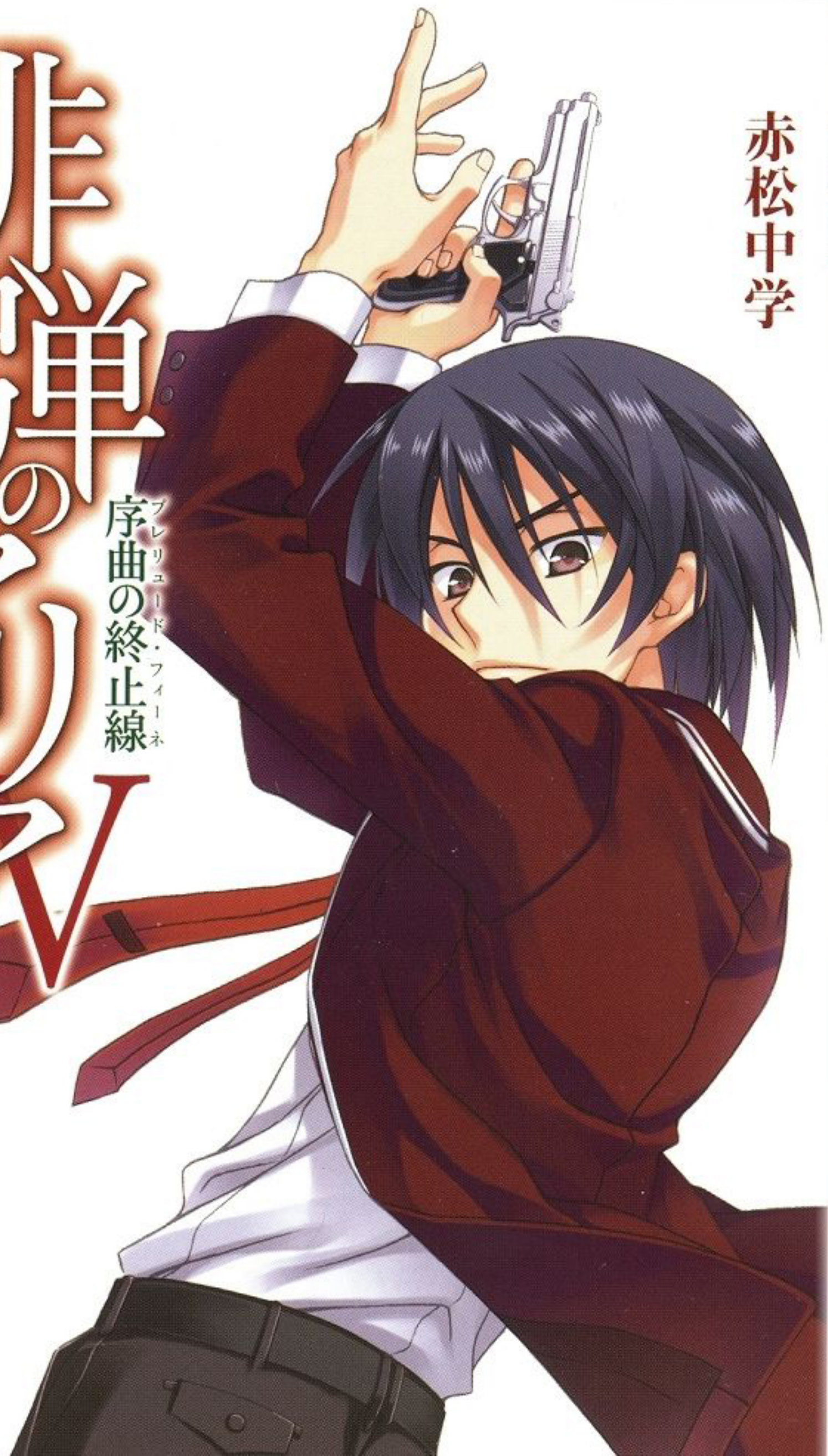


赤松中学

緋弾のアリア

Aria the Scarlet Ammo

プレリミード・ファイナー
序曲の終止線



緋弾のアリア

Aria the Scarlet Ammo

プレリユード・ファイネ
序曲の終止線

赤松中学





「お前の

パートナーは俺だ。
シャロックじゃない。
だから奪い返す」



「2回目ね、
あんたと戦^やるのは」





Shirayuki Hotogi



Riko Mine



Kanzaki·H·Aria



Reki

P11^{ピ ア ス シ ャ ー ロ ッ ク}貫通弾1 時空を超える男

P74^{ピ ア ス プ レ リ ュ ード ・ フ ィ ー ネ}貫通弾2 序曲の終止線

P141^{リ ロ ード}再装填1
粉雪、白雪の妹

P187^{リ ロ ード}再装填2
マルセイユ・ルーレット

P243^{リ ロ ード}再装填3
グッバイ・アリア

P282^{Go For The NEXT!}
ハロー・レキ



Contents

PIERCE 1: THE MAN BEYOND SPACE AND TIME

"Kana! --Kana!"

Shouting, I realized that Kana, cradled in my arms, was slowly losing strength.

The blood, flowing out of his left chest, showed no sign of stopping.

Aah, I won't accept it.

But, Kana was--shot through the heart!

Butei High's bullet proof uniform can block even a shot from a high-caliber rifle.

However, the bullet that Kana was shot with...I'm afraid that it was an anti-tank bullet.

It's definitely that kind of armor-piercing bullet, which in theory could be made, yet was outlawed by International Law.

"...Kinji..., Here--"

In a trembling, masculine voice--Apparently, Hysteria Mode had worn off--With a sharp gaze, Kana—no, Nii-san handed something to me, which had been hidden behind his back.

"This is, Aria's...!"

Silver-white and pitch-black M1911's, along with their magazines.

Nii-san had probably found where Patra had these hidden.

Taking them, I couldn't help but turn my head, looking at Aria, who was standing on the tip of the Annbelle, in a daze.

"Aria, get down! We're under attack! Do you want to get hit!?"

"...!"

Thump Her butt hitting the deck, Aria...was still staring at Sherlock. However, because she was still in a state of such shock, it appeared as if she was seeing nothing but a blur.

I can't blame her. After all, the person who attacked Nii-san is the "Perfect Person" that Aria respects from the bottom of her heart. Even keeping his photo by her side, no matter where she goes...Sherlock Holmes.

--

--Aria's great-grandfather himself!

The person in Inquesta textbooks, written as being born in 1854, Sherlock...was still alive.

Not only that, he was the leader of I-U.

Her heart and mind could not possibly keep up with all the events that had suddenly transpired.

I--slipped the guns into the holsters on the paralyzed Aria's legs, hiding behind the railing at the edge of the deck, staring out to see.

I-U.

Making Aria's innocent mother taking the full weight of their charges, the outlaw group.

Something that even countries could not fight against, an organization of the elite.

And now, they had floated up in front of us.

--I see. No wonder no country was able to exterminate them.

Because I-U is something that's submerged inside the vast oceans...a nuclear submarine!

My mind flashed back to the plane-jacking incident from 4 months ago.

At that time, Flight ANA600, flying above Sagami Bay, was hit by an anti-air missile attack from an unknown location. That, too, must have been fired by I-U--out of the sea!

"...!"

Suddenly, my gaze fell onto that.

But, it was already too late.

The two trails of water that I noticed inside the shallow waters--coming from the direction of I-U, which we were facing, they were heading straight for the Annbelle.

Those are--torpedoes--!

"...Eh...?"

Aria had noticed them as well, and when she had emitted a noise that expressed her inability to understand--two explosions rang out in unison, and a reverberation stemming from the bottom of the Annbelle getting impacted, went through the whole ship.

Pillars of water shot out of the water and droplets of water hit the deck, as if we had entered a rainstorm.

"Kyaaa!"

Behind me, Shirayuki's voice reached my ears.

"--Shirayuki!"

Turning my head, panicked, I saw Shirayuki grasping hold of Patra's golden coffin, which had fallen over from the previous impact, barely keeping her balance.

"I-I'm fine! Just now was...!?"

"I only saw it for a moment, but that was...I'm afraid that those were MK-60 torpedoes! I-U has attacked us!"

Shouting, still under the influence of Hysteria Mode, I confirmed the grievous situation.

The bottom of the Annbelle, having already been weakened by Patra, who had tried to sink it, completely cracked from the impact and detonation of the torpedoes, letting water rush in.

Barely floating on the surface of the ocean, the ship was visibly sinking, and not only that, there were raging fires on the lower parts of the deck, raising a thick screen of smoke.

Fatal flooding as well as shipboard fires--This won't do, we have to abandon ship!

Thinking back to the blueprints of the Annbelle that I had seen before, I,

"Shirayuki, on the stern of the ship, there are lifeboats! Get those down!"

--started issuing orders. Shirayuki immediately rushed to the aft end of the deck.

The next moment--*Clank!*

Patra had kicked the lid off, jumping out of the golden coffin that Shirayuki had just left.

And, turning a flip with her undergarments, which looked like a bikini, Patra started running, her hair in a mess.

"--Hey, hey!"

"Kinichi!"

Ignoring me, who was about to draw my gun, Patra flew over to Nii-san's side, with movements akin to that of an animal.

And she kicked at me with her bare feet, which had lost their gold sandals, pushing me aside.

"Kinichi, Aah, Kinichi...!"

Tears in her eyes, Patra laid her hands on Nii-san's wounded chest, and they emitted a blue light.

Seeing this scene, my instinct told me that the person who healed Aria's bullet wound, Patra--has healing techniques, after all.

However, that expression, full of exertion, told me that, having lost her pyramid as a magical source, she didn't know whether she could save Nii-san, who was near death.

--So, this isn't the time to take Patra back into custody.

The tip of the Annbelle was spewing out smoke, and I-U was heading towards us at full speed. From the bridge, sticking out of the back--

Sherlock Holmes strode onto the deck, seemingly going to walk the whole 300 meters of the nuclear submarine to come here.

(He...! Is coming...!)

I can only commit everything--huh.

I-U's leader, the hero of England from the past century, Sherlock Holmes.

The name I-U had come from the codename for submarines during the World War 60 years ago, the submarine itself had come from Russia, 30 years ago--

A submarine that had been stolen from the former Soviet Union. And, it was equipped with modern American MK-60s.

Sherlock Holmes, you're exactly like the books described. You're well deserving of that reputation.

You're the "Man Who Has Walked This Whole World"--

No, the "Man Beyond Space and Time".

Rumble...In the wake of the deep noise, the Annbelle, seemingly having been hit by the I-U under the waterline, shuddered.

What are you doing, Sherlock Holmes?

Are you fighting us directly?

But, the Annbelle is burning up.

(How are you going to get through that wall of fire--?)

As I thought this, in front of my eyes, *Shhh*....Something white, riding atop the wind, swept past.

Under the illumination of the fire, its multiple facets sparkled, just like a gem, as it danced through the air.

(...Snow...?)

No, wrong.

Those small droplets, dividing and growing greater were--Diamond Dust.

The ice of the magic of the Diamond Dust Witch, Jeanne d'Arc was scattering around the fire, as if it was going to smother it.

At the same time that I had noticed this, the curtain of smoke and fire was pushed back by the ice.

And afterward, *Kira Kira*...His whole body, looking like it was covered with the ice particles in the midst of the light of the inferno, he...

Appeared.

--Sherlock Holmes.

The famous detective that all hailed as the best, and the strongest.

That body, clothed in old-fashioned English clothes, was tall. Roughly 180 centimeters. His age--I don't know why, but he looked like he was only in his early twenties.

His hair was neatly brushed into a barragan, his nose was tall, and his face was firm and handsome...however, he was even more imposing than the photos of him in textbooks, radiating an extremely powerful aura.

Tap, Tap His black leather shoes ringing out, he strode towards us. Behind him, the seawater, freezing, had, at some unknown point in time, created a gigantic block of ice that looked like a gigantic barge.

From that floating block of ice, a gold staircase, linking up with the Annbelle, crumbled back into gold sand...the gold sand and ice, mixing together, flew through the air, creating something like a background behind him.

Seeing this scene, the me in Hysteria Mode understood.

Like links of a chain clicking together, I understood everything about this man in one breath.

(...I see, that's how it is...)

Sherlock had used Nii-san's technique -- "Invisible Bullet" to attack him. Not only that, but he also used Jeanne's Ice Magic, Patra's alchemy, and like Vlad Dracula, he was living for over a hundred years.

Vlad and Jeanne had said this already.

I-U is the gathering place of those geniuses who hold supernatural powers, where they copy them off each other.

Something that only geniuses can do, they shared their infinite abilities.

And the end result is, the materialization of the perfect form of all their abilities combined.

And this perfect form is definitely the strongest. Recognized as the strongest existence, he is beheld with fear.

Which is to say, their leader--Sherlock Holmes--!

--I had already deduced that this would be our time of meeting."

The first sound that Sherlock uttered made me tense every cell in my body.

What--

What is this aura.

This can only be called charisma.

Something that would make anybody in front of this man, bow down before him--

The difference in power was made clear with just those few words.

--Excellent deductions allow me to know the near future. I call that "Cognis". In short, I knew everything about this beforehand. Therefore, Kana-kun...no, Tohyama Kinichi-kun. Even what you were hiding inside your chest--I was able to deduce."

Sherlock said something, as if he was answering a question to an exam, to Nii-san, who was about to die.

Not able to make a sound, yet still saying something, Nii-san--*Cough Cough* coughed up blood.

However, using the lip reading techniques I learned in Inquesta, he said "I see."

"Then, Tohyama Kinichi. You know about me, right? No, it isn't pride that makes me want you to understand me. After all, I myself, I've been portrayed by all those hated books and movies. But what is laughable is--that is all I can say to you. Because nobody could think that you can introduce me."

Used to not directly coming to the point, Sherlock paused--

"--Nice to meet you. I am Sherlock Holmes."

He introduced himself.

That's right.

Yes, that's right. This is the real thing. He's not a fake. My instincts in Hysteria Mode were telling me this as well. They were telling me not to delude myself into thinking that he was somebody dressed up as the real thing, or even a robot.

"Aria-kun."

Hearing Sherlock call her name, Aria, who was in a daze, started.

And, her gaze met with her blood relative--

In that moment, it felt as if a thousand, ten thousand words had been exchanged.

"The times are changing, but you're the same as ever. The hairstyle of those ladies in the Holmes bloodline, keep it well. That was the first thing I ordered your great-grandmother to do. Because, I had already deduced when you would appear."

Staring at Aria's twin tails, Sherlock--

--strode into our midst casually even though we were armed, like a teacher would do, facing his students.

Instinctively, I raised the barrel of my Beretta, pointing it towards him.

"--Be a little more prudent. Because, if you continue to play with sharp objects, then one day, you yourself will be cut."

Sherlock wasn't looking at me, but this was clearly--a warning.

With that sentence, my hand felt like it had been bound by something, and it stopped.

--What. What is he?

Is this what a true--"Ancestor" is?

Is it because he isn't a descendant like us, but is the real thing?

"Aria-kun. You're very beautiful. And strong. You--hold the ability of becoming the most excellent lady of the Holmes bloodline. However, you were taken as a burden of the Holmes family, and were called a defect...the day that one's own ability isn't recognized by their own family must be every painful. I--have come to name you as my successor."

"...Ah..."

Completely at a loss for words, Aria murmured something softly.

This isn't resistance. It was like confirming the reality that he had spoken to herself once again. That kind of weak voice.

"Come, Aria-kun. As long as you feel you can. Come, Aria-kun. Even if you feel you can't."

Sherlock flicked away the fabric of his coat, reaching out.

Whole body frozen, Aria's eyes, normally filled with the light of victory and triumph, were now showing a glimpse of weakness.

"Come, like this, we can save your mother."

This sentence made Aria, whose eyes were opened wide to begin with, stretch her eyes even wider.

That was evidently--different from the stunned appearance of just now.

Sherlock spoke, flashing a happy expression which conveyed "This reaction is just how I deduced it would be,"--

"Come, Aria-kun."

He swayed, with a movement as refined and hypnotic as ballroom dancing, embracing Aria to himself.

--Hesitation will very easily fill those who make the wrong decision with endless regret."

Taking advantage of her indecision, *whoosh*, he swept her into his arms, princess-style.



"Ah...!"

Aria cried out, almost gasping, but--she did not resist.

Just, letting him hold her.

With a movement filled with pity, Sherlock stroked the Aria's clothes, where her scar from being shot was--*whoosh*

He stood up, letting Aria, still in his arms, see the nuclear submarine directly in front.

"Let's go. That is your I-U."

In front of Sherlock, the inferno had already been quelled by the power of the Diamond Dust...

And the magnificent grandeur of I-U was once again visible.

--Kinji...!"

Turning her head in his embrace, Aria had a strange expression. It was full of confusion and timidity.

But still, she did not resist.

She accepted Sherlock's words, accepted this sudden reversal.

"Aria-kun. You are all students. So, from now onwards, it is time to start 'studying'"

Saying this, Sherlock, as if jumping over a small brook, leaped off the head of the Annbelle.

And, *Hyyu*

For just a moment, the long coat spread wide open, just like a paper aeroplane, and he softly landed on the iceberg in front of I-U.

This distance that humans should not be able to jump, whether it be distance or height, with just one leap--

(That...that is...!)

Just now, his coat moved unnaturally.

That is the same thing that allows Riko to control her hair, Ability...!

He also knows how to use that?

No, what is most important right now is--Aria.

Aria is going to be taken by him to I-U.

Before this, Patra had taken Aria as well, but this time, the implications were completely different. This time, the situation was far more dire.

When Sherlock had taken Aria into his arms, if she had wanted to escape, she could have. At least, she could have struggled in an attempt to escape.

However, Aria did no such thing.

She didn't run.

Receiving affirmation from Sherlock Holmes, the one figure she truly admired and respected, hearing that she was chosen as his successor, and...hearing that she could save her mother who had entered prison on false charges, Kanzaki Kanae...

These must have stripped her of any reason to resist.

But, Aria.

--Don't go.

Don't go over there.

I understand. I inherently understand.

He--Sherlock Holmes, is dangerous.

"Aria!"

After Sherlock's binding on my hand had slowly faded away, I finally shouted out on the head of the Annbelle, which was just about to sink...because this shout made me realize the gravity of the situation I was in again, I grit my teeth.

My nakama, my partner, from in front of my eyes, widened like this, is being taken away from me.

--I will chase.

However, I have no way of jumping onto the iceberg from here, no way of getting onto I-U.

What do I do...!

"ARIA----!"

Only able to scream, I roared once again.

--*Thud*--!

A burning feeling permeated my body, starting from my core.

"This is--Hysteria Mode...? No. I should already be inside Hysteria Mode."

Different. There's something different. What I'm feeling right now, as compared to what I normally feel, is different...!

"...Sher...lock...you bastard. Did you think...that if you shot me through the heart, you would be able...to stop...my justice...?"

Hearing Nii-san's voice come from behind me, I turned my head.

I saw that he had ripped off his uniform, throwing it off, and now, standing there, completely clothed in bulletproof material, just like an assassin, Nii-san, was struggling, trying to stand up.

The blood oozing out of his chest had slowed, but not stopped.

"Do-don't stand up, Kinichi! Don't stand up! Your injury hasn't been healed yet!"

Patra held Nii-san tightly, trying to stop him.

"This is fine--don't heal me anymore."

Saying this, emphasizing each word, Nii-san opened the long hair reaching down his back-- Whether it was because he wished to lighten himself, I did not know, but he let the blade of the scythe that was hidden in his hair, fall to the ground.

That, sharp gaze--

"...!"

Didn't even allow me to suck in a breath.

Nii-san, at some period of time--went into Hysteria Mode again...!?

How did he change? Losing the ability to be Kana, and in this kind of situation, where it would be impossible to be sexually excited by the opposite gender, how...did he change?

Nii-san, as if answering my unspoken question, brushed the blood of his lip, coming to stand next to me--

"Kinji, listen well. HSS--Hysteria Mode, because of maturity, or times of need, will evolve and form a derivative. The me as of right now, is in Hysteria Agonizante."

What...did you say?

Hysteria Mode's derivative...!?

"Another name is, near-death Hysteria Mode. Those men that receive near-fatal wounds, will, before they die, receive an enormous instinct to leave their young behind--this is the Hysteria Mode under the influence of that instinct."

I really didn't know...It appears that inside our Hysteria Mode, there still lies another hidden ability.

But--isn't that a Hysteria Mode that is used at the cost of one's life!?

"Nii-san, stop it...Do-don't fight like this!"

"Don't interrupt me, Kinji. This is a good opportunity. This ship is Japanese. Japanese laws apply on this boat. Just now, he committed the crime of kidnapping a minor--This is a rare opportunity in which we can arrest Sherlock in flagrante delicto."

"But...!"

"Kinji, remember this. One act of greatness overshadows a life of nothingness...!"

Nii-san.

For the sake of the "Justice" you believe in...

You want to use that already broken heart,

-using all that you have without reserve.

To fight him!?

"Kinji, listen to me. Hearing your shout from just now--I have confirmed it. The Hysteria Mode that you are in right now isn't normal."

What...did you say?

"The normal Hysteria Mode is Hysteria Normale. However, the you as of right now is slowly going into Hysteria Berserk--the Hysteria Mode when a woman is being taken away. Because, in front of your eyes...you saw another man take away a woman."

...!

"Be careful...Hysteria Berserk accelerates, aggravates, and enhances the hate and jealousy that you feel for other men, a very dangerous mode. Sometimes it will spill over to women as well, sometimes you will even take all a woman has with force. Your battle prowess is 1.7 times that of Hysteria Normale, but your thoughts will be completely focused upon aggression--so this too, is a double-edged sword. That mode will appear in unpredictable situations--it's not impossible to control, but the first time will be very difficult...But Kinji, I'm very sorry, but I have no time to warn you anymore. When the hull still hasn't sunk till it's 1-meter above the waterline, jump--follow me...!"

Opening my eyes in continuous amazement, I--

-because of Nii-san's last sentence, my eyes widened even more.

"Nii, san...!?"

A few years ago...I had continuously tormented Nii-san, trying to get him to let me "fight together" with him.

However, Nii-san has never been my partner. Not even once.

And that is because, knowing the enormity of the distance between us, he thought I would be a burden.

So, last month, when he said that we should kill Aria together, Nii-san probably just wanted me to act as a lure.

But now, Nii-san said it clearly.

He clearly said--

Follow me.

--By myself, I stand no chance against Sherlock. You by yourself cannot stand against him either. However, if it's us two brothers...us two brothers, both inside Hysteria Mode, we have a chance of victory!"

When two Butei are to be partners, they have to have mutual agreement.

This is something that is even written in Butei Law, a great regulation.

Right now, Nii-san is--showing his faith in me, asking for my will to prepare to do battle by his side.

--I want to answer him...!

I wish to respond to his faith. Because, this is the first time, and could be the last.

Making that decision, I felt my trembling body filled with a whole new power.

Annabelle will soon sink to a level where we can jump onto that iceberg.

"Exodus 14:21 --Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided."

And like the verse that Nii-san had recited, I-U split apart the waves, as if making one big road, as it appeared onto the ocean.

And now, Aria was being brought on by that road.

"...Let's go, Kinji! First, we save Aria!"

Never leaving his companions, Nii-san jumped on to the iceberg first.

"--After, we arrest Sherlock Holmes! Follow me!"

Nii-san yelled, using that superhuman strength to quickly leap across the surface of the ice.

Hearing Patra wail Nii-san's name, I--followed him, I jumped--

With all the power of Hysteria Mode rushing through my veins--!

Nii-san and I continued to sprint across the large block of ice leading to I-U.

Below our feet, the ice cracked and mixed together, as if we were stepping on snow.

(Sherlock...!)

At the far edge of my vision, I could see Sherlock's back, holding Aria while walking onto I-U.

It's so far. There was still a huge distance between us and them.

All around us was a storm of diamond dust, the iceberg below us froze even further, becoming a field of diamond dust.

...*KCCCCH*...*KCCH*...!

The sound of gigantic icebergs scraping against each other rang out from under us.

What kind of--magic do you have, Sherlock Holmes...!

Just turning my eyes and holding my Beretta, I gritted my teeth, having already been covered with frost.

"--Don't be afraid, Kinji! This ice is nothing before us!"

Not allowing me to show any weakness, Nii-san shouted out.

"We have guns! Bullets, made completely of metal, able to pierce through our target at supersonic speeds of 300 meters a second--guns are the thing we humans have made, an instrument of battle with no equal. And on this planet, the only thing that allows guns to be exploited to their full extent, is Hysteria Mode!"

Shouting, Nii-san sped through the storm like a hurricane.

The blood oozing out of his chest and back continued to build up.

(--Nii-san--!)

I severed my weakness, staying right behind him. We had already passed the point of no return.

Piercing through the diamond dust, as sharp as knives, I didn't care about the small wounds opening up on my face and fingers--only rushing forward!

(Aria!)

We broke through the storm, racing across the iceberg--

Nii-san and I landed on I-U's black deck.

Carrying Aria, Sherlock was walking towards a structure that was sticking out of a deck, the bridge.

"--SHERLOCK!"

Nii-san shouted, and in front of him, right in front of the absolute core of his body, a flash.

"Invisible Bullet"--!

--*CLANK!*

10 meters behind Sherlock, the bullet burst into sparks, having been deflected.

That was -- "Billiard Shot"

Sherlock is using the gun-techniques that belong to us brothers.

It didn't surprise me. Nii-san was part of I-U after all, it makes sense that Sherlock would master his techniques.

But, during the "Billiard Shot" just now...I didn't see his gun at all.

Which means, "Billiard Shot" and "Invisible Bullet"--these techniques that require incredible amounts of concentration, were used at the exact same time. And, while his back was facing this way.

Amazing. He doesn't only have ability. Sherlock's gun-techniques...are beyond ours as well.

--But! I will not be scared. We are two. Don't look down on our Hysteria Mode--!

"Kinji!"

"--I understand!"

As brothers, we had a mutual comprehension that required no words.

I immediately understood what Nii-san ordered me to do.

Following the flash and gunshot, Nii-san's 2nd bullet flew towards Sherlock.

And at the moment, when it burst into sparks and was deflected from behind Sherlock--

(--How about this!)

The Beretta in my grip spat forth tongues of fire, deflecting that bullet back at Sherlock.

The bullet, flying through the air in an N pattern--

--*Clank!*

Exploded into the 3rd shower of sparks.

Ugh, it was deflected...now it's an M...!

Sherlock--only half turning, smiled at me, who was stunned.

And he raised the right hand, which was carrying Aria, *Shhhhhh* extending his index finger, which was shaking.

"--!"

In my mind, something slid into place.

At around the same time, *Bang Bang Bang Bang!* In front of Nii-san, four flashes of light appeared continuously.

This time it's 4 continuous shots of "Invisible Bullet"--!

Immediately slotting the 6 bullets he had thrown in the air beforehand into the revolver, he fired off another 6.

Added to that, he whipped out the other, hidden Colt Peacemaker, adding on another 6 shots.

That which could be said to be a divine technique, a continuous 16-shot "Invisible Bullet", sped towards Sherlock in unison.

But--*CLANK CLANK CLANK CLANK CLANK CLANK!*

All of them burst into sparks as they sped through the air.

It was completely blocked--even if it was a continuous 16-shot "Invisible Bullet!"

"UUOOOOAAHH!"

My reflexes in Hysteria Mode stimulated my body into changing the magazine even before I had thought about it.

Using the Beretta, which had been set into full auto, I helped Nii-san to deflect the countless bullets hurtling through the air.

Not only "Billiard Shot", but a few of them were also aimed at the enemy's muzzle flash--the location of the enemy's barrel, the new technique "Mirror Shot", but all of our efforts were blocked by Sherlock's bullets.

--Billiard Shot, Billiard Shot, Mirror Shot, Billiard Shot--!

In the blink of an eye, in the air above I-U's deck, 32--64--increasing exponentially, over 100 bullets were deflected off each other, bursting into sparks in the 3-dimensional area.

If it were to have a name, it would be called "Infinite Bulletstorm!"--!

The first time in history that a battle of "Bullet Contact" has taken place.

Added to this, we were charging towards Sherlock, racing across the black, metal deck.

Continually closing in on an enemy position. Directly proportional to the number of bullets, continually increasing. The time that we had to notice and take care of each threat, had been compressed to a mere 0.01 seconds. One moment of carelessness would lead to death.

Within our sight, was a hurricane of bullets. And the eye of the storm, was us.

What kind of battle is this...! This is what it means to be on I-U--the place that we were standing, right now.

Hysteria Mode was exerting all it had, even Hysteria Berserk, which was above Hysteria Normale, was reaching its limit.

And Aria, her eyes wide open, was staring at this battle between the elite, the superhumans, in a daze--and it was her first time seeing Nii-san like this, battling like Ashura--

I'm sorry, Aria. I had never told you that he was my Nii-san.

But, the time for apologies comes later. The most important thing right now is--

(Getting to your side!)

As if having felt my feelings of complete abandonment, Sherlock jumped, performing a flip in the air. With just that one jump, he mounted the 7 meter tall bridge.

Spinning around, Sherlock turned Aria, in his arms, to face us.

If I shoot now, I'll hit--Aria!

--!?"

Sherlock's next movements made me crease my eyebrows into a frown.

His hands, lightly supporting Aria, touched her ears.

And the tie of his suit, split open with a *RIIP*. The buttons on his shirt all burst off.

That chest--as if it was a balloon, was...expanding...

--!"

That is!

The thing that Vlad Dracula used in Yokohama-- "Wallachia's Magic Flute!"

-

*IIEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!*

The wail that Sherlock suddenly blasted forth blew away the clouds, even the ocean started to froth, as if it was boiling.

This impact is...what!?

That wail pulsed through all the organs in my body. My lungs exploded, my breathing stopped, and my intestines felt like they were about to spill out of my mouth.

Clasping my hands over my ears as if my life depended on it, I crouched, trying to endure that enormous attack.

His voice was vibrating. Trying to escape from the midst of this air pressure was completely impossible.

I could only hold my hands to my ears, close my eyes tight, grit my teeth, enduring it with all I had...!

His goal is to dispel our Hysteria Mode.

How could--we let you dispel it!

Hysteria Mode--is the one lifeline that gives us a chance to win this battle!

...Not long after, noticing that the enormous roar was getting weaker, I...in a panic, investigated my own blood flow.

My blood flow...great...it's fine! Hysteria Mode wasn't dispelled!

