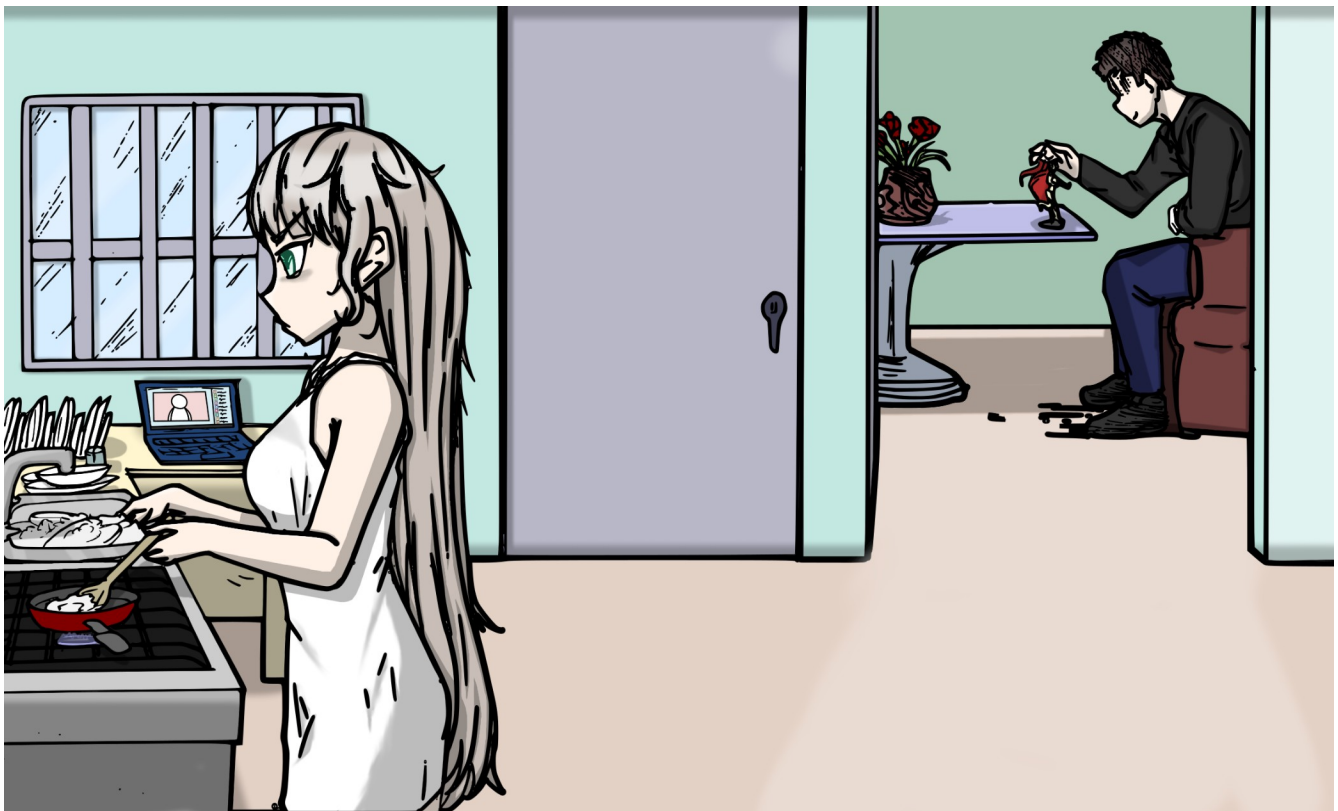


Burnout

Written by "Ina Izumi"

Anna is a secretary who has a very busy life, she has to take care of making money and doing housework. She is married to Joey, her otaku husband, who has been unemployed for several months. They have been married and have lived alone for ten years, in addition to have met since high school, both are around 25 years old, but in recent months he has been unemployed due to the pandemic, while she has continued working as a home office, becoming the only pillar of the home. She is a little tired of that situation, because they have spent a long time living that way, she has hold on because she loves him, but he doesn't even help her with housework such as cleaning the house or cut the lawn, he is there all day watching anime, playing video games or taking care of her collectible anime figures, so Anna spends practically the entire day busy without time for herself.



