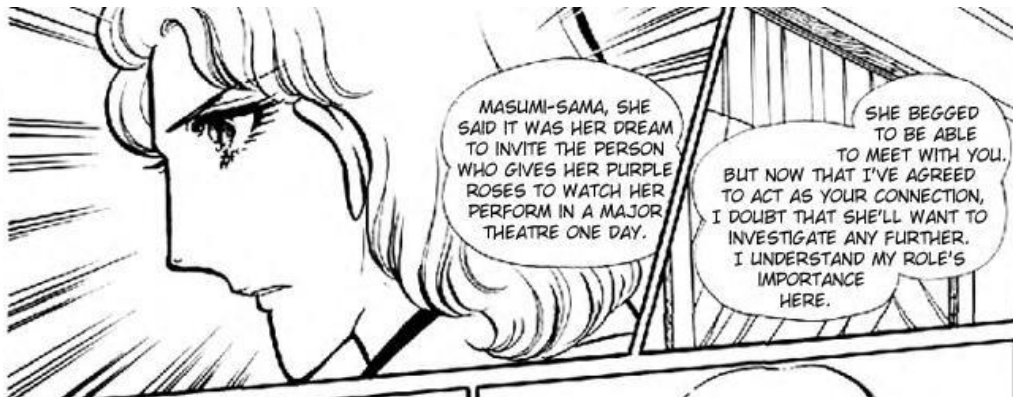
I HEARD THAT AYUMI HIMEKAWA HAS BECOME THE MOST LIKELY CANDIDATE FOR THE "PERFORMING ARTS GRAND AWARD".

The difference is still too...

AND GROWTH THAT SEEMS TO BE ON WINGS...

A FRESH STAGE...

MAYA KITAJIMA ...SHE ALREADY KNOWS MY NAME.



MASUMI-SAMA, SHE SAID IT WAS HER DREAM TO INVITE THE PERSON WHO GIVES HER PURPLE ROSES TO WATCH HER PERFORM IN A MAJOR THEATRE ONE DAY.

SHE BEGGED TO BE ABLE TO MEET WITH YOU. BUT NOW THAT I'VE AGREED TO ACT AS YOUR CONNECTION, I DOUBT THAT SHE'LL WANT TO INVESTIGATE ANY FURTHER. I UNDERSTAND MY ROLE'S IMPORTANCE HERE.



YOU'VE BEEN WORKING HARD.

AND HERE IS THE SECRET INVESTIGATIVE REPORT ON THE Q BUSINESS PRODUCTION FACILITY.

PREPARING EVERYTHING AHEAD OF SCHEDULE.

THERE'S ALSO ANOTHER PORTION ON THE N ARTISTRY LEVEL AND A ARTISTRY LEVEL INVESTIGATIVE STUDY PARAMETERS. THESE ARE ALL TOP-SECRET DOCUMENTS.



THAT WOULD BE...

...AN HONOR.



EVEN THOUGH THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO KNOW ABOUT YOUR EXISTENCE ARE THE CHAIRMAN...

...AND ME.

I... RARELY EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE TO OTHERS.

I AM MOST GRATEFUL ...

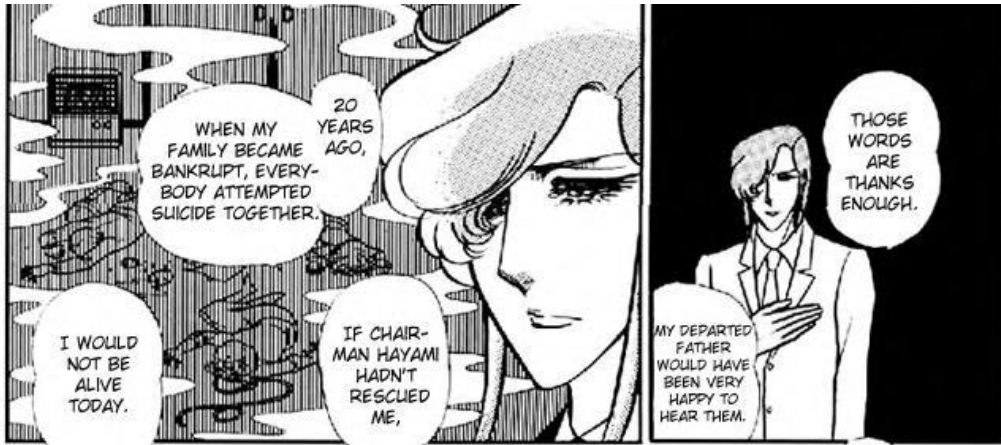
BUT TO YOU...