Sherlock's "Wallachia's Magic Flute!"--was endured by me!

But, turning around...

(...!)

I saw that Nii-san hadn't covered his ears.

Blood was leaking out of them, and his fingers, reaching out to Sherlock like a hook, were frozen in that crooked position.

Not able to take any defensive measures against Sherlock's sudden attack, Nii-san--his wound on the chest, which he had forbidden Patra from healing further, spurted out fresh blood once again.

And--I understood.

Nii-san, Nii-san's final Hysteria Mode, was dispelled!

"Nii-san...!"

Nii-san dashed towards me,

"Kin...Kinji! ---Get away!"

-pushing me away, who was facing him, bewildered.

(--?)

In the moment when I widened my eyes.

The place that my heart was just now, and the place that Nii-san's heart was right now--*Bch!*

One bullet--

-leaving behind a tail of blood in the air, pierced through it--

"...!"

I used all the strength in my body to support Nii-san, who was about to fall down.

Aahh...!

Nii-san predicted it.

He predicted that I, because of his injury, would get hit, and would die.

And, having been jerked out of Hysteria Mode, Nii-san gave up the possibility of using "Billiard Shot" to defend--and he used his own body, sacrificed himself, just to protect me...!

Even though his heart had been pierced for the 2nd time, Nii-san still raised his Colt Peacemaker, pointing it towards the bridge--

But all trace of Sherlock had already disappeared.

"...Kinji...chase after him...! That bastard, do-don't let...him...run to a lifeboat...!"

Under the support of my shoulder, crimson-black blood started spurting out of his mouth as he gave me an order.

"Nii-san...! How do I...!"

Nii-san, as if trying to stop me from speaking--laughed.

"Hehe...having you worry about me...I will go back..."

Afterward, he took out two 9mm bullets that were hidden in his hair, handing them to me.

"In a battle that "Billiard Shot" cannot be used, use this...!"

The black and white bullets that I had taken off the crescent shaped card were--

(...Butei bullets...!)

This was the first time I had seen them, but the engraving on top could not have been wrong.
DAL (Detective Armed Lethal)--

Nicknamed, Butei bullets.

On each of these Butei bullets, there were various hidden special properties, enhanced bullets. Only professionals in the field of bullet-making could make them. They were expensive and rare, lethal weapons[1] only circulated among the elite Butei.

"Kinji, go and--attack! We've already come this far...already this far...!"

Cough Cough! Spitting out blood, Nii-san clutched my sleeve.

"This is probably the first time I've asked something unreasonable of you...I order you to, only relying on one pistol and one knife, to fight this submarine...! Kinji--In life, there will be times where you have to do things that are completely outside the boundaries of reason...! Now, this is one of those times!"

Nii-san, half forceful, span me around, making me face I-U's bridge.

Because it seemed that, even with this, I was going to retreat, he encouraged me...

"--Don't you dare turn back!"

Thump!

Using the ultimate secret technique of all those in the Tohyama bloodline, who were born hardheaded--he headbutted me, encouraging me.

"Kinji...Don't you dare turn back...! Go now...!"

Nii-san is--ordering me.

He's using an order...to leave this mission to me.

I--closed my eyes. I told myself not to turn back. I told myself to abide by Nii-san's order.

"Nii-san--"

Afterward, I opened them again, staring angrily at I-U.

Go! Yes, for the sake of Nii-san's order.

"--If you die, I'll never acknowledge myself as your little brother again!"

Shouting as loud as I could, I heard Nii-san chuckle.

"Then, Kinji. You--forever, will be my little brother."

Climbing up the stairs on the side of the bridge, I jumped in the pressure valve. Holding the Beretta and rushing down the winding staircase, I...

-by I-U--

-by what could be called an exterior hall, a huge hall resembling a theater, was stopped in my tracks.

What...is this place...

In this bottom level, the gigantic chandeliers, hanging down from what I feared was the top level, the deck, illuminated the floor, which was rock which had naturally formed from erosion.

And on the floor--towering over me were skeletal models of Tyrannosaurus, Stegosaurus, Triceratops, and Plesiosaurus and other dinosaurs.

The walls, were lined with enormous wooden shelves, reaching all the way up to the ceiling. Fearing that all this was for academic interest, I looked, and--the shelves were lined with the shells of giant clams, and shells of sea turtles.

Dugongs, dolphins, lions, tigers, wolves, and many other models of extinct animals that I had only ever seen in pictures.

Is this really the interior of a submarine?

Unbelievable. Just these decorations are probably worth 100, 200 billion.

It was exactly like a zoo, or a museum...No, this is a palace. An evil palace which roams the oceans.

(...?)

Walking down the length of the hall, staying hidden by the fossils' feet, I frowned.

There were...no souls in sight. No members of I-U had come to do battle with me.

This is their stronghold.

But, this isn't the time to think about those things. If they aren't here, it's better for me.

I scanned the walls of the hall again--and I noticed that a door opened, all by itself.

--It was an invitation.

Where is Aria?

Charging down the winding staircase, I passed through a dark room filled with aquariums of coelacanths and multi-colored tropical fish. In front of that, was a garden, illuminated by a blinding sun lamp. Running past the corridor of peacocks, where many birds with vividly colored feathers were flying about, I arrived at another display. It was a huge warehouse that had gold, silver, and jewels, a compilation of all the minerals in the world.

Where, is Aria?

A long tapestry on the walls, stacked high with leather-bound books was a library. Filled with everything, from gold pianos to gramophones, a music room. Collecting weapons and armour from the Middle Ages, a small room.

Filled with bricks of gold and bank notes from countries all over the world, a treasury...I went through many, many different places.

But, each room, filled to the brim with astounding objects, gave me a feeling that I was just running in circles. Already having ran through all the rooms that I had found, I gasped for breath.

Where--is Aria!

My breathing becoming more and more erratic, kneeling down in a room, which had a floor covered with soil, I--

With no way out, I scanned the hall, with no apparent exits.

(...?)

Inside that vast, strange room.

The walls in front of me were covered in large oil paintings, and in each painting, there were--stone slabs, crosses, hexagrams, etc.

The leftmost portrait was a drawing of a fierce Japanese person in an old military uniform. On the top of it, I could see a title, which said "Elite Squad Commander of Imperial Japanese Navy--First Generation I-U - Submarine Captain - Showa 19 years 8 months[2]". Directly right of it was a portrait of a German soldier with a 卍 badge.

The closer the portraits were to the right, the newer they were. Next was an African woman, a Chinese person in a wheelchair, an Arab with a gigantic beard, many different people.

This, I'm afraid it's...the graves of those that were captain of I-U.

As if confirming my thoughts, most to the right, about half-drawn--was Sherlock's portrait, hanging there.

--I see. I feel that I understand I-U's history now.

In the beginning, I-U was formed as a battle-group, raising the elite for the sake of defeating the enemy.

From the dates on the portraits, it was probably formed during 2nd World War. The first generation and 2nd generation captain were Japanese and German, respectively...which means, it was the joint-plan of the Axis powers. Jeanne had said that I-U uses German and Japanese as their main languages, probably as a reflection of its ancestors.

After the war, I-U used its own position as a submarine to escape its demise--and formed on its unique values, it became a secret organization. Using "Professor" to substitute commander, they sought to revamp the submarine, and now--it is within Sherlock's grasp--

This kind of... group, like that of war ghosts...!

(They took my nakama!)

I stood up again, pounding my feet into the floor, and behind Sherlock's painting...I heard something.

That sound made the me in Hysteria Mode think that it was hollow.

Striding towards the painting, I flipped open my butterfly knife--*Kch, Shiii...!" ripping open the canvas.

Snapping the tactical flashlight from my shoulder strap on, inside...I noticed a secret passageway, an escalator leading downwards.

I subconsciously understood.

I was approaching--Aria, and Sherlock...!

Going through that passageway, I arrived at...a classroom.

The whole marble floor was covered with latin engravings and statues, there were no chairs.

From the pictures on the pillars and the ceiling, this is--a Catholic Neo-Gothic styled classroom. Modern England should have new classrooms, but it appears that the captain, Sherlock, hesitated to change it, and just left it the way it was. Is this there some ceremony going to go on here? The white porcelain vases decorating the aisles and walls were filled with fresh flowers, giving this place a beautiful atmosphere. It makes this place feel like sacred ground.

Inside, the only light source...came from a complex stained glass window, standing there.

Below it--

"...Aria!"

Aria was kneeling there, her back facing me.

Kneeling there as if she was confessing her sins, Aria heard my voice and span around, standing up.

"...Kinji!"

I ran towards Aria, whose strawberry blonde twin tails were waving around.

And, my hands grabbed her small shoulders, pulling her towards me.

--What a relief. She's still safe.

"Why did you come, Kinji..."

"Do I really need to say it?"

Returning one sentence to Aria, who, because of the height difference, could only look up at me, I scanned the surroundings.

But, I didn't notice even one hint of Sherlock's presence.

"Sherlock...is he trying to pretend to be a gentleman? Leaving you alone in this kind of place. But, it's perfect that we managed to meet up. First let's temporarily retreat, and reco--"

From in front of me, who was talking. *Shh*

Aria took one step back.

"...What is it, Aria?"

"Go back."

...?

...Go back...?

From in front of me, who thought that I had heard wrong, Aria took another step back.

"Kinji, go back. Right now, you can still escape."

"Go back...what? What are you going to do?"

"I will stay here. After this...I'm going to stay here, living with my great-grandfather."

What...did you say?

You want to stay in I-U, living with Sherlock?

"Hey...! Why...!?"

I approached her--

Aria, in response to my approach, stepped back even further.

"...You wouldn't understand. You, obviously wouldn't understand what I'm feeling right now..."

Finally, the light of refusal appeared in those camellia eyes--

"Because I, have never told you...about the situation in the Holmes family. Kinji, nobles...wish that each of its members can fulfill their duty as a member of the family. If that isn't the case, they aren't even allowed to exist. They will simply act as if such a person does not exist--"

Aria, completely different from usual, smiled a cold, chilling smile.

"And for those that couldn't reach the expected glory in the Holmes family, I am--the only one who hasn't fulfilled that level of power. So, I was called a defect--so, I was looked down upon, ignored by everyone other than mother. You must have had a vague sense of it, right? I...I was ignored by my the whole Holmes family! For my entire childhood!"

Hearing that sharp voice echoing through the classroom, I...

Thought back to the start of the first semester, when I had Riko investigate Aria, who was binding me.

"However, there seems to be some friction between Aria and the [H] family."

So, that was what was going on.

The defect of the Holmes family, Aria--

"But even though that was the case, I still had great-grandfather as a pillar, supporting my soul. The world may have only praised him for being a famous detective, but he was the predecessor to Butei. Therefore, wanting to achieve just half the glory and honor that my great-grandfather had--I became a Butei."

Backing up until she was about to touch the statue of Jesus, she placed her hands on the chest of her uniform.

As if she was expressing the thing that she kept inside her Butei Handbook--as if expressing the photo of Sherlock inside it.

"For me, my great-grandfather is a God. You could say that he is my one, true faith. And he, still living...appeared in front of me. DO you understand the feeling I have? My great-grandfather, acknowledged me! And he called me, who was cast down to the dregs of the Holmes family, his successor! You...can you understand what I'm feeling right now? --There's no way that you can!"

Just now...

Seeing Aria, taken away by Sherlock, not resist, I had a vague, uneasy feeling...and now, from the looks of it, that feeling wasn't wrong.

I went "Tch" in my heart.

Sherlock Holmes--for Aria, is a God. Just like me, who used to view Nii-san as a God.

What Sherlock says, what he does, in the eyes of Aria, it is all good and righteous.

No matter what he says, she will obey, no matter what he has her do, she will accept. For her, Sherlock is that kind of absolute existence--

But...

But, Aria.

"Aria, calm down and think about this properly. The people that had Kanae-san carry those false charges is I-U. And Sherlock is I-U's leader."

Hearing her mother's name, Aria looked like she had been struck in the face--

But even with that, she still raised her eyebrows, glaring at me.

"Mother's situation...has been solved. Great-grandfather said that he will give I-U to me. With that, I can save mother. Here, I can collect all the evidence to free mother of her sentence. Why I-U hurt mother in the first place--for the reason of establishing the reason for that, I should stay here. There definitely was a deep, hidden reason behind it...!"

"Aria...aren't you putting the cart in front of the horse!? I-U are your enemies! And now, you want to become one of them--!?"

"Then, what do you want me to do!?"

Shouting loudly, baring her canines, Aria opened her hands wide, as if trying to express the whole of I-U.

"You, do you think that by yourself, you can bring I-U all the way to Tokyo? Ever since great-grandfather became the captain of this submarine, that's been impossible!"

"Aria...!"

"It's time to explain everything. You absolutely, cannot underestimate Sherlock Holmes. Great-grandfather, is not just a genius. He's strong, very strong! He's the strongest person in history--even if it's right now, even if you're in your other personality, there's no way you can stand against him. Kinji...you have to understand...there's no way you can do it!"

Seeing Aria, so stubborn--I, closed my eyes, slowly.

...Aahh, so this is how it is.

Sherlock is, for you, an absolute existence. Your mother's situation has been solved, here as well.

Since you trust in that so deeply, saying those kinds of things--

Then I have no need to hold back any words--

I will take what is in my heart, and pour it, pour it all out...!

"No way, Tired, and Troublesome.--Aria, the day I met you, that is what you said."

"...?"

"You also said 'Those 3 points are the only things restricting the possibilities for humans. Don't ever say anything like that in front of me again.'"

"..."

"Listen well, Aria, since you're like this, I'm going to say this directly. These people, they're pirates! Your great-grandfather has lived too long, his mind is corrupted, that's why he became their leader!"

"...Don't you dare...insult great-grandfather...!"

As if I could take it no longer, I closed my eyes.

Aah--this is the exact opposite of that time, Aria.

That time last month, when I was defending Kana, who had beat you half to death--arguing with you.

"As a Butei..., I will not forgive I-U, nor will I let it go free!"

"Now--there's no need for you to be a Butei any longer!"

Aria's widened camellia eyes and long eyelashes quivered as she roared out of rage and anger.

"Despite the fact that originally, you hated this job! Despite the fact that you said you wanted to give up being a Butei! Get out of here right now! Go and quit being a Butei right now! Before, you've seen the wound on my back, right!? That was from an assassination attempt! When I was 13 years old, I was suddenly hit by some unknown person! That was definitely done by some offender that hated everything Butei and the Holmes family stood for--at that time, the bullet sank so far in that even surgery couldn't get it out, even now, it is still embedded deep within my body! Butei are people that let their family and their children enter that kind of danger--the most dangerous job on this planet! That's why, Kinji, go back, don't be a Butei anymore...forget about me...For me, this is fine. For me, this is...!"

I just continued to gaze directly at the tears streaming down from her eyes--Aria.

"...As you said, I want to quit being a bloody Butei."

"....."

"It may not be my original intent--but right now, I am still a Butei. You and I, are both Butei. Not only that, we are partners. For a Butei, the mistake of a partner is one's own mistake. How can I watch as you surrender to the enemy, and even say 'this is fine'?"

If I was in the normal Hysteria Mode...I...

-would find it impossible to say these words, making Aria cry even more.

This...could be what Nii-san warned me about, the aggressive behaviour that the blood flow of Hysteria Berserk causes.

"--I no longer need any partners!"

Aria's seiyuu-like voice echoed throughout the classroom.

"You--obviously never wanted to be my partner! Now that things have come to this, what do you want! Insisting that I am your partner...!"

"The person who insisted was you. At that time, when you wanted me to be your partner."

I did not cower. The more I was refused and rejected, the more I became this way--

I understood, the blood flow of Hysteria Berserk was getting more and more powerful.

Facing Aria, a fierce emotion was bursting out of the dams of my heart.

"--as Butei, when we do maneuvers as partners, mutual agreement is required. But right now, we have no such thing. Therefore--I will gain your agreement. Even if it is by force."

"...Did you say...force? You want to use force...to do what to me?"

"Kidnap you."

"...!"

"Your partner is me. Not Sherlock. I will steal you back."

Seeming to be angry, her face turning red, Aria--

"...I...had a feeling that things would come to this."

Her eyebrows raised, her hands reached towards the short skirt of her uniform.

"...So, I'm going to try and talk you out of this. I don't want to hurt you."

"Ha--don't joke with me, Aria. In your heart, you believe that I have no chance of victory."

I laughed at Aria.

"Looks like in this part, you need some instruction--shortie. Before you start your education as an elite of I-U."

Pretending to yawn, I...

-tried to control my berserker blood, trying to reduce the amount gathered in my core.

For the sake of what happens next, I have to make sure that I don't hurt Aria too much--

And, that control...I felt it went well. Perhaps because it was the first time it had experienced this, but the berserker blood in my body didn't seem to be operating at full efficiency...

And now, I finally reduced it. By about half.

"--You know how to talk, you know...? Your insults against me, you can't take them back."

"I won't take them back."

Aah--Aria.

If we were a boy and girl in a normal high school, our argument would be done right now.

But, the students in Butei High are different.

After this, there will still be a continuation.

"I'm going to make a hole in you. This time, I mean it."

"Don't look down on me. The person ending up with holes, will be you."

Aah, this is way too abnormal.

My own hands reaching for my Beretta, my heart pounded.

Butei High is so abnormal that it makes one dizzy.

In Butei High, the next step is drawing your guns.

But, what is between Aria and I is not an exception. I may have forgotten it recently, as we grew closer, but from the first time we met...this is the way we were.

After the bike-jacking incident with the "Butei Killer", you charged me as an offender in the sports warehouse--suddenly attacking me.

That time, you were chasing me everywhere...and now, I will be the one to chase you.

"Fighting you, this is the 2nd time, right?"

Seeming as if she had been thinking the same thing, Aria stared at me.

"That day I ran, but today, that will not happen."

I returned her stare.

Butei Law article 1. Believe in your comrades and help each other--hmm?

But as I experienced infighting between partners, I understood for the first time--the real meaning of that, was full of irony.

Nakama cannot just stand there, listening to the other person's views.

When nakama walk down the wrong path, even if one has to use force, one has to stop them.

And at time, naturally, they will strike back.

"You draw first, Aria."

--Aria.

I will protect you.

And for the sake of protecting you, I will defeat you.

There is this method of protection as well.

"You go first."

"Ladies first. Draw your guns."

At the same time I said that--

--*Bang Bang!*

Aria completely ignored her skirt flipping up, and with a speed that the eye could hardly follow, she fired!

Grasped inside those small hands were the two guns that I had given her on the Annbelle.

Those silver-white and pitch black M1911s.

"--!"

I switched my Beretta into 2-burst, and used "Billiard Shot" to respond.

Governments' .45ACP bullets...when it comes to stopping power, they win my 9mm Parabellum bullets.

And because of that, taking that into account, using the gun-breaking "Mirror Shot" to finish it in one moment, was impossible.

So the first thing I used was "Billiard Shot", defending myself.

--*Da!*

Through the petals dancing through the air, Aria charged.

Mid-ranged gunfights involve keeping on the other side of the enemy's gun hand, taking advantage of that weak spot. And Aria, completely used to both hands, followed that basic rule, circling towards my right.

Bang! Aria, doing a cartwheel, started firing at me in that upside down position.

I leaped, dodging those bullets, and hit the floor, going into a roll, and trying to counterattack, I pointed my gun towards her-

Having hit the ground, Aria started firing as she slid, her legs acting as an emergency brake. Face up, she continued to slide backwards, firing at me all the while.

Aria, attacking and dodging at the same time, was improvising on the spot, there were no patterns to her movements.

I had no idea of where she was going to attack from next.

A difficult battle--and the worst.

But...I noticed something about Aria, who was running through the petals flying through the air with a dance-like movement.

I noticed something I could use to predict her movements.

--Her hair.

Those long twin-tails were like those ribbons used by new-age gymnasts, curving in an arc, following Aria's movements.

Counting on that, I grasped hold of Aria's method of movement.

Just now I heard Sherlock say that that was the hairstyle that he instructed his descendants to keep. That old man, why would he specifically instruct the use of such a hairstyle, which is so disadvantageous in battle...his own amusement?

Facing Aria, who was circling the classroom while attacking, I was slowly getting used to her movements, and the accuracy of my counterattacks were increasing as well. Aria's expression also had something in it which conveyed "It was exposed?"

And finally, my bullets started to whistle by Aria's M1911s.

I've seen through your movements, Aria.

I'm sorry, Hysteria Mode has no competitor. Victory--is only a matter of time.

Back facing the stained glass, Aria stopped running around and just stood there, exchanging bullets with me.

Lifting herself off the floor with that beautiful hand, she spun around, dodging my bullets, which broke part of the stained glass.

But even with that, I continued to chase Aria's movements, which were focused on defense, the barrel of my gun continuously flashing.

Bang! Bang! Another portion of the stained glass window was broken.

Afterward, taking cover behind the marble altar, Aria...paused.

--It's a shame, Kinji."

Hearing this anime-like voice...

I finally noticed.

Around me, everything had become red--scarlet.

The color of the lights had changed. When?

(The stained glass window--)

Ha. I returned to reality, looking towards the stained glass window.

And I saw that except for the red part, everything had been broken. And, by my own bullets too.

Aria's defensive movements just now were all aimed towards creating this result. She was luring my attacks.

--This isn't good--

In the moment I went "Tch"

Aria rushed out of the shadow of the altar. Again, from the right.

But, I was unable to catch her movement completely. Normally, Aria's hair was very obvious, but in this scarlet light, that hair had become camouflage.

It's not that I can't see her at all, but definitely not as clear as just now.

Added to this, Aria, who had been running in a curve motion all along--suddenly made an L-shaped turn--this time, rushing towards me.

Fuck--!

(--Aru=Kata--!)

Aria.

As expected of an S-rank Butei. Not only do you create favorable conditions for yourself during battle, confusing my senses, but you also force me into the zero-distance combat that you're so adept at.

No time to admire her, I, as well as Aria--

Bang! Bang Bang!

In the distance, whittled down to zero, we both fired at each other.

Aru=Kata is a combat technique for marksmen. Using bulletproof material as a premise, this combat technique combines striking and firing from point blank range.

Spinning around simultaneously and dodging the first blow, just like a dance of death, we--

--both closed in to a distance where we could interrupt each others' attacks.

Aria's elbow knocked my arm aside, just as the edge of my palm pushed aside her hand, pushing the line of fire off each other. Even knocked away, the muzzle flashes continued, almost as if we were fighting with swords of light.

Facing somebody wielding two guns and only having one of my own, I--

(...Tch...!)

I was being suppressed, despite the fact that I was in Hysteria Mode.

My left hand had flicked open the butterfly knife, increasing the area of defense, but in the end, I couldn't use it for the purpose that it was made for.

"--Kinji! Why!?"

At that very moment, kicking off the floor with one leg and performing a flip, Aria kicked towards my jaw.

My torso jerked backwards, and the leather band on the tip of her shoes brushed past the tip of my nose.

One of Aria's hands, still carrying the gun, hit the floor, and spinning on it, she performed a double roundhouse kick, aimed at my head.

"Kinji! Why are you such an idiot!"

Immediately after, she leaped up just as she contacted the floor, her small shoulder put pressure on me, who was stumbling, specifically, my right shoulder, and using that as a push-off point--
whoosh

Her legs, like a pendulum, flipped sideways, and she landed behind me.

Fyuu

And along with her came a gunpowder-stained, Gardenia-like scent.

Aria's fragrance, for the first time--made my heart erupt into an inexplicable fear.

--Quadra Aria--

This graceful movement in battle, it's an amazingly 3-dimensional technique.

--!"

Having had my back grasped hold of, I span around, only to see Aria's arms horizontally crossed--

-aiming at me.

Those fingers, even now, are pulling the trigger.

Counterattack--

(--I won't make it--!)

Hysteria Mode's reflexes made me understand that instinctively.

I have enough time to raise my pistol and point it towards her--but as for pulling the trigger, that one moment is too much.

What do I do?

If I take those high-caliber bullets face on, there's no way I'll be able to continue with the battle.

But, I won't allow that. Right now, in this moment, give up on firing--

-and do something!

--!"

--*Click!*

This sound came from two places between us.

Aria...didn't fire.

No, she couldn't fire.

I...

--had put the barrel of my Beretta directly onto the barrel of her silver-white M1911.

And the barrel of the pitch-black M1911 was sealed by my knife.

No matter which one she fires from--Aria's guns would self-destruct. Well, the same goes for me.

Since this is what it had come to, neither of us could move.

If this had to be put into Shogi or chess terms, the situation would be that of "[Threefold Repetition](#)"--neither of us could make another move.

Even if this goes on for a thousand days.[\[3\]](#)

Which means, a draw.

Making sure that my reaction would be faster, even if only by a little bit, I pointed the heavy Beretta in my right hand towards the left, and I moved the lighter butterfly knife to the right, where it would need slightly more movement, yet saving movement of my Beretta.

My two wrists, crossed--along with Aria's arms, also crossed, drew an XX shape in the air with our 4 arms--still, unmoving.

"Why...why are you such an idiot, Kinji?"

Aria raised her eyes, staring at me.

"Your bullets--why were you only aiming for my guns..!"

Facing the girl who was making an expression which seemed to convey that she was insulted, Aria, I chuckled.

That's right--It wasn't easy to control the berserker blood, but the me in Hysteria Mode...still has no way of taking action against girls.

I may be able to fight like this, if it is for a girl's own good, but--I still found it impossible to harm them. Even if I would be the one to get hurt.

I, in the end, am this kind of man.

That's why the next thing I did--

-was this.

I--took my fingers off the Beretta's trigger.

"...?"

Watching my forefinger leave the trigger, Aria frowned.

"Fire."

Putting the Beretta down, the butterfly knife in my left hand...was also released.

That barrel of the M1911, as black as hell, once again, pointed at me.

"I don't care what happens to me anymore. If you can fire, then fire. You can shoot me in the head if you like, you can fire where you want."

I...*Click, clatter* let my weapons drop to the ground.

This--

"The battle just now was a draw. It looks like it doesn't matter if I use words or force, I can't take you back. Therefore, I have nothing else I can do. Since you are to become an outlaw, it means that the former Butei, Kanzaki H. Aria...has disappeared."

This...could be called gentle.

' "And, Butei Charter article 1. 'Believe in your comrades and help each other.' Unable to help you, I have betrayed the Butei Charter. Which means, I am not fit to be a Butei. The partnership that we have, has been completely annihilated. Just now."

This...was the order that Hysteria Mode was giving me, the ability to throw everything away for the sake of one girl...an absurd gentleness.

But--this is fine.

"Fire, Aria. After all, I have nowhere to run. As opposed to being killed by those outlaws, I'd rather die under your guns."

"I-I won't kill you...that's right...you can stay here, with me..."

"Don't say anymore, Aria. I won't become a companion of outlaws. I don't wish to throw away that which each generation of my line has been titled with, 'Ally of Justice'."

This is fine, Aria.

"This is fine, Aria. If we continue to pull each other down a road we don't wish to go, there will be no end to it. Therefore, one of us must disappear. And I--no matter what, no matter the circumstances, cannot fire at you. Even though...why that is so, I cannot tell you."

Hearing my words, which were meant to hide the existence of Hysteria Mode--

As if understanding something, Aria's face...*Gah*...blushed.

"So, fire. Send me from this Earth, then you can do whatever you want. However...think of it often. Think of the Butei that was willing to give everything up, willing to give his own life, to bring you back. And, go back. Leave the world of outlaws, go back to your normal days--go back to Butei High."

Aria's face, as if each of my sentences, filled with passion, with my soul, were cutting into her heart, her face twisted into one of pain.

And--*Shh*...those camellia eyes, once again, brimmed with tears.

Don't do it, Aria.

Don't let me...see you like this.

It will definitely waver my determination.

--Fire, Aria!"

Hearing my shout, Aria--

-the barrel in her hand, *Pa*, trembled.

"...Why..."

In those big eyes--tears, tears of heartbreak, were overflowing--

"Why...why do you...want me to do something that I can't do...!"



And those two guns swept off my body, clutched to her own flat chest.

"I, can't, point my guns at my great-grandfather...!"

Drip Drip Tears flowing endlessly, Aria, just like a small child, shook her head left and right.

"But, making me...making me point my guns towards my partner, I can't do it, I can't do it...!"

With her blood-relative on one side, and her partner on the other, she really doesn't know what to do...is that it?

She looked up at the ceiling, and although she had tried to endure it for so long...

...Uwahhh...

Finally, she slumped into it, crying.

She slumped into what she had been pointing her guns at just a moment ago, my chest.

"Aria..."

I, held her tightly to myself.

Just like that...I embraced her.

Slowly, that trembling, small back, calmed down.

"...Aria. Let me say something to you, plainly."

I said to those twin-tails. *Whoosh* Aria's crying face looked up.

"I--was ordered by Kana to 'kill' you."

"....."

"For the sake of destroying I-U. Just now you saw as well, right? The other personality of Kana's split personality...actually, he's my Nii-san. Nii-san is the only family I have. At that time, I also cried, stuck between my partners and relatives. Just like you right now."

Reaching my finger out, tracing it up the trails of tears on Aria's cheeks, I continued,

"In my heart, Nii-san is a God as well. Because he is so full of justice, so strong. There was also a period of despair where I felt that I would never catch up to Nii-san, that I was useless. But--there was a path I could take. I took that path, and in the middle of it, I pointed my gun at Nii-san...and now, here I am. I am here, --by your side."

The last sentence was unnecessary, right...

It must have been Hysteria Mode acting up, making me say it.

But, it appears that that sentence had a huge effect on Aria.

"...I, over Kana..."

Gah...Her face reddened.

It might be that she's very good at blushing, or maybe it was because she was in the midst of my embrace--but not only were her ears and neck red, but even her hands, on my chest, were tinged with pink.

Doesn't that mean that her whole body, even her fingertips, were reddened?

"...Kinji...over your relatives, over your own flesh and blood...yo-you chose...me...?"

Until just now, still filled with an air of refusal, that air disappeared from Aria's cheeks...

And slowly...it returned to that cute Aria.

"I-I'm sorry"

I said, my eyes darting away, and Aria shook her head left and right, violently.

Afterward, full of unease, she raised her head, gazing at me.

Be-being stared at by this beautiful, almost doll-like, girl from contact distance, I-I will be embarrassed too, you know.

"But, you won't trust me anymore. Because I...betrayed you. I pointed...my guns at you."

"...That's what you do normally."

