



IF I DON'T GIVE IT A TRY,

HOW WILL I KNOW FOR SURE?



THE PRODUCER, KANEHIRA-SAN, WILL BE COMING OVER TONIGHT.

IS THAT FOR REAL?



PLEASE TELL ME WHO I NEED TO TALK TO!

WHAT!

I'M NOT IN THE STAGE PRODUCTION STAFF...

DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME ASKING ME, BECAUSE I DON'T KNOW.



WHAT'S UP?

YOU'VE GOT GUTS! TO SAY SUCH THINGS...

THIS GIRL SAYS THAT SHE WANTS TO JOIN THE AUDITION FOR AYUMI'S PARTNER!



WHAT TIME WILL HE BE COMING?

I'M NOT SURE MYSELF, BUT PROBABLY AROUND 8 OR 9 TONIGHT...



IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER IF THIS DOESN'T WORK OUT, BECAUSE EVEN IF I FAIL...

WHY DON'T YOU JUST GIVE UP? NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO, IT'S USELESS! YOU SHOULD JUST GO HOME!

YOU... INTEND TO SPEAK TO KANEHIRA-SAN ABOUT THE ROLE?
THEN... COULD I WAIT FOR HIM HERE?
YES!

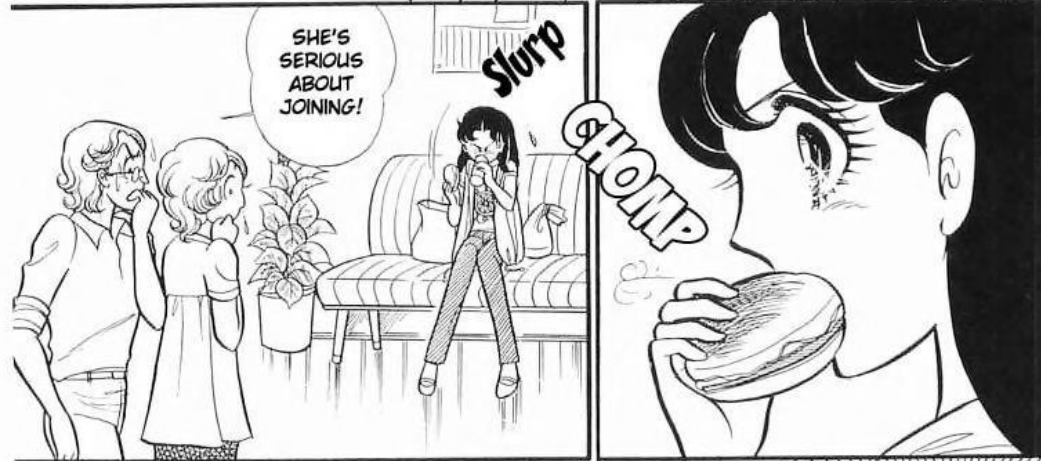
Two men looking surprised.

4:30.
IT'S STILL QUITE EARLY...

Smile
THIS IS STILL BETTER THAN NOT DOING ANYTHING AT ALL!

AH... I'LL BE BACK SOON.
BUT SINCE I'VE DECIDED TO WAIT IT OUT HERE, I'LL HAVE TO GET MYSELF PREPARED!

九月三日
日帝劇場
日時 9月3日~9日





I'll take my destiny into my own hands!

I'll gather up my courage and try anyway!

It doesn't matter if I don't succeed.

I used to take things as they come...

But in times like this, you need to become stronger.

I have to depend on my own hands to open the gates to my fortune...

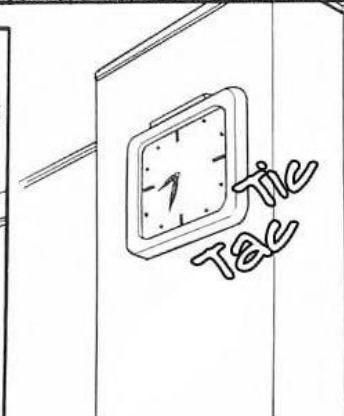
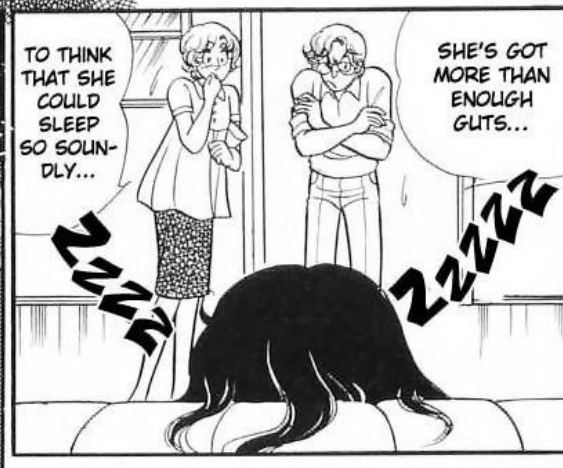
If I keep being afraid of getting hurt, then I won't be able to do anything at all...