PERSEVERING IN YOUR WORK...

WILLING TO WORK UNDER COVER OF DARKNESS... NEVER TO SEE THE LIGHT...

KARATO... YOU ARE THE DAITO COMPANY'S "SHADOW" OPERATIVE.

FOR TWO GENERATIONS, YOU AND YOUR FATHER HAVE LIVED UNDER DAITO'S SHADOW...



20 YEARS AGO,
WHEN MY FAMILY BECAME BANKRUPT, EVERYBODY ATTEMPTED SUICIDE TOGETHER.

I WOULD NOT BE ALIVE TODAY.

IF CHAIRMAN HAYAMI HADN'T RESCUED ME,

THOSE WORDS ARE THANKS ENOUGH.

MY DEPARTED FATHER WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY HAPPY TO HEAR THEM.



IT WAS CHAIRMAN HAYAMI WHO GAVE US SOMETHING TO LIVE FOR, A NEW PURPOSE IN LIFE.

THERE WAS NO OTHER CHOICE BUT TO EXIST AS SHADOWS.

I LOST MY MOTHER AND MY YOUNGER SISTER ON THAT DAY.
MY FATHER AND I HAD BOTH LOST OUR STATUS IN SOCIETY.



THESE PAST SEVEN YEARS MY FATHER HAS BEEN TOO ILL TO PERFORM HIS DUTIES AS A SHADOW,

EVERYTHING, FROM HIS HOSPITAL FEES TO MY SCHOOL TUITION AND OUR LIVING EXPENSES, HAS BEEN TAKEN CARE OF BY CHAIRMAN HAYAMI.



I HAVE ALREADY "DIED."

TO BE ABLE TO PERFORM MY DUTIES AS A SHADOW FOR THE DAITO CORPORATION

EVEN IF OTHER PEOPLE SAY THAT THE CHAIRMAN IS A COLD-HEARTED MAN WITH NO FEELINGS, I STILL FEEL THAT HE'S AN EXTREMELY GOOD PERSON...

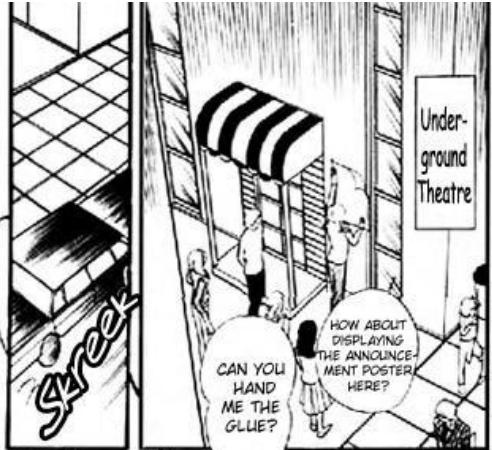
I PREPARED TO DEVOTE MY LIFE TO THIS TASK LONG AGO.

BECOMING MASUMI-SAMA'S SHADOW...

IS WHAT I TRULY WANT.



Blam



Underground Theatre

CAN YOU HAND ME THE GLUE?

HOW ABOUT DISPLAYING THE ANNOUNCEMENT POSTER HERE?



Cold-blooded workaholic!

DAITO CORPORATION'S...



THANK YOU FOR YOUR WORDS OF PRAISE.

TA-TALENTED AND ABLE YOUNG PRESIDENT ...

NOW, IF ONLY YOUR EXPRESSION WOULD MATCH YOUR WORDS.

Argh



DAITO CORPORATION'S...

I WANT TO HEAR.

WHAT WERE YOU GOING TO SAY AFTER THAT?

AH... THAT...



WHA-WHAT DO YOU WANT?

OR DID YOU COME HERE JUST TO MAKE FUN OF ME?



A PLAY ENTITLED JULIET...

AND AS MY WAY OF SAYING THANKS, I WANT TO INVITE YOU TO WATCH A PLAY WITH ME.

OH!

THIS IS THE STRAWBERRY UMBRELLA THAT YOU LENT ME WHEN IT WAS SNOWING A FEW DAYS AGO.

I CAME TO RETURN YOUR UMBRELLA.



Ayumi...