Today, like every day, it is the same routine: she gets up at 6 AM, takes a bath, gets dressed, cooks breakfast and serves it at 7 AM, cleans what she messes in the kitchen while her husband has breakfast, cleans the house porch and returns to the room to have breakfast as quickly as possible and clean the table where they had breakfast, then return to the kitchen to wash the dishes and only have 10 minutes left to get dressed and be ready in his study at 8 to start working. She works hard for hours on the computer until 1:00 PM when her break starts, then she prepare the food for her husband and her, eats, cleans the table, kitchen and dishes all in one hour until 2:00 PM. Then she back to hard work from that hour until 5:00 PM.

Exhausted, she still has a long journey to finish the day; She have to take a shower again, change clothes to

work in the garden, clean and cut the lawn all days, because grows very fast because they live in a rainy place, so the plants grow fast and drop leaves very quickly, when the garden is full of trees and bushes and being autumn. In addition, she have to having to feed the dog, go out to buy anything that has run out in the house only if it is urgent (today the dog's food ran out and she had to find more). Anna is obsessive about cleaning, so she is interested that everything is perfectly clean every day, although with each passing day her mental health is affected. Any pending issues must be completed by 7:00 P.M. when go back to the kitchen and prepare the dinner for her husband and her, finishing and cleaning the kitchen around 8:00 PM and having dinner at that time, taking a little more time until 9 to talk with Joey about his day .

Anna: How was your day?

Joey: well, today I was playing Genshin Impact again all day and I bought on internet 4 new figures

Anna: Uhhm ... haven't you been playing that game for two weeks all day? And... wait... another 4 new figures...?, Isn't that enough ...?, You have a room full of them ...

(Anna opens her eyes wide and her hands shake, causing a tense moment)

Joey: Uh, it's never enough, you shouldn't take it so seriously ... I know it's your money, but you too can go into the dolls room and enjoy its beauty.

Anna: I suppose.... that.... okay... as long as you are happy I am happy as long as you are happy.

(Anna looks down tired and sad)

Anna sometimes thought that Joey loved and treasured dolls, those figures, more than herself, despite all the sacrifices she made for their marriage, but that was not what tormented her so much: Anna loved it. But it seemed unfair of for him to spend money in these crisis times on such things, money that is earned by her, since she is the breadwinner, although Joey has access to her bank accounts in case of emergency. On weekends, Anna's days off, she spends hours doing a general cleaning of the entire house and doing the laundry work on Saturdays and the next day at the supermarket with gloves, a mask and a face shield due to the pandemic issue. making it difficult for her to breathe and sacrificing her comfort, and it costs money to pay for that protective gear throughout the month. Many times on Saturdays she finds some damage in the house that costs money to repair and every Sunday she goes to the supermarket she has to economize on what she is going to buy and ration the food, because even if she earns a lot of money, not earns enough to splurge, and at the end of each month before payday, not much money left. It seems unheard of for her that apart from doing nothing he spends money on that.

After eating and chatting with Joey about how was their day, at 9:00 P.M. clean the dining room and wash the dishes again, to take a last bath before going to sleep, not without mopping the bathroom a bit before leaving it in case it is flooded or dirty. At 9:30, before going to sleep, she puts on her sleeping dress, a white strapless dress and takes off the discreet makeup that she puts on every morning to work, that half hour in which she removes her makeup and prepares to sleep It is the only half hour where she is in complete silence or without suffer an exhaustive mental or physical effort, although she is always thinking all the time and, above all, at that time, the pending issues she has, the things that need be fixed in house or what to eat the next day.

She looks in the mirror ready to sleep, and sees herself with watery and tired eyes ... Anna, despite being

young, sees her skin have turned gray, her eyes are haggard, with a twisted gesture and sometimes having some tics or tremors in the body, and his light brown hair having the occasional gray from stress. Even she, despite always been thin, now looks even a little undernourished. Anna had always been a pretty woman and she liked to dress well. She measures 5'6 ft and has a slim figure, in addition to having firm skin, but all that physical and mental effort of recent years and, above all, of recent months, has been diminishing her beauty, which it has been negatively affected. Perhaps, despite having resisted everything that happens in her life so far, that is most what affects her emotionally, she was always proud of her beauty, and it was beginning to decline, perhaps due to age, because she was approaching 30, but surely it also had to see the lifestyle she led.