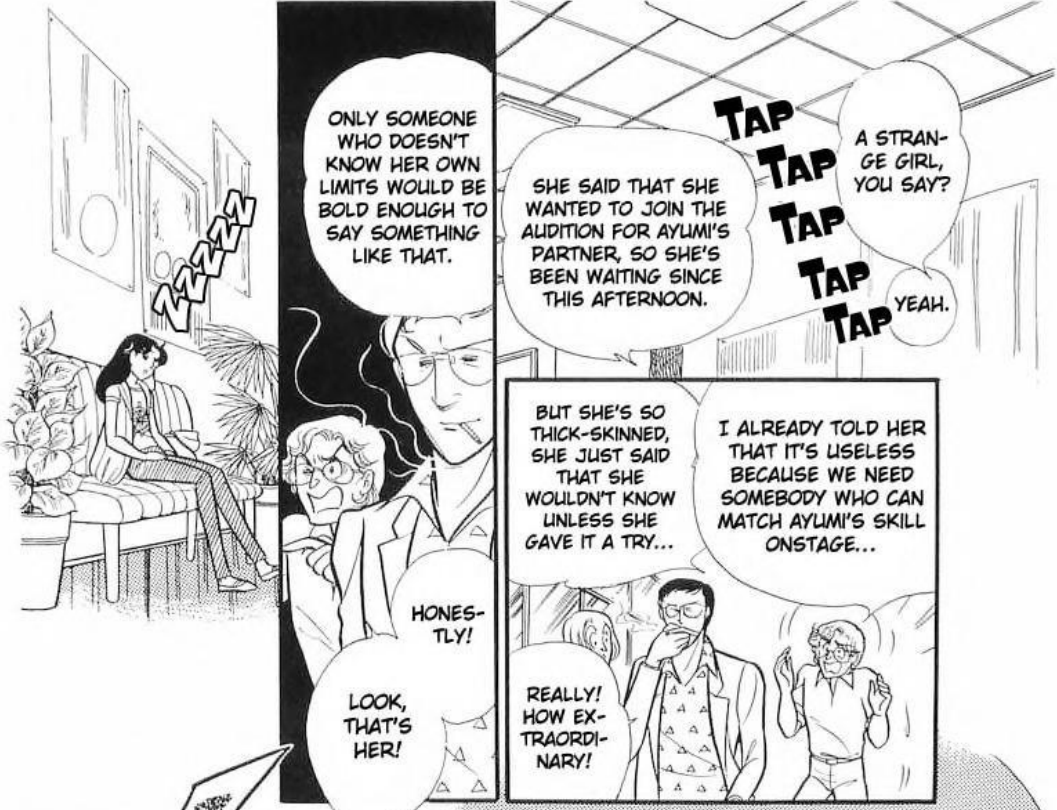
Only if I use my own hands!

Drilling

WHAT? YOU CAN'T CONTACT THE HEAD OF PUBLICITY? WHAT A BOTHER!

HEY!





ONLY SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T KNOW HER OWN LIMITS WOULD BE BOLD ENOUGH TO SAY SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

SHE SAID THAT SHE WANTED TO JOIN THE AUDITION FOR AYUMI'S PARTNER, SO SHE'S BEEN WAITING SINCE THIS AFTERNOON.

A STRANGE GIRL, YOU SAY?
YEAH.

TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP

BUT SHE'S SO THICK-SKINNED, SHE JUST SAID THAT SHE WOULDN'T KNOW UNLESS SHE GAVE IT A TRY...
I ALREADY TOLD HER THAT IT'S USELESS BECAUSE WE NEED SOMEBODY WHO CAN MATCH AYUMI'S SKILL ONSTAGE...

HONESTLY!
LOOK, THAT'S HER!

REALLY! HOW EXTRAORDINARY!



NZZZZ
NZZZZ



JUST SOME STUFF ABOUT AYUMI.

EH?

WHAT DID YOU TELL HER?

BOSS, SHE...

I TOLD HER THAT ONLY SOMEONE WHO CAN MATCH AYUMI'S TALENT WOULD BE GOOD ENOUGH, AND THEN SHE...

IT'S NOT STRANGE FOR HER TO SAY SOMETHING LIKE THAT...

AH!

AND THEN SHE SUDDENLY SAID SHE WOULDN'T KNOW UNLESS SHE GAVE IT A TRY.

AHH! THE GIRL WHO WAS IN THAT POPULAR PERIOD DRAMA...

MAYA KITAJI-MA?

DO YOU KNOW HER?

EH?

YOU HAVEN'T RECOGNIZED HER YET?

SHE'S MAYA KITAJIMA!



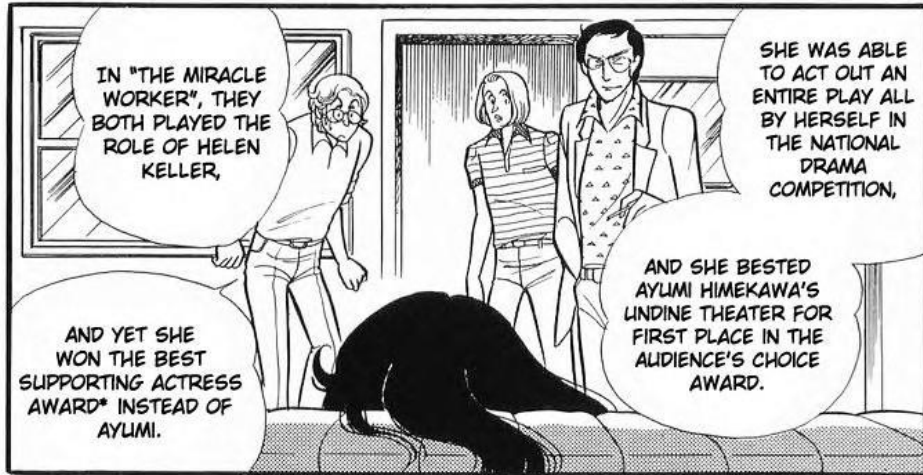
YOU WOULDN'T RECOGNIZE HER AT ALL. SHE LOOKS JUST LIKE AN ORDINARY GIRL WHEN SHE'S NOT ACTING ONSTAGE...