OCCASIONALLY WATCHING A SHOW WHILE STANDING DOESN'T SOUND SO BAD, DOES IT?

THESE PAST FEW DAYS HAVE BEEN FULL HOUSE SHOWS, AND ALL OF THE SEATS HAVE SOLD OUT.

JULIET!

THERE ARE STILL A HUNDRED STANDING ROOM ONLY TICKETS THOUGH. AND IF WE'RE LUCKY, WE MIGHT ACTUALLY FIND EMPTY SEATS AT THE BACK.

THE SHOW STARTS AT 6:30. WE CAN GET THERE IN TEN MINUTES FROM HERE.

NO! I DON'T WANT TO WATCH THAT PLAY!

THIS JULIET, IS AYUMI HIMEKAWA'S SOLO PLAY.

PLEASE LEAVE! YOU CAN GO WATCH BY YOURSELF! PLEASE DON'T CONCERN YOURSELF WITH ME!

I ASSUME YOU'VE HEARD OF IT BY NOW?



IF YOU DON'T WANT TO WATCH IT WITH ME,





GOOD! IF WE LEAVE NOW WE'LL JUST MAKE CURTAIN CALL.

Wha- what? This annoying person!

I'LL BE BORROWING CHIBI-CHAN HERE FOR A WHILE.

I... I'M GOING! I'M GOING!

DON'T WORRY; I'LL BRING HER BACK HOME AFTERWARDS.



R-REI!

ALL RIGHT. WE'LL LEAVE HER TO YOU THEN.



THAT PERSON... HE WANTS MAYA TO WATCH AYUMI PERFORM.

IF IT'S THAT PERSON... I CAN TRUST HIM. AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT I THINK.

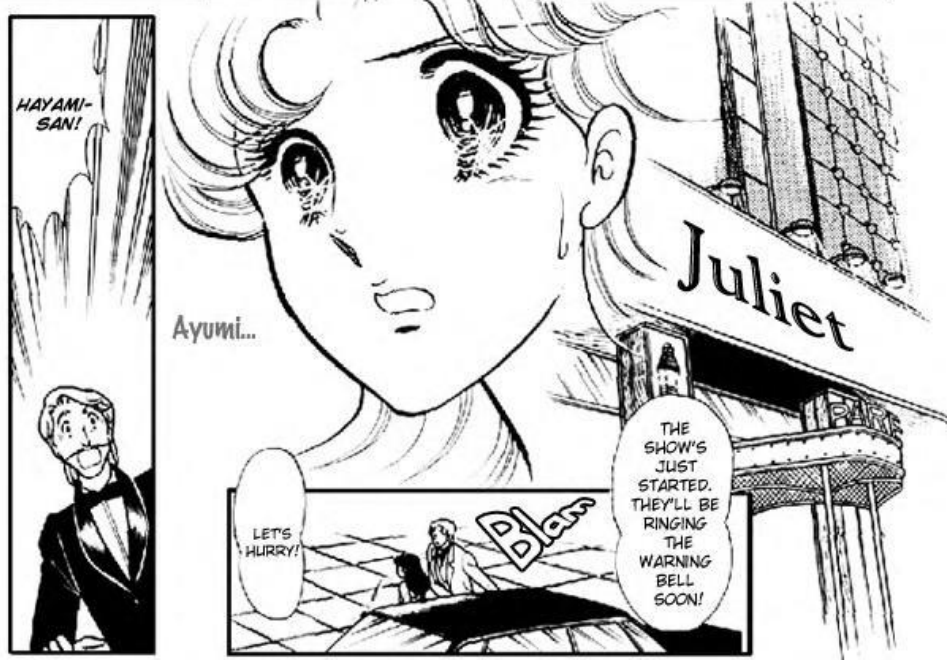
AND TO GOAD HER INTO GOING HE WAS DELIBERATELY ACTING RUTHLESS AND BLACK HEARTED!