Extremely embarrassed, I cracked a joke, and Aria...

Fell silent.

She fell silent, but, those eyes, still covered with a layer of tears, looked at me weakly.

What is it...yo-you...what is it you want to say.

These organisms called women, in these kinds of times, they're amazingly unfair.

"...Come back."

"..."

"I...um...will always trust you. I've said it before, right? 'As long as I live, I will trust you.'"

Repeating those words which I had said before, in the heat of the moment--

Aria, *Shh*...tightly clasped her left breast.

I thought that I could hear her heartbeat, as she was blushing so much that she was glowing and radiating heat like a stove.

Actually, *Thump Thump*, I really can hear it.

Was it really so moving?

Ah, wrong, it's my own heartbeat. Why can I hear it? That's seriously messed up.

"An...and, if we throw away the credits we earned as partners, it'll be bad."

Nearly breaking the embarrassment limit, I grasped Aria's slender shoulders with my hands, putting a little bit of distance between us.

"What's left is...do you, trust yourself? At least, the you of just now, had no trust in yourself. That's why--I stopped you."

"I-I..."

"Listen well, Aria. Your mother--Kanae-san, we will definitely save her. But, the path you took just now was completely wrong. Kanae-san would not want you to do that either."

I thought that it was a little unfair to bring up her mother again, but I need to make sure the final blow hits home.

Thinking that way, I said--

--a sentence that actually did, finish Aria off.

Because I understood. The inspiring look of facing her destiny had once again returned to her cute face.

"Just now you said that you would be able to solve it like this, but that's wrong. You just chose the easy way out. --Don't, run away. Just now I said, there is nowhere to run. In front of us, there is only one path. It is the arrest of Sherlock Holmes, as well as I-U. That is the way of Butei."

"But...Kinji. I...drawing my guns...against my great-grandfather is..."

"Don't worry, Aria. I've experienced this with Kana, so I understand how you feel. Therefore, just do things that won't require you to point your gun at Sherlock."

If the enemy is someone she respects that much, it's impossible that she would be able to fight him normally.

"...Kinji..."

"--Capturing him without hurting him, I've already thought of how to do so. However...I need your assistance. Therefore, even if it's just a little. Can you help me?"

Speaking words of confirmation, I, in my heart, lied to myself that this was something that Hysteria Mode had made me say--

-Continuing to chase her.

"I need you."

Aria...

Wha... Forming your mouth into that kind of expression, you look like you've been enchanted.

And for a few seconds, remaining at a loss--

Her whole body froze up--*Ko ku ri*

Softly, perhaps stiffly...but she...

-nodded.

NOTES

1. Lethal weapon written in katakana, certain kill weapon in kanji.
2. August of 1944.
3. The equivalent term for threefold-repetition in Japanese is 千日手. Lit. Hand of one thousand days. It means that no matter what you do, the situation can be forced back to the same thing. The 千日 (One thousand days) part is what Kinji is referencing.

PIERCE 2: OVERTURE'S FINE

After that, becoming very straightforward, Aria said...

Sherlock said that he would leave her alone in the classroom, and he disappeared through one of the doors.

Going through that door, there was an iron wall...once Aria stood in front of it, it was like an automatic door. The pieces making up the wall, going up and down, left and right, slid open.

The floor of the tunnel became a stainless steel grating, looked similar to a drain. The electronic torches on the walls on the left and right flashed, giving off light...It gives off a very futuristic feeling.

Also, with the radioactive hazard sign--there was a notice, warning about radiation--plastered onto a very thick wall. However, the wall, not even giving us enough time to take note of the danger, swung open...

The scene that appeared before us rendered Aria and I speechless.

In this hall, the largest we had seen so far, there were several pillars, reminiscent of pictures of the Parthenon that were to be seen in our textbooks.

No, those aren't pillars.

ICBM.

Something that can be fired from any corner of the world, hitting anywhere you want-- Intercontinental missiles, the top parts.

The bottom part was definitely inside the deep hole in the stainless steel grating.

They numbered 8.

I don't want to think about it...but looking at the characteristics of their warheads--no matter what large country it is, it will be annihilated within a day.

(Is this real...?)

I thought that I had gone through many battlefields, but this scene made an ill shiver go up my back.

"How..."

But, the voice of Aria, who had exclaimed something by my side--appeared to be shocked at something else.

"...?"

I turned my head, seeing Aria look around, bewildered.

Afterward, looking at my face once again, those camellia eyes widened.

"...I've seen this room before...!"

Aria's inexplicable words could not help but make me frown.

I suspected that she had entered a state of confusion after undergoing numerous shocks, but, that didn't seem to be the case.

Because Aria's gaze was not that of somebody that was confused. Just, just shocked.

"Calm down, Aria. That's impossible. That's called déjà vu."

"No, I've definitely...seen this place before. And...in this place, I met you...!"

"...That's impossible. I've never come here before."

When I had just said that--

Bu Bu Noises...? They appeared.

As the sound grew louder, I realized that it was one of Mozart's operas..."Die Zauberflöte"

"In the world of sound, there exists, deliberate coordination and sweet intoxication."

In the wake of it came a deep voice, from the shadows of the pillar-like ICBMs...

The world's greatest, the world's strongest detective, Sherlock Holmes, made his appearance.

"That is something that illustrates our endless cycle of battle and chaos, a beautiful thing. Also, as this recording ends, the battle will also end."

Sherlock put the recorder with speakers attached by his feet, *Kch Kch*

His black leather shoes resounded off the stainless steel floor, coming a few steps closer to us.

"Haha. Seeing your expressions, you must believe that this is the chapter where we settle things. But that is just your haste. Because, I am nothing but a bookmark--just the 'Overture's Fine'"

"Overture...?"

"That's right. This battle is just part of Kinji-kun and Aria-kun's opera--the overture. The meaning of my words, you will soon understand. Alright, then."

Sherlock, as if changing the subject, took out an old-fashioned pipe, and he lit the tobacco inside.

"Falling out--the plan that Kana had in mind when joining I-U, how was it?"

Those words made Aria and I glance at each other.

Looks like the person who facilitated our gunfight from just now, was Sherlock.

Well, I had a feeling...but, what is his goal, exactly?

If his goal was the wastage of our bullets, then it certainly was effective.

Just now I checked how many of Aria's .45 ACP bullets were left, and there were scarcely any.

And my situation was even more serious, as for the normal bullets that I carried around with me...after the battle with Patra, the Infinite Bulletstorm, and Aru=Kata...Not one was left.

"Great-grandfather..."

Raising her foot, as if gathering her courage, Aria--took one step towards Sherlock.

"I-I...I respect you greatly, my great-grandfather. Therefore, I cannot raise my guns against you. As long as you don't order me to do so."

Choosing her words with care, Aria placed her guns by her feet. Both of them.

"I, just as you deduced...used these guns, trying to chase away my partner, who was your enemy. But, I couldn't stop him."

Both her hands at her chest, Aria, in a small voice--yet clearly, continued speaking,

"He is the person I've finally found, the one person in the world--that can be my partner. Great-grandfather, please forgive me. I...want to help him. And that...means I will take part in doing things against you. Please, please, I beg of you, forgive me."

Facing Aria, who was in this state...

"Don't worry, Aria-kun."

Sherlock, for some reason, returned a very satisfied smile.

"--Right now, you have overcome my existence in your soul. And for one very special man, you have chosen to fight me. This means, Kinji's existence in your heart is greater than mine. I guess, it still is a little distance away from love."

Talking about something that Aria and I weren't very good at, Sherlock...

"You may be children, but you two are still a man, and a woman. The hearts of women are something that I am not very good at--but because of that very reason, I can say this. Women, no matter how cruelly they are treated by men, they will never hate all men. Even if things become such that they have to point their guns at each other. 'After a storm comes a calm'--just like that saying, you two will come back together, with a stronger bond."

It looks like...

The reason he instigated our falling out was not for such a cunning aim as to waste our bullets.

But for something even harder to understand, an even more complicated goal.

I may not know what his real goal is, but...well, there's one point I'm very clear on.

"--You're trying to say, everything was deduced by you, right? Sherlock?"

Beside Aria, who was stiff and blushing for some reason, I glared angrily at Sherlock...

"Haha. That is but the first step of deductive reasoning, Kinji-kun."

Sherlock, flashing an expression that made me feel like he was just playing with us in his fist, said, in a mocking tone.

"Then, have you deduced this as well?"

I whipped out my Beretta in a heartbeat.

And I pointed the barrel at Aria's head.

--This was something Aria and I had agreed on doing earlier.

"..."

Sherlock...

Silent, he took another drag of his pipe.

"You, are you trying to take her hostage?"

Barrel still pointing at her, I moved behind Aria.

"Sherlock. Your goal is Aria, right? And I heard Nii-san say this before, if Aria isn't here--I-U will fall into disorder."

"But, you won't fire."

"I'll tell you this, I'm already extremely desperate."

Saying this, I sneaked a peek at Sherlock through the gap between Aria's twin tail and ear.

He, had turned this way.

That's right. I understand. This kind of plan, unable to even trick a child, would not ruffle Sherlock.

I will pretend to take Aria hostage...for the sake of keeping his attention here.

"That's right, Sherlock, I have a gift to give you."

I, for the sake of focusing the enemy's attention on me, I raised my voice.

"--this is from Nii-san!"

Shouting, *Sha!*

I threw a white bullet.

--Flash grenade.

This was one of the bullets that Nii-san had left me.

It was something that could be thrown, a flashbang--!

--*Ka*--

In between Sherlock and us, it expanded into a miniature sun.

The opponent is the world's strongest detective, Sherlock Holmes.

If we fight him directly, there is no way we can win.

Therefore, we have to weaken him.

I may have said it was miniature, but its effectiveness is the same as normal flashbangs--No, it's even greater.

As long as people see that flash, they will completely lose their sight for a couple minutes, without exception!

"Kinji...No-now!"

Hearing Aria's voice, I looked up, using my arm to shield my eyes...

I noticed that Aria had bent over.

"A-Aria...? You--didn't--shield your eyes!?"

"Even if you're hiding behind me...if I shielded my eyes, great-grandfather would definitely notice!"

Turning around, Aria's eyes looked up at empty air, not where I was.

--She, lost her sight. Temporarily.

"Kinji, arrest great-grandfather quickly! I saw it, great-grandfather was staring directly at the flash!" Hearing her shout, I--

--took the handcuffs for Choutei that Aria had lent me, and was about to charge...when, I stopped short.

I could only stop.

Because Sherlock was standing there--calmly.

"Yes. That move just now was extremely smart. Pretending to take her hostage, but in reality--using a flashbang, that kind of plan. However, your deductions did not cut it."

Saying that in a leisurely voice, Sherlock's words stunned me.

Could it be...it didn't affect him?

Why?

"--I am blind. Around 60 years ago, when I was poisoned, I became blind."

"...!"

"However, nobody knows. They think I move like I still have my sight, but in reality, I am far more clear on what is happening around me than you, who still retain your sight. In the beginning, this was possible because of my deductive ability, but now, just through the flow of air and sound, I can understand. For example, right now, your heartbeat is racing from surprise--it's as clear to me as my own."

We were completely taken in...

Everything was useless.

The plan that we made. The Butei bullets that Nii-san gave me. Aria's sacrifice...

".....!"

Within my body, there appeared to be the sound of an explosion.

Thunderclouds seemed to be moving through my body--

I was extremely clear, that was the berserker blood, which I had been suppressing all this time, flowing out.

My vision, narrowing greatly, focused on Sherlock's body like a homing radar.

--Ah, this is how it is.

You are a great person of history. A famous detective who transcends space and time. My small tricks could not possibly affect you.

"Kinji...run away! I'll persuade great-grandfather...!"

"--Do you think you can? Aria, back away."

I stood in front of Aria. Releasing--all the ferocity from Hysteria Berserk.

Release? No, that's wrong.

It burst out. It had nothing to do with my own thoughts.

"Sherlock."

"What is it?"

"Let's decide it now."

"Decide what?"

"Detectives and Butei--which one is stronger?"

My right hand whipping out my Beretta, I stood my ground.

In front of Aria, as if I was trying to hold Sherlock back.

Aria. The fact that you yourself have lost your sight--makes me a little relieved.

Because this means that you won't be able to see me rip apart your most respected person.

"...Kinji-kun. I've met with all manner of vicious and strong monsters from all over the world, I've been fighting for over 150 years. And you, you are but a child that has been living on a peaceful island for 17 years. That inexperienced you--wants to fight with me?"

My left hand flicking open the butterfly knife, I glared at Sherlock angrily.

"That's right. In the eyes of a great, famous detective like you, I'm probably just an inexperienced kid, right? Even as a Butei, I am but the lowest of the low, an E rank. But...I haven't fallen to the point where I'll let someone who hurts my partner go."

"Is Aria so important to you? Ah, that is certainly good to hear."

With a toying expression on his face, Sherlock removed his coat.

"As an elite, I have already warned you, but you didn't accept. Understand?"

The recorded opera, "Die Zauberflöte" as a BGM--

Sherlock raised the thick, metal cane hanging on his arm.

Not a...gun.

"Is it alright if you don't use a gun? I'm not the type who respects his elders."

Saying this, I put in the last of the 9mm Parabellum ammo--put it in the magazine of black Butei bullets that Nii-san had given me, and slotted it back into the Beretta.

"As for guns, I will use one later, just once. And I deduce that it will be the full stop of my "Study in Scarlet", an extremely important gun."

"A Study in Scarlet"? I don't understand what that is...but you dare underestimate me?

Do you think that if you battle with me like this, one cane will be enough?

"Come at me. As you said, there's no need to respect your elders in battle. Don't hold back."

You'll be the one to do that, right?

This is a good chance to put off the use of your gun.

More than that, this is an extremely rare, excellent opportunity.

"Don't worry, Sherlock. I am a Butei. A Butei's mission--is the arrest of outlaws."

Saying that, I--raised my Beretta, aiming it at Sherlock.

"--My mission, I will fulfill it!"

Bang!

That one bullet raced towards Sherlock--*Clank!*

Sherlock raised the cane as if it were obvious, blocking the bullet.

The sound of metal hitting metal rang out, and the bullet, deflected by the cane, raced towards the ceiling.

"SHERLOCK!"

Immediately after, I fired my 2nd bullet--shooting the black bullet that Nii-san had given me.

When Sherlock put his cane up once again--for a moment, he frowned--

--*BAAAANGG!!*

My arms shielding my face, I protected myself from the shockwave.

Aria, behind me, yelped with surprise.

...Ama...amazing...!

This is the first time I've used such a thing!

That bullet, holding the power of an RPG, something I had only seen in Assault, Sherlock...took it full to the face.

From the information source that is me, he was unable to deduce this firepower.

Because I myself--didn't know that the power of Butei bullets was this powerful.

So, he had no way of knowing. Not knowing about this attack, he defeated himself.

Sherlock, great detective.

The reason for your defeat was your ultimate reliance on your deductions.

(How could I...let everything go your way.)

From my mouth, whose lips were broken during the battle with Aria, *Phoo* I spit out blood.

Sherlock Holmes was a unique, famous detective. I don't think that he would die from just this...but maybe, I did it.

Maybe, I went back on Butei Law article 9.

As I was scanning for Sherlock's condition--

--!?"

Pa--

A chilling feeling ran through my body, almost like electricity.

In the midst of that smoke, slowly dissipating...

-He was there.

He was there.

And...like the first time we met him, no, he was releasing a crushing aura of existence that dwarfed the one he had displayed at that time.

(Wh-what is this...!?)

That feeling...that breathing...

That is, Hysteria Mode...!?

--Until now, I've been 'studying', Kinji-kun."

In the depths of the warehouse, the white smoke permeated the hall, in the wake of a hissing sound.

The black smoke from the explosion completely dissipated, as if being chased away by the white smoke.

Standing within the swirl of black smoke, Sherlock Holmes--was completely untouched.

He had gone into Hysteria Mode.

He--how did he do it.

No, it was exactly like what he said, "Practice"--It's not impossible that Sherlock managed to do it, just like Vlad Dracula's ability to assimilate a hereditary state like Hysteria Mode.

But, how did he do it! In this kind of situation!

Shouting this out in my heart, the image of Nii-san from just now appeared in my mind.

(--Hysteria Agonizante--)

The Hysteria Mode at the edge of death.

...So that's how it is...!

It may not look like it, but he is reaching--the end of his life.

From the very beginning, he was at the edge of death.

Taking the fatal blow of the Butei bullet directly, he was completely awakened. It awakened the derivative of the Hysteria Mode that is passed on through the generations of men of the Tohyama bloodline.

"From now on...I will start your 'tuition', after this I will exhibit the abilities of all those enemies you have fought before. After all, in this place, I am called the same name as my mortal enemy--'Professor'"

Sherlock ripped off the jacket and shirt that had been ripped to shreds by the Butei Bullet--

On that naked torso, there was a frightening amount of muscle.

And it wasn't the bulky, bulging muscle that Vlad had. It was the type of muscle that only the best of athletes attained, a perfect, tight body. And the surface of that muscle was filled with the scars of old battles.

....*Zzzzz*....*Zzzzz*...

The ground beneath started to shake.

Staring at him, behind Sherlock's back--the bottom part of the gigantic, pillar-like ICBM--the nozzle of the jet engine started to release white smoke.

Isn't that preparation for immediate launch?

Something bad is going to happen.

Thinking this way, I--

--laughed...my hair was dancing about from the hot air rising up from below the grating.

It was as if I was becoming one of those berserkers in the world of Butei. A reckless Butei, a Butei that is not afraid of death.

The opponent is Sherlock Holmes. The person who beat back Nii-san, who was using his full power, the strongest enemy yet.

And added to that, he was in Hysteria Mode. There is no chance of victory.

If I was in the normal Hysteria Mode, which would calmly assess the situation and take appropriate action, I would have, for the sake of Aria's safety, chosen to temporarily retreat.

But, the blood that is flowing through my body now is the blood of Hysteria Berserk.

Doing things for the sake of testing the distance in ability. Those pieces of trash that would do anything just for that.

I just, I just--want to fight him. One on one.

I wanted to lay him low, I wanted him to taste my power.

I wanted him to understand, never to lay a hand on my partner ever again...

--*Clatter!*

His back facing the white smoke, he threw the broken metal cane onto the ground with a sound reminiscent of heavy machinery.

The cane shattered--and from inside it, he drew a hidden blade.

That blade, slightly turned over--radiated dazzling light, leaving no doubt that it was a sword of legend.

I had seen that in the appendix of Assault's textbooks. It was made to be slender because it is sheathed in a cane, but that blade, looking like that of a rapier...

Is probably a scramasax.

If we were to compare it to Japanese swords, it would be made in the same period as the ancient swords. It was made in Europe, a very durable single-handed blade.

"...That's a nice knife."

"--It would be better if you did not ask its name. This is an English national artifact that my Queen, her majesty lent me. And as for this blade, after this, your bloodline might feel its sting as well."

"I have no interest in its name. After all, if it isn't Excalibur, then it's probably Ragnarok or something."

As I casually named the names of legendary swords in games...

Sherlock, a little surprised, raised his eyebrows.

As if saying..."How did you know?"

"Haha. An impressive deductive ability. You have what it takes to be a detective. I guarantee it."

"You...are actually a very casual person."

Already out of bullets, *Click*--I flicked open my butterfly knife.

The ignition fire of the ICBM, illuminating the room below, slowly became clearer and clearer.

"It looks like we don't have much time left. Let's finish this in 1 minute."

Sherlock, his feet looking as if they were flowing through the white smoke, walked this way.

"How coincidental. I was thinking that as well."

And I approached Sherlock as well.

Afterward--when we were 5 meters away from each other, we--

Da! We charged simultaneously, clashing together.

The blade and knife, clashing together with a ringing sound, sent up showers of sparks--
KCCCHHHH

The ball of lightning, suddenly appearing in front of my eyes, made me bend backwards.

Lightning...!?

Well, it was within my expectations. Ever since he said this would be the time for "Tuition."

If I didn't have the reflexes of Hysteria Berserk to dodge backwards, I would have definitely been stunned by the electricity.

But, I can still fight--! Using my hands like a spring, I bounded back up from the floor, but at some point in time, by my side--not only was there smoke, but mist was there as well.

--?"

Shh! Following the impact, something, easily piercing through my bulletproof vest and into my shoulder, which suddenly had a wound on it. Ignoring the pain and reaching out to my shoulder--there were no bullets.

My wound...was wet.

I'm afraid that...this is water. High pressure arrows of water, piercing through my shoulder.

Outside of electricity, he can use mist and water?

Sherlock. To be honest, you should quit being a detective and join a circus.

As I swore at him in my heart, something pierced my foot with a *Hss!*

The me in Hysteria Mode tried to dodge, but my right foot--was filled with a sharp pain.

I fell forwards, clutching at my calf. On it, there was a gaping wound which had been sliced open by a thin blade.

--The slicing just now had no feeling of impact. it was like being sliced open by a sickle. It was an attack--of wind.

Backing up from electricity, losing my vision from mist, my limbs injured from water and wind, my movements continually slowing down, I...

Shook...and when I tried to stand up--

--*Hyyu!*

Piercing through the mist, Sherlock raised the blade, gleaming like a gem!

That blade raced straight at my left chest--

--*KCCCCCCHHH!*

Sparks flying furiously, I just managed to catch that blow on the edge of my knife.

But, that single-handed sword seemed to be made out of some sort of special metal, it was far more heavy than it looked.

--!"

The handle of my dagger, blown away by the force of his blow, rammed into my own chest, and I flew back as if I had been hit by a truck.

I went through the mist and smoke, smashing violently into the steel wall.

I forcibly held back the blood that threatened to rush up my throat--but still, with a coughing noise, I spat out blood, unable to stop myself. I-it hurts, this--it looks like I've fractured my ribs.

Within my line of sight, hazy from the enormous impact, Sherlock followed up with another attack.

That sword, held in one hand, was still aimed towards my left chest--!

"!"

In this short time--Dodge it!

--*KCCCCCCHHHHH!*

The western sword cleaved through my bullet-knife proof vest like it was paper.

"KINJI!"

Towards Aria, who was wailing--

With the last of my strength...I smiled a smile which conveyed "Don't worry."

Sherlock's sword, from my bullet proof vest--

-pierced through the side of my ribs, burying itself into the steel wall behind me.

Dodging an expert in fencing--who was also in Hysteria Mode--His sword piercing the side of my ribs...If I wasn't in Hysteria Berserk, there's no way I could have done it.

Well, I could clearly feel that the edge of the blade had pierced through the side of my vest.

Nailed to the wall, along with the bullet proof vest, I--

"Now that I think about it, this vest is of no use against you!"

-and I ripped the vest off.

Immediately slashing with my knife--

Sherlock, using my fist as a footrest, jumped backwards, doing a flip.

And...*Shh*

Flying as if he was weightless, he gracefully landed a few meters away from me.

His sword...was still buried in the wall. He left it.

Just now, deciding whether to take the sword or leave it- it can't have been easy in that short a time.

If I had hesitated even one moment in lashing out, he would have buried his sword in my throat.

--...O zitt're nicht, mein lieber Sohn...!--

At that time, Mozart's "Die Zauberflöte" pierced the air...

--an *Aria*--

Brazenly going into heavy vibrato, it entered into a graceful, beautiful female *Aria*.

"How...will you still come at me?"

Expression frozen, Sherlock.

"As this opera went into the *Aria*--I had thought to make you silent. You fought on longer than I had deduced- that, I fear, is because of those reflexes, faster than HSS. It is that which confused my deductions, also confusing 'Cognis'."

...Is that so?

It looks like while Sherlock knows about Hysteria Normale and Hysteria Agonizante, he doesn't know about Hysteria Berserk.

"Which means, for the first time in my life, I made a false deduction. You are a man worthy of praise."

"I...am not somebody that is worthy of your praise."

Saying that while shrugging and facing Sherlock--

"I am but a high school student. And I am very low-ranked, in a very rough school."

Shh...

Kch

The butterfly knife, spinning around in my hands, closed.

"...Why did you keep your weapon?"

"--You were waiting for me, just now."

Just now, when I had fell down from the wind sickle and water arrow--

You had the opportunity to send me to eternal rest. Many opportunities.

But...before I stood up, no attacks came.

You were waiting for me to stand up.

"This way, we're even."

If I thought about it normally, I had no strength to spare to disadvantage myself like this.

However, I may have the resolve of a berserker right now, but not owing something to the enemy is something that I am serious about.

Seeing me close my knife and pocket it, Sherlock's face reddened, as if he was a little embarrassed.

Ah?

This expression...where have I seen it before?

...Ah.

It's amazingly like Aria's.

It's like when I'm teasing- Aria.

Suddenly noticing this, I felt my mouth slowly ease into a smile.

"It may have been denied by you, but I still want to say it. You are an impressive boy. This is the first time I've had this feeling since Reichenbach."

"This song wasn't written by Bach, but Mozart.."

The *Aria* still resounding in my ears, I answered, and Sherlock chuckled.

What is it?

Was there something so interesting about what I said? I didn't say anything of note, did I?

But this...was exactly like Aria, sometimes randomly laughing at what I'm saying. It looks like I'm very amusing to them in some inexplicable way.

"Kinji-kun. Saying this might not be very fitting in a battle but- I like you. I was impressed by your will to keep this battle fair, and I want to fight with you bare-handed from now, but...I'm very sorry. This *Aria* is the last lesson--this is the bell for the start of the lecture on the 'Study in Scarlet.' Because, as a gentleman, I have to be punctual."

(...A Study in Scarlet...?)

Once again saying these words, which seemed like they were out of a riddle...I couldn't help but frown.

And opposite me, Sherlock, softly closing his eyes...Around him...slowly...

...Wh-what...is that...?

-light started radiating of him.

That wasn't a hallucination. His body, started to glow.

Sherlock seemed to be releasing some sort of power.

That light, as I looked upon it, became more and more vivid.

And--slowly...it turned scarlet...

--The reason I could become the captain of I-U, was because of this power."

That light seemed to be some sort of gas, floating around Sherlock.

And I--had seen that light before.

It was the scarlet light that had appeared around Aria during the battle with Patra.

This and that--looked completely alike.

"But, I'm not ready to use this power. Because the 'Study in Scarlet'--the research on Hidan[\[4\]](#) has not been completed."

Speaking, the gun that Sherlock drew was--an Adams 1872 MKIII.

The former weapon of the English Imperial Army, it is a 45 caliber double-action pistol.

"...That 'Hidan'...you've shot it before too?"

"I'm afraid that what you're talking about is a different image entirely. The ball of light that Aria shot out of her finger before--isn't Hidan. If we were to use ancient Japanese words, it would be called 'Hiten Hiyoumon[5].' However, it is one of the manifestations of Hidan."

Saying this, Sherlock opened the magazine of the pistol--*Click*

And the single bullet that was inside it, he took out.

"This, is a 'Hidan'"

The tip of that bullet--almost like fresh blood, almost like a pure rose, almost like a blazing inferno--was a deep scarlet.

"This bullet is Hidan. No, the form is of no import. This is called Hihirokane[6] in Japanese...which is this metal. You probably remember the cross that Mine Riko, Lupin the 4th uses. In that, there is a trace of the same kind of metal that is used in this bullet, Irokane. Irokane...is something that makes all magic look like child's play, an enormous, colossal material that is filled with supernatural power. Also known as, 'The Core of the Supernatural World.'"

Hearing his words, I thought about Riko's blue cross.

Now that I think about it, only when Riko held that cross could she move her hair like a hand.

Thinking about it with the new information that Sherlock had just told me--that cross, as well as the scarlet bullet that Sherlock was holding now, is imbued with a very dangerous metal, able to make a normal person an ability user.

...But...Aria, standing behind me, has nothing like that.

So, why was she--able to emit that scarlet light?

"--Right now, the world is entering a new war. The existence of Irokane, as well as all the power and properties that it holds, are being studied as we speak...in completely confidentiality, it is being researched. The same as my 'Study in Scarlet'. The only groups that hold Irokane are I-U, and in Northern Asia, "URS", in the south of Hong Kong, there is "Ramban". In my country of origin, England, one of the most well-known groups in the world is acting as well. Italy is supporting the Vatican City, one of the non-governmental organizations, from the shadows. The number of instances of Irokane around the world that receive governmental-support are too numerous to mention. The White House, and Hotogi, also in your high school, in Japan's Imperial Household Agency--Ah, I've said too much. And, those people, like me, who possess large amounts of high-grade Irokane constantly observe each other's Irokane--but because of that abnormal power, so absurdly enormous, we are all caught in a deadlock."

Saying this, Sherlock put the scarlet bullet back inside the chamber.

"However, using the bullet needs a little bit of time--I'll let you see a little more."

With that, he pointed the forefinger of his right hand towards me.

"The phenomenon you've seen before, is this, right?"

The scarlet light enveloping Sherlock's body...gathered at his fingertip.

(It...It's the same! As that time...!)

This scene was completely the same as the one where Aria used the bullet of light to attack Patra.

That technique, similar to an artillery shell--Sherlock can use it as well?

This is bad...!

This is horrible!

"...Kinji, what happened...?"

Aria, her eyes not yet fully recovered, were staring forward blankly.

I forced my quivering legs to move, finally reaching a point in front of Aria where I could protect her from Sherlock.

But...the light that Aria had emitted during the fight with Patra had enough firepower to eradicate the top of the pyramid, leaving not a trace. And my actions, using my body, which didn't even have a bulletproof vest, to act as her shield--is like using a biscuit to block a bullet, completely meaningless.

And even more unfortunate--I felt that the blood of Hysteria Berserk was slowly returning back to the normal Hysteria Mode. Like Nii-san said, the blood of berserkers was extremely unstable--like the tide, it would rise and fall.

Taking the opposite action as what I had done during the fight with Aria, I tried to awaken the blood with my own consciousness, but--I couldn't do it.

I can control it to a certain extent, but I cannot call the blood of the berserker.

Swallow Swallowing the saliva in my mouth, I, behind me--

"...?"

A scarlet light...

Another scarlet light had appeared.

I turned around, noticing that it was appearing from Aria's body.

"Aria...!"

In front of my eyes, light was continually building up in front of the forefinger of Aria's right hand--

It was smaller than Sherlock's, but another sun started to shine.

"What...what is...this..."

Apparently able to distinguish between darkness and light, Aria's head turned to face her right hand.