THIS ...



SHE MAY HAVE BEEN BLACKLISTED FROM THE WORLD OF ACTING, BUT...

SHE'S THE ONLY PERSON AYUMI HIMEKAWA ACKNOWLEDGES AS A RIVAL!



IN "THE MIRACLE WORKER", THEY BOTH PLAYED THE ROLE OF HELEN KELLER,

SHE WAS ABLE TO ACT OUT AN ENTIRE PLAY ALL BY HERSELF IN THE NATIONAL DRAMA COMPETITION,

AND YET SHE WON THE BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS AWARD* INSTEAD OF AYUMI.

AND SHE BESTED AYUMI HIMEKAWA'S LINDINE THEATER FOR FIRST PLACE IN THE AUDIENCE'S CHOICE AWARD.



AND SHE AND AYUMI ARE BOTH CANDIDATES FOR THAT LEGENDARY MASTERPIECE...

THE CRIMSON GODDESS!



YES...

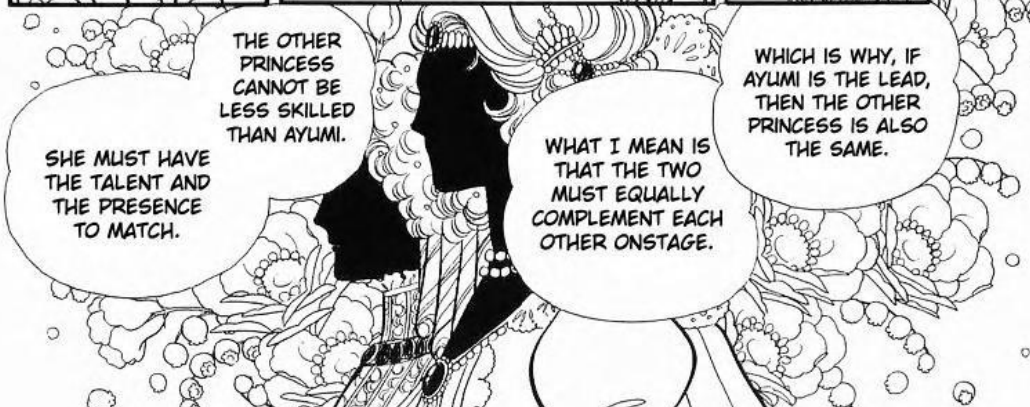
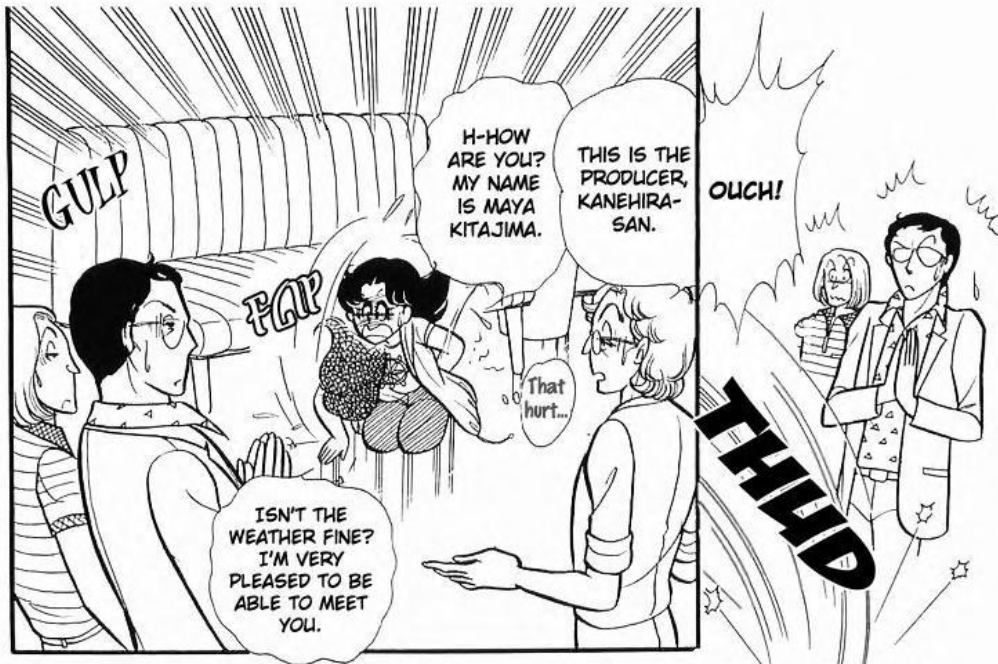
I WAS TOO.