Finally, shortly before 10:00 PM, she lies down on her bed and sleeps alone, since Joey sleeps later, because at that time she is still playing video games in the living room.

The next day, Anna woke up, there is something strange about the ambient light. Anna gets out of bed and looks out through the window, to realize that it seems that she woke up much later, like at 5:00 PM... Anna was silent for a few seconds thoughtfully, took a deep breath and she fell to scream and crying from frustration, rolling, kicking and hitting the floor, he has missed a full day of work and that will affect the income. Anna did not understand how that had happened, if she had always slept at 10 and woke up at 6, the necessary eight hours, she never delayed and she had never needed alarms to wake up at that time, but the damage is done ... Anna has lost the day for not being able to wake up on time.

Then Joey enters the room to see what happening and why all the fuss, and Anna turns trembling with wide, watery eyes and growling with her shrill voice.

Anna: YOU HAVE TO HELP ME!!

Joey: Whats happening?...

Anna: LISTEN... IT HAS ALREADY BEEN ENOUGH! TODAY I HAVE NOT WAKE UP ALL DAY AND I LOST A DAY OF WORK!, THEY WILL PAY ME LESS MONEY AT THE END OF THE MONTH AND IT ISN'T ENOUGH !. ..

Joey: Uh ... I didn't even realize it; I fell asleep in the living room after I finished playing and I just woke up. Hmm ... And how can I help you?

Anna: YOU HAVE TO HELP ME WITH THE HOUSEWORK AT LEAST! OR LOOK FOR A JOB AND DO HOME OFFICE AS I HAVE BEEN DOING ALL THIS TIME! I CAN'T MORE! I DON'T REST FOR ONE DAY AND THAT IS MAKING ME AGE RAPID AND IS KILLING ME SLOWLY! I CAN'T DO THIS ANY MORE!

Anna crawls towards Joey and, after grabbing him by the legs, shakes him desperately. Joey just sees her, sweating and showing a lot of worry on her face, surely worrying more that her leisurely lifestyle could be threatened. Joey, after looking at her worried and after several minutes of deathly silence, takes her by the shoulders

Joey: Okay. Give me a few minutes to think about what to do, okay? While you eat something

Anna: W-well... I think... I'll... sleep a bit more...

Anna stops holding his legs and collapses on the floor, as she is still very tired. Then Joey hugs her and puts her on the bed, for later sit in the living room, thinking about an hour what he will do. Then he comes to a

conclusion, he has a friend who can offer a "medical" treatment, so to speak, to Anna but that would help both of them, Anna to stop being busy and start living a relaxed life, without pressure. no responsibilities, without him having to give up his comfortable lifestyle.

Joey's friend had told him that this treatment is experimental and that he was looking for candidates for this treatment, and that it is really very expensive and that he had to recover the investment of the material that he bought for that experiment, but as he is experimenting with this recently, he will let that treatment be free for the candidates of the experiment. Joey, after reviewing some of Anna's documents to be sure that what he has planned will work, intends to execute the plan.

After another hour, Anna, motivated by hunger and the smell of dinner, woke up and walked to the dining room, where she see the food already prepared and served by Joey.

Joey: Great, you wake up! I was just going to wake you up to tell you that the dinner was ready. Come and sit.

Anna: U-Uhmm ... how weird that you did something ... I thought you were going to order fast food.

Anna begins to eat slowly, thinking about what will happen to her future, she feels suffocated by all the bad thoughts and stress and pending problems that she has, until she finishes eating and prepares to stand up.

Joey: Huh, you look like you were really hungry. But wait, as I clean the dining room and kitchen, and clean the garden, could you go to the figure shop? The figures that I told you I bought have already arrived. Then Anna frowns ...