"Aria-kun. This is 'Consona'. When people who carry high-grade Irokane meet, and one of their Irokane is awakened--they will undergo something like resonance and tuning, also awakening the attributes of the other Irokane. At that time, the phenomenon will also resonate. Like now, as both your forefinger and my forefingers are emitting light."

Saying this, Sherlock--

-pointed his forefinger, which was continually collecting scarlet light, towards us.

"Aria-kun. I am going to fire this bullet of light, 'Hiten' at you. As far as I know, the only way to stop this is to use the same technique, 'Hiten' creating a collision. I haven't tested this before, but in ancient Japanese texts...it is written that this will calm Hiten, transforming it into "Koyomi Kagami^[7]"

"Great...grandfather...?"

Sight slowly returning, Aria had no idea of what to do.

"Just now...you said 'as long as you don't order me to do so', you would not fire at me. Then-- Now, I am ordering you. Fire that light at me."

"...At great-grandfather..."

She may be still confused, but she understands this dangerous atmosphere.

Sweat appeared out of Aria's forehead, and that expression slowly turned into one of hysteria.

"That's right. Make sure that the Hidan does not take your consciousness--calmly, deeply-- concentrate the power in your fingertip, as if trying to keep it there. Kinji-kun...be Aria's eyes."

"Wh-who would trust what you're saying? You won't shoot. Aria is your--"

"I'll tell you this, I'm already extremely desperate."

What I had said just now--probably with Riko's voice-changing--Sherlock repeated it, in the same voice.

And, seeing Sherlock blink at me like Aria...

I fell silent for a few seconds, thinking deeply.

If we get hit by that light, we would be blown into pieces, as if we had been hit by Shinkansen Line.

Judging from the speed from before, when Aria had used it, dodging this bullet of light at this speed--'Hiten', would be very difficult. No, aside from me, Aria, still unable to see, would never be able to dodge it.

I found it hard to accept that Sherlock would kill Aria, but from the situation...

He's at a dead-end?

"I...don't understand. I don't understand anything."

Helpless, tossing this sentence down, I...

"However, I understand one little thing. You are about to act. And we have but one thing we can do. This is how it is, right? Sherlock?"

"Well said, Kinji-kun. Please, from now till eternity, use that excellent deductive reasoning and situational judgement of HSS--to help Aria."

If you want that to happen, then don't say HSS so carelessly.

If you let Aria know about the existence of Hysteria Mode, I will be in deep trouble.

I pursed my lips...holding up Aria's hand.

"...Kin-Kinji...?"

"--I will explain all that I understand to you. Right now...Sherlock is aiming the main battery of his battleship at us. I may say this, but this is not just an analogy. His ability really has the firepower of a battleship battery. And, Aria. You too...I may not know why, but on your finger--there is a similar battery."

I held Aria's hand lightly, pointing it towards Sherlock.

"Aria...this should be it."

I touched that finger, glowing with light, stretching her forefinger outwards...but, it was not hot at all.

I, holding her hand from the back, reached both our hands out, supporting hers with mine--

Her eyes still slightly blurry, unable to aim, Aria...I grasped her right hand.

The target is, Sherlock's fingertip.

And on that fingertip, the scarlet light...!

"Kinji..."

Aria turned to me in fear.

"Don't worry. When you were fighting with Patra, you used it once, though you were unaware of it at the time."

Saying this, I clasped that trembling right hand with both of my hands.

"And, I may not be able to help...but I am at your side. No matter what happens, at the very last moment, I will still be by your side."

Hearing my words...Aria's trembling calmed down.

Focused on that small fingertip, the light became stronger, becoming like that of Sherlock's.

Seeing this scene, Sherlock, on the other side of the scarlet light--smiled.

"You've found a good partner. Aria-kun."

He looked exactly like a teacher looking on a student who had passed her exam.

"Just like how I had Watson, the people of the Holmes bloodline require a partner. At the end of my life...seeing you two as a symbol of co-operation, of mutual support, I..."

Sherlock stretched his forefinger out even further--

"--am very lucky."

--*Paa*.....

-he emitted the light.

As if responding to that trigger, Aria's light left her fingertip with a *Paa*

"...!"

The two lights collided in between Sherlock and us...

In the air--it stilled.

A terrifying silence.

Afterward, it melded...

Becoming one.

--I deduced the date of my death."

From the light, Sherlock's voice reached us.

"No matter how much I extend my life, in the year 2009--today, I can only last until now. So before that, I have to let one of my descendants 'succeed' the Hidan. Because originally, the Hidan was only given to us to pass down by her Majesty, who said, 'Let the Holmes family research it.'"

Within the dazzling scarlet light, I hugged Aria's head, not wanting her eyes to get any worse.

But...

Suddenly becoming strong, they suddenly shrank as if the energy within had been discharged.

"But, after I had done that, I researched that...there are 3 difficult conditions to succeeding the Hidan.

The first, there is only a certain type of personality that can awaken the Hidan. They have to be passionate and prideful. I don't believe myself to be that way...but, they have to have the personality of a child.

However, in the ranks of the Holmes family, no such person exists. Therefore, I could only continue to wait for a descendant that fit that criteria. And the one that appeared--was you, Aria-kun.

The second condition...I can't explain it, for the sake of what comes after for you two...but if she wishes to awaken the Hidan, Aria's heart, as a woman, needs to grow."

In the wake of Sherlock's words, the scarlet ball of light slowly became transparent.

"The third condition--before the successor's ability is awoken, they have to coexist with the Hidan for at least 3 years. Like an egg undergoing incubation, it cannot leave the successor's body--"

Slowly melding together, the light slowly changed its appearance...

...It slowly became a transparent lens roughly 2 meters in diameter.

"It may seem easy, but it is an extremely difficult task. After all, the other holders of Irokane are continually spying on each piece of Irokane, so if one isn't awakened, it is very hard to keep it from their hands.

Therefore, I, who was awakened, have been keeping the Hidan until this day--

--and from today onwards, the awakened Aria will keep the Hidan.

For the sake of this day, I had to keep the Hidan safe until this day, but I also had to give it to the you of 3 years ago. For me, this was the greatest challenge of my lifetime. But, the thing that solved that challenge--was also the Hidan."

The Sherlock within my line of sight slowly became hazy.

From inside the lens of light floating in the air, something appeared.

What is it...it's something like a portrait.

The thing that appeared in the lens--no, it was not a portrait.

Something, something with substance, appeared within the lens.

Something the shape of a human...

"Kinji...what's happening...who is...that...!?"

Her eyes more or less able to see, Aria stared at the lens in rapture, furrowing her brows.

But, I did not answer.

Because what started to exist within the lens...

Made me speechless.

"This is it...! This is what is written in ancient Japanese scrolls, 'Time Mirror'--a lens which transcends space and time. However, this is the first time I have seen this with my own eyes."

Filled with some sort of excitement, Sherlock's voice was not fully absorbed by our ears.

Stopping us in our tracks, appearing inside the lens--

Appearing inside the lens, that person is--

That is...!

(--Aria--?)

Aria, not the one in my embrace right now, but another Aria, appeared inside the lens!

Not strawberry blonde, but flax colored twin-tails that shone like golden thread.

Her eyes were different as well. They were not camellia, but an azure reminiscent of sapphire.

But, that is definitely Aria. Having been her partner for so long, I understood. That aura, that expression, it could not be anyone other than Aria...!

Wearing an evening dress with no back, Aria was happily talking to somebody, not shown inside the lens. That face was totally unaware of this angle.

"Aria-kun. When you were 13--you were shot at your mother's birthday party."

Hearing Sherlock's words, I suddenly realized it.

Because Aria had always been so small, I hadn't realized till just a moment ago that there was no particular difference with her appearance in the mirror, and her appearance as of now.

But, I vaguely understood.

The Aria in the lens seemed to be more childish than the Aria who was beside me.

It may be unbelievable...but that...is the Aria of the past...!

"I...I was shot by someone. But, that...what does that have to do with now..."

Aria, replying, turned towards the direction of Sherlock's voice.

"--I was the one who shot you."

"!"

I understood. Aria, in the midst of my arms, froze out of indelible shock.

"No, it's now that I will shoot you. However, both ways of saying it are completely correct."

Saying that, Sherlock *Click*--

Raising the pistol in his left hand, he pulled back the hammer of the Adams MKIII.

"As long as I use the power of the Hidan, I can even open the gates that lead back to the past. Right now, I will have the you of 3 years ago, succeed the Hidan."

Sherlock--"The Man Beyond Space and Time" pointed the gun in his hand towards the Aria in the lens.

This shocking scene reached into the deepest part of my heart, terrifying me...I had no idea what was happening in front of my eyes.

But, even though that is the case, instinctively--

"Sto...stop--!" -I ran forward!

For the sake of stopping Sherlock. For the sake of keeping the Aria in the lens from being hit.

I charged towards the Aria in the mirror.

"There's no need to worry. I am a famed marksman, after all."

The Aria in the lens was totally unaware of Sherlock, who was speaking. She was completely vulnerable.

"ARIA!"

I knew that it was of no use, but I could not control the scream that erupted from the depths of my being.

"--ARIA! --DODGE IT!"

This sound-- Did she hear it?

The Aria in the mirror, *Shh*, widened her beautiful, azure eyes.

And...turning this way, she looked directly into my eyes.

That back, completely exposed, was facing Sherlock.

"--And...in this place, I met you--"

The words that Aria had spoken just as we entered the warehouse flashed into my mind--

Bang...!



The sharp crack of a gunshot pierced the air.

Having been shot by the "Hidan" at close range and falling down in shock, Aria--

--Inside the mirror, she became blurry...

And like a movie fading out, she slowly disappeared.

"...!"

The hand that I had stretched out towards Aria grasped nothing but air, and stumbling--I sprawled onto the steel grating.

Aahh...

Is that how it is...because of this, Aria...

--can use the scarlet light.

Aria...she said that the bullet that she was hit with in 13 still remained, embedded deep inside her body.

And that bullet was shot by Sherlock, who, with the power of the Hidan, opened the gates of time to the past.

--That was the "Hidan"...!

"Aria-kun--there are two points I must warn you of in advance. This has to do with the side effects of the Hidan. The Hidan has the ability to extend your lifetime, but at the same time, it will heavily delay all growth in your body. From that point onward, your body hasn't grown much, correct? Also, from what is recorded in the scrolls, if Irokane is embedded into the body of someone in the midst of growth--the color of their bodily characteristics will also be changed. It may not be able to change the color of your skin, but your hair, your eyes will all slowly progress to an exquisite scarlet. Exactly like the you--of right now."

Unable to protect the Aria of the past, still lying down on the floor, I dazedly listen to Sherlock's voice, which sounded like a teacher explaining a lesson...

"With that, the lecture on my 'Study in Scarlet' is over. All that I have uncovered about the Hidan...I have told you."

Gazing upon Aria...probably because he had lost the Hidan, which extended his lifetime, Sherlock, seeming to gain several years in a heartbeat, finished speaking.

"Kin...Kinji...Kinji? Are you alright!?"

Aria, rubbing her eyes, swaying unsteadily, rushed to my side.

Thinking that I had been shot by Sherlock and worrying, Aria's eyes appeared to have fully regained her vision. However--it appeared that she was still very disoriented, and she hadn't seen the scene of herself getting shot.

Like that, it appears that she had no idea of what had just transpired.

"Aria-kun, Kinji-kun. The 'Study in Scarlet'...I leave it to you. The fight between the keepers of the Irokane, we are still in the stage of mutual containment. For now, things will be kept in the stalemate that we have now. However, the battle will soon be realized, and you will probably be sucked into the midst of it. Until that time, please protect the Hidan from the hands of evil--This, is for the world."

Sherlock, speaking like a teacher finishing his lesson, looked at us.

I...glared at him.

Did you say...the world?

Stop.

I won't let you--I won't let you say anything else.

I won't let you--play with Aria's fate again!

"Don't fuck with me...!"

Already looking 35--the same age as he was in the photographs in textbooks--Sherlock...In front of him, I stood up.

At that time, that unrivaled darkness, that unparalleled bloodlust--the blood of Hysteria Berserk welled up within me again.

"Sherlock...are you trying to make Aria enter that kind of dangerous war!? Your own blood relative...you want your own great-grandchild...!"

--Nii-san had said it. Hysteria Berserk, directly amplifies and aggravates the impulse of rage, hate and anger towards other men that I feel in Hysteria Mode.

I see. Right now, I have that kind of feeling.

I cannot forgive him. I will never forgive. Just this one man, this one man who treats Aria like a tool to be used, toying with her in the name of fate...This man, I WILL NEVER FORGIVE--!

"Kinji-kun. You still do not understand how important Aria is to this world. Just like the world before the 21st century needed me, she is an important character in the world of today."

"--YOU'RE WRONG!"

I bared my canines like Aria, interrupting him.

--Now, I will be the one to interrupt.

"She's just a high school student! I know that very well...!"

As if trying to get Aria to retreat, I pushed her back.

"She--no matter what is inside her body, she is just a normal high school student! Loving to play with dolls, loving to eat peach buns, loving to watch the TV and laugh stupidly...she's just a normal high school student! The one who doesn't know anything at all, is you, Sherlock!"

"...I can understand your unwillingness to accept this. Because, she is your partner. Kinji-kun. You assume that there are no demons in this world. However, people with the claws and fangs of demons are innumerable. In this vast world, malicious people that you cannot even imagine want to take Irokane--"

"I have no interest in that kind of bloody world! Malice and compassion have nothing to do with me!"

Hearing my shout, filled with the rage of provocation--

Sherlock fell silent, closing his eyes.

Afterward...

"--That is the world's choice, huh?"

Saying that, he turned around.

As if he had already withdrawn himself from everything.

"...Since that is the case, live out a peaceful life. You can choose to do that as well. For the sake of realizing your resolve, realizing your will, protect Aria for eternity--safely, let the Hidan pass down to the next generation. Everything is up to you. You can do whatever you like."

Because, you are already strong enough.

"Listen well, Kinji-kun. If you want to realize your will, you have to become strong. A powerless will will be quashed by a stronger one. So, for the sake of your 'strength', I used the members of

I-U. In stages, I sent opponents that you would survive to face you, and using that method, I accelerated your growth."

...Sherlock...

Everything...!

Was everything, was all this planned from the beginning...!

I gritted my teeth, glaring at him again.

And this time, the blood of Hysteria Berserk had fully permeated my body.

After this, no matter what happens--I do not care.

Right now, I felt like nothing mattered anymore.

"...Butei Charter article 3--'You must become stronger. But above all, you must support justice.'"

"...?"

"If you are not strong, you cannot realize your will. That is absolute. However, if you do not support justice, you cannot realize your will either. That is one of the rules of Butei. You, have turned your back on that. Carrying a genius-intellect and supreme power, you wanted to hurl Aria into the midst of your danger."

"--You may be right. But, I am able to do so."

"I said I will not let you intervene."

"Then, as I said before--it's fine if you do not do so."

Leaving these words, which were like answers out of Zen, Sherlock--*Chhhhh*--*Kch!* The sword, embedded into the wall, returned to his grasp.

Tap Tap He started walking.

And, he walked towards one of the ICBMs, constantly spewing out white smoke.

As if waiting for this moment, the ceiling of the hangar opened like a valve.

From outside that big iris--

I could see the sky.

"Wait. Do you think this is over? Face me."

In the ever-growing jetstream and the air that had swirled in from the outside, the furious winds--
I shouted at Sherlock.

"What."

Talking to me with his back turned, Sherlock answered with a voice that was deeper than just now.

"I've become angry."

--*Click*--

In my hands--I flicked open the butterfly knife.

"No matter what the reason may have been, you fired and hit Aria. From behind, you shot your own great-granddaughter."

"That's right. So what? There is no way you can win against me."

"I probably can't. However, I will return that blow. Butei do not leave things unsettled. If you shot my partner once, I will hit you once."

"Do you think you can?"

"I can. 'Ouka[8]'--that one, unavoidable attack.

"...There--are things that even I cannot deduce. And your extremely illogical actions, seems to be one of those things."

"What is it."

"That which is between men and women, love."

--...!

I could not bring myself to think of the reaction of Aria, behind me--

Once again, I charged.

I did not care.

I did not have one bullet left. I was wounded all over.

But, I have to hit him once. That is absolute.

Keeping that one thought in my mind...I brought my knife up!

(This distance--I can do it...!)

Using that self-sacrificing technique, which I had only come up with in theory, "Ouka". Just as a floating cherry blossom will never return to its branch, it is only a one-use--double-edged sword.

Sherlock is a God of deductive reasoning. If I want to hit him, I have to use a secret technique that even Nii-san, let alone Sherlock, doesn't know about.

First, I sprinted as fast as I could at the enemy, forcing 36 kilometers per hour out of my body.

--These falling sakura--If you can disperse it--

My reflexes in Hysteria Mode allow my toes to move at 100 KM/H, my knees at 200 KM/H, my waist and back at 300 KM/H, my shoulders at 500 KM/H, and my wrist at 100 KM/H.

All this--even if it's just for a moment, moved together at the same time--

Final, combined velocity, 1236 KM/H--

Creating a supersonic attack!

"Then do so now!"

--*Paaaaaaaaaaaaan!!*

A sonic boom rang out from the tip of my butterfly knife.

Just like Nii-san's scythe did, the tip had surpassed the speed of sound--

On the back of the blade, small water droplets condensed, just like cherry blossoms.

At the same time, a wound on my right shoulder was ripped open by the supersonic speed, spurting out blood.

--Exactly like bloodstained cherry blossoms scattering through the air--

"UWWWOOOAAAAHHHHH!!"

This is what I had sacrificed my right shoulder for, the ultimate, the strongest blow.

An attack that humans could not possibly dodge.

And Sherlock, turning around with the sword in his hand, appeared to have realized this. He made no attempt to evade the attack.

As opposed to that, he stretched out his left fist, empty.

---*KCCCCCHHHHHHHH!*

Yes. Sherlock did not dodge.

He caught it. He used what he was most proficient in--martial arts.

--Edge Catching--Single hand version.

Just like how I had used it against Jeanne, he caught my blade between his forefinger and middle finger.

"What a shame, Kinji-kun--"

Saying the same words as Aria from just now, Sherlock slashed up with his counterattack.

But that blade, racing towards my left chest, I too--*Pa!* stopped it with a ringing noise.

In the same way, between my forefinger and middle finger--single handed Edge Catching.

"It's not a shame at all."

I'm sorry, Sherlock.

This Edge Catching, was something that your great-granddaughter taught me. A few months ago, I underwent a hellish training in order to use it.

--Sherlock and I constrained each others blades.

This is the same as with Aria just now, Threefold Repetition.

Right now, we had been forced into a situation where neither of us could move.

"--I knew--"

I said, and afterward, threw my head back violently, looking up.

"That things would come to this!"

"--!"

At the last of the last, I saw the look of surprise on Sherlock's face.

I saw 'Oh fuck' written all over it.

That's right.

Although Aria and I had been in this situation earlier, I had no way of forcing myself to do it.

But through the ironheadedness passed down through the generations of the Tohyama family, the true secret weapon--is this!

--*GGCCCHHHHHHHHHH!*

My head thundered into Sherlock's--into the world's most intelligent head.

"...!!"

The strongest detective in the world, *Shh*, his head thrown back...

Releasing his hold on the blade in his right hand, the dagger, stuck between his fingers, slowly, slowly, fell down.

Sherlock. If there's something to hate, hate the fact that you are a man.

If you were a woman, I would not have smashed into you so hard.

Shh As Sherlock fell to the steel grating--"Die Zauberflöte", resounding in the room all this time, finally fell silent.

I--deeply, took a breath.

Sprint, attack, slice, and in the end, I even used a headbutt...I may have used my whole body, but in the end, I took him out.

I defeated the world's strongest man.

"...Aria."

Calming myself down, trying to control Hysteria Berserk, I took my gaze off Sherlock--I turned around to see Aria, who was idly staring at our battle.

Aria...ran to my side, tenderly grasping my wounded, fatigued right arm.

"Kinji...you arm...how did you wound it...?"

"As opposed to Aria's injuries, this is nothing."

When I first met her, I said something like this too, right?

And also, I was in Hysteria Mode as well.

Thinking back to that, I used my right hand to cover my right arm, which had wounds crisscrossing it like lightning bolts.

Aria softly whispered, "Idiot...!", and buried her head in my chest...

She took out the handcuffs meant for Choutei, and knelt by Sherlock's side--it looks like her eyesight has completely recovered--and hesitating for a moment...

"Great-grandfather...No, I must call you...Sherlock Holmes."

Click

She bound those wrists.

"--You are under arrest..."

With this...

It's all over, right?

"Thank you for the wonderful gifts. I will accept this as proof that my great-granddaughter has surpassed me."

--!?

In the air--A very hoarse voice made Aria and I look up in shock.

That was, on an ICBM--

Grabbing hold of the open door on the top--

His wounds were still oozing blood from being smashed into, but smiling, lightly waving--

His head full with white hair, Sherlock!

"Kinji-kun. Your attack from just now, I did not deduce it at all. If it was me when I was young, I would have definitely deduced it. Well, I can't fight with age."

--!

We looked towards the Sherlock on the ground in unison, seeing that his right arm--

Shh

-had become gold sand, crumbling.

And that left hand, holding Aria's handcuffs, rushed to the Sherlock above us.

--Crap--! At the last, I was careless...!

Sherlock, taking advantage of me turning towards Aria while she was worried about my injuries-

-

-used Patra's ability to create a gold sand substitute, leaving it behind while he rushed into the ICBM!

"Sherlock, where are you going...! Won't you only live for today...!?"

"I'm not going anywhere. Isn't there an old saying like this? 'Old soldiers never die; they just fade away.' It's the graduation ceremony right now. We should celebrate with fireworks, right--?"

Seeing Sherlock stride inside the ICBM, I finally realized it.

The people in I-U modified the supercavitation torpedoes into that mini-submarine called Orcus.

And just like that, this ICBM is, using missiles as a basis--also a transportation device...!

"Great-grandfather--wait!"

Rushing forward from my side, Aria broke through the screen of white smoke, going towards the ICBM.

"Don't go...! Don't...don't...! I still have many, many, things about you, things about mother, to talk about...!"

"Aria! Don't chase him! It's going to lift off! It's dangerous!"

Aria ignored me, who was chasing her from behind, but instead, she drew her wakizashi.

"--ARIA!"

"...Great-grandfather!"

Clank!...! *Clank!*

Alternatively inserting the blades into the pillar, Aria scaled the ICBM as if it was a mountain.

"--Aria-kun."

On that tall, tall tip, his legs dangling outside the half-closed door, Sherlock said.

"It wasn't a long time, but I'm very happy. About my legacy...I'm sorry. I...don't have anything that I can give you."

"...Great-grandfather..."

"--So, I'll leave you my name. After 'Hidan' was converted into English, I had this title. 'Sherlock the Scarlet Ammo'--From now onwards, this name belongs to you."

"Name..."

"Goodbye--'Aria the Scarlet Ammo'--"

With those final words, Sherlock closed the door.

Shaking, the ICBM, slowly, slowly--

-lifted up its gigantic body.

This--this isn't good.

Aria is still on the ICBM.

And, she has already ascended to an altitude where she can't just jump off.

(...Ahh!)

Gritting my teeth, ignoring the agony that ripped through my arm, I picked up the sword that was in the hands of the fake, sand Sherlock, and with my own knife--*Kch!* I inserted it into the surface of the ICBM.

What appeared to be just a tank containing liquid oxygen and liquid hydrogen fuel, the ICBM, as opposed to the inferno below the grating, was cold, even having a layer of frost on it.

But, for the sake of carrying passengers, it appeared to have been modified so it would not be overly cold.

"Aria! Get down!"

"--No! Great-grandfather is leaving...!"

"There's no time! Get down!"

My head--water dripped down on it. Are these Aria's tears? Or is it the ice covering the surface of the ICBM melting?

Following Aria's example, I used the knife and sword to scale the ICBM.

Blood continued to fall from the wound in my right shoulder.

Tolerate...Tolerate it, Kinji...! Keep...conscious...!

Zzz....*Zzzzzz*...the gigantic ICBM began to lift off.

It flew towards the sky.

With this, there's no way we can get down!

As I was thinking this way--Aria and I, still stuck to the ICBM--

From I-U's back, we started moving outside without pause...!

".....!"

It I let go now, I can survive. The worst that could happen is that I smash into the grating, sustaining heavy injury.

But--Aria...realizing that Sherlock had already started on his final journey, had lost all sense of self.

I can't just let her go by herself.

(--Aria! You...Idiot!)

I will definitely bring you back.

Whether it be from the gates of Heaven or Hell...How could I--let you go there!

Blasting off from the deck, the ICBM visibly sped up.

Speeding directly, directly, towards the atmosphere.

Looking down, at that moment, we were only one hand length away from the deck of I-U--

-I, approaching a position where I could grab that slender leg...

(Uu...!)

At that moment, I could not move.

What...kind of speed is this!

This G-force is not normal.

A roller coaster can't even come close!

The wind pressure didn't allow me to breathe. Even keeping hold of the sword and dagger, stuck into the surface of the ICBM, took all the strength in my body.

And Aria was already, already in a state where she could only hold on to her blades, enduring it.

The scarlet twin tails looked as if they were about to be ripped off in the midst of the raging winds.

This is not only speed.

The altitude of the ICBM was continually increasing. I can't...see I-U anymore...!

"--!"

Bang!

With that noise, the ICBM rushed into the sea of clouds.

My line of vision flashed white. Small water droplets continually pounded into my face, rendering me unable to keep my eyes open.

Piercing through the cloud layer and into the sky, which was cold enough to freeze us, the air was abnormally dry.

Cracking open my eyelids, I could see the crescent moon, shining with white light through the clouds--we were racing through the air at a speed which made me think that we were going to fly onto it, going ever higher and higher.

The horizon was becoming more and more round. That is--the curvature of the Earth--

(Ho-how high is this going to go...! I'm at my limit!)

So high above the Earth that even the air had thinned out, I--used my eyes, whose eyelashes had frozen, to look at the traces of clouds, rising up high into the air like a white dragon. 1, 2, 3--there were 7.

(...That...that is...!)

Those are jet trails. The other ICBMs, launched out of I-U, at that moment, were all racing up towards the sky. They were scattering, going in all directions.

Those are, transportation devices--which means, there's somebody seated inside, right?

Yes, those are the remnants of I-U--!

As I noticed that, *Kch!*

Sherlock's blade, and afterward, my knife, left the ICBM.

(Ah-)

Without even refocusing, I had been tossed off.

Looking at Aria, whose blades had reached their limit as well, falling off the ICBM, I--

-fell towards the ground, face up.

After a few seconds, the ICBM, continually going upwards--shrank in my line of sight--only that jetstream could still be seen, looking like one of the stars in the sky.

From inside that star, I saw Aria fall.

--What would you think if a girl fell from the sky?--

Aria, in the midst of the sky, twisted around, her back facing the ICBM--

-reaching out towards me.

Falling down, the distance between us was roughly 30 meters.

I spread my arms wide, increasing the air friction, continually decelerating.

Aria, her head down, was continually accelerating.

The distance between us was continually decreasing.

--It would be a prologue to unimaginable, unique events--

Aria lowered her altitude, getting closer and closer to me.

That right hand stretched towards me with all it had.

I also stretched out my right arm, stained with blood, covered with wounds, giving all I had to maintaining this position while keeping my balance.

Flying through the sky, my hand and her hand, still had 1 meter to go--

Reach it...Reach it!

There's still 50 cm--

After, 30, just a little more...10 cm--I'm touching it--just a little more--!

"...Kin...ji..."

"...A...ria...!"

My hand and her hand, linked together firmly.

Ku! I pulled Aria while we hurtled through the air, and Aria came closer to me as if she were sliding.

In that inverse position, one facing up, one facing down, we tightly embraced each other.

And like the morning of our school's opening ceremony, we went into the same position as the bike-jacking incident.

The next moment, *Pa!*, we pierced through the cloud layer, as if we were trying to make a hole through it.

--In reality, that would most definitely be both dangerous, and troublesome--

Shh--My line of sight widened again.

Changing positions in the cloud layer, Aria and I gripped each other tightly, our heads rushing down towards the far-away sea. There's no need to say it, but dropping down from this kind of altitude...there's no way out.

When people are in free fall, they will reach a stable terminal velocity of around 200 KM/H.

If we smash into it at this kind of speed, the water will be as hard as concrete.

--But I, Tohyama Kinji--

If it's for her, I am willing to sacrifice myself.
Perhaps, like all the men in the world...Like all the heroes living in this world!

"Kinji...!"

Aria spoke, just by my ear.

"Having you accompany me like this--I'm sorry."

"Ha--You're saying this now?"

My voice had an air of abandonment.

"Thank you. Thank you, my partner. I am proud of you--"

Saying those words, full of solemnity, Aria's camellia eyes stared straight at me.

"Just like great-grandfather said...this is the 'Overture's Fine'. It's the end, yet the beginning. The age of detectives has been concluded--and now it's the start of our age, the age of Butei.

And--Butei Charter article 10--Do not give up. Butei must not give up for any reason.

Kinji, to tell the truth...Inside I-U, I...had given up several times. Before fighting with you, I had already given up on everything. But, you are the one who made me face it all again, you are the one who did not give up...therefore, we, now! Are still! Alive!!"

Saying that, Aria embraced me with all the strength in her small frame--

As we approached the sea below us, we only had 10 seconds before the distance became 0...!

"Great-grandfather definitely deduced that this would happen. Therefore, he had all the women in all the generations of the Holmes bloodline keep this hairstyle--"

She closed her eyes, seemingly concentrating on something.

"--If Riko can do it, I can do it as well...!"

Afterward...those twintails.

Not because of wind pressure--they widened, widened, opening like wings--

... *Pa* ...!

"--!"

Our stance, *Shh*...! Under the changed wind pressure from Aria's twintails, it was reversed.

Our feet rushing downwards, the velocity of our fall had visibly decreased.

Aria's long twintails--like Riko's, were controlled by her own will, opening up like wings.

The Hidan that Sherlock shot into Aria's body is the same kind of metal as in Riko's cross.

Hearing that, Aria used her technique.

Learning from sight, she followed suit.

"...Aria...!"

You're amazing! But, what is amazing isn't this power of yours.

It is your intelligence and bravery, as well as--confidence.

In this situation, with no way out, your light illuminated the darkest depths of death.

Betting it all on a method you had never used before, bravery.

And being able to make it reality, confidence.

Haha--Aria.