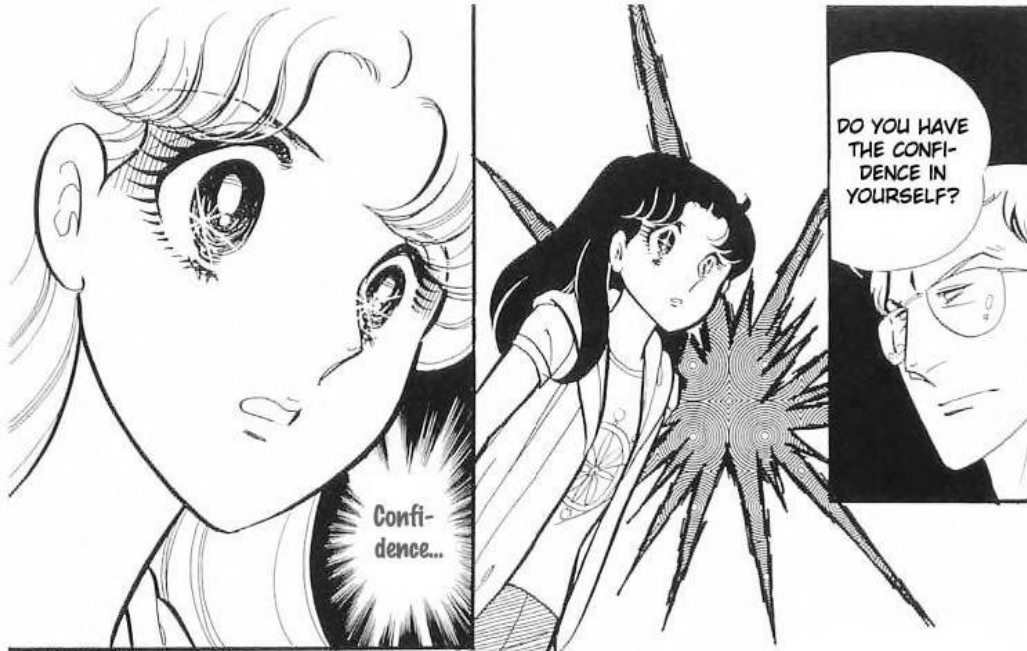


I WAS DEEPLY MOVED BY HER HELEN!

*TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: MAYA WON THE BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS AWARD, NOT THE BEST ACTRESS AWARD AS REFERRED TO IN PREVIOUS VOLUMES









Hmph



THE OTHERS WHO WILL BE PARTICIPATING IN THE AUDITION ARE ALL EQUALLY TALENTED ACTRESSES WHO WERE HAND-PICKED BY THEIR RESPECTIVE THEATERS.

YOU MUST DO YOUR BEST!



I won't lose!



Yes!



I'LL BE ON TIME FOR SURE!

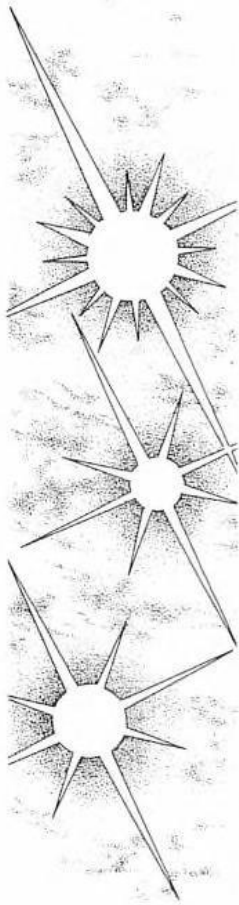
YES!



YOU CAN ASK THE PEOPLE IN THE OFFICE FOR THE DETAILS.

EH? THEN THAT MEANS...

NOTE THE TIME, AND DON'T BE LATE.



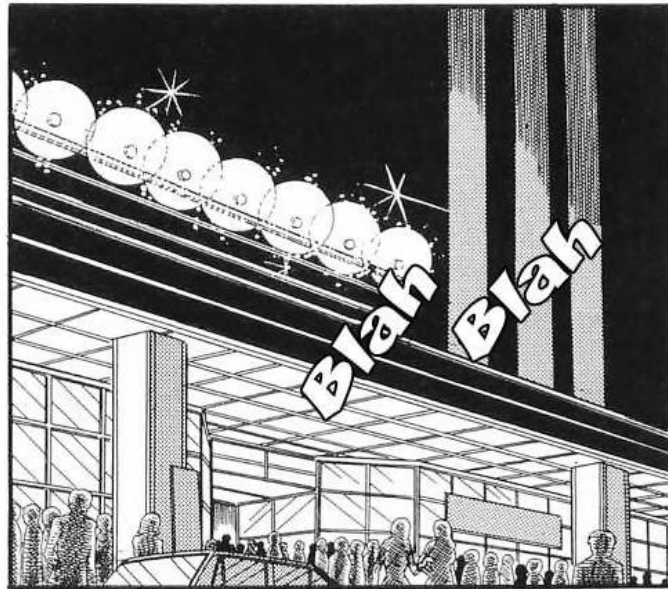
YAY!