Anna: Wouldn't it be better return them? Perhaps with the returned money we can better save the money that loss today, for the end of the month.

Joey: Oh, maybe that would be a good solution, but those dolls are just what I need to complete a very expensive collection of figures from the pretty cure series, I found them cheaper separately and I plan to resell the entire collection for a higher price, for make some profit. Plus, you can driving faster than me, the figure shop closes in an hour.

Anna: Grr ... this ... okay. I'll come soon then.

Joey: Remember to ask about Joey's order when you get to the salesperson.

Then Anna puts on a mask and the rest of the protective equipment, in addition to a raincoat since it is raining, and flip flops, because she was barefoot, but without dressing in a better way and even having her sleep dress, because she doesn't have time to get there if she gets dressed better, also because of the hurry she doesn't even bother to take her cellphone, plus it's a nearby place she'll go. Then, she drives to the figure store. Anna thinks along the way if Joey is really prank on her, because Anna doesn't think Joey can be useful or so conscientious after so long. She would have always been hoping that Joey would reciprocate her sacrifices and be more conscientious, but, this situation are too good to be true for her.

Anna arrives at the figure shop and gets out of her car. It seems like a very normal and conventional store, it does not even seem that it has a page for online sales, Anna thinks it is strange that it even had to go to the store for the dolls that Joey asked, rather than being sent home by mail, or why would Joey ask for the order to

be delivered to the store and not to the house since it is safer to receive it at home by mail? But, tired for thinking so much, she assumes that there is always an exception. Anna enters and sees that even though the store is open, there is no salesperson behind the counter, so she rings a bell that is on the counter. While the salesperson comes, Anna look at the figures that are in some glass showcases. For some reason, although she doesn't like the figures, like Joey likes, a few of the dolls quickly captured her attention.

They were of such firm skin, bright color and full of life, apart from the material they reflected the light of the environment, with such beautiful dresses and such beautiful poses ... They were so perfect that they seemed to be alive, it caused her some chills, suddenly she heard a noise and turned quickly to where she heard the noise: the salesperson had come to the counter with four small boxes.

Anna: U-Uhhm... I'm here for Joey's order.

Salesperson: Oh yeah, it just came in at noon. It's these four, Joey just called me on the phone to tell me that his wife would come for them, but I was just start to pack them, plus these four figures together come with a fifth figure as a gift, I was just going to look for it to pack it together with the others. If you want, you can wait for us in our waiting room and pour yourself some coffee as we pack the order.

Anna: Mmmmhh... Okay.

Then Anna enters in the waiting room, which is quite cozy: it is a simple room with yellow walls and a floor with black and white tiles, resembling a conventional chess board, with several glass showcases full of beautiful figures on the room corners, a table in the center, and a sofa attached to each of two of the room reverse walls, while the other two reverse walls had two white doors, one to enter from the front of the store, and another that probably leads to a warehouse, office or another section of the store. Anna looks around and doesn't see a coffee dispenser, but instead the salesperson comes in with a fresh, steaming coffee, so the coffee dispenser is probably in another room and the salesperson did her the favor of bringing it to her. Then the salespeson says that it is better to close the door to keep the heat on as it is cold from the rain and close the door.

Anna sits down, and continues to look curiously at the showcases, while sipping her coffee. The smell and taste of the coffee is quite good, although the strong smell of the room catch her atention, a very sweet, seductive smell that captures and envelops. Suddenly she begins to feel very sleepy Even though she has many problems, she does not seem worried about anything ..., as if her common sense has been deactivated. Anna suddenly, even more or less conscious, realizes how her problems and pending issues have disappeared, she feels so relaxed that she finishes taking off her protective equipment and her raincoat, and enjoys the sound of the rain and the soft and relaxing background music that he has noticed in the room, and she finishes drink thecoffee, which was quite delicious. Then Anna feels so relaxed and so confident that, after a brief moment that seems eternal, and having already lost track of time, she puts her crossed legs on the table. The relaxing music, the cloying smell in the air and the warm coffee passing through her throat and stomach, relax her so much that she inevitably loses consciousness. The last thing she can see out is a blurred silhouette coming out of the opposite door from where I enter. She drops the coffee cup and is unconscious with her eyes wide and dilated.