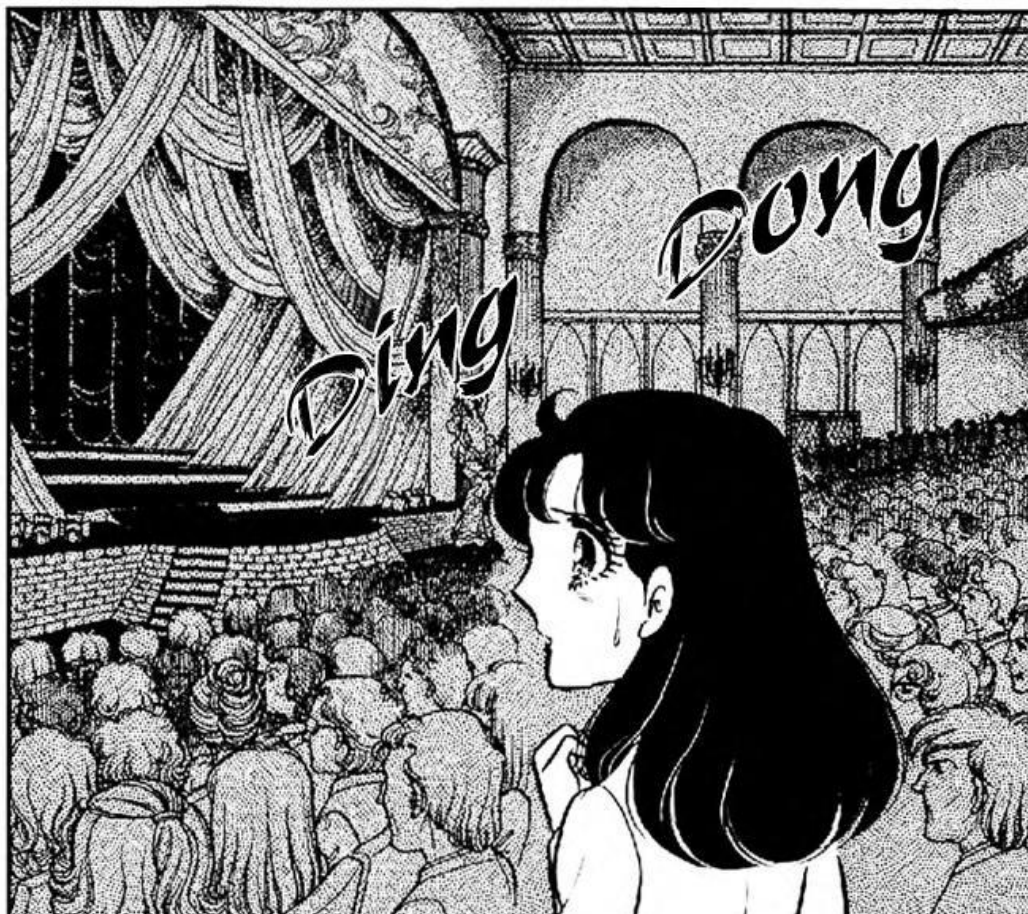


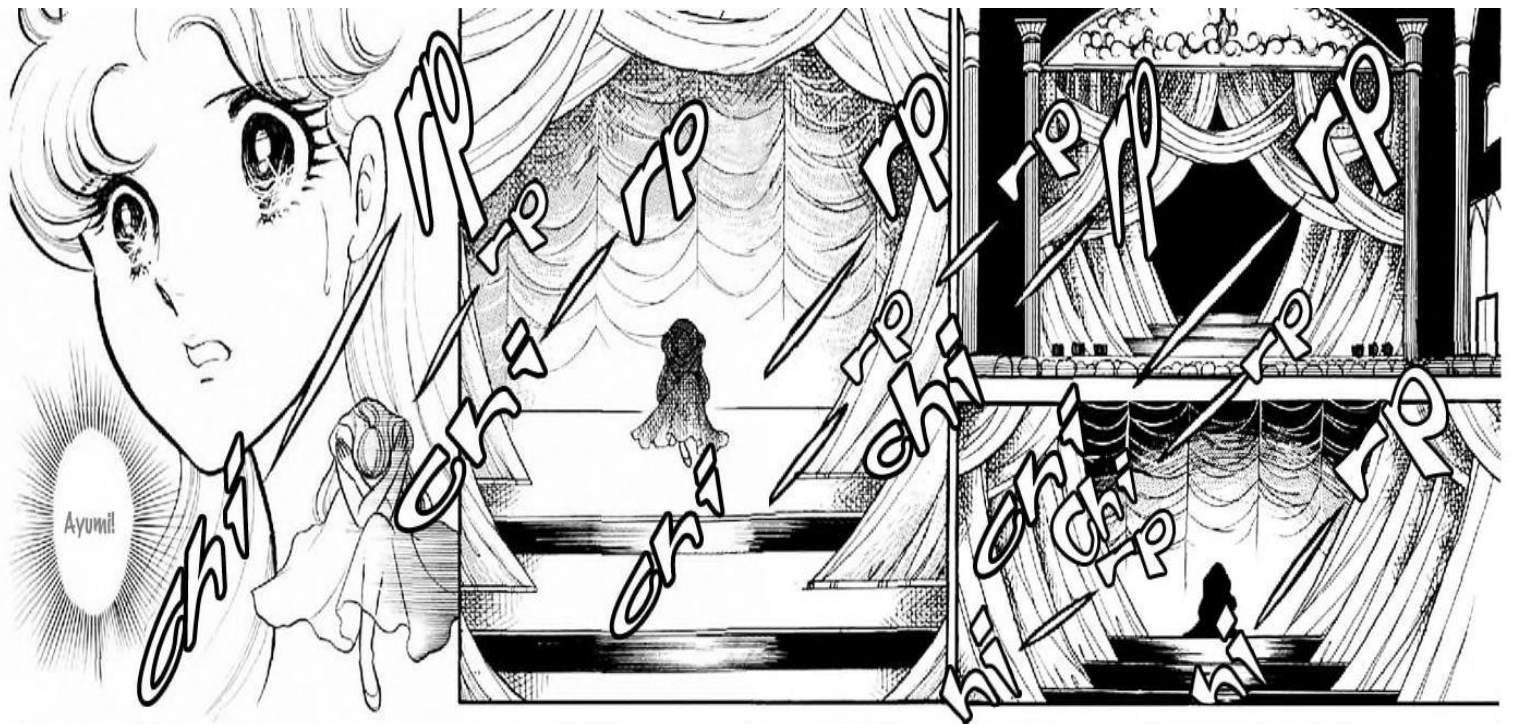
ALLOWING THAT PERSON TO GO OUT WITH MAYA LIKE THAT!