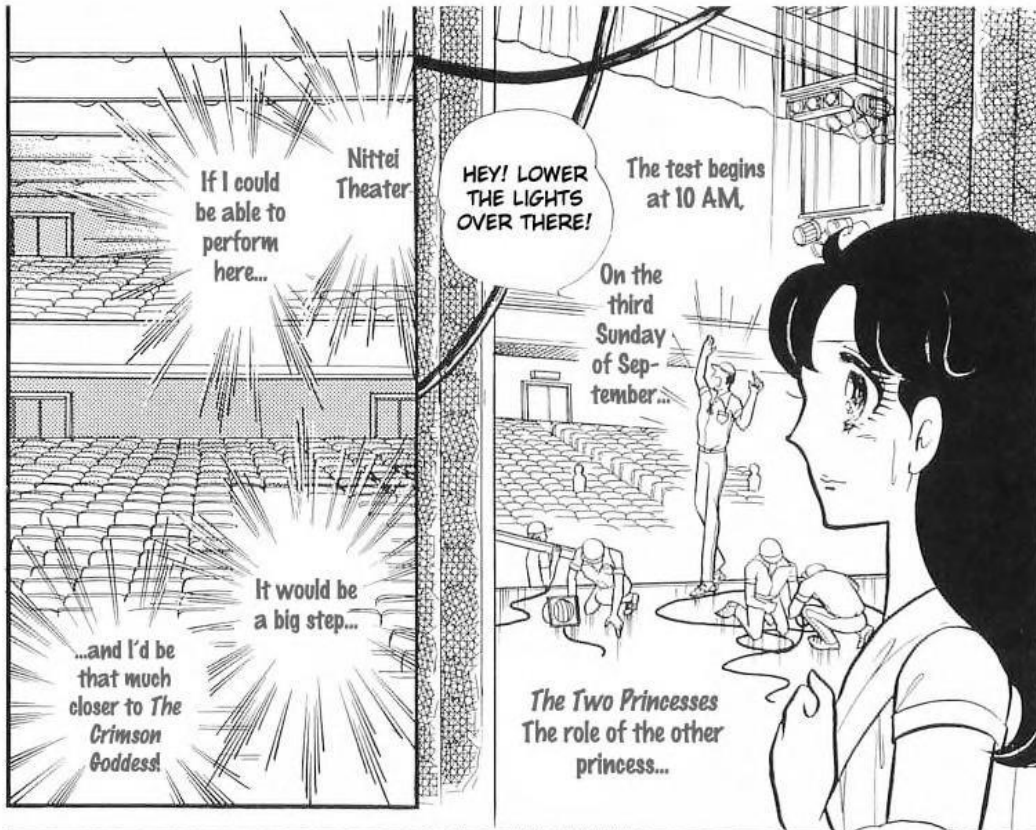
**I DID IT!
I DID IT!
BANZAI!
YAY!**

**WAIT...WAIT
A MINUTE!**

**YOU HAVEN'T
EVEN GONE
THROUGH THE
AUDITION YET!
HEY...**



**Blah
Blah**



Nittei Theater

If I could be able to perform here...

HEY! LOWER THE LIGHTS OVER THERE!

The test begins at 10 AM,

On the third Sunday of September...

It would be a big step...

...and I'd be that much closer to *The Crimson Goddess!*

The Two Princesses
The role of the other princess...



Masumi Hayami...

That jerk!

Just thinking about him makes my blood boil!



YOU'RE NOT EVEN GOING TO BE IN THIS PRODUCTION.

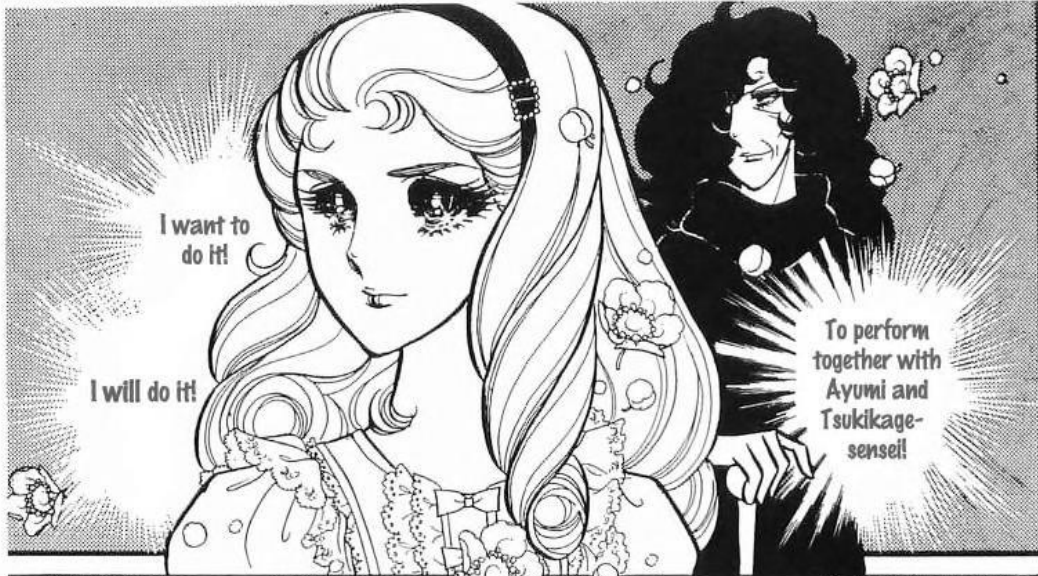
I don't care if I don't get to perform at Athens!