Then Anna wakes up and opens her eyes. Anna feel quite relaxed, rested, light, and as if she had slept several hours. Where is she? She sees nothing but darkness, a reflector that illuminates her and an impeccable stretch

of white ivory floor below her, and herself, standing with her legs slightly open, only recognizing that smell from her surroundings sweet and scented from the room she was in, but... what about her hair? normally it has always been so long that she can easily see her hair without looking in a mirror, but her hair is... something weird. It seems like it has changed color and shape, it has become a metallic blue color and more like a kind of solid, but still manipulable. But after noticing her hair, which was the first thing that caught her attention, she looked at her clothes. What happened to their clothes? Why are you wearing this now? Anna wears a long and elegant red party dress that accentuates her hips and slim torso, with a rose on the chest and a pink bow in the middle, with light yellow sleeves that leave her shoulders bare, with the skirt uncovered in front showing a crinoline with very fluffy and robust light yellow ruffles that reaches to the ankles. Long gloves up to the elbow of the same color as the crinoline that accentuate her delicate hands with red ribbons on the edge of the gloves, white stockings, crimson heel shoes with a white bow. and a delicate but tight red ribbon at the neck. Anna wonders, What happened? Why is she there and dressed like this? Is she dreaming?

Anna, puzzled, tries to walk, but notices that her shoes are stuck to the ground somehow. Then she tries to get her delicate feet out of the shoes, but finds that they are glued to the floor, so she can't get out. Suddenly, she hears a voice that comes from the infinite darkness that surrounds her

Unknown Voice: It seems that you are almost ready. Don't be scared, everything will be much better from now.

Anna: Who are you? Where am I? What's happening here...? I'm dreaming?

Voice: No, Anna, this is reality, and it will be better from now... Are you not tired? Tired of so many responsibilities, stress... don't you feel that the world is very unfair on you? Always working hard every day for selfish people... Don't you wish all your problems were over? Stop being a slave? Try true freedom full of peace, love and calm?

Anna: ...how do you know all that?

Voice: I know everything, Anna, I have always observed you, valued you and sympathized with your sorrows, but... I have an offer to end your suffering. Anna, haven't you thought that being human involves many responsibilities, suffering, pain and effort? Is it really worth suffer so many adversities? Imagine if you gave up all those boring responsibilities, all that complicated decision making, and tiresome work and financial problems, Anna, wouldn't you want to be truly free, forever and ever?

Anna: ... yeah, m-maybe., M-maybe I wanted to get away all that and leave it ...

Voice: Then, you will understand, that it is not worth being a human. Being human is too unfair, you work very hard without anyone thanking you, while you deplete your vital forces, you grow old and die... Always trying to solve your needs and the needs of your beloved ones, so that in the end you will gradually wither away, until you get distorted and unrecognizable, until your beauty becomes a sad and painful memory. Anna, wouldn't you like to be beautiful forever? Live forever without worrying about any need that being human implies? Of course, beauty and immortality is not for everyone. As long as you remain human, no other destiny awaits you, how sad...

Anna: I-I... I want... I-I want to be beautiful forever and immortal... what do I have to do? I-I would do anything...

Voice: Anna, little one, do you like silence? Do you like infinite tranquility?

Anna: Y-Yes. Sometimes... I think how happy I would be with just a little silence and calm... maybe I would be infinitely happy if that silence and tranquility were infinite.

Voice: Just think about it, Anna, the facilities you would get for giving up your heavy and decaying humanity. And the only price in return would be to be silent forever, stop thinking so much tormenting yourself or, perhaps, stop thinking permanently... Imagine Anna, if you didn't have to move to do that hard work every day, give up moving to be calm and resting forever. Just think about it Anna, that would be the only cost, besides always being pretty and well dressed, but that might not be a cost to you. All that seems to me a fair price in exchange for all those benefits that I told you before. In return, tranquility, infinite peace and silence, immortality, you would not even have to bother with how to dress ... Imagine that every day they would comb your hair, change your dress without having to overwhelm yourself with those irrelevant choices such as choosing the colors of your clothes or like walking or posing, doing the tiring task of moving ... If you move, you get tired, you rust and you wither, but if not, if you renounce all those disadvantages and accept all these benefits, you will be free..., like a doll.