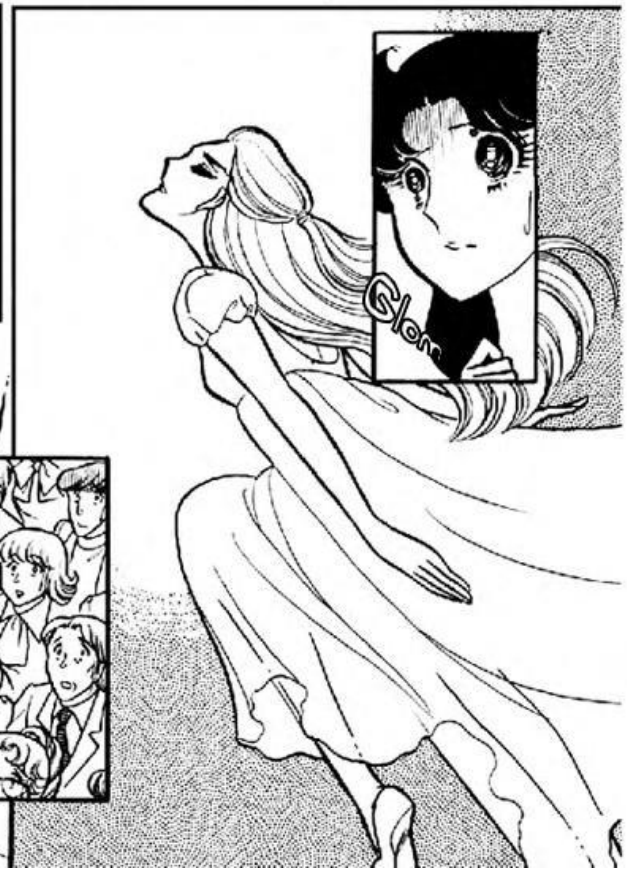
REI, WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?!