I'll focus my efforts on this one goal!

I might as well go through this audition!

Since I won't be performing at Athens,



I want to do it!

I will do it!

To perform together with Ayumi and Tsukikage-sensei!



I will! I will catch up with you!

Ayumi-san...

Ayumi-san...

I'll catch up with you for certain!



OH, IT'S YOU!
I DIDN'T NOTICE YOU
COME IN.

TING

Daito
Corporation

THIS BLUE
MOUNTAIN
COFFEE YOU
BREWED
SMELLS
GOOD.

THANK
YOU.

HERE.



WHAT
ARE YOU
TALKING
ABOUT?

I THINK I'M GETTING
USED TO YOUR
TACTICS.

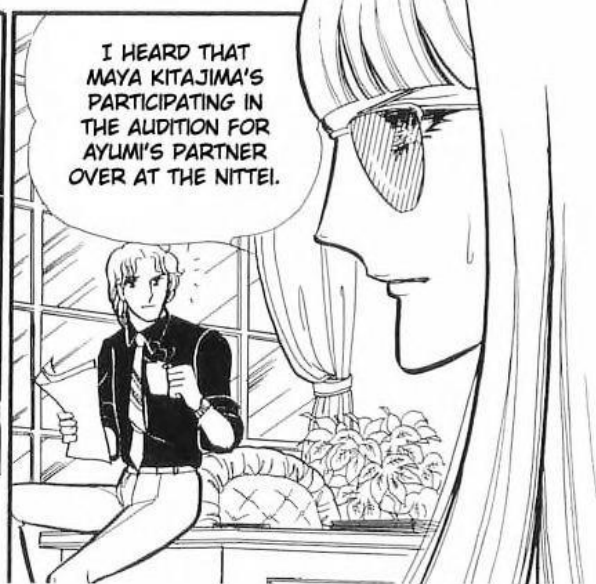
MASUMI-
SAMA,



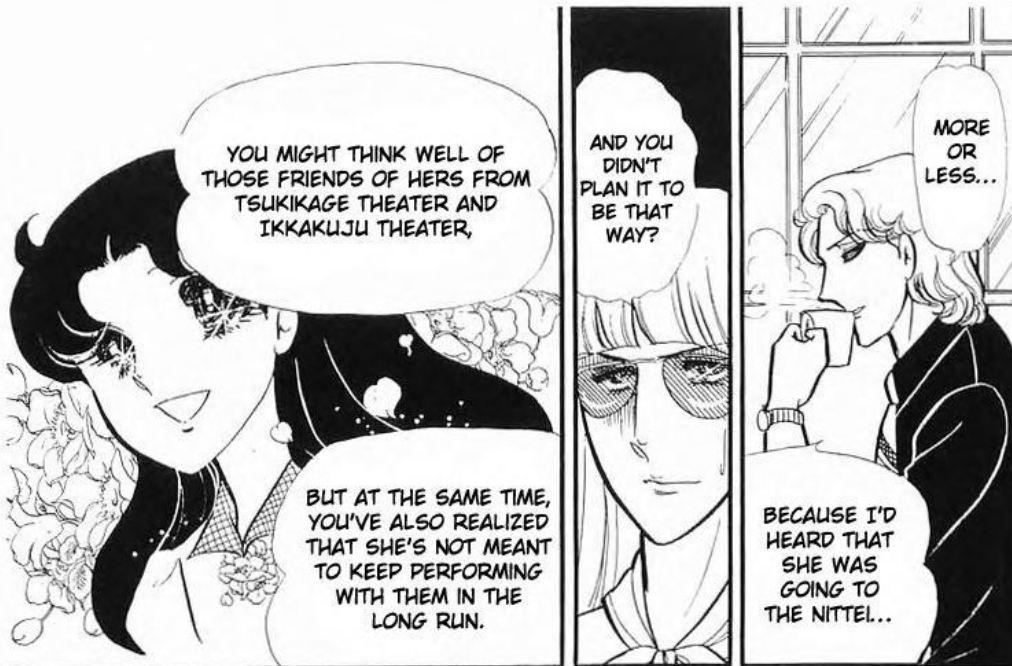
YOU'RE
NOT SUR-
PRISED?

AND?

THEN THAT'S
BECAUSE
YOU ALREADY
KNEW
ABOUT IT!



I HEARD THAT
MAYA KITAJIMA'S
PARTICIPATING IN
THE AUDITION FOR
AYUMI'S PARTNER
OVER AT THE NITTEI.



YOU MIGHT THINK WELL OF THOSE FRIENDS OF HERS FROM TSUKIKAGE THEATER AND IKKAKUJU THEATER,

BUT AT THE SAME TIME, YOU'VE ALSO REALIZED THAT SHE'S NOT MEANT TO KEEP PERFORMING WITH THEM IN THE LONG RUN.

AND YOU DIDN'T PLAN IT TO BE THAT WAY?