Anna: A-and, what do I have to do to get that? I-It seems like a fair exchange... I-I accept the proposal.

Voice: So, do you give up being human? Do you accept to be a little doll always treasured, loved and protected?

Anna: W-what? well... if you show it like that... yes it's very overwhelming... Okay, I decide give up being human... But wait... what did you say? A doll?...

Voice: Very good, you made a good choice Anna. I'll take care of the rest ... now, just let yourself be carried away by your wishes and, be happy, little doll.

Anna: W-wait... A-A doll? I-I'm... not... a d-d....

Suddenly Anna feels tired eyes, her mind clouded and her lips go silent, leaving her mouth open and dripping a bit of drool. Anna, although scared with the idea of being a doll, think that it was some very pleasant dream, wanted to stop thinking about the consequences and give herself to her wishes. At the end of the day, everything will end when she wake up from the dream, right? Anna surrenders to a state of total relaxation, comparable to a deep sleep, but without being able to close her eyes, keeping them wide, even despite feeling tired eyes. Suddenly, she feels like a giant hand begins to adjust her pose, taking one of her feet off the ground with a small knife, as if it were glued to the floor with glue, but not very resistant glue, and stretching her leg back then. Finally, two giant hands take her from her delicate hands and arms and pose her extending them, now she is posing as if she were a ballet dancer. Suddenly Anna feels a gentle prick on her neck, although, as her senses are uninhibited, she reaches to feels it. From the corner of her eye, she sees that much of her blood is being drained with a syringe almost herself size, but without completely draining it and, for some reason, without losing consciousness, and once that syringe is withdrawn, she feels another gentle prick, and seen again from the corner of her eye other syringe, this time injecting a violet liquid throughout her body. Anna suddenly feels an ecstasy and an enormous hypersensitivity in her skin even to the environment, further clouding her senses, although without losing them completely. This also makes Anna's skin brighter and more flawless, like porcelain or PVC. Suddenly, a glass box is placed on her, enclosing it, as if it fell from the sky, and the darkness

dissipates. Anna is now a doll, a figure, cute, adorable and helpless, posing in a glass box, and the illuminated ivory floor turned out to be a small platform that fits perfectly with the glass walls and ceiling, being completely enclosed. You can move your eyes, but only that. Suddenly Anna is packed together with the other 4 figures from the pretty cure series that Joey had ordered and from there everything is impeccable tranquility, peace and darkness, but a darkness that for some reason she enjoys, completely losing track of time again.

Some time later, perhaps hours, days or weeks, Anna again sees the light and is blinded by it. What happened? Little by little the image in front of her eyes clears, Anna moves her gaze to all sides, beginning to clarify the environment. Anna has been unpacked and the glass box has been removed, standing on the white ivory base as she had posed before and now installed on a pedestal in the middle of Joey's figure room, "What does this mean?" Anna wonders in her mind, looking desperately around, showing despair in her eyes, "hasn't the dream ended? It has already become too long..."

Then Joey, now giant from Anna's gaze, is in the same room, talking to a guy in a suit, they seem to be talking... about life insurance, Joey has open a briefcase full of money, maybe millions of dollars, on a table, and gives a little bit to the suit guy, guy who looks like an insurance agent, who looks happy and leaves...

Has Joey faked Anna's death and charged Anna's millionaire life insurance for it? Is Joey really that selfish? Although... now, looking at him from the other side, so Joey can live peacefully all his life with that money, but Anna thinks, what will become of her? On the one hand, Anna, with mixed feelings, wants that dream to end, but even so, she would not think that it is a bad dream because, on the other hand, she feels excited and full of ecstasy by such a morbid situation, and very deep inside her she hopes that dream will never end. Or maybe Anna is under the influence of that violet substance. We will never know