It will be difficult if you weren't this way. After all--you are my partner!

"Do-don't stare at me like that. Like that...it's really embarrassing...!"

Shh--

Already becoming exactly like wings, Aria's hair flapped again, riding the wind.

Is it because she was too embarrassed? As usual, exhibiting that blushing face, Aria went "Nnn...!" making an obscure noise, *Pa*. Once more, she flapped those wings of hair--

Right now, wrapped together in an embrace, our speed had slowed to that of a normal jump.

Below us, Shirayuki, on a lifeboat, was looking up at us, in a daze.

And Patra, also on the lifeboat, and Nii-san, sitting up in the midst of her embrace--That's great, they're still alive--were staring up at us in wonder as well.

"Kin-Kinji. In the end, I need you after all. Butei Charter article 1!"

In the moment we hit the water--

Aria's anime-like voice suddenly quivered, almost as if she was afraid.

"First...'Believe in your comrades and help each other'...?"

"Th-that's right. So, Kinji."

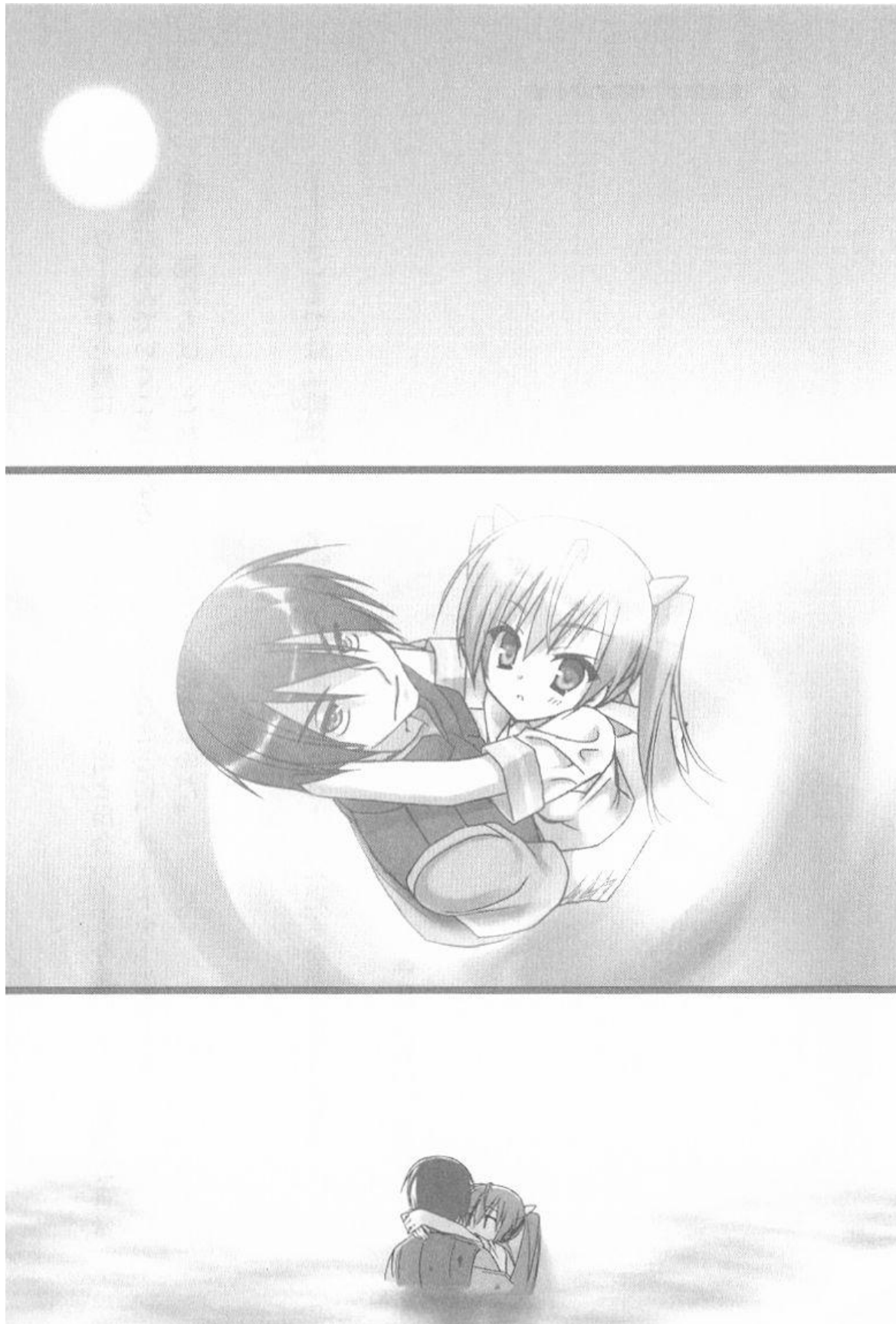
Thump

"B-be my life ring!"

Aria and I dropped into the ocean, safely--

Being clasped by Aria, just like a Koala, I chuckled, looking up from slightly beneath the surface of the ocean.

There, the glaring sunlight, was shining in the water like a silver needle.



As Aria said while we were up in the air...This is not the end.

Using the encounters with I-U as an opportunity, Aria has met new, strong enemies and allies alike--plunging into a daily life more dangerous than now. And the sad thing is, I, as her partner, have been dragged into it as well.

That's right. We have come to understand this.

--Everything that has happened up till now is just the prologue for "Hidan no Aria".

THE END!!! OF JUST!!! A PROLOGUE!!!

NOTES

4. Lit. Scarlet Ammo
5. Lit. Scarlet Sky - Lit. Scarlet Sun Door
6. Lit. Scarlet Metal - Lit. Coloured Metal
7. Time Mirror
8. Lit. Cherry Blossom

RELOAD 1: KONAYUKI, SHIRAYUKI'S SISTER

...*Hyyu Hyyu*...

Lying on the bed of the Butei Hospital, the sound of birds woke me up.

Sitting up, my torso was wearing hospital clothes reminiscent of pajamas. I used my right hand, still injured by the shock-like wounds, to press a button on the remote, turning on the TV. From the words written all over the screen, I knew that today was--August the 22nd.

That battle, almost like a nightmare, was almost a month ago.

(...Today, I leave the hospital...)

My mind still fuzzy, watching the news, I recalled many things.

Returning from I-U alive, we were pulled onto the lifeboat that Shirayuki had deployed...a few hours later, we were sitting on the secret seaplane that Logi used for our rescue mission.

The plane, driven by Muto, took 1 day to return back to the Odaiba area, and I, in a semi-conscious state, was sent by Ambulance to a nearby Butei Hospital.

As for what happened to I-U afterwards...I didn't know, nor did I want to.

--I have no wish to think about that group anymore

After all, they have already lost their leader, and have scattered--

After that, some men, dressed in black suits, declaring themselves from the government, and the teachers from Butei High all gathered in my sickroom, asking me all about what happened in I-U. And leaving one sentence, "We will take care of your rehabilitation. Do not, for any reason, spread any information about this." they departed. Those men were probably armed prosecutors from the Ministry of Justice.

And, Nii-san and Patra--well, as I predicted--vanished from Tokyo.

I may not know where they went, but I hope they are able to live out their days in peace.

And, I...

-must contemplate this. Everything that happened in I-U. I may have said that it was all for my partner, but I was far too reckless with my life.

(Kinji, this won't do, if you keep going on like this...)

Calmed down, no longer under the influence of Hysteria Mode,

If I continue to do things like that, it won't matter how many lives I have.

I can't--play with my life any longer. I have to realize the gravity of Hysteria Mode as well. With that, I can definitely, step by step, walk towards that enjoyable and normal days of a "normal high school student".

--And, these thoughts of mine--

I was discharged from the hospital, taking the first step towards my new life.

Now, Aria has been going out all day because of the things with I-U. Gathering evidence to free her mother, who was falsely charged and imprisoned, or talking about something extremely urgent with her lawyers.

I may say that, but she never even came to visit me once. No, the fact that she, who is able to make me enter Hysteria Mode so easily, didn't come is a good thing--But, it's a little cold.

So, is she taking this chance to strike...?

"Kin-chan, congratulations on being discharged!"

This is my childhood friend--Shirayuki.

I had just walked into the hospital lobby, when Shirayuki, bowed a deep, 90 degree angle bow at me, coming to pick me up.

She raised her head, and her black eyes were hazy...it seems that she had tears in her eyes out of joy, making them wet.

"Ah, aah. Thank you, Shirayuki."

When I was in the hospital, Shirayuki was amazingly kind to me.

Not only did she come to nurse me basically every day, but she really went and made Chinese medicine for me from base herbs and other materials. Not only that, she helped me with my homework. She really has such a generous spirit.

Well...As for her, being able to make a new uniform that was not even 1 millimeter tight or loose without even measuring me, she accidentally erased all Aria's contact details from my phone.

This crowd of coincidental things, upon reflection, made me just a little terrified...I'll find out about that later.

"...Now that I think about it, the herbs that you used to make the Chinese medicine were kept inside a bag from Little Hong Kong, right? Did you go to Odaiba by yourself?"

Hotogi Shrine's young lady - Shirayuki, was forbidden by her clan to step foot outside of the shrine and school.

The Shirayuki from the past would hesitate to do a minor thing like taking a light rail off Butei High, but it appears that, in this aspect, she has grown.

"Ah, mm. I was a little uneasy at first, but I was able to buy the herbs properly. Because, I am Kin-chan's private nurse after all. If it's for Kin-chan, I'm willing to do *anything*."

Saying that as if she was the luckiest person in the world, Shirayuki used her hands to cover her face, which couldn't stop smiling.

...Private...nurse?

I don't remember anything about having such an arrangement with you...Well, it doesn't really matter.

Besides that, I had already told Shirayuki in advance, "I don't want to hear anything about I-U or the Hidan, don't talk about it."

So, while I was in the hospital, she always looked like she wanted to explain those things, but now, she will completely avoid anything to do with that battle, having a normal conversation with me.

Shirayuki, heeding my words, and I talked about the second semester, walking towards Butei High's dormitories.

And...suddenly seeing the Masters' noticeboard, I stopped in my tracks.

"...!?"

Ah...What!?

I sprinted up to that paper, "Report!" written on it in big red letters, rubbing my eyes, taking another look.

I-I'm not hallucinating. Th-this is...!

Noticing my panic, Shirayuki took a look at the noticeboard as well...she too, widened her eyes with a "!"

"Students with a credit demerit at the deadline of August 20th - Tohyama Kinji - Division (Inquesta) - 1 credit demerit."

Hey...HeyHeyHeyHey...What the hell is this!

I already did the security job at the casino, right!?

Thinking this way, I looked closer, and following the main message was: "Odaiba Golden Pyramidion Security Detail, because business could not proceed at normal efficiency, the credit reward is halved (Fraction rounded up.)"

Hey, Hey, Hey...!

I have...1 credit left, if I can't get it within the summer holidays...then won't I have to stay back a grade!

"Ki-Ki-Kin-chan! Yo-your credits! Cr-cr-cre-cr-cr-cr-credits!"

Even more panicked than me, Shirayuki started flailing around...

Flip! She flipped open her Butei Handbook.

And, *Shhh*. With a terrifying expression, she used a small pen to write something inside.

"..."

Seeing her write in such a panic and not able to quell this uneasy feeling, I...peeked at her handbook...

ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY

↓

MUST EARN CREDITS → GO UP A GRADE → GRADUATE → DO BUTEI MISSIONS TOGETHER → MARRY → HAVE CHILDREN → HAVE AROUND 7 OR 8 CHILDREN → ALL OF THEM WILL LOOK LIKE KIN-CHAN-SAMA

For a second, I thought I saw an absolutely horrifying life plan scribbled tightly onto one page, but the words were too tight, so I couldn't make them out clearly.

But, I didn't take another look.

...Pretend you didn't see anything! YOU DIDN'T SEE ANYTHING!

Shhh! Radiating an aura that suggested that the pen she was holding was about to be snapped in half, she marked something down on the page titled "CREDITS" and "ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY", which incidentally, had flower drawings all over it, *Bang!* Slamming her handbook shut, full of determination...

Whoosh! Suddenly standing up straight, she spun around, facing me.

Wh-what is it.

"Ki-Kin-chan! We still have 10 days left till the Summer holiday ends! Let's think of something to get 1 credit!"

"Ah, that's right. If I don't, things will get really troublesome."

Shirayuki faced me, who was brushing the cold sweat off my forehead, and she held her first up, flashing an expression that said "Go for it!"

"I-I will do all in my power to assist! For the sake of becoming a famil...ah, um, going up a grade!"

You...how did you manage to mix up becoming a family and going up a grade? None of the characters are the same...

But, first, let's ignore what I didn't see clearly just now, an honor student will definitely be very reliable. After all, this is a dangerous situation that is far more serious than the situation with I-U, in a certain way.

So, we were going to go and look around Informa to find a quest boost, even if it took us all night...however, all the Inquesta credit missions that we found required a professional Butei.

(...This is really, really bad...)

Shirayuki and I, deciding to continue searching at my computer at home, returned to the boy's dormitories.

--We didn't know that waiting for us at home, would be an even bigger problem.

"...?"

Under the fluorescent lighting, that back, waiting for us in front of the door to our apartment, was—



On her back was a bundle with the pentagram symbol of her house on it. Her hand was holding a red, oilskin parasol, and she had black hair, going down to her shoulders...another...Shirayuki?

No, it was a girl wearing Miko garments slightly smaller than Shirayuki's, standing there.

"So, it looks like my feeling of unease has been confirmed."

Whoosh

Spinning around, that girl...glared at us.

That neat, tidy fringe may be the same as Shirayuki's, but the eyes underneath were reminiscent of a fox.

From the looks of it, she knows us...but, who is she?

"Konayuki!?"

Next to me, who was extremely confused, Shirayuki suddenly shouted in surprise.

"Kona...yuki?"

Konayuki!? It's the person from Hotogi Shrine, Shirayuki's--sister!

Relying on the memories from when I was small, I slowly thought back to Shirayuki's six sisters.

Kiriyuki, Hanayuki, Kazayuki...because Shirayuki's sisters all look like her, the only way of differentiating one from another is through their ages. However, only Konayuki is a 'different' one--she is Shirayuki's step-sister so both her looks and her behaviour was different from Shirayuki.

I remembered that she would always stick to her Onee-chan, always jumping onto Shirayuki's back and being brought everywhere, giving off the impression that Shirayuki was carrying a little monster.

"...Konayuki! Ah, you've grown so big. From what I remember, you're 2 years younger than Shirayuki. You're in your 3rd year of middle school, right?"

Just as I greeted her as if I was an uncle that was close to her family....

Konayuki ignored me, *Shh*, grabbing hold of Shirayuki's arm.

"Onee-chan, as I predicted in my 'Taku[\[9\]](#)'--has been tricked by this demonic Butei - Tohyama-sama in this evil Butei High!"

--"Taku"

Hearing this, still slightly shocked from our meeting, I vaguely remembered the rumoured divination method of the Hotogi's.

The divination of Hotogi Miko, has a "Sen[\[10\]](#)" that is the aim of divination, and the sudden realization of prediction that is "Taku"

From what I remember...the contents of "Taku" are not strictly limited to what one wants to know in "Sen", this is the divination technique that those Miko below 15 years old use.

Whoosh! Staring at me, Konayuki went on to look up at Shirayuki from contact distance.

"Walking with a boy so late, Onee-sama is unclean! Onee-sama, so pure that she is an example for any Hotogi Miko...is with a boy! So late at night!"

She started her long lecture.

Eh...glancing at Shirayuki, seeing her cower before her little sister, I checked my watch.

Right now it's 9:00.

"It's fine, right? Just going out..."

I looked at my watch, trying to speak.

"Ho-how shameless can you be...! Tohyama-sama is unclean!"

What's that supposed to mean! Konayuki didn't even give me time to speak, and with a *Pa* she pointed her finger straight at me.

"Onee-sama's curfew is 5:00! And by 8:00, she has to be asleep! These are the rules of the Hotogi!"

5:00? In modern times, even elementary school students don't go back by then, right?

But, I still had no chance to say anything--Konayuki fished out the keycard from Shirayuki's shirt pocket, opening the door to my room.

"Alright, alright, Onee-sama, don't listen to those ravings of that fallen boy! Come in quickly, and take a bath, you have to be cleansed. There's no need to pay attention to anything else right now, let me wash your back!"

Konayuki pushed Shirayuki, who had an extremely bewildered expression on her face, into the room, turning her head while closing the door.

She stuck her tongue out at me, who hadn't said a thing.

"--may you be cursed by the nail-studded ox!"

Tossing that sentence at me, *Bang!*

As if trying to blast the door off its hinges, she slammed it, *Click*, I heard the sound of a lock clicking from inside.

"Ah, this...this is my room..."

So, all that was left was one pitiful boy locked out of his own house.

No, well, I have my own keycard, so I can enter...

But they said that they were going to go in the bath, so all I can do is go down to the convenience store and read manga. I felt bad about just standing there and reading, so I bought one and returned to the dormitory.

...Why is it that I feel that this has happened before? Well, whatever.

But now that I think about it...let's exclude personality for now, Konayuki really has become beautiful.

The Konayuki in my memory was but a child, but now, she has already grown to become a very beautiful girl. If I had to say it, she has a bit of a proud air...the thing that Aria has so much expertise in. However, when she was small, she was very pretty as well, it's natural that she would grow to be such a beautiful person.

Usually, anyone who are hostile to me would instantly make Shirayuki go ballistic. It was a great trouble stopping her every time that happens, yet the Shirayuki a while ago, rebuked by Konayuki, was extremely obedient, as if she was some sort of child that had been caught doing something wrong.

That scene really confused me as to who was the older sister, and the younger sister.

Well, in front of those with the "Hotogi" name--Shirayuki still hasn't changed her habit of acting like a good girl. Well, if Shirayuki could be more gracious normally, that would be good. In terms of safety.

I returned to my own house...Uu. It might be because two girls had just bathed, but the inside of the room was filled with the fragrance of soap and shampoo, that kind of feminine scent. I can't take it.

Alright, it appears that they've bathed already. The lights are on in the living room, after all.

I don't really want to act like this, looking like I'm peeping, but if they're still changing, then it'll be trouble. So, I followed the unspoken rule that Butei must understand the enemy, and stealthily scanned the scene in the living room.

...They've already changed.

And, those are Hotogi robes, right?--they were wearing the same Miko garments.

Apparently having bathed with her sister in the cramped bathroom in my apartment, Shirayuki seemed a lot more graceful than usual...she was using a comb to fix Konayuki's fringe.

Sitting up straight as well, Konayuki was making an expression as if it were spring.

As I looked upon it, I thought that it was a cozy scene that would make anybody want to take a photo of it.

"Just now, at the last, Konayuki helped me wash, right? That's the opposite of when we were little."

"No, there's no need to thank me. Being able to help Onee-sama is something very fortunate for me. Thank you for the meal."

"Meal...?"

"Ah, um...about that, Onee-sama. Everyday I will make good things for you to eat--so please return to the Hotogi. If Konayuki doesn't see Onee-sama, she is very, very lonely."

Hurriedly changing the subject, Konayuki was making Shirayuki feel a little embarrassed. "And just like before, we can worship together, and we can do [Kagura](#) together, hand in hand, you can teach me about that dance, the attraction within it indescribable with words. As sisters, we can eat together, sleep together...ahh, once I think about Onee-sama's expressions during that time, Konayuki will...ah, I can buy you a lot of digital cameras. Any model you want."

Propping her cheeks with her fingers, Konayuki said some incomprehensible words in a very moving tone.

I may not be too clear, but in front of her most favorite big sister, her brain seems to be full of flowers.

"I'm not the only one. All our sisters really miss Onee-sama as well. The little ones, because they miss you so much, will sometimes stay awake half the night, crying."

"I-I see..."

The more she heard Konayuki's words, Shirayuki's eyes, a little drooped normally, drooped even further.

And seeing Shirayuki's anguished expression...

Her completely red, Konayuki's round eyes trembled, mouth half open--a face filled with moe. That's how Riko would put it.

Exactly like a cat with silvervine in front of its eyes.

Using my lip reading, what I deciphered from those lips, moving soundlessly was "Aah, so cute, so cute, so cute." And, she was saying this countless times. Hey, what kind of thing are you saying about your Onee-san, who is older than you? It's...terrifying.

Konayuki's fingers were constantly wiggling, almost as if she couldn't calm them down, it made me think for a second that behind her she had a wolf's tail...

Knowing by instinct that there was an extreme amount of danger approaching Shirayuki, I--

"...Sorry for interrupting."

-walked into the living room.

I had just come in when, *Whoosh!*, Konayuki's eyes, just below her fringe, stared at me.

That was obviously an expression which meant, "Don't interrupt."

And, Hmph.

She turned her head to one side.

"--Please come in. However, I'm only letting you in under special conditions."

"'Special'...? This is my apartment..."

"It's only because Onee-sama's instructions that I couldn't help but let you in."

"No, I'm saying that this is my..."

"'After they turn 7 years old, boys and girls should not reside in the same room!'"

Shh

Looking at Shirayuki, sitting up straight, her back towards me, Shirayuki pressed her hands together in a [Gassho](#), which meant "I'm sorry, Kin-chan."

Now that you mention it...Hotogi Shrine is a shrine that is extremely stern about its forbiddance of men. So, the Miko there, except for the men in the Tohyama family, who were let in for some unknown reason, have never really seen any men.

So, Shirayuki and the other Miko girls were quite scared when they had seen the me as a child. However, at that point, we were all children, so we became friends very quickly. However, in the end, Konayuki was the only one who hid in a corner, watching Nii-san and me...I've never seen her smile before.

Putting it simply, she probably hates men. Exactly the opposite of me, who hates women.

As if proving this theory, Konayuki, switching on the TV, continually flashed through the programs...looking for a series with only women in it.

...That's quite some commitment.

Should I avoid the other gender with the same commitment as her?

From the other side, Shirayuki brought a small teapot over from the kitchen.

"Kin-chan, we have rice crackers. It's a present that Konayuki brought."

Saying that, she sat next to the glass table.

Noticing that she had something else she wanted to say, I folded my legs as well, sitting by the table.

Drinking the Japanese tea that Shirayuki had made, I started eating the crispy southern rice crackers...However, feeling the killing intent that Konayuki was emitting behind me, I could not stay still at all.

"You know, Kin-chan. I found a job where you can earn 0.3 credits in half a day."

Crack Breaking the rice crackers into smaller pieces for ease of eating, Shirayuki said, smiling.

"--Really?"

"Un. I already called Masters to ask, these credits will be recognized for any division."

"Th-there's some kind of nice job like that?...What's it about?"

"Accepting a commission from a hopeful applicant, bring Konayuki to Butei High to 'tour the campus.'"

Bring Konayuki to tour the campus...

"Konayuki. Could it be that you're getting ready to enroll into Butei High?"

"Wrong. I hate schools like Butei High with all my heart. After all, this is the place which made Onee-sama leave Hotogi."

Avidly staring at the shopping scene on the TV series, Konayuki said, her back still facing this way.

Which means, bringing Konayuki to see the school...An unwilling client?

Konayuki, at that moment, seemed to be totally engrossed with the shopping mall on the TV, and she fell silent.

"Kin-chan, um..."

Glancing at Konayuki, who was still fixated on the screen, Shirayuki whispered to me,

"Konayuki is here to send a message from Hotogi...and if possible, to bring me back to Hotogi. So what kind of place Butei High is, what kind of job a Butei is...if we don't find a way to make her think that this isn't an evil place...I-I'm sorry, Kin-chan. I can't believe I'm dragging you into my personal matters."

Shirayuki put her hands together, apologizing to me.

Mm...which means, this commission will help Shirayuki?

She took care of me a lot while I was in the hospital. If I can repay her like this, it'll be killing two birds with one stone.

"...Then, I'll do it. Tomorrow morning, is that fine?"

"Yes. Because this--is Onee-sama's order. As long it is Onee-sama's order, I will hear and obey. For the sake of Onee-sama, I will do *anything* Ki,KiKi..."

...?

KiKi?

"KiKikiKi, ki...!"

I looked at Konayuki, since it appeared that there was something wrong with her, and I saw the appearance of a man in the series on the TV across from her.

And, it was a kissing scene with the female protagonist.

"--Ki!"

Crack! Konayuki smashed the TV remote as if she was trying to break it, turning off the TV. Her face was so red that it looked like it was bleeding, and she threw the remote, hitting me straight in the face.

"I-I-I-I-Impure! Unclean! I have to cleanse the infection!"

Shouting out "Ki" for some inexplicable reason and getting hit in the face for no reason at all, I...

-had a pained feeling that this job was not going to go well.

--Butei High's facilities were extremely plentiful.

After all, this artificial island, originally meant to be an additional runway for Haneda airport is very wide. Not only that, but this island received investments from the Butei Hall and the Butei Public Commission.

So, the fact that students can use facilities according to their choice and division is one of the good things about this place. For example, a 15 year old Logi student can take an exam for a driving license for normal cars, and Informa and Connect are constantly supplied with the latest technology in terms of computers and cellphones.

Therefore, the students of Butei High have large amounts of interest in this area.

However...

The morning of the following day, following us to look around, Konayuki had been in a very bad mood the whole time.

Aside from Supernatural Searching Research, the division that Shirayuki belonged in, she displayed absolute no interest, saying nearly nothing in all other classes. It looks like having to look around with me=man as a guide, made her very unhappy.

However, I hated this job as well. After all, I have to walk around the school alone with a girl.

And, she's wearing a sweater from a summer uniform that was obviously not from Butei High. Could she be any more conspicuous?

With this, "Lady-killer Kinji has gotten another girl again"...that kind of rumor, which I never wanted to hear again as long as I lived, would definitely appear again.

Now that I think about it...walking together with a girl, I, not willing to talk, suddenly thought about Shirayuki who had excused herself because of some Student Council work.

(...Now that I think about it, Riko calls Shirayuki, "Yuki-chan". So, if she comes across Konayuki, she'll definitely give her a nickname...so troublesome...she'd call her something like, "Kona-chan", right?)

Thinking about that amazingly petty subject, I...

-brought Konayuki to the last division--my old haunt, Assault.

Over here, I have to pay attention. Because, the Boy:Girl ratio is simply...too high.

"Konayuki. Watch your step, over here. If you're used to it, you'll pay attention to all your steps, because over here, there are bullet casings scattered everywhere...Therefore, out of all those students that come over here to observe, several always fall down."

Having said this, we strode into the training facility, just like a black gym--

-suddenly, *Rumble! Thud!* "Die!" "Go to hell!" Around 5 freshmen, wearing the light Armament Set A, were sparring with melee weapons.

It looks like they were fighting for real over an idol swimsuit photo.

Really...this really fits this place, where outside of strength, there are no good points;Assault(Suicide Squad).

Whoosh Glancing at Konayuki, who was next to me, it was as I had thought. She was staring at the boys, frowning.

As if seeing filth in front of her, she looked like she was sick to her stomach.

"Th-that's also one aspect of sparring."

I hurriedly pushed Konayuki's back, quickly passing by those guys, who had started a team battle.

Right now it's the summer holidays, therefore, there aren't many people on campus.

Therefore, the introduction of every classroom has been going very well. As if walking into a movie set, we walked into the exercise room, where there were several moving puppets as targets. In the classroom, I explained the basics of firing and trajectory, and in the actual firing range, I demonstrated live fire.

But, Konayuki did not react at all.

From the beginning, she had been radiating an aura which was full of apathy.

In fact, she seemed to be even more angry than we had entered Assault's main building.

"...With all that...the tour of the campus is over. Is there somewhere else you would like to go?"

Making sure I didn't trip over any casings while making my way to the corridor, I asked Konayuki a question. She shook her head.

"No. This is enough."

And, she pursed those sakura colored lips.

"--Because, I already understand completely. I understand how barbaric Butei High is, now."

"Ba-barbaric?...What about Inquesta and Informa, they're pretty peaceful, right?"

"Wrong. They are all birds of a feather. Anyways, the idea of being paid to use force is something abhorrent to me. I cannot tolerate--Onee-sama, who should be keeping herself pure, to stay here."

Konayuki insulted Butei High, fuming.

Well...normal civilians having this kind of attitude against Butei is a normal occurrence.

This tour was also meant to, for the sake of Shirayuki, who doesn't want to go back to Hotogi, improve Konayuki's impression of Butei High. However, I fear that it actually had the opposite effect.

Normally, I would agree with her, but I guess I should defend this place a little.

"Just think about it a little, Konayuki. You should look at this in another light, as well. Those with fair amounts of money and a problem to solve are continuing to increase, in Japan. Incidences with serial/street killers, assault, murder, stalkers, and theft are continually increasing, and there simply is not enough manpower in the police. Therefore, society needs Butei--"

"The one who should look at this another way is Tohyama-sama!"

Repeating the reasoning of the teachers, I was suddenly interrupted by Konayuki about halfway through.

"Making demands about the result of doing stupid things like that and putting yourself in danger, they have a responsibility too. At least, there's no way that I would let myself have that kind of problem. As long as you don't go anywhere dangerous, there's no need to start throwing money around."

"...It's inevitable, you know. The motives of some offenders are inexplicable."

Konayuki seemed to have been aggravated by my counterpoint--

"That kind of thing doesn't matter! In short, I hate Butei High with all my hate, I hate Butei with all my heart! It's because of Butei High that Onee-sama left Hotogi--I understand--Onee-sama has been tricked by Tohyama-sama, so she doesn't want to go back!"

-spouting out some childish reason, Konayuki pointed her finger at me.

(Ah, ahh...so that's how it is.)

...Konayuki has reached her boiling point.

Her most loved elder sister--Shirayuki went to Tokyo, but because she doesn't want to direct her anger at Shirayuki, so she redirected the brunt of her anger towards Butei High and Butei, the "recipient."

The way she was being so unreasonable made me a little angry...but she's my client, and a child. If I get angry over what a child says, then I fail as a man.

So, I'll take the higher ground as an adult, and let her rant on.

"Well, let's not talk about Shirayuki right now...about Butei, it is as Konayuki says. If nobody gets into trouble, that would be the best solution. That should be it--let's go back. Did you forget anything?"

Hearing me say this, an expression which conveyed her willingness to argue flashed over Konayuki's face, and she shrugged, showing off a posture which said, "Do you plan to run? Give me all you've got."...

However, I ignored it, turning around.

"The exit is over there. I'll warn you once more, watch your step. If you fall down after stepping on some empty casings, you'll have to go tour Medica."

"Fine...then, Tohyama-sama. Because the job is over, I have something to tell you."

"What is it?"

"Actually, I found out something through the 'Taku' about Tohyama-sama. As a Hotogi Miko, I have a necessary responsibility to tell the parties involved within a day--therefore, though it's a little sudden, I am going to tell you now."

Hearing that Konayuki was extremely unhappy, I turned around.

"'Taku'...? Aah, divination, huh? What is it? If it's something terrifying, there's no need to say it."

"No. It's a good omen."

Seeming to be a little embarrassed about saying it, Konayuki's eyes darted away--

"Tohyama-sama will be proposed to. This month."

Pro...Proposed to?

Proposal...? Yo-you...this is too sudden. Anyways...

"B-by whom?"

In my mind, the face of 2~3 girls who could possibly do this suddenly appeared.

"I don't know. However, there's not even the slightest chance that it is Onee-sama. That, I can guarantee."

One face disappeared from my mind.

"Don't know...You...are really irresponsible. No, before that, there's another problem. By law, men cannot be married before they're 18 years old. Your 'Taku' must be wrong."

"...Wrong? A-are you saying I'm stupid!"

As I laughed, Konayuki, just like before, started going hysterical, approaching me.

"My 'Taku' might not be able to match Onee-sama's 'Sen'--but it's correct as well! It could be recorded and sent to the Prime Minister! I went through all the trouble of telling you...and yet, you suspect me? I won't forgive you!"

Her eyebrows raised so high that they looked as sharp as a knife, Konayuki reached into the waist of her sweater.

From that movement, I understood...That's probably the sheathe for a tanto.

It looks like for Hotogi Miko, doubting their divination is extremely serious.

"Ah, hey, Konayuki. Don't be so angry. Ah, watch your step--"

However, my warning was late by a second.

Konayuki, stepping on what appeared to be a .50 Magnum casing--

"--Uwaah!"

One of her legs was thrown back violently, and she fell this way.

--Danger--

I can't let there be an accident with that tanto--!

I immediately stretched out my right hand in order to hold the hilt of the tanto that Konayuki was drawing from below...*Thump!*

Our two bodies twisted together, both of us fell to the floor.

Our position was such that Konayuki was below me, but I had managed to wrap my left arm around Konayuki's waist, so I managed to manipulate our position such that my iron head was the one that impacted the floor, keeping my client from being hurt.

I rubbed my head, which had gone fuzzy from the impact, raising my torso...my hand was holding the gold-patterned sheathe of the tanto that Konayuki carried next to her body,

"...!"

Holding the tanto, preventing an accident went well, but, my eyes--

Th-this...another accident happened...!



My hand--was raised such that I was pulling off Konayuki's summer sweater and shirt with the tanto...showing off that gold pattern on the sheath for all to see!

And unexpectedly, underneath the white themed clothing that Konayuki was wearing, I saw that she was wearing pink underwear with green embroidering.

"!"

I closed my eyes in panic, standing up, getting away from Konayuki's body.

Ca-calm down, Kinji...don't go into hysterics...!

Didn't you just reaffirm the gravity of Hysteria Mode? Anyways, if I go into that mode in front of a pure middle school student like that--it'll definitely be a trauma that will never fade!

I forced myself to start breathing deeply, calming my heart down.

It...It looks like...I'm fine.

It looks like, the fact that the girl in question was 3 years younger used up one of my nine lives.

I have no interest in people that are younger than me. That's the reason I can't become hysteric over Hiraga-san.

"....."

Because Konayuki, below me, was abnormally silent, worried, I cracked open my eyelids, seeing if she was alright...

Konayuki, *Pa*

Still in the same position as when she had fallen down, she had completely frozen.

Her eyes were extremely wide, not even blinking.

Those jet black eyes had completely lost all light, almost as if they had been stained by some sort of steam.

Because she was so still, just like a wax model...I found it very hard to speak.

So, I watched in silence...*Pa*

Wow. She moved.

Pa, PaPa!

As if she had been shocked with the current of an AED, Konayuki's body started twitching.

But, those widely opened eyes started to stare at empty space.

Sca...So scary!

"...Ah, this...I'll say this in advance, this is because I was keeping hold of your knife..."

To explain, I have to give advance warning.

Thinking of my father's motto, I spoke while retreating a few steps, in the face of this chilling situation.

"--!"

Konayuki, *Pa!*

her two legs shooting upwards, she wrapped her arms around her knees, rolling backwards.

And, *Roll Roll Roll Roll*, seeming to be running away, just like an armadillo (?), she rolled to the far side of the corridor. In short, she was putting distance between her and me.

Thud! Smashing her head against the other wall of the corridor with a sound that the whole building could hear, Konayuki became dizzy for a moment...then she stood up.

"To-To-Tohyama-sama is the worst! The worst, the most unclean! I understand completely, now! Being treated so barbarically by Tohyama-sama, I understand completely! As I thought, Butei are poisonous, Butei High is a den of demons! I'm going to report to Hotogi, and plead for Onee-sama's immediate return!"

20 meters away from me, Konayuki drew her tanto and waving it around, she started shouting.

Looking on from afar, that summer sweater as well as her shirt had been smoothed over at some unknown point in time.

"Do-don't you dare get close to me! If you come closer, I'll impale you! I will impale you, and at night I'll curse you! I'll stab 5-inch nails into random places on a straw doll! I'll use an industrial nail gun!"

...Isn't impaling me before making a scarecrow the wrong way around...

But, having heard that the straw dolls of the Hotogi could really curse somebody to death, I started nodding my head non-stop, expressing my understanding.

--I'm sorry, Shirayuki. You might really be taken back to the Hotogi.

(It looks like on Earth, there's no such thing as an easy job...)

Thinking this, having completed the 'tour the campus' mission, I used a mail to send a short report to Masters...and using the computer, I started searching for my next job.

In other news: After Konayuki came back, she took at least 10 baths.

"Don't use so much water, water isn't free, you know"--I had walked in and complained for the 5th time, but I immediately heard things like, "This is necessary for the sake of cleansing the taint of Tohyama-sama's impurity! Tohyama-sama, face the consequences for your own actions!" being shouted out in a shrill voice, coming from the bathroom. Am I a cursed item or something?

Whatever, she's going back to the Hotogi tomorrow, anyways, I'll just let her do as she likes.

"Kin-chan, Konayuki. I'm back. I'm sorry for being late."

And at one of those times, Shirayuki, bringing many ingredients for dinner, came back.

"Onee-sama, welcome back!"

Clothing herself with her Miko garments once again, covering her skin, which was shining from being cleaned so much, Konayuki, just like a guided stinger, flew into Shirayuki's arms.

And burying her face deep into Shirayuki's chest, she smiled happily at Shirayuki from between her breasts. That was a super, super, super happy smile. Despite the fact that when she hadn't smiled even once when we had spent the whole day together. (Anyways, that split personality...where have I seen that before...?)

As I thought about it, Shirayuki's--attitude switch towards Aria/me came to mind.

Shirayuki and Konayuki are very close sisters, yet, they are distant relatives. As I thought, bloodlines are terrifying.

And Shirayuki said, "Really, Konayuki sticks to Onee-chan too much," gently stroking Konayuki's head...Shirayuki, be careful. I have yet to know of any evidence of that kind of determination, but Konayuki's passion far exceeds the normal sister-love that little sisters have when they stick to their elder sisters.

No, well, love comes in different forms, I don't mean to discriminate.

But anyways, I shouldn't think about it too closely. It's dangerous. In terms of Hysteria Mode.

I've changed--I've gone into Hysteria Mode.

But, it's not because I was thinking of the relationship between the Hotogi sisters.

...This is how things went.

First, because, tired of hearing Konayuki rant on about how not sleeping at 8:00 was impure...I, with nothing else I could do, went to go lie down on the bottom bunk of the bunk bed in the bedroom, trying to fall asleep.

"--That's why...Onee-sama...Can you not give Tohyama-sama up? After all, Kanzaki Aria will sooner or later, because of the scarlet...die...since we already know it...!" "...Be careful, Konayuki. There are things that can and cannot be said...about her death...I...didn't look forward to it...at all...rather..." "...rather...I've said too much. But...--No matter what, the Hidan will fall--"

Drifting in and out of sleep, I wasn't able to hear the entire content of their conversation, but the sisters seemed to be arguing...but they made up very quickly...in the end, the sisters, close again, entered the bedroom, sleeping on the top bunk.

Ah, stuck sleeping in that cramped bed, I feel sorry for Shirayuki, as I drifted back into sleep, thinking those things...around 9:00 at night...

I dreamed of the situation where I had pushed Konayuki in Assault.

At that time, I had closed my eyes immediately, but the memory was still terrifying.

And, I don't know why, but Konayuki, who I had pushed, was Shirayuki, in my dream.

And she was still wearing those extremely sexy black underwear.

--So, I struck out.

But the fortune within the misfortune was, this was something I had separated into "Dream Hysteria"--One could say that is the safe kind of Hysteria Mode.

If I had to explain, when I'm sleeping, I'm just lying there with no girls in front of me, after all. Which means, as long as I stay still for a while, it can "fade". It's that kind of Hysteria Mode.

So, I hugged my arms to myself, and curling up my head, which had, rather pointlessly, become intelligent, I closed my eyes.

Dreams--at times, things that cause stress in the subconscious will be pulled in, and they will materialize in the conscious--

Then, what's the meaning of this dream?

Even if it's my mind in Hysteria Mode, solving this question is very difficult.

(...)

Afterward, I noticed a problem.

A problem that made me get serious.

Shirayuki may be sleeping soundly--

-But Konayuki is gone.

I can't hear any sign of her, nor can I hear her breathing.

It appears that, while I was dreaming, she disappeared from the top bunk.

I want to avoid moving while I'm in Hysteria Mode, but right now, my first priority is the safety of women. Where the hell did she go?

As her senior, I should go look for her, right--?

So, I...just like a spy, I got up, not making a sound.

I had just gone to look, when I found Konayuki.

Well, more like, she was at home the whole time.

Originally, this was a 4-person apartment, so, outside of the living room and bedroom, there are 4 small rooms, each meant for one person. One is my room, the other was occupied by Aria, who took it for her own, and the rest are empty.

And in one of those, I felt what should be Konayuki's breathing.

(...?)

I had no wish to do something like spying on a girl...but, Konayuki, so vehement that we should sleep early, moving secretly at night...It could be something that she couldn't tell us. I apologized to her in my heart, and with that, I approached the room, straining my ears.

"...I-I have to gather my courage. Tonight...is the only chance! Go for it!"

From inside, the sound of Konayuki steeling herself reached my ears.

Those footsteps were approaching the door. It appears that she was about to leave.

I used the sneaking technique that I had learned in Assault to kill all sound that might come from my feet, and I moved to the other empty room.

Spying at the corridor through the keyhole...

(...Haha...)

In my heart, I couldn't help but laugh.

Stealthily walking out of the little room, Konayuki had dressed up.

A fashionable layered skirt. A slightly adult short-sleeved jacket with a U collar and a short tank top. She was also wearing a mesh belt with a large buckle.

All this...If she were a little taller, it would be exactly the same as the coordinated sets that one sees in fashion magazines aimed at high school girls.

With unspeakably horrible footsteps, tiptoeing through the corridor, Konayuki accidentally fell backwards, right on her backside. *Thump*, emitting a noise, her face, which had had makeup applied, looked towards the bedroom in panic.

Afterward, lowering her breathing, waiting for a moment, once again, she started moving, almost like crawling...

Held in her hands were a pair of corsage sandals, also in fashion--

Click

Opening the door softly, she left the apartment.

Putting on my school uniform swiftly, I used the tailing techniques that I had learned from Inquesta to follow Konayuki.

Exhibiting a helpless look, needing to even ask a passing Butei High girl how to buy a ticket, Konayuki finally got on the monorail.

Making sure she didn't notice me, I followed from behind...reaching Odaiba, Konayuki opened up a town guide, completely covered with paper notes, hurriedly walking towards the streets.

Looking from the shadows, I saw that Konayuki was happily watching a shining VenusFort--a shopping mall aimed at women.

And those eyes seemed to be lost in the neon lights.

(Aah...)

I understand.

Konayuki wants to go shopping.

Hotogi Mikos are only allowed to stay at the shrine and the school. Which means, they live an existence as a "Caged Bird" under the restrictions of their clan.

Shirayuki is afraid of the outside world, but Konayuki, who has a different personality, actually yearns for it.

While watching TV, she was also watching a series that was set in a shopping mall.

("Tonight is the only chance", huh...)

Normally, Konayuki firmly sticks to the traditions of the Hotogi Miko.

But sometimes, she wants to go to shopping to relax, right?

I may have understood her goals, so going back would be fine--but she's still a middle school student, and what's more, she's a caged bird that has been sealed in Hotogi up till now.

So, I guess I'll be her bodyguard from her shadows for a while. Just in case.

Konayuki, as if walking into a kingdom of dreams and fantasy, quickly started shopping around VenusFort, which was approaching night, in order to alleviate her rising stress.

Maybe it's because it's her first time in a mall, or maybe it's because she took advantage of the opportunity to buy an exquisite music box...but the number of shopping bags slung over those slender arms continued to mount. Hotogi is a pretty wealthy shrine after all, so it looks like Konayuki's budget is pretty big.

Department stores, shoe stores, and boutiques. Carefully choosing only those stores with female assistants, Konayuki, surrounded by the beautiful female assistants, was applying blush to her cheeks--laughing happily, from her heart.

The amount of spending she's doing is very worrying for a middle school student...but there's no way I could break that smile, that smile she had after fulfilling her dream of so many years.

For now, I will watch from afar, keeping her from danger.

Her hands finally starting to tire under the weight of the massive amount of paper bags, each of them colored differently, Konayuki...

-seeming to want to rest, she entered a small, yet beautifully decorated, outdoor coffee terrace.

I followed Konayuki, just ordering black coffee, continuing to watch over her.

Watching from the shadows of the decorative plants, I saw Konayuki's eyes, behind a sundae, which looked like a miniature castle, sparkle...Taking big bites of it, she smiled, full of joy...patting her cheeks.

Haha. She's really cute.

Although she's so firm all the time, seeing this scene, I could only conclude that, in the end, she was just a middle school student.

Glancing at Konayuki, who took a picture of the sundae with her cellphone, seeming to want to have a memory of it, I folded my legs softly, enjoying the taste of the Costa Rica coffee under the night sky.

Glancing at the watch on the inside of her wrist every few seconds, Konayuki left VenusFort.

It looks like she's preparing to take the last train back.

Judging from the direction she was going, she was probably going to take the route by the Statue of Liberty, going around Hotel Nikko to get to Odaiba station. If that's the case then I have to be careful. That street doesn't have many people on it.

--At that moment, the fall Tokyo night breeze, a little early, washed over us, bringing a chill with it.

Her black hair, draped over her shoulders, fluttering in the midst of the wind, which was tinted with the scent of the sea...standing there, Konayuki stared at the night view of Tokyo, which was glowing under the shining illumination of the moon, an expression which showed how sad she was to leave.

Just now, I had just thought she was a child...

But like this, standing at the end of the street under the night sky, she looks more grown up.

Konayuki is an amazingly beautiful girl, if she grows up, she will definitely become a Yamato Nadeshiko the likes of Shirayuki.

Looking at that figure, feeling as if I had seen it before, I felt as if seeing this had been somehow...good for me.

"Good evening, you've bought quite a lot of things."

From the park, a few young men sauntered towards Konayuki.

"Oh? Could it be that you're by yourself? It's a shame, you're so cute."

All dressed like hippies, the boys smiled, forming a ring around Konayuki, who was backing up.

From their appearance...they appear to be university students. There are...four, huh?

"Ooh, a bag from Max&Co. And an LV Damir leather belt, could it be that you're an ojou-sama^[11]?"

"Lucky! Could we borrow some money?"

"Why don't you give yourself to us as well?"

Ahaha! The men burst into laughter, slowly closing the circle around Konayuki.

Konayuki--looked left and right determinedly, and she looked back as well--but there was no escape, she could just stand there, not able to move.

"Pl-please leave. Hotogi Miko will not submit to the persuasion of filthy thugs!"

Whoosh! Seeing Konayuki raise her eyebrows, staring at them, those university students, smiling all over--

-suddenly changed their attitude.

"Haa?"

"Are you speaking Japanese, you brat!"

"I'll strip you down!"

A pistol--

Seeing one of them take it out of their pants pocket, I felt a light headache coming on.

Recently, even these kinds of people, who can't even make it as gangsters, will suddenly start waving those all around.

That's a Blackstar. It's an imitation of the TT3-Tokarev of the former Soviet Union, a low-quality gun of Chinese make.

"...!"

The paper bags fell from Konayuki's arms, and for a second, she seemed to be grasping for something within her chest...but the tanto from this afternoon was not in those clothes.

Seeing the other three people draw their tasers or knives, Konayuki's determined look disappeared, and she crouched down...

"...O...Onee-sama...save me..."

Ah-ah.

She's crying.

I can't help it. Looks like it's time for me to take action.

"--Hey, you guys. If you want money, then get a job."

Putting the little money I had to one side, I showed myself.

Hearing my voice and turning her head, Konayuki widened her eyes, which were full of tears, well, I'll explain later.

"What the hell do you think you're doing, brat! Get out of here!"

Looking at the delinquent, who had swiveled around and pointed his gun at me after noticing me, I chuckled in response.

I may have brought my gun, but if I draw it against these small fries, I would be shaming my Beretta.

So, I'll use words to try and solve this.

"--3.2% "

"Haa?"

"Total amateurs. At 9.5 meters--this is the distance between us right now, that is the probability that you will hit me. As I've seen, you guys are pretty excited, but that will just decrease the chance even more."

Hearing my words, the other three also turned to face me. Oooh, he's pointing his gun at me. Be still, my terrified heart.

Well, this level of fear can't even be compared to Tsuduri-sensei...it isn't even 1% of the fear aura that Ranbyou-sensei emanates.

"Who are you, you brat..."

"I am a student at Butei High."

Indicating the direction of the school with my head, I walked towards the delinquents nonchalantly, as if they weren't pointing weapons at me.

Whether it's a bad or good reputation, Butei High is pretty famous.

"Ah, hey. Shoot him. You've shot someone before, right?"

The man holding the gun tossed the gun to one of the other guys.

"Ah, um, about that..."

"Shoot, quickly! He's a Butei! We have to surprise him!"

"Why don't you shoot! It's your gun! You surprise him!"

Those students, who hadn't seemed to have fired a gun before, started shouting at each other.

Hey...declaring loudly that you're going to surprise me means that I won't be surprised.

--Don't throw it around, you should kick it across with your feet. It may be accidentally discharged, you know. Especially this Blackstar, it doesn't even have a safety catch."

Saying this, I finally stopped right in front of the man holding the gun.

But each of the four were handing the weapons to each other, not attacking me.

...What do I do?

Facing these guys, who pose no threat at all, may be I shouldn't go too over the top.

"..."

Helplessly, I grabbed the stock of the Blackstar...inserting my finger into the trigger guard. I used my thumb to press down on the wielder's forefinger, disabling his ability to fire.

Afterward, I twisted the person's wrist outwards, easily stealing the gun from him. Hey...what kind of weak grip is that?

"Ah...I-I'll give that to you. Don't shoot us in the back, alright?"

The guy who was holding the gun in the beginning backed up, and as if at his signal--

The four people suddenly sprinted away at top speed.

Their running speed is their specialty, probably. In the blink of an eye they had disappeared from the end of the park.

...I don't want some cheap piece of crap like this. However, I could only look at the shiny handgun, sighing.

"To-Tohyama-sama..."

Crouching by my side, Konayuki raised her head, looking at me...

Tap

And with a movement exactly the same as Shirayuki, she knelt there and bent down.

That back, probably from the weight of her transgressions, was shaking.

"...Pl-please keep this from the Hotogi..."

I thought I was going to be scolded, I didn't expect that she would apologize.

I flicked the safety catch of my Beretta, putting it in my jacket, keeping the Blackstar in my holster.

Afterward, kneeling down on one knee, I lightly patted Konayuki's hair, as soft and smooth as silk.

"Do-don't tell anyone...!"

Tears trickling down her cheeks while looking at me, Konayuki appeared to still be afraid of the night excursion she had just had.

"Alright, I won't tell anyone."

"Re-really...?"

"Really. What happened tonight will only be a secret between us."

Saying these words, the me in Hysteria Mode, as if calming Konayuki down--smiled at her.

Konayuki, seeing me like this...

That face, glittering like snow, went slightly pink, reminiscent of a sakura petal, and she stood there, dazed--after a while, she nodded, wordlessly.

"--This is for you."

I picked up one of the paper bags that Konayuki had dropped.

Konayuki, blushing, stood up, drooping her head, picking up another of her paper bags...following me closely, Konayuki, who had said "Don't you dare get close to me!" this morning, stuck close to me.

...Well, that should be all, right?

I--as if nothing had happened, cast a glance at Shirayuki, who was wearing her miko garments, standing atop one of the utility poles.

That's right.

Shirayuki had already realized that Konayuki had went out at night...protecting her from afar. From the time that Konayuki went into the open cafe...around then, right?

Konayuki had not noticed Shirayuki's presence and she continued to follow me, seeming to be thinking about something.

You have a good Onee-chan, Konayuki.

Meeting my eyes, Shirayuki laughed, embarrassed, and with a feeling of "I'm sorry, Kin-chan."--
-she put her hands together, lightly.

The following morning, a beautiful Onee-chan, who named herself the Hotogi's chauffeur, came to the apartment.

I looked at the door of the dormitory, only to see an amazingly long limousine waiting there.

The Hotogi...are really wealthy.

Already finished with all her preparations to go back, Konayuki handed her luggage, which was a lot bigger, to the chauffeur--and at the door, she knelt on the floor, three fingers outstretched as a sign of respect to Shirayuki and me.

"Thank you for taking care of me during my stay. Tohyama-sama, Onee-sama, goodbye..."

Th-this respectful manner from a Yamato Nadeshiko in Miko garments...I-it's like a picture, after all...

I may not have been in Hysteria Mode any longer, so I turned, returning "Ah, take care too, Konayuki," but I felt that that was a little impolite...so I decided to accompany her to her car.

Exiting the elevator, Konayuki, a little strange, slowed down, approaching my side--

"Tohyama-sama."

Without looking at me, she called my name, cheeks a little red.

"...What is it?"

"...Thank you...very much."

It looks like she still thinks that Shirayuki, walking a little ahead of us, doesn't know about last night--

Her tone, just like when she came, was a little haughty.

But, well, in this area, little kids are pretty cute.

"Also...I have to apologize to you for something."

"Apologize...?"

"My insults against Butei High and all Butei."

"Ah, that."

It's fine if you don't apologize for that.

After all, Butei is a profession that society does not completely understand.

"But, um...last night, my position changed. I may not be able to say that I like it...but I feel that in this society, it may be a necessary job."

"...Is that so. Well, if you're interested, you can come for another tour."

And, I can earn another 0.3 credits.

"Yes. I will come again. Next time it will be truly to 'tour the campus'"

""Truly'...?"

"Yes. In the end, Onee-sama said that she does not wish to return to the Hotogi--so, I thought about it again. Since that's the case, I can come here to stay with Onee-sama like this--"

Not able to stop my face from twitching, I turned towards Konayuki, who had just said that...And, for the first time, Konayuki smiled at me.

"After this, I'm going to trouble you a lot more, you know. Tohyama-sama."

Yes, that was--

-exactly like a flake of powder snow[\[12\]](#), dancing through the air, that smile was both lovely and cute.

Reload for the NEXT!!!

NOTES

9. "Taku" is something along the lines of 'entrust' or 'hint'. It involves God 'entrusting' or 'hinting' something to the diviner in question. Since it is divination, the thing that is 'entrusted' is information. It is less specific than "Sen", because one is not making a direct divination of a subject. Rather, one names a subject and God gives one general information on the subject.
10. "Sen" is to divine. Pretty much what it means. One divines something specific through a request to God.
11. Rich young lady.
12. Konayuki means powder snow.

RELOAD 2: MARSEILLE ROULETTE

August the 25th. The day after Konayuki returned to the Hotogi--

Shirayuki said she needed to go to the Hie shrine in Tamati Hisashi, and she had just left when the doorbell rang immediately.

Originally thinking of looking for a job to get some more credits and switching on my computer, I,

"What is it, Shirayuki? Did you forget something?"

I opened the door casually--and couldn't stop an "Uu" sound from erupting from my throat.

Standing there was...

"--Raging Riko Pose!"

Wearing a frilly, light modified uniform, her hands outstretched like a crane, one of her legs stretched up--

It was Mine Riko Lupin the 4th!

"..."

Right now, she wasn't wearing a heart-shaped eyepatch. It looks like Patra's curse has been released.

But, what kind of reaction should I make? In the face of this "Riko Something Pose"

Seeing me fall silent,

"...I saw it on the noticeboard at Masters! Ki-kun has a big problem! The slacker is in danger of being held back!"

Riko released that Kung Fu pose and, *whoosh*, she flashed by my side, intruding on my apartment.

"O-oi."

Carelessly throwing off her little, red boots at the door with a *Pa Pa*, *Tap Tap Tap*, *Bang!*

Like a jumping box, she jumped over the sofa, sitting on top of it.

"So, Riko has come to send you some missions, which anybody from any division can use to get credits!"

Immediately turning on the TV, she took out a Fan DVD from the red backpack on her back and, *whoosh*, she threw it like a flying saucer.

Shh That disc went into the slot of the DVD player perfectly.

She...is pretty adroit.

But, what is that DVD? It couldn't be one of those terrifying things that Muto is hiding, right?

While I was tensed up, alert...the TV broadcast the image of an overseas professional soccer match.

"The mission is...?"

I have a lot of other things that I want to talk to Riko about...but right now, going up a grade is my first priority.

And don't be deceived by Riko's appearance, she is a phantom thief, an expert information gatherer.

It could be that she's found me a really good mission.

Fishing out a box of Pocky from her red backpack, Riko's big eyes, with double-fold eyelids-- *shh*, closed nearly completely, laughing.

"Hehe. Watch it, watch it, Ki-kun."

Uu. She's moving to my side?

I sat on the farthest end of the sofa on purpose.

The sweet scent of vanilla wafted off her soft, supple hair. This really is Riko's fragrance. How hateful.

"This is an emergency mission that just appeared on the Butei High Network. This particular commission is for those in Tokyo Butei High. This is what it is about, 'Because the entire soccer squad has been suspended, immediately find 11 substitutes for the National Highschool Soccer Competition, CS, the 2nd qualifying round!'"

I evaded Riko, who was leaning her body this way, and I took out my cellphone...

The site confirmed it.

"The entire soccer team was caught secretly making [dum-dum bullets](#). So, the entire team was suspended for two weeks."

"...That is a horrifying reason that only Butei High could ever have..."

"Look here, if the substitutes win, they get 1.2 credits, and even if they lose, they get 0.6 credits!"

Ooohh...!

I have 0.7 credits left, so as long as I win, I can take care of it.

And this mission is to join a soccer competition. Just like a normal high school student.

For me, who is slowly drifting even further from normal society, this is a pretty good rehabilitation lesson.

"Alright...I'll do it. There's no other fitting missions, anyway."

"Alright!"

Taking a stick of Pocky out of the Pocky box, Riko jumped up, excitedly, *Thud*

She landed back on the couch.

"Then, Ki-kun, as a reward for bringing you this mission, let's play a Pocky game."



"Pocky game...? What's that?"

Hearing my question, Riko held that stick of Pocky between her lips and closed her eyes,

"Mmm"

-reaching this way.

You want me to...eat it too?

And, it's eaten from both sides.

You're an idiot.

I pushed the entire Pocky into Riko's mouth with one hand, watching the DVD.

Ooh...This looks like the highlights from the career of the former French soccer star, Zidane.

It may be a video from very long ago, but those skills really are on the level of geniuses. It looks like he too, is an elite.

"Kuh, Kuh...Ki-kun is way too much! It's DV! It's a date DV!"

Coughing non-stop, lying across my knees, Riko...

"Uu~~"

Pressed her lips together, moaning.

"No!"

"What..."

"No, No! I can't take it if you don't give me a reward!
NoNoNoNoNoNo~~~~~No~~~~~!"

Riko, lying face up on my knees, started flailing around.

You...You're exactly like a kid.

"If you aren't going to give me anything, Riko will gather 11 people immediately and steal the mission! Riko will definitely gather enough people first! Riko has a lot, a lot of friends! Ki-kun doesn't have any!"

"Doesn't have any"! Saying it so frankly...

But...the fact that I have less than the class idol, Riko, is true. Making Riko angry now wouldn't be a good idea.

And knowing her personality, she might really be angry enough to take the mission first.

"Alright, I agree. Don't throw a tantrum like a spoiled child. I'll do whatever you want, besides that Pocky game."

I said, helplessly.

"Then, do whatever Ki-kun wants, do something good~~ with Riko, OK?"

Grabbing my clothes, Riko, *Shh*, rubbed her head on my stomach like a spoiled kitten.

...It's happened.

It's happened, it's happened, it's happened. Riko's fondling.

Ever since the Vlad case, Riko's been acting like a normal girl towards me--keeping some sort of distance when she touches me...but, the hearts of women are inexplicable. The feelings of girls will change like the rise and fall of the tide.

However, the fact that she's changing her attitude so much is kind of weird...well, it's Riko, after all. Looking deeper into it is just a waste of time.

I twisted away from Riko, escaping to the other side of the couch.

But, Riko was still grabbing onto my shirt, sticking to me closely. Aahh, this is so troublesome.

"Hey, Ki-kun--are things going well with you and Aria?"

Thump Lying down on the sofa face up, Riko suddenly--asked about something else entirely.

"Things aren't going well, right...? Yuki-chan has felt this too. Anyways, that Aria has been leaving Butei High to run around...she hasn't even sent a mail, right?"

"That...has nothing to do with you."

Seeing me answer quite coldly, Riko, *hehe*, laughed, still on my knees..."My tuuuuuuuuurrnnnn," she said some mysterious words to herself.

In truth--ever since I was discharged from the hospital, I haven't seen Aria.

When I was discharged, I sent her a mail, alerting her, but I didn't get a reply.

Well, for her, who doesn't really know how to use mails, this isn't a strange occurrence, but...

I felt that recently, she's been abnormally cold and distant.

It couldn't be that she's shouldering something by herself, not talking to me, could it?

"Hey. Aria and Yuki-chan aren't around right now, so you have to pay attention to Riko, you know. No matter what Ki-kun does, Riko won't make you take responsibility, you know. Just like last night, come at me violently..."

Hah...? What does "last night" mean! Having no memory of anything like that, I turned my head-

But my head, *shh!* was suddenly twisted to the other direction.

Because somebody behind me was grabbing my ear!

Ouch! Wh-who is it!

"He~~? In the short period that I left you alone, you're doing this immediately! You idiot slave!"

shh! My ear was yanked viciously, and a scream ringing out in my ear, I couldn't help but look up, seeing--

"A-Aria!?"

-wearing a uniform, Kanzaki H. Aria-sama was standing there.

Her face was very, very, very red, and she was gritting her canines viciously.

"Wh-when did you come back? Ow, ouch, my-my ear! It's going to be ripped off!"

"When Riko was shouting 'NoNoNo'. Fuu~. Last night. I see. When I'm not watching you, this is what you do, Kinji? But, there's no helping it. Riko is cute, isn't she~~"

Aria's camellia eyes were ablaze with fury, and she glared at me, 3 cm from my eyes.

"But, I've said this before, right? I'll forgive you once, but you have to cut your relations with Riko, OK?' Didn't you hear me then? That's right. You didn't hear me. Well, since your ears can't hear anything, THEN-YOU-WON'T-NEED-THEM-ANYMORE, WILL-YOU!?"

Giri Giri Giri

Pulling at my ear with even more force, Aria forced me to stand up.

"Ear, my ear! It's really going to tear off! Stop it, Aria! You're going to make me go back to the hospital!"

"Ooh, Aria, your possessiveness is really showing! Ahaha!"

Pa Pa! Riko clapped her hands together in joy.

Hey, don't just stand there and do catcalls, come and stop this abuse!

You're able to fight with Aria evenly, right!?

"Po-po-po-possessiveness? No way in hell! This is the punishment for my slave's disloyalty!"

Finally releasing her hand, Aria, *Whoosh!*

-drew her guns, pointing them at Riko, who was lying sideways on the couch, princess style.

"Fufu. After all, Aria likes Ki-kun."

"W-why would it become like that?"

"Ehhh, it's because she likes you that she bullies you, you know."

Hehe. Being laughed at by Riko, Aria *Fufufufufufufu*

Her bad habit of blushing furiously had, for unknown reasons, become even worse.

S-so that's how it is.

Riko had noticed Aria arriving...so she threw a tantrum like a kid on purpose, hiding it from my senses...And then, she suddenly started to stick to me. Just to make Aria angry.

Hey you guys...you really don't know when to stop, do you?

Well, they are the great-granddaughters of Lupin and Holmes after all, the fact that they're as incompatible as water and fire isn't so hard to understand.

"No way in hell no way I like him ever ever ever absolutely definitely absolutely!" Aria, shouting, approached Riko, who was laughing *Nya Nya*

Hey, your foreheads are about to touch, your noses are about to touch...that kind of thing is fine, huh. Are you doing this as well, Aria?

Riko planted a kiss on Aria's cheek, *Chuu*, stopping her in the midst of her work--

* Holding tightly onto the sleeve of my right arm, which she had grabbed just a moment ago, she made a face at Aria.

"Hey! Get away...!"

Aria seemed to want to push Riko away, but Riko's two long tails started moving, pulling my back, spinning me around.

St-stop it!

In the eyes of that demon Butei, it looks like I'm hugging you of my own will!

Behind my back, starting to move more like a snake, Riko's hair...controlled my right hand, making a V signal at Aria.

Oh my Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil.[\[13\]](#)

"You~~~~~two~~~~~Kinji!! Riko!!"

Aria, just like a child whose toy has been stolen, charged over, her face completely red.

And grabbing the arm that was making a V signal like she was about to snap it in half, she yanked on it in fury.

And Riko, going *Hehe* and flashing what could only be described as a Riko smile, pulled me from the other side--the left.

--It's like this, Aria. In front of you, I'll demonstrate it--becoming more intimate with Kinji. The Aria that I wish to beat is an Aria that can use everything at her disposal. So, you have to become more intimate with Kinji, becoming as close to him as Holmes the First was with Watson. Well, the meaning of 'close to him' would be different, right? Fufu, Kufufufu!"

"Ah, hey! Both of you, stop! I-I'm going to be torn apart...!"

Whatever Riko's expectations are, it's not important right now.

If this goes on, my whole body, let alone my ear is going to be divided into the left section and the right section!

--Don't say those kinds of things that nobody can understand. Let go!"

Pa!

Grabbing hold of my arm, Aria used those legs, clothed with black knee-socks, to perform a low-kick at Riko's shin.

"Uu!" --Actually, Riko likes a bit of pain too, you know."

Her smile becoming something extremely terrifying, Riko, *Pa!*

She used her leg, clothed with a white sock with cherry decorations, to return Aria's kick.

"That hurt! You~~~~~Idiot Riko!"

Aria sent a vicious kick at Riko, and Riko, still wearing a Riko smile, returned a sharp kick.

Seeing those vicious kicks fly by one by one, each one probably able to crack a baseball bat in half--

Th-these two. Their leg strength is amazing.

These leg skills. They can be used in soccer...!

It's sad, but I had already gotten used to these scenes of carnage...so, I was able to ignore them long enough to think about that.

Of course, one cannot play soccer on his own.

If I want to send a mail to Masters, accepting this mission, I have to gather some members.

So, after that, I spent an entire day making phone calls, sending mails, asking face to face, gathering all those people whom I knew were free.

For the 2nd semester, I will take on any mission for free as repayment.

Following the rules set down on the website, if we're missing one person, we can still be recognized as participating. A soccer team is made up of 11 people, so I need at least 10. And in the more detailed rules, one of the components in male-female equality in sports states that girls can participate as well. That really was lucky.

The morning of the following day--

The sound of cicadas echoed through the second field, and the eleven people, filled with passion and spirit, had gathered.

Well no, it was time and not one person had gathered here. This first point had already filled me with unease.

I was the first one. Because I was the most motivated, (To tell the truth, I had no choice,) I was the most forward position, the [FW](#). Which means, I would be the captain for now.

And because Aria, joining for the sake of keeping an eye on Riko, was very aggressive by nature, she was also a FW.

Riko, who had volunteered...seemed to have been influenced by some anime, and wanted to be the [GK](#), so, without caring about whether she was really fitting for the position or not, we let her be the keeper.

After that, was Reki. I had dragged her, who was sitting still on the top of the Snipe building, to the field. When she tried, she was able to juggle indefinitely, and of course, her passing was flawlessly accurate. So, she was the dexterous center player, an [MF](#).

So, with that, I had struck gold...! But, the moment that I had felt that rush of pride, I immediately discovered that Reki had zero proficiency with keeping a ball.

She was naturally disposed to daydreaming, so as long as I use some sort of method, I was immediately able to steal the ball. But, well, I'll turn a blind eye to that particular flaw. At this point, I'm willing to bring furniture into the team to act as players.

And then, came Shirayuki.

One might say that at the beginning, the fact that Shirayuki stared at Aria and Riko as if she wanted to impale them then and there made me feel like we were going to have some team troubles, but the problem...was not there.

"Hey, Shirayuki. Once the ball rolls that way, try kicking it."

After I said that, her answer rang out clearly, "Yes!"...

But when I rolled the ball to her lightly...

"Eh!"

That foot flew straight through the air next to the ball, *Thud!*

"Kyaa!"

Her black hair, tied down by a piece of cloth in a white ribbon, flew around, and she fell down, face up.

As if being pushed by some invisible person by the waist, she fell down on the back of her head.

Really, you're able to kick the air even though the ball was hardly moving, your running is so slow that you're reminiscent of a pigeon, and you're able to fall down over thin air, but despite all this, I'm amazed that you're still able to be the captain of the volleyball team.

...The rest of the hurriedly-formed team...

Two horrible, male friends had come to help as well. Muto, who was tall in stature, was the [DF](#) for the sake of boosting our defense, but that guy has no focus at all. All he did was stare at Shirayuki, whose sticker number kept on falling off because her breasts were so large.

And Shiranui, who was smiling for some reason as he watched Aria and I, was unexpectedly, in a soccer team in middle school. Because this was an amazing asset...well, I should say that he's the only one in our team that has the capability of battling, so we chose him as the person who could take care of both offense and defense, an MF.

Well, up til now were all the members that understood common sense.

"I'm sorry for being late. I went to find some books to research what soccer was, but I spent too much time."

Appearing in the wake of that voice, which was such that I felt full of unease, was Informa's Jeanne d'Arc the 30th.

Her long, silver hair was tied up with a red hairpin, *Pa*, and standing there as if holding her ground, Jeanne...

-was wearing something that showcased those long, beautiful, slender legs, bloomers (U-718)...! Why the hell!

"You...What the hell is with that outfit!"

Hearing my words, Jeanne looked at her clothes with a "?" expression.

"Outfit? You really are ignorant, Tohyama. This is Japan's traditional sportswear. Because this was recorded in the books I read, I especially went to borrow it from one of my friends in SSR."

"...Which era were the books you read from...Anyways, before, you said, "unmarried girls shouldn't be openly revealing their legs like this!" right?"

Said I, doing all I could to avert my eyes from Jeanne's appearance in that "Bottom-only Swimsuit".

"Tohyama. I'm not wearing any erotic clothes like that. If you go swimming, you have to wear a swimsuit, if you do ballet, you need to wear a leotard. Regardless of whether it shows skin, I will acknowledge those items of clothing that are meant for specific sports."

Her perception of embarrassment appearing to be radically different from that of normal people, Jeanne refuted my words in a dignified manner...

I had already lost all heart to go on arguing with her.

Having some expectations, because she came from one of the countries where soccer was popular, France, I'm a huge idiot.

Added to this, from her words just now, it appears that she hasn't even seen soccer before.

"It's a good morning!"

Appearing in the wake of that special greeting was--was a tiny girl that immediately made one want to say on sight, "Hey, elementary school students can't just come here,"--Hiraga-san from Amdo.

She says that her motor skills aren't very good, but without enough members, I still called her out...but, I really hope that those training wheels-like objects on the wobbling kid's bicycle, which is slowly approaching, are some sort of special device.

You can't mean that you really need training wheels. Could it be that your motor skills are so horrible that you can't even ride a bicycle?

"Aya-ya! Good morning!"

Calling out what seemed to be Hiraga-san's name-based nickname, Riko stopped her scuffle with Aria to run towards Hiraga-san.

It looks like they know each other, no, they're probably very close.

As expected of Riko, who has a lot of friends.

"Ah! Riko-Chaaan! Thanks for all the business!"

Stopping her bike by Riko, Hiraga-san...ignoring that elementary school student appearance, she's one of the elite of Amdo. She's able to watch anime in her peaceful workshop at home while performing complex modifications that even professional gunsmiths have difficulty doing. So, everybody has a lot of respect for her.

As for her Butei rank, if you just look at her skill alone, it's definitely an S--however, because the price of her modifications is, naively, raised so high, and also because she commonly does illegal modifications, her Butei rank is A.

And that Hiraga-san, "Nngg," got off the bicycle unsteadily...

"Ah! A butterfly!"

Her eyes shining, she suddenly ran off campus, innocently.

"Hi-Hiraga-san. Could you not chase butterflies and instead, chase the ball...!?"

My plea was scattered in the midst of the wind...

Reverting back to her childish behavior, Riko also went "Woah!" and bringing the ball with her, she started chasing Hiraga-san, who had her eyes locked on the butterfly.

Added to this, Aria, from behind, shouted "Riko! Don't think you can get away! I'm definitely better at soccer than you!", and drawing her M1911, she started chasing them.

--*Bang Bang!*

"Do-don't use your guns, Aria! That's a foul in soccer!"

Shouting and watching those 3, chasing each other around like kindergarteners, my consciousness--in a flash, went fuzzy.

Because one has to constantly fight for a ball in the air, the taller one is, the better. But...1.43 meters, 1.47 meters, 1.42 meters...I've never heard of a high school team with those three, whose average height isn't even 1.5 meters.

"You three, please come back on campus...!"

I pointed my hand at empty air, speaking, but those three had started a real game of Hide and Seek, with Aria, who was fuming, as the devil. They completely ignored my directions.

Just as I was about to expose my lack of the charisma needed to be a captain--

--*Shh!*

A gust of wind tore through the field, and from within the dust...another girl appeared.

"...Fuuma...!"

I immediately shouted out that name, and my eyes met with the eyes of the girl who had just appeared.

Lezzad freshman, Fuuma Hina.

Known as the descendant of a famous ninja, she was my female kouhai.



Standing there, Fuuma's hands were forming a seal, and the long crimson cloth, acting as a muffler, fluttered in the wind. She looks like one of those ninjas in manga.

Well, she may also be wearing a t-shirt and short pants.

But, ahh...This is so troublesome, she finally came?

But well, I was the one who called her out.

"--Fuuma Hina reporting for duty!"

...Because that wasn't a joke, my headache got even worse.

I--before, in the sub-section of Butei High, the middle school in Kanagawa prefecture, I had done some battle training with Fuuma.

At that time, I was coincidentally in Hysteria Mode...and I subdued Fuuma, who had made the first move, like a kid.

Ever since then, she's had an abnormal amount of respect for me, and she became a troublesome female kouhai that called me "Master" whenever she could.

"Master! I [\[14\]](#) haven't been able to meet with you for a while because my training was very busy, so I was very lonely! But, the time where I can help Master has finally arrived---with this, I'm very fortunate! I'm really very fortunate!"

I wasn't sure if it was a ponytail or a [chonmage](#), but her hair waving around, Fuuma knelt on the ground, looking at me.

In her eyes, *Crackle Crackle Crackle*, the fires of motivation were burning.

Uuu, she hasn't changed...she's still a hot-blooded person.

So, I didn't want to find her.

"...Since you feel that way, then don't be late. You said that you're reporting for duty, but you're the last one here."

Lectured by me, Fuuma...as if struck by an enormous blow, *Chuu*. She shrank.

"M-my sincere apologies...! Last night, I stayed at the restaurant, practicing really late...this morning, I couldn't get up."

By the way, for everybody's information, the practice that she's talking about is a job.

Fuuma appears to be quite poor...she's so poor that she can't even pay her tuition, and as such, she's in debt.

"Whatever. Then, Fuuma, try shooting it into the goal."

I said, pointing to the ball on the field...

"...Shoot, huh? Ha?"

Fuuma frowned, not understanding.

And glancing at me, she made an expression which conveyed, "like this?"...

...she fished out a 卍-shaped shuriken.

Why is that each of you...has to draw your weapons!

"You can't use weapons! Weapons are forbidden in soccer! Use your feet to kick that!"

I snatched the shuriken from her and pushed her back, pushing her right next to the ball...

Letting her kick from there.

...As expected, she's like Jeanne, she doesn't know what soccer is.

"That way! The inside of the ball! Kick it!"

After I had patiently explained all the steps, Fuuma turned towards the ball, saying "Nin!"...

She raised her leg high, as if ice-skating...

Rumble

Hmm...?

Some weird noise appeared.

I just frowned...when I saw Fuuma put down her leg, out of energy...

Her butt raised high, she slumped over the ball.

"Ah, hey."

Seeing her strange appearance and moving forward, I noticed that her eyes were spinning non-stop.

Wh-what is this?

"...Ma-master...be-before we start work, could you share some of your rations with me..."

"Ra...? You mean food?"

"Ac-actually, I haven't eaten anything since two days ago."

Rumble Rumble

Once again emitting that strange noise, Fuuma, blushing a little, patted her stomach.

It looks like that's her stomach growling.

"...Fried, br-bread..."

With that last sentence, Fuuma collapsed on the ground, completely out of energy...You didn't even kick the ball.

Seeing this scene, I...had no choice.

Aria, Riko, Reki, Shirayuki, Muto, Shiranui, Jeanne, Hiraga-san, Fuuma, and I.

I may have gathered 10 people, but basically all of us are useless.

Can we really win like this? No, can we really play a game of soccer like this?

The competition is on August the 30th. The penultimate day of the summer holidays.

If we don't win, I can't go up a grade.

This time--have I really reached a dead-end?

In the end, without even doing normal practice, we faced the day of the competition.

Entering the field under the guidance of the graceful cheerleaders was the team of a normal school, Kounan Sports High...

They...they seem really strong.

This was to be expected, after all, Kounan is an amazingly strong team that took first place of the Tokyo competition last year. And, rumor says that they're a rough team that thinks nothing of playing dirty.

I heard that in the first qualification competition, they sent three people on the opposing team to the hospital, gaining an absolute 4-0 victory.

"Hey, hey. What team are they? All of them are cute girls."

"Looks like we come out on top if we bump into them."

"Sim vamos meninas isca. (Aah. I'll treat you very well, cute ojou-chans.)"

The whole team wearing an evil smirk while staring at us, the members of the team from Kounan were all boys...but even if we weren't to take that into account, all of them were very lithe and muscular. Simply put, they are a truly passionate team of 11.

Hey, what's with that obviously Brazilian exchange student. But, even if I feel that they're too cruel, we have, although she's powerless, Jeanne, who's French, so we can't say anything.

Because we had no uniforms, we stuck the numbers onto our shirts...and because the height difference between our team members was so huge, we formed a very bump circle.

"Listen up, we..."

As I, the captain, started to say something to encourage everybody.

"We still aren't finished with Kinji (Our toy)! Let's graduate together with him!"

Muto suddenly cut in, shouting out an insulting order, and everyone followed suit, shouting "Oooh--!"

After the match started--

-having a complete disadvantage in terms of physical characteristics, Hiraga-san and Fuuma had already been charged at by Kounan.

Because the victims were girls, they had aimed for places like the chest or the thighs, smashing into them with their whole body, and even though I wasn't in Hysteria Mode, seeing that really made me angry--but, that isn't against the rules, so I can't complain.

The only one whose physical characteristics could match the enemy, Muto, saw that Shirayuki, who had been hit in the head by the ball, was about to fall down, so he went to go and save her, letting that Brazilian student, called Rodrigo or whatever, charge into him.

The fact that it was 10 against 11 was bad too. Kounan quickly noticed that only Shiranui's movements were excellent, and they constantly kept two people on him, sealing his movements.

Not only that...the opponents even tugged on Shiranui's and my clothes, stopping us from moving. If we managed to steal the ball, they would hook our legs, making us fall down.

But because all that was done out of the sight of the referee, they didn't get a foul.

(...Bastards. It looks like this is how they play all the time...!)

Because of those reasons, they specifically targeted Jeanne, who was flailing about after being slide tackled--and around 20 meters in front of Butei High's goal, they forced her to commit a foul.

In the first 5 minutes of the first half, we've given the enemy the huge opportunity that is a free kick.

A free kick occurs while the game is stopped...and the representative of Kounan will try to score from the place that Jeanne committed a foul.

Of course, Butei High had gotten into a row in front of the goal, forming a human wall to defend...

But Rodrigo's shot went lazily over the short Riko's head--

Jumping up, Riko couldn't grab it, and it shot deep into the top corner of the goal.

With this, it's 0 against 1--Butei High, which had an aggressive team to begin with, had been scored upon in a timeframe where Aria and I, the FWs, could not even touch the ball.

Damn it, the distance in skill is too obvious. This...is obviously a failed plan.

The first half was over...the guys from Kounan were shouting "Today, we will make a record of 10 - 0!", extremely excited, continually saying that to the cheerleaders, who were probably their girlfriends.

At half-time, the score was 0 against 5.

The Butei High team--as Riko might say it, had been completely demolished.[\[15\]](#)

The ball possession was something like 10 against 90. Although Shiranui managed to shake off the enemy's defense and pass to me, my shot, with all the strength I could muster behind it, was blocked by the German goalkeeper, Junkers.

No matter how one says it, that Junkers is massive person, with a height and arm span of two meters. He gives off the feeling of a God of defense. Even though his face looks like a gigantic gorilla.

But--the second half, can we steal back 5 points? No, to win, we need 6.

I left the resting room, which was full of lockers, and in the football club room, with no one to see me, I hung my head in despair. After all, it wouldn't be good if the team members were to see their captain in such a depressed state.

(...6 points, huh?)

It may be bitter to face up to, but it looks like this commission will be unable to help me rise a grade.

No, right now, I'm just bitter about this entire situation.

Are we going to continue like this, not able to get the ball, getting tackled endlessly...into the second half?

--Soccer is more mentally stressful than it seems.

As I sat down on the bench like that, sighing--

"Guess who?"

Somebody, having entered the room at some point in time, covered my eyes with their hands.

This voice.

"Aria..."

Turning my head, as I thought--her bib taken off, was Aria.

Releasing her hands, Aria, sat down on the bench next to me.

"...Don't use the same trick twice. You did this while training to be a cheerleader, right?"

Hearing me say this, Aria...seeming to have forgotten about the "Guess who?" she had done before, widened her eyes.

"Um, ah, un, yeah."

Saying this, she opened her plastic bottle, and taking a drink of the sports drink inside, *Chh, it's a good feeling', she said some mysterious words to herself.

"Here. Have some too, Kinji."

--Seeing Aria smile and hand over the bottle, which she had just drunk from, to me, I froze.

Four months ago, when the coca-cola was mixed up, you beat me up...

What's up with you? Could it be that you forgot about it all?

But...not accepting it doesn't feel right, either.

"..."

Hesitating for a moment, I just took a gulp, passing it back to her.

What Aria's small mouth had touched just now, I too...kuh, ah.

This is bad, Kinji. A weak flow of the blood of Hysteria Mode...had, so quickly, gone up to my face.

My eyes darting to Aria for a moment, I saw that her lips were curved into a slight smile.

Th-this Aria...what's with her. She feels different from normal.

She feels...she feels so relaxed...

"Cheer up, Kinji. Don't make a hopeless expression like that."

"...We've already lost, right?"

"We haven't yet. No matter what competition it is, up till the last moment, there's always a chance to win. We don't know which side will come out on top, so, everybody is trying their best."

For Aria...these words were said very well.

My face showed an expression with a trace of agreement--and Aria, suddenly returning to normal, laughed, a little embarrassed.

"Um, this, what I said seemed to be like what a normal high school student would say."

A normal high school student, huh?

Now that she mentions it, whenever I saw Aria in the midst of the match, she really did feel like a normal girl, playing sports...Well, if I were to say it was a good feeling, I wouldn't be lying.

"If I become normal--How would I be?"

Asking me, who was thinking about something else, directly, Aria made me start.

"Ho-how would you be? I don't get it. Your question is too vague."

"Then, answer vaguely."

"Mm...that. Well...it wouldn't be bad, right...?"

Helplessly, I returned an extremely vague sentence and turned my head away, as if saying, "don't ask me any more questions."

Why...has it become like this. I don't understand anything.

I can't possibly put on my true face, and praise you.

"Mm. 'wouldn't be bad', huh..."

Mmm. Hugging her arms to herself, thinking about something, Aria...

Tap Tap She tapped my knee.

"Wh-what is it?"

Being touched, slightly alert, I saw Aria make another thoughtful expression--seeming to be pondering whether she should speak her mind, covering her mouth a little.

"Then...what about Riko? Riko as a normal high school student, how would she be?"

"Why...are you suddenly asking about Riko?"

"Th-that doesn't matter, right! What about her? What do you think about her?"

You, are you still angry about that episode from before?

Well...I don't really get it, but it seems that I have to answer.

"...If I say this, you might get angry...but, although her attitude is really troublesome, I don't think that Riko's character is bad."

Aria looked straight at me, listening to me intently.

What is it?

For you, is how I view Riko that important?

"Riko--may look like that, but in truth, she has a very strong will, right? She may have those kinds of idiotic interests, but I feel that she's more experienced than us. And she isn't like you and I, existences that withdraw from society, she's pretty popular in class. And Jeanne said this before, Riko is the type of person who works very hard from the shadows. So, there are probably a lot of areas where we can learn from her...you too...shouldn't always fight with her."

I--noticed that Aria's eyes had teared up a little with the last sentence, so I stopped short.

Is the fact that I praised a girl of the Lupin family, Holmes' sworn enemy, making her unhappy?

No, for some reason, she seems to be really touched...

"Bu-but. Before, Riko was here to kill Ar...No, to kill us."

"--are you talking about that 'Butei Killer' incident in April? Well...although Riko has been our enemy a number of times, that's a pretty common occurrence within Butei High. And, afterward, Riko helped us--this soccer mission was also brought to my attention by Riko. Later, we may have to fight again, but right now, we have a truce. There's no need to be prejudiced."

"...Kinji, you..."

Aria drooped her head, *Shh*, and she grabbed my clothes.

"...are really compassionate."

Saying this and raising her head, Aria looked at me, who had an "?" expression--

whoosh She leaned against me, suddenly.

--*Chuu*--

Kissing me softly.

Almost as if thanking me for something.

The touch of those lips, as soft as cotton candy, that syrup-like, sweet scent--

"...!"

--You, what are you doing!--

But, so shocked was I, that I could not make a sound.

"Alright! With this, let's think of something to win the second half!"

Shh Winking at me, her twin-tails dancing around, Aria stood up, and like that...

Tap Tap Tap Tap She dashed out of the room.

This extremely sudden development made the blood of Hysteria Mode...

This type of petrification seems to be delayed by one tempo.

After a while, finally returning back to normal from my petrified state, I charged out of the room, almost as if chasing after her--

Suddenly, I met her.

I met Aria, in the corridor.

"A-Aria."

Suddenly a little embarrassed, I couldn't help but reach my hand up to cover my mouth.

"?"

Frowning slightly, Aria, *hss*, drank something from within her Pula bottle.

Hmm..? Just now, wasn't she drinking some sports drink from a plastic bottle?

"...What did you mean just now? I didn't understand it at all."

I blushed, asking, and Aria frowned even more.

"Just now?"

"Ju-just now, in the club room...um, doing weird things. What were you doing? Explain."

"Weird things? What are you talking about? I've been cooling off in front of the fan in the girl's locker room the whole time. If I don't calm down, I'm probably going to draw my guns and take those annoying Kounan bastards out."

...Ah, ahh...

I kind of...understand. I understand.

I understand those inexplicable actions from just now.

Ah, your reactions are too slow, me. You should have noticed this earlier. That, wasn't even the second time, but the third time. I was taken in again.

"..."

But, since that is the case...M-my words...so embarrassing...

While I had realized this, something, which had awakened to a certain degree, happened.

Thump Thump...This heartbeat. This feeling.

"Really..."

"?"

"A kitten."

"Hmm, Ah?"

"--like a kitten, a naughty, mischievous girl. And, she tricked me."

Looking at me, who was suddenly speaking in a disgusting manner while staring into space, Aria's face started twitching.

"Aah, Aria, don't worry about anything. The me as of now has already started to relax."

Fu...Hey, don't laugh. Don't laugh like this, the me in Hysteria Mode.

Aria, who's right in front of me, must be terrified right now.

And, I made Aria back up until she was against the wall, and as if nothing had happened, I placed one hand on her shoulder.

"Aria and I are still fine without that. After all, today, we are just 'normal high school students'. So, with that, we should appreciate this time, slowly capturing the taste and meaning of it. Like this, right?"

Ah~Ah...

Aria, going "Eh, what, what?" has started blushing because of you, you know.

And, her hands were clasped in front of her chest, how lovable.

"Wa-wait, Kinji...! Wh-why now, in this sort of place! G-go back to normal! Th-there's only 5 minutes left before we have to rejoin the competition, right!?"

Pa! With one hand, she shoved my forehead, forcing me to retreat. Pretending to be reflecting on my actions, I backed off.

But, once I saw Aria relax a little, I immediately launched a surprise attack, drawing close to her again.

Whoosh! Aria, as I thought, pressed her body against the wall, frozen. Haha.

"That's right, Aria--the half-time break is about to end. Then, let us go play soccer. Giving them 5 points, it should be enough of a handicap for our opponents, right?"

My face, passing by one of Aria's twin-tails, nearly caressing it, I whispered into her air.

"Ha-handicap..."

"Counterattack. We will take the victory."

This time, it was a deep, clear voice.

For the sake of preventing her retort at my next words.

"Aria--don't say anything, listen to me."

Gathering the whole team in the locker room, I--

-as the captain, only gave two directions to the team.

First, your position and the common rules of soccer? Forget them.

Second, do things your way. But, follow Kounan's example, and don't be caught.

That's it.

Suddenly noticing that my expression had become a lot more sharp, the team members--with the exception of Riko--were shocked at first, but these two orders pumped them up.

Afterward, I gave specific members of the team certain directions...

We returned to the second field, where the wind had become strong.

Us 10 were not in the formation of the match just now, of normal soccer rules. We had spread out, standing the place where we thought we would be best able to use our own abilities.

Seeing us like this, the Kounan team started roaring with laughter...

--But, opposed to this, I felt that everyone had finally become motivated--

Beep Beep Right after the whistle blew, the second match commenced, with the ball starting in Kounan's possession.

At the same time, Aria, Shiranui, Hiraga-san, I, and even the DF, Muto immediately rushed towards the enemy.

Added to this, like an embodiment of freedom, GK Riko also left the goal behind, charging forward.

Kounan, seeing our movements, roared in laughter again, charging towards the empty Butei High goal.

"The signal for our counterattack has sounded--follow me, charge!"

First, Jeanne, who had been flailing around the whole of the first half...

From the side of Kounan's Rodrigo, who was being careless--*whoosh*

With a perfect tackle, she stole the ball.

--Hotogi!"

Showing off those beautiful legs, passing the ball to Shirayuki, Jeanne--followed my instructions, putting on her glasses.

Originally, Jeanne, whose eyes weren't very good, was wearing contact lenses for astigmatism, but from the start of the match, because she had been smashed into by the opponent, they had dropped off.

"My turn!"

Shirayuki raised her legs high, waiting for the ball that Jeanne had passed.

There was no trace of the white ribbon that was normally inside her long, black hair.

Although the fact that it could only be done for a moment was a shame, she released her kidoujutsu, massively boosting her explosive energy.

--Eh!"

Blasting forth from Shirayuki's foot with a huge noise, the ball flew past the midline--

Turning into something that blew past the Kounan players one by one, the ball of flame, *Thud!*, smashed into Muto, who had been waiting at the sidelines, stopping there, bouncing off his stomach.

His expression was full of agony...but on that twisted face, which for some reason, was filled with a satisfied expression. Behind Muto, who was falling down...

Taking advantage of her small body, Hiraga-san, who had been hiding, appeared.

"Your turn, Shiranui-kun!"

Hiraga used those deer-like legs, finally passing the ball to Shiranui, who was in the middle.

Shiranui, who had been guarded by two people throughout the whole of the first half, was only guarded by one.

Thanks to Riko, who had rushed to the front, the number of people that he could pass to had increased.

Although leaving the goal completely empty, she had created a chance for an earth-shattering assault.

And accepting that pressure, Shiranui--as expected of one with the soul of Assault.

With amazing alacrity, he flashed past the enemy--

"Reki-san!"

-passing the ball to Reki, who was on the right.

Reki is a sniper. She's extremely used to not breathing...No, it would be more accurate to say that she probably hasn't done anything like breathing since she was born.

Evading the sights of the other players, Reki was completely open.

Reki immediately passed--

-accurately sending the ball between Aria and I, who had charged forward.

"--Kinji!"

"Combination attack, Aria!"

Aria and I, passing the ball from the left and right, attacked the goal.

The opponent, GK Junkers, dived to one side--

And Aria and I, using the ball as the intersection of our X--*Byuu!*

Did a crossover, scoring a goal!

Aimed towards the other side of Junkers, the ball smashed into the net viciously.

Beep Beep!

In the wake of the blasts of the whistle, all the people in the Butei High team jumped into the air.

--We did it.

We got 1 point!

That shot just now was called "X".

It's something that Aria and I--that only long-time partners could do, a combination attack.

It's an attack that was planned so that even the God of defense, Junkers, could not decide at the last moment who was going to shoot.

"Aria. Beautiful shot."

Tap I lightly patted her on the back, and Aria, who had scored a point using "X"--

"Kinji! Let's keep scoring like this! Alright, get back to the midfield!"

Flashing an incomparably brilliant smile, she gave me, the captain, an order.

The powerful Kounan team started to break apart.

They had been practicing against normal soccer teams, playing by normal methods. So, facing us, who didn't give a thought about things like position or tactics, they seemed like they had no idea how to react.

After that, Aria, I, and Aria, in that order, continued to score easily using "X".

40 minutes into the second half, the score was 4 - 5. As long as we can score another point, it will be a tie.

"This sport isn't so bad."

Just completing a hat trick, Aria exposed those cat-like canines, smiling at me.

Although I was happy about catching up in terms of points, the thing I was most happy about--
--was that you, Aria, had smiled.

But...with just about 5 minutes till the end of the game, it was a situation such that I could not bring myself to relax, to appreciate Aria's smile.

Kounan team had changed their formation.

Their DF was made up of 5 people, and even their MF were concentrated upon defense.

Once the ball came over to them, they would pass it around cautiously...not attacking.

(--Are you trying to run?)

There were 3 minutes left.

If we let them delay like this until the match ends, we'll lose due to the lack of time.

It may not be against the rules, but facing those obviously unfair tactics and getting angry--

"You!--You dare call yourself men!? Fight with dignity!"

Like a lone knight, Jeanne charged towards the ball.

Forcing the Kounan players to pass the ball back to the penalty area, she prepared to steal the ball.

"Kufufu!"

And at that moment, Riko came to assist.

That honey-colored, soft, supple hair--Hmm? Why is it going against the wind?--danced up, in the wind...

Because of that hair, obscuring our vision, the referee and I couldn't see Jeanne very well, and during that time--

"Uu--!"

-Brushing past the DF, Jeanne fell heavily.

"...Jeanne!"

The referee and I ran over, only to see Jeanne kneeling down on the ground.

Just now, when we couldn't see her properly, was she hurt?

"...Uu...Kuh...Ah..."

"Jeanne! Uwaahh--Jeanne's leg is broken--!"

As Jeanne moaned in agony, Riko fell to the floor by her side, "Uwaaaahhh!", crying out.

And on the opposing side, the DFs, who had been so desperate a few moments ago, let the ball roll away, standing there, unmoving.

The referee looked at the three of them, and *Beep!*, a shrill whistle blasted forth.

Looking at that hand signal, he's giving Kounan a foul.

"..."

Seeing Jeanne and Riko suddenly fall silent like they had a silent agreement...

As if nothing had happened, they stood up in unison.

And, giving each other a high five, they seemed to be saying "Yuppi!"...Hah?

(Ah...So that's how it is...!)

Jeanne d'Arc--she may seem dignified and upright, but in truth, she is one of a race of tacticians.

And, she has great pride. Her dangerous personality is such that she feels that every slight must be revenged.

She used Kounan's tactic from the first half, "Cause a commotion and get a foul," repaying them in kind while she was sealed by the defenders. And predicting her actions, Riko even controlled her hair to hide the view of the referee.

It looks like their relationship while in I-U was really good, their combination seemed to include some sort of silent understanding.

"Butei High, PK."

Hearing the referee say this, from my side--

Aria appeared.

"Kinji. Let me shoot. The you as of right now...should understand, right?"

Seeing Aria's left leg twist around on the field, I replied with "Alright, I'll leave it to you," and smiled at her.

The match is paused...

The ball was placed on the penalty mark 11 meters in front of the goal.

PKs are normally supposed to be advantageous for the attackers, but the opponent is the two meter tall God of defense, Junkers.

On the other hand, her height not even three quarters of the enemy, Aria--

"Taking out the bomber aircraft is the job of the agile fighters, right?"

Smiling fearlessly, she gave herself some running-up distance.

The whole field, focused upon the one-on-one between Aria and Junkers, fell silent.

And right after the referee blew his whistle--*Tap Tap Tap Tap!*

Charging forward, Aria--

Byuu!

Having used her right foot to shoot all this time, unexpectedly, Aria suddenly thundered her left foot into the ball.

Having been concentrating on Aria's right foot, Junkers had been defeated by this completely unexpected attack--

The net shook violently, *Beep Beep!*

Announcing the point, the sound of the whistle sent the Butei High team into cheers.

With this, it is 5 against 5. A draw.

Aria opened her arms wide, and excitedly, she charged towards midfield like a plane, following her in the same pose was Hiraga-san, as well as Riko, imitating her.

As this squadron, none of whom exceeded 1.5 meters, reached the midfield, the time was 45 minutes into the second half--

The match time has expired.

But, the match won't end like this.

From now, it's Additional Time--nicknamed Loss Time.

For the sake of making up for substitutions and treatment of injured players, we had entered into a short, extended battle.

From what I felt, it was probably around 1 minute...that's probably how it is.

We've already struggled so hard to come this far. We must, within this minute--take one more point!

The match started with the ball in Kounan's possession.

"--This way! Defensive pass!"

The Kounan member was tricked by Riko, who had imitated the voice of their team captain, and the ball was stolen from him.

Alright. If they start passing around like last time, it will end as a draw due to the lack of time.

That won't do.

Of course, I'm also thinking about my credits--but today, we've done our best as normal high school students, right?

At least, for the sake of these treasured 90 minutes, we should have a good memory.

Seeming to think the same way, the members of our team gave up on defense and instead committed ourselves to an all-out attack.

"Aria!"

She did an overhead kick, passing the ball above her head towards Aria.

From Aria, the ball flew between me, Muto, Shiranui, Hiraga-san and Jeanne.

We ran in a snake-like pattern, continuing to pass, slowly fighting our way to the other goal.

This ball, cannot, for any reason, miss. And everybody, believing that it will not miss, is helping me.

The referee is starting to look at his watch. We still have 30 seconds--!

As expected of Kounan, the elite team that won last year's Tokyo championship. That defense, even til the last moment, was as rigid.

Doing the opposite of us, all their members were defending. It really was difficult to pierce their defense.

The time ticked downwards. 20 seconds left--

--I have no choice.

Since things had come to this, I steeled my resolve, just like a real captain, and blasted towards the enemies' defense.

In front of me was a Kounan DF--Kounan team's captain.

This is a duel between the generals.

The referee bit down on his whistle. 15 seconds left--

Trying to tackle the ball away from me, the enemy's captain charged.

At that moment, a certain image--appeared in my mind in Hysteria Mode.

That technique. I've only seen it, but I haven't tried it before.

I--as if trying to get the ball away from the charging enemy captain--*Shh*

-used my heel to bring it behind me.

Keeping the ball protected behind me, I span on the spot like a revolving door, fending off the opponent's attack.

And as a result, my back, and the back of the enemy captain, who had just brushed past me, touched together--

And the ball...continued towards the enemy's goal, still under my control.

Marseille Roulette.

It's the special technique on the DVD that Riko brought, the one performed by the former member of the French soccer team, Zidane.

I may have just been doing exactly the same thing as I saw him do, but I really pulled it off.

Anyways, if I had to compare this with Billiard Shot and Edge Catching, this is far easier.

Alright--All that was left in front of me was the goalkeeper.

Only Kounan's God of defense, Junkers.

Those deep set eyes stared directly at me.

"You're mine!"

I raised my leg far back, making it look like I was going to shoot--

Thud And I kicked it above Fuuma Hina's head, who had been charging up the right.

The reason I didn't shoot straight, although it was also because I was a little far from the goal--was because I saw that Junkers had shifted far to the left, preparing to defend against me.

In front of Fuuma was an empty goal.

--Nin!"

The ball that I had chipped up was directed to the goal by Fuuma, who had leaped forward, performing a header--

But the veteran Junkers reacted immediately.

Those big hands, as if swatting a fly, smashed the ball back towards the field.

The ball was deflected towards the center--

"Careless...!"

Snarling with anger at her own mistake, as Fuuma landed--*Bang!*

From under her feet, a furious dust storm erupted.

Although it made the referee frown, he didn't call a foul.

But, not calling a foul was the right thing to do.

After all, that wasn't with explosives or anything, it was just her foot striking the ground.

A normal person may not be able to understand from seeing it, but that's Fuuma's technique "Tremor". She moves all the joints in her body at the same time, creating an extremely fast downward movement. It's able to create a massive point of impact under her feet.

As an aside, my own autotomous attack, "Ouka", was invented in middle school after seeing this attack.

Covered in a cloak of dust, Fuuma disappeared--and as the smoke cleared, she was nowhere to be seen.

Fuuma disappeared?

But, now is not the time to be shocked about it.

The clock is still ticking.

We only have 10 seconds left--!

Chasing the ball, still in the air, Aria was extremely fast.

But in front of her, already in position, Rodrigo opened his arms wide, standing there.

--!"

Aria, dodging Rodrigo, who was like a wall, her tails dancing--

-she threw her head to one side, passing the ball to the front, which was devoid of people.

Aria, that's a fatal mistake...! As I thought that, I noticed that I was wrong.

Slightly in front of the goal--

Cloaked with the sand, using it as camouflage, Fuuma, creeping on the floor, *Pa!*

Appeared once again.

"The mistakes that one makes has to be corrected by oneself--!"

Because of the sand, the referee must not know who's about to do what.

Junkers, seeming to be protesting, moved to the side, protecting the goal.

Fuuma pretended to shoot--

"Master! Aria!"

and as if trying to get the ball away from Junkers, she raised her leg backwards like she was doing ballet, a backwards pass.

The ball, kicked by that foot, once again returned to the air at the left-side of the goal.

--!"

I, who as on the left, and Aria, who was in the middle, leaped forward, in an X-shape--

At the intersection, my iron head blasted forth, *Byuu!*

--The net--

It shook.

We did it...!

This is called--"X - Aerial"--it's an aerial maneuver, an "X" with a header.

Although it was done in the heat of the moment, but still, it was done...as I thought this, *Thud!*

Aria, who had been doing a header as well smashed violently into the back of my head. That hurt!

I sprawled on the floor and Aria fell on top of my back, Fuuma was dancing around punching up into the air--

The whistle that signaled the end of the match rang pierced through the field.

6 against 5--It looks like, we finally did it.

Thanks to everyone.

After the match, changed back into my bulletproof uniform and checking my gun, I, for some reason...

Returned to the second field, which was empty now.

And in the midst of the sunset, I kicked the ball up, for no particular reason.

(Normal high school students...huh.)

Now, I promised myself that I would become--a normal person.

Taking normal classes, no training or missions after school, and in that time, I would participate in sports or clubs.

Watching TV, reading manga, a youth full of things like books, mails, songs--

Does that really fit me? To tell the truth...I don't know.

But, it's definitely better than my current high school life, where guns replace greetings.

So, in my heart, I've always felt a great jealousy for normal high school students.

And like today, playing soccer normally...doesn't feel bad.

The reason I was like this, staying here, not wanting to leave, juggling the ball, was probably because of that feeling.

But this kind of feeling had been completely smothered by the autumn, the smell of gunpowder, the clashing of swords.

Thinking back to those events, I picked up the ball, listening to the cicadas...and with my free arm, I took some water from the drinking fountain, pouring it over my head.

Like that, I tossed my damp head, letting the rivulets run freely.

After all, it's summer. It'll be fine if I let it dry by itself.

Thinking this, I was about to pick up the jacket that I had stripped off...when from the side, a towel was thrust in front of me.

"--Here, Ki-kun. Use this."

It was Riko, who had already taken a bath, changing back into that frilly uniform.

Ah...my dog-like actions from just now were seen by her.

"If you were here, you should've said so, Riko."

Blushing a little, I accepted that pink towel--

"...Now that I think about it, I haven't thanked you yet."

"...Thanked?"

"About the credits. This match...this commission was only accepted because of you. Thank you, Riko. I was very happy today. Doing these kinds of sports occasionally isn't bad."

I said, looking at the towel, which I had dried my head with, not really sure what to do with it--

and at that moment, Riko snatched it back, stuffing it inside the red backpack on her shoulders.

And, *Tap Tap*, she kicked the ball by my feet...walking onto the field.

Seeing me stand in front of the goal--Riko stood inside the goal box as well.

"--Don't get it wrong. I had no intention of working together with you guys."

Her tone suddenly becoming vicious, she said.

"Sports? Don't make me laugh. That kind of useless thing doesn't matter."

...This feeling.

Is this the inner Riko? If I had to say it, this is closer to Riko's real personality--

A feeling of nervousness appeared in my body.

"This commission was just a method of letting Aria and you become closer to each other. If you were to stay behind a grade, getting far from Aria, it would be tough on me. The Aria I wish to defeat is the one who has you as her partner! The complete Kanzaki H. Aria. So...Aria and you, for eternity...like today, must stay close..."

Saying that, Riko cut off her words.

And, *whoosh*, using a glare so sharp that it was hard to believe that the Idiot Riko of normal days could do such a thing, she stared right at me.

Is she angry about something? Or is she annoyed or puzzling about something? That face was tinged with red.

She still is...a girl that I cannot understand at all.

"Listen well, prepare properly. You two--are my prey."

Silently, I looked back at Riko, who had said those words.

...Ah, I understand. Riko.

Today, for us, was just a day of rest.

The thing that was started ever since you used those automated Uzis in this place, field number two, against Aria and I...our battle--has not ended.

"But...the Ki-kun of today...was really cool."

Spin Twisting around so her back was facing me, Riko's voice...made me think that she had returned to normal again.

Just like an ever-spinning coin, flying through the air--

I understood, her heart...was constantly flipping between heads and tails.

As if trying to hide that expression of hers, she picked up the ball with both hands, hiding her face.

"...Also, back in the club room...thank you."

As expected.

Just now, Aria, who was asking me about Riko, was just Riko disguised as Aria.

Not only is she troublesome, but she does those kinds of embarrassing things...

"Ah...Uu...Why do I feel so unsatisfied..."

Heads, tails, heads...Constantly switching, Riko, in the end, as if angry at herself--stomped on the ball lying on the ground.

"This kind of...Somehow, gaoh!"

Whoosh

Extending the forefingers of both hands, she formed an angle above her head.

Afterward, that skirt, which had a completely pleated hem, fluttering, she brought the ball to the penalty mark.

"Ki-kun!"

Whoosh Riko's childish face, turning to look at me, who was in front of the goal...was as normal. But for some reason, I felt that she was angry.

"What!"

Far away from each other, we both shouted.

"Take this!"

* Throwing the ball up into the air, Riko--

"Ki-kun, I like you!"

Pa!

Suddenly, she kicked the ball at me. She volleyed it, flashing her drawers for a second.

"...!" Yo-you, what are you--!"

The ball tracing an arc, it flew towards the goal, behind me.

As this unexpected thing happened--

I didn't even have a chance to feel the rising blood of Hysteria Mode--

--*Pa*

I reacted reflexively, diving towards the side, catching the ball against my chest.

In the sunset, Riko started jumping around, as if she had scored--

Waving her hands in the air, as she hit the ground, she said "Ahaha! Ki-kun gave his all! But, I was lying!" making a face at me, just like a devil.

Riko. Riko.

My face twitching, I chuckled lightly...turning to the side, my face still twitching, I stood up.

Riko. You really--

-are completely incomprehensible. No matter where. No matter when.

NOTES

13. Namusan is a derivative of Namusanpou, the three treasures of Buddhism, except that this particular permutation of it is like saying "Oh my Buddha!" However, for the non-Buddhist audiences, I changed it to the Lord's prayer. The wikipedia page fully explains this, It says something along the lines of "magical incantation used when asking for protection in times of danger" as well as the Namusanpou thing I explained above.
14. Fuuma uses sessha, a very ancient 'I'. Take note that all of Fuuma's speech is in this speaking style.
15. Uses フルボッコ (Furu Bokko), which means getting violently destroyed with great violence. Ahem. This is an onomatopoeia equivalent in English, based off ボコボコにされる (Boko Boko ni suru), which means getting knocked down or charged down, something to that effect. The Boko is supposed to be the SFX when you get smashed by someone else.

RELOAD 3: GOODBYE ARIA

I had never heard of the existence of the rule called "[Offside](#)".

No, it's more like I've heard of it, but I didn't fully understand it.

"Generally, outside of the goalkeeper, passing to your own teammates behind all members of the other team is forbidden." is the rules of offside, it was a rule that I found hard to understand even after asking Shiranui.

But...although the referee wasn't able to see it through all the dust, according to the photo that the Kounan high school students and cheerleaders took...

That play that led to our victory, the pass from Aria to Fuuma, was offside.

It may be that canceling points *after* the match is extremely rare, but with photo evidence, and the fact that the linesman raised his flag, it was accepted as an exception, and Kounan's appeal went through.

As a result, the last point became void, and the match was counted as a draw.

According to our agreement, Kounan, who had gotten more points in the first qualifying match, won--

And the 0.7 credits that I needed to get at any cost, was only alleviated by 0.6 credits.

Ahhh, Ahhhh, this isn't something that I can "just let go"...

Because, the summer holidays end tomorrow!

At a complete dead-end, I called my homeroom teacher, Takamagahara, and living up to her reputation as a kind teacher in Butei High, she promised that she would find a way for me to get a commission to get 0.1 credits.

Which means that I--

-accepted the commission that the teacher gave to me out of sympathy, "Clean the Inquesta building."

As such, from the morning of August 31, I started cleaning, all by myself...

But, this is pretty tough work. The Inquesta building has one large lecture hall, four large classrooms and six small classrooms. In total, it's about as spacious as a mixed apartment block.

Doing it by myself, it looks like I'll be working deep into the night.

Trying to find someone to help, I was rejected by Muto for this mysterious reason: "There's no reason for me to help somebody like a protagonist from a galgame." When I called Shiranui, he said: "Isn't there someone more reliable for this job?" laughing, before he hung up.

Although I called Aria, without any other options, she didn't pick up. Shirayuki went to participate in Meiji shrine's rituals, and she's only coming back tomorrow morning. Riko dragged Jeanne to some sort of doujinshi convention.

Fuuma sent me a message that said "The responsibility for the defeat from yesterday lies upon me, I am ashamed of relying upon the fortunes of war, and I am contemplating the phrase, "eternal rest", written entirely in kanji, giving off the feeling of "I am too ashamed to see Master." And Hiraga-san--because she was accepting another commission, I didn't wish to disturb her.

With no other choice, I, on the last day of the summer holidays...swept the floors, cleaned the windows, passing the time all by myself in the otherwise empty Inquesta building.

(Alone, huh...)

What is this feeling?

This is...loneliness?

I should have been used to being alone already...but recently, the companions by my side have started to increase.

But, in the end, humans are alone.

Those that can stay together forever are probably only those who are married.

(...Marriage...)

This word made me think back...Now that I think about it, Konayuki had predicted this before.

"Tohyama-sama will be proposed to. This month."

...That, right?

There's no need to say this, but I was not proposed to.

The month ends today. And today, I'm already dedicated to doing this boring job.

As expected, Konayuki's mysterious "Taku", was wrong.

(It looks like she's still pretty inexperienced.)

Yet...as I chuckled, pushing open the door to one of the small classrooms, which I hadn't cleaned.

--*Tap*

The chalk eraser, clipped at the top of the door, fell on my head, sending up clouds of dust.

"Falling for that kind of trap, you're too inexperienced. You don't fit Inquesta at all."

Folding her legs, sitting on top of one of the desks in the small classroom, was...

"Aria...?"

-the person who hadn't picked up my call just now, Aria.

Thinking it was useless, I sent her a mail saying "Come to Inquesta. I'll do anything you ask me to, so help me clean."...

But I never expected that she really came.

Aria, *Tap*, jumped off the table, walking in front of me, who was dusting the chalk dust off my head.

"Uwah. Your face is really horrifying, even if it's always like that."

"You're so noisy."

"My, my, you're very lonely, right? It's written all over your face, you know?...Wanted to meet me?"

Hehe, seeing Aria smirk at me, I couldn't help but purse my lips.

From this, this girl, really is an [S](#). She can really raise her nose and look down at me after finding my weakness.

But, well, if I deny it, it'll be troublesome if she turns and walks away. Let's just agree for now.

"...Well, a little."

Hearing me say this, Aria..*Whoosh*

Not really sure what to do, she smiled, embarrassed.

Why is it that the fact that I acknowledged "Wanted to meet me?" makes you flash an expression of victory?

"Mmm. An honest Kinji is a good Kinji. Then, Aria-sama will lend a hand."

Aria-sama. Write down the distinctions between bad Kinji and good Kinji in a rulebook, please.

Because, once you see bad Kinji, you'll tear my ear off.

"Alright...to be honest, you'll be a big help. If I had to do this by myself, I'd be working deep into the night."

"We'll be able to finish before evening. As long as you finish this, you won't be held back, right?"

"Yeah. As long as I finish it. But, I never thought you'd come, Aria."

"Hmm...? Well...you don't have enough credits...as someone who made you my partner, I'm responsible. Probably around 2%."

Wrong, wrong. I believe that 98% of this is because of you.

I may think that, but seeing Aria cross-legged on the desk, her guns showing, I didn't say anything.

"...Hmm?"

Suddenly, looking at the desk that Aria was sitting on just now, I...

Noticed what looked like a pink line, but was actually a fallen strand of hair.

"Ah."

Aria had noticed that as well, and she fished a handkerchief out of the pocket of her skirt, brushing the strand of hair onto the floor.

Why is that I feel like she's panicked?

The familiar sweet Gardenia scent wafted over from Aria's waving twin-tails...but within it, there was a hint of shampoo.

"Did you cut your hair? You don't look very different."

"No-not really. I-I didn't go to the beauty parlour--because I was seeing you."

Ah. She said "No-not really". It may have been just for a moment, but she really said it.

The reason I remembered it was because this was something that Riko had said a lot while dressed up as Aria, but she really said it.

Aria's hands twisted her twin-tails, baring her teeth at me, blushing.

"This is just a little trim to straighten out my bedhair. Really."

"Since you were meeting me...there's no need to straighten your bedhair, right?"

Not really understanding Aria, my words made Aria go, "[Uguu](#)," falling silent.

...Really, I don't understand this girl at all.

Aria, as if digging her own grave, exposed an embarrassed expression...

Grabbing her mop, *Tap Tap Tap*, she ran straight to one corner of the classroom,

"Kinji!"

Suddenly, *Pa!*, she pointed at me.

"--Let's compete!"

...Compete about what?

"I'll start from here and you'll start from that corner! The person who reaches the center of the classroom first wins! Whoever loses has to treat the other to [Ripobitan D](#)! Ready, set, go!"

Aria didn't care about me, who obviously didn't have time to get ready. She seemed like she was trying to cover something up...*Ta Ta Ta Ta Ta!* As fast as a mouse, she started running, *Shhh* using her mop to clean the floor.

It's Aria, after all. If I lose, I'm not sure what kind of inhumane punishments will await me.

So, I quickly brandished my mop, running diagonally to the corner, mopping all the way.

Aria and I ran in a snake-like manner around, getting closer to the goal that we had marked, next to the desk.

Right--Left--Right--Left

Aria was very fast...but because her skirt was caught in one of the desks halfway through, so I managed to make up for how much I had fallen behind in the beginning.

Alright, I can do it. I'm beginning to grasp the trick to this.

Your stance has to be low. Your gaze has to be fixed in front of the mop, while turning, brace the mop against the table and swivel around, it's faster if you only have to turn your body.

This Aria. The fact that you started the battle with a surprise attack wasn't bad, but you didn't predict my massive sense for games that has been cultivated under Muto.

I will take the Ripo D for myself. Even if I don't want to drink it right now.

(Alright--!)

I was slightly in the lead. After I had decided that I would get rid of my fatigue with the sports drink--

Thud!

Intuitively staring at the tip of her mop as well, the same trick as mine, Aria's and my head collided.

"--!"

"Ah!"

I saw Aria falling backwards--*Whoosh*

And entangled such that we were embracing, we fell between the desks and chairs.

(This isn't good. I was too focused on the competition...!)

Ju-just now was really effective--Aria, you have an iron head, just like me. I'm already slightly dizzy, and I could feel small stars revolving around my head. Am I some sort of old anime?

No, but...this kind of situation...I have a bad feeling about this.

It's like before, when I pushed Konayuki down--

"...Nnn..."

Little birds flying around her head like a merry-go-round, Aria...

"...!"

--I knew it!

Fa-fa-falling face up on the floor...I was completely on top of her!

And unfortunately, because of the confusion when I was trying to save her--wasn't clutching the mop, but grabbing onto Aria's slender wrist. I really don't know how, but my two hands were grasping her two wrists.

Ho-how did things become like this? That one moment from just now...

Doesn't it look like I pushed Aria down!

"...!"

Rumble

It was an empty classroom. Subconsciously thinking about that, my body froze.

Aria's...body, even smaller than Konayuki's, was complete covered with mine.

Her long twin-tails were spread out over the floor, drawing beautiful curves, and her wrists, clasped by my hands, were curled up, showing her delicate fingers. As I thought--once again, it was painfully brought to my attention that Aria really was a girl.

My mind blanked into a field of white.

--And, that whiteness in my consciousness...

In a heartbeat, was filled--with a certain feeling.

I've thought this many times before, but now, I had no choice but to think it again.

Ahh, she--is really cute, so cute, cute...

I only thought that specific girls were cute, but already, I had become such that I couldn't think of anything but her.

Ignoring that vicious and willful personality, only Aria's appearance was cute...enough so to make me speechless. At least, I felt that this feeling was overwhelming, not leaving me any chance to resist.

If there really is a God, then he has a cruel sense of humor.

He had to place this kind of girl by my side, who has a disease like Hysteria Mode.

"...?"

Aria, who was below me...

Didn't seem to understand what was going on, and she blinked those camellia eyes.

Blink.

Blink, blink.

"...!"

And noticing her position, being pushed down by me,

"...~~~~~!!"

Her mouth opened and closed.

Open, close, open, close!

...She couldn't make a sound, probably because she was so overwhelmed with rage or surprise.

I read the movements of those cute lips, just like sakura petals,

"MAKE-A-HOLE!"...

Wh-what do I do?

If I let go of her hands, she'll definitely start the Summer Festival Hole Making Ritual.

My mind...was suddenly filled with images of the Tohyama gravestones at Sugama [Honmyouji](#).

In front of that scene was Shirayuki, who was about to commit suicide out of grief, Riko, who was crying and writing my [Kaimyou](#) on the gravestone with a magic marker, and Reki, who was [pouring water](#) into the bowl by my grave, expressionless. All of them were wearing funeral clothing.

That overly realistic scene made all the blood in my body freeze up--

Shh It dissipated my Hysteria Mode, which had just gotten halfway.

Aah. The only thing that could possibly get me out of this situation alive has been sealed.

No...No, no.

This is good. Kinji.

The me as of right now is alone with Aria in a classroom.

Try going into Hysteria Mode in that kind of situation.

I--will definitely seduce Aria with beautiful words, doing reckless things that could not be made up for no matter how much I try.

I've never done that kind of thing since I was young...but recently, I had been becoming more adult, and in that respect--I had a really bad feeling.

I didn't want to think about it, but the reason for this power was so I could leave children behind.

So, the fact that Hysteria Mode was interrupted was probably a stroke of good fortune.

And like that, as the realization that my calm 17 years of life was about to come to an end flashed into my mind like a revolving lantern--

"...?"

I suddenly noticed that Aria's expression wasn't one of anger.

She was breathing in and out, *Haa Haa*, as if she was in pain...

"Ah, hey. Did you get hit somewhere?"

I released my hands, bringing them around her, pulling her up, and Aria, not angry at all, dipped her head--

Her hands were clasped to her flat chest.

She just sat there, *Sshhh*, turning her back to face me.

"...Are you...alright?"

Thinking about how she had totally deviated from the normal pattern, I was...a little worried.

"Ah, mm, I'm fine..."

Aria's deep breaths, which seemed to be trying to calm down her beating heart, faded away.

"...Why? Recently, sometimes...here..."

Talking to herself, Aria looked at her left breast, strangely.

It...looks like she doesn't feel well.

I'm not a doctor, so I have no way of knowing for sure.

"Aria, you should rest a bit. Don't push yourself."

"Ah...No, don't worry. I'm fine already. Alright Kinji, let's not waste any more time and let's start cleaning."

Saying that while fixing her skirt and standing up, Aria...

As if trying to cover something up, she turned her head towards me, laughing, embarrassed.

In truth, her weak appearance from just now didn't seem to be much of a hindrance...afterward, Aria immediately returned to normal, and she grabbed a duster to help me tidy the bookshelves.

Aria and I--talked about a really interesting new movie, talked about the hamburgers we liked at McDonald, talked about the rumors that Assault's Devil Teacher, Ranbyou was going to get married. We really talked about those irrelevant, petty things while we cleaned.

Originally, being alone with a girl would, for me, be an extremely bad circumstance...

But now, I felt that Aria was an exception.