MORE OR LESS...

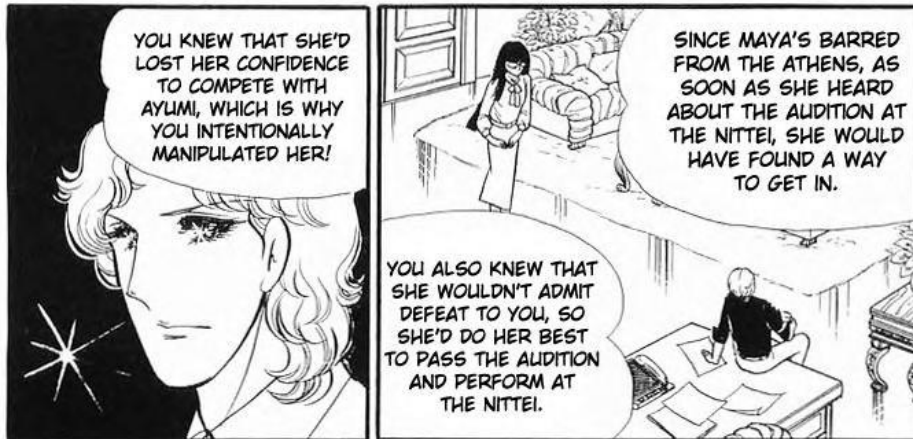
BECAUSE I'D HEARD THAT SHE WAS GOING TO THE NITTEI...



YUKARI KITAZONO'S REFUSAL OF HER ROLE...

IT'S BECAUSE OF WHAT JUST HAPPENED AT THE NITTEI, AM I CORRECT?

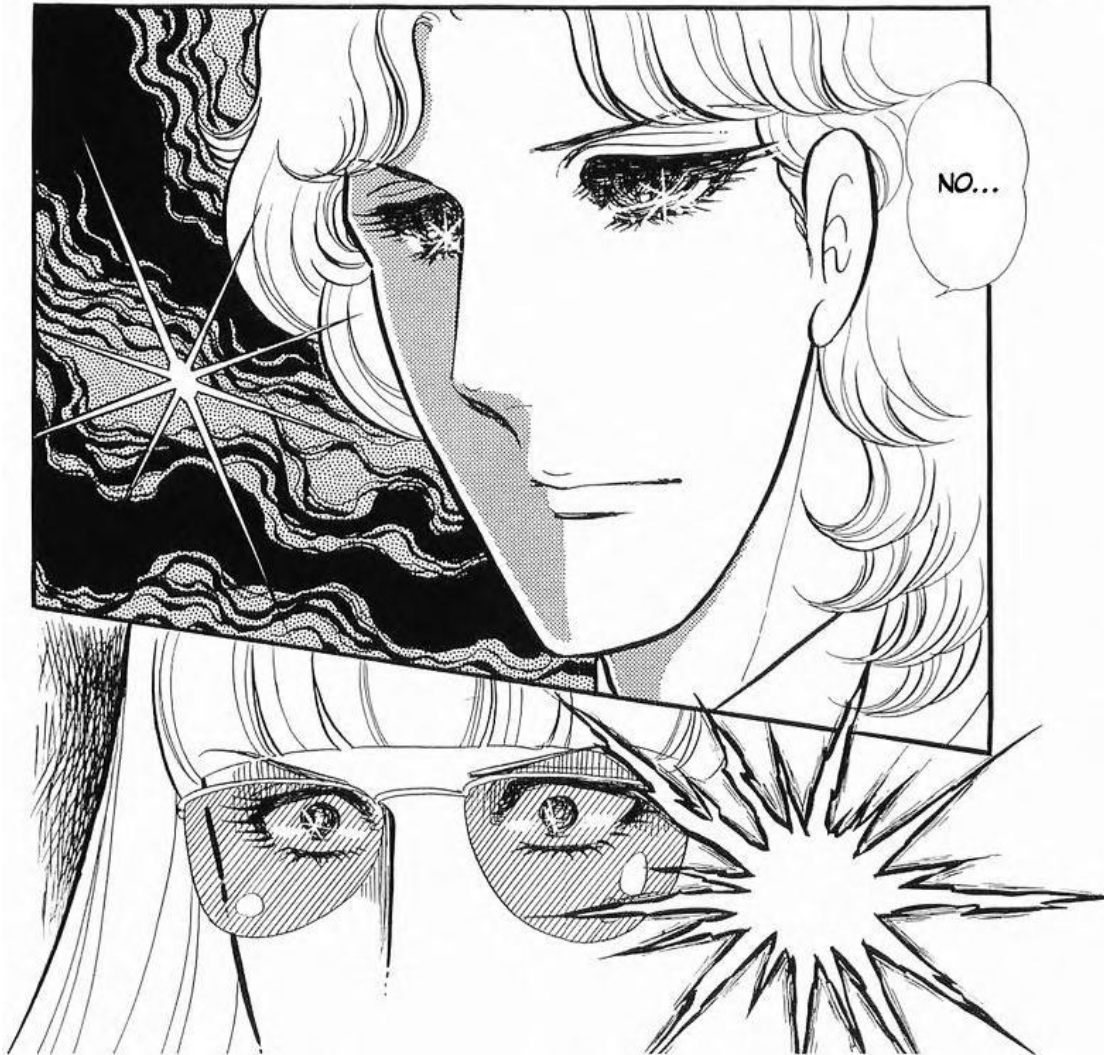
THAT'S WHY YOU DELIBERATELY SET THINGS UP SO THAT THEY'D GET TO PLAY AT THE ATHENS, BUT THAT SHE'D BE LEFT OUT.