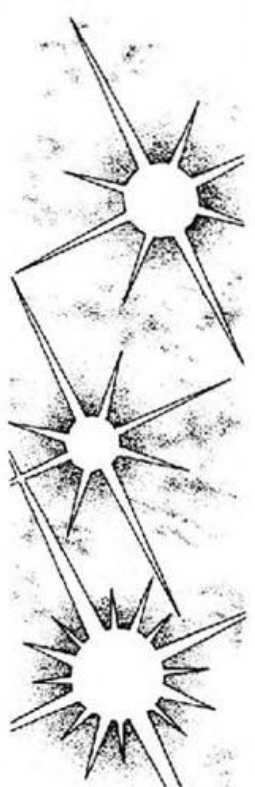
Blam Vroom









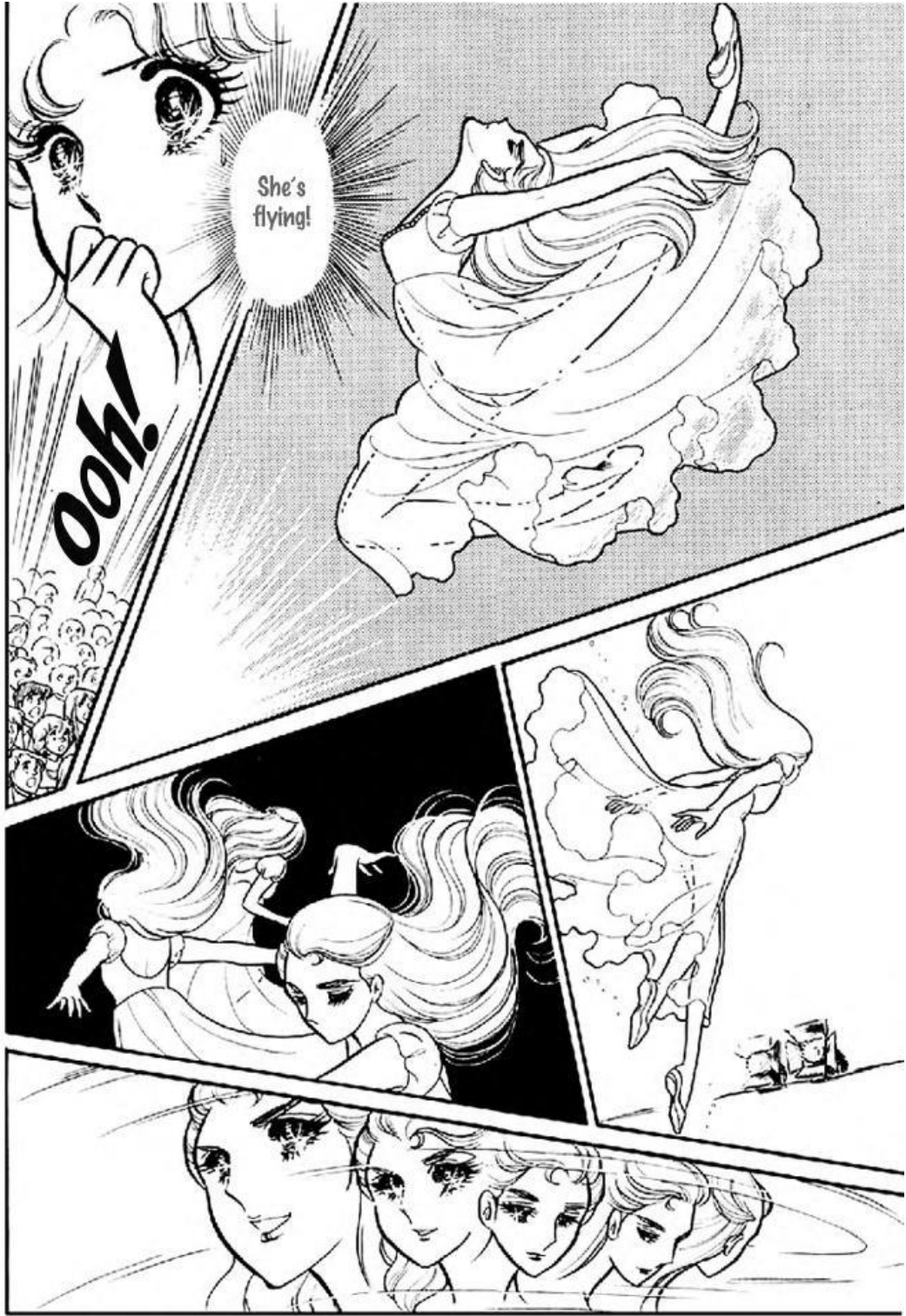


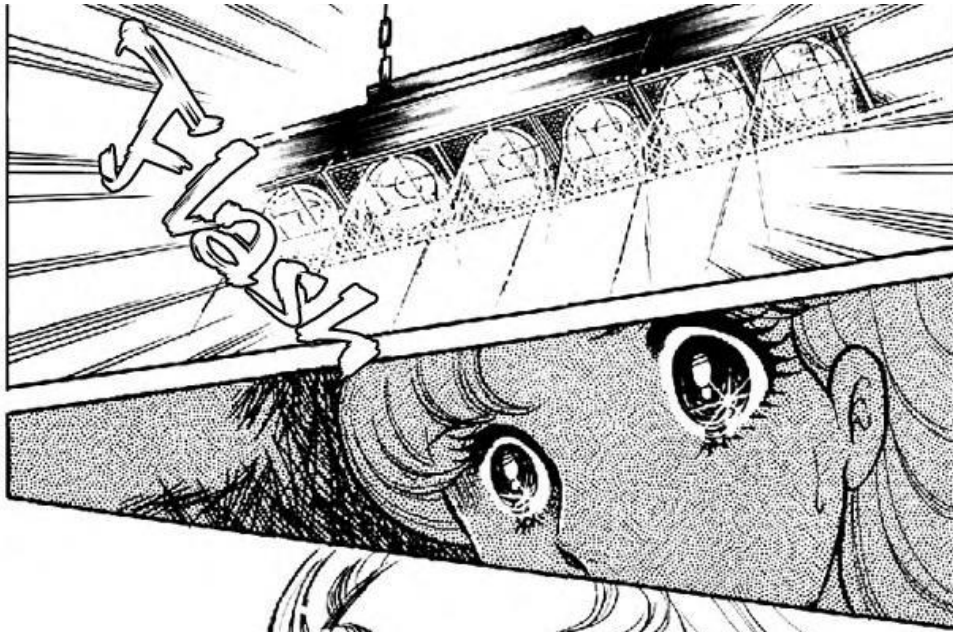
Wear



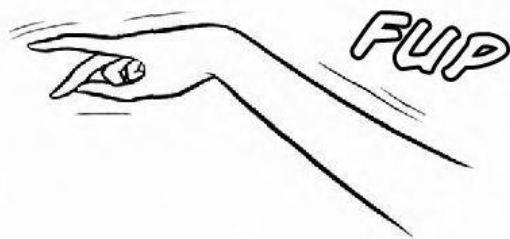
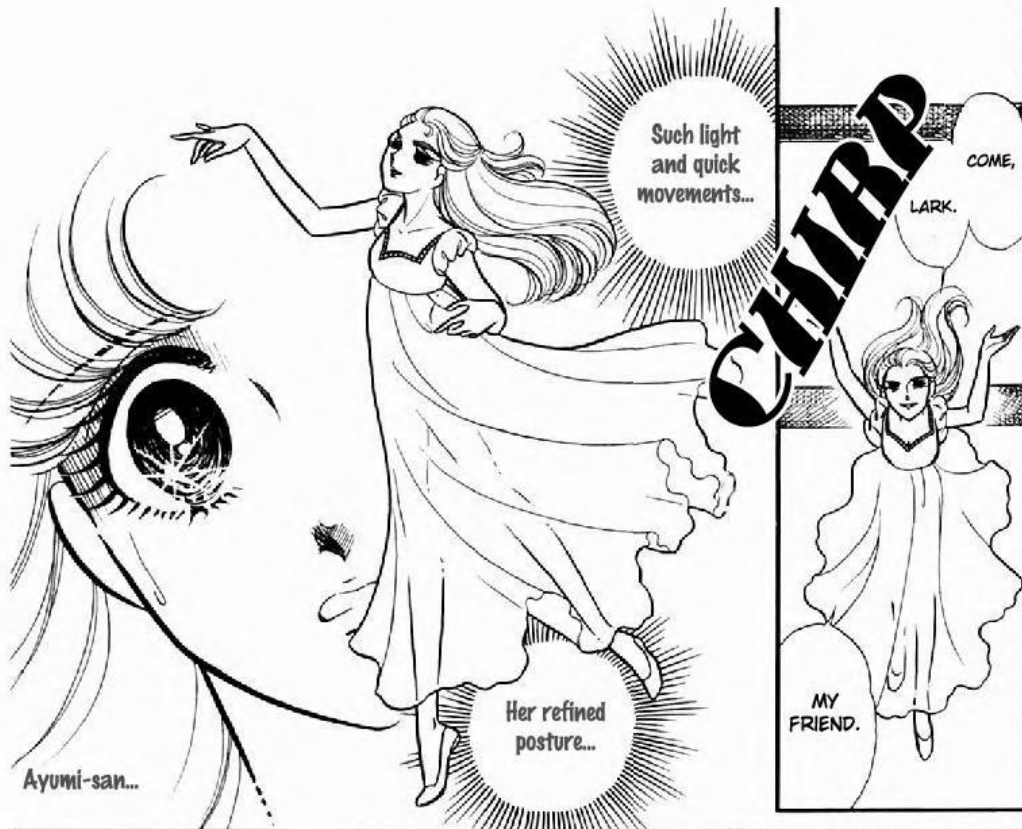
That's a bird?

Ch

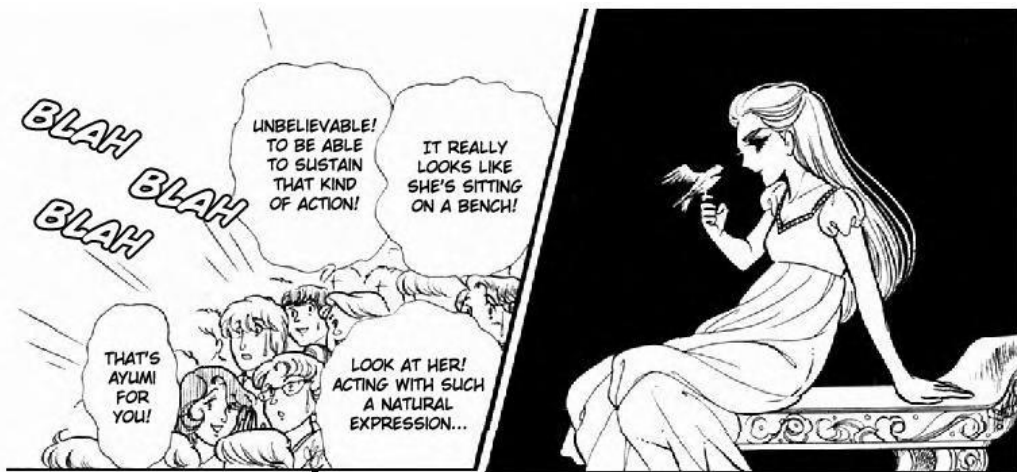












**BLAH
BLAH
BLAH**

UNBELIEVABLE!
TO BE ABLE
TO SUSTAIN
THAT KIND
OF ACTION!

IT REALLY
LOOKS LIKE
SHE'S SITTING
ON A BENCH!

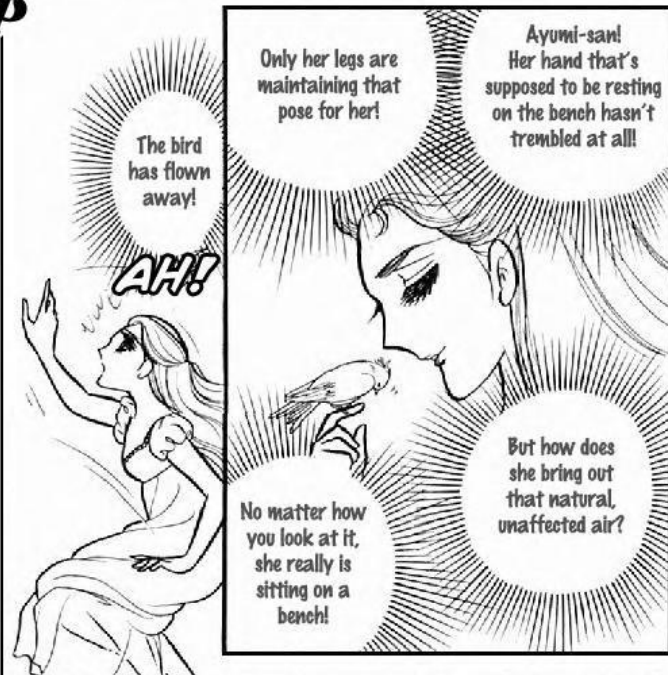
THAT'S
AYUMI
FOR
YOU!

LOOK AT HER!
ACTING WITH SUCH
A NATURAL
EXPRESSION...



CHIRP

CHIRP



The bird
has flown
away!

AH!

Only her legs are
maintaining that
pose for her!

Ayumi-san!
Her hand that's
supposed to be resting
on the bench hasn't
trembled at all!

No matter how
you look at it,
she really is
sitting on a
bench!

But how does
she bring out
that natural,
unaffected air?



Both of her
legs remain
in place!

Only her
torso is
moving!