YOU KNEW THAT SHE'D LOST HER CONFIDENCE TO COMPETE WITH AYUMI, WHICH IS WHY YOU INTENTIONALLY MANIPULATED HER!

YOU ALSO KNEW THAT SHE WOULDN'T ADMIT DEFEAT TO YOU, SO SHE'D DO HER BEST TO PASS THE AUDITION AND PERFORM AT THE NITTEI.

SINCE MAYA'S BARRED FROM THE ATHENS, AS SOON AS SHE HEARD ABOUT THE AUDITION AT THE NITTEI, SHE WOULD HAVE FOUND A WAY TO GET IN.





WHETHER OR NOT SHE GETS THE ROLE, IT ALL DEPENDS ON HER OWN POWER!





Masumi-sama...

COULD YOU PLEASE BREW ME ANOTHER CUP OF COFFEE, MIZUKI-KUN?

A STEAMING HOT ONE...



I never noticed...

By the time I did notice it, the stoplight had already changed back to red...

The red stoplight!

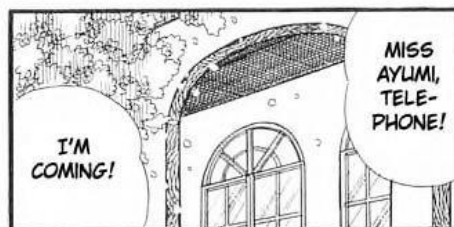


I'M SUCH AN IDIOT! I ALMOST CONVINCED MYSELF THAT YOU WERE A GOOD PERSON...

She's on the other side of the road,

And I'd thought that the stoplight would always stay red.

When did it change to yellow?





REA-
LLY?
THAT'S
GOOD!



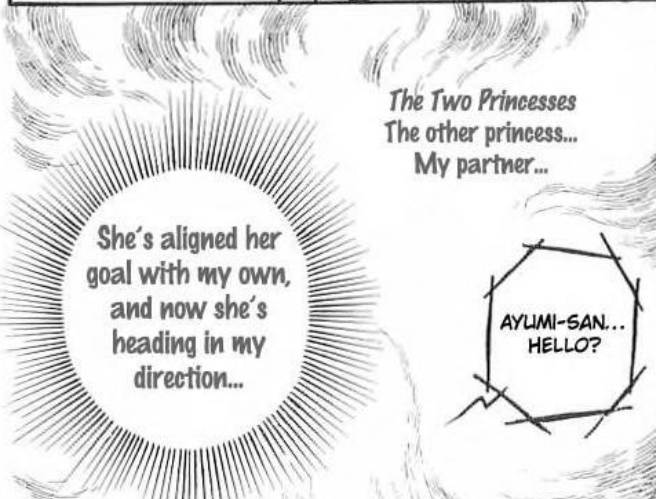
MAYA
KITAJI-
MA...

SHE'S ALSO
JOINING THE
AUDITION? OH!
I UNDERSTAND.
THANK YOU.



Maya! You've
finally crossed
paths with me
again!

UH-HUH. AND THERE'S
ALSO REMI FUJIKAWA
FROM JAZZ THEATER,
AND YOKO UEGUSA
FROM DREAM PRO.,
AND...

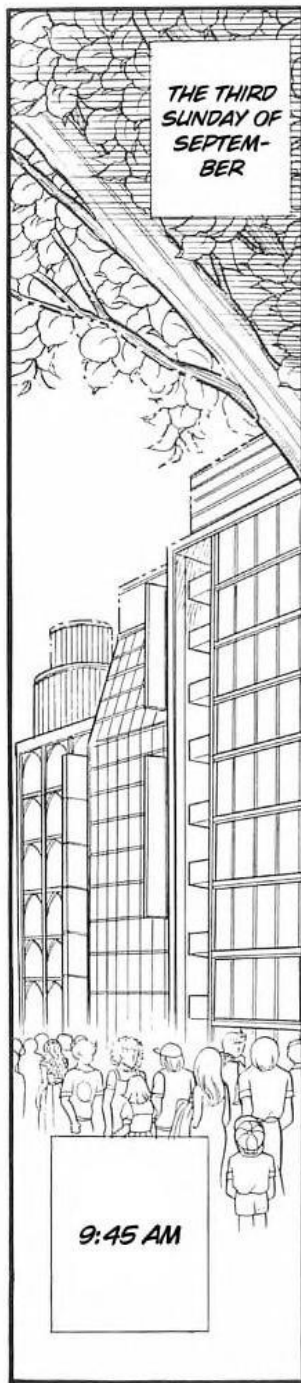


She's aligned her
goal with my own,
and now she's
heading in my
direction...

The Two Princesses
The other princess...
My partner...

AYUMI-SAN...
HELLO?







NITTEI

NITTEI
THEA-
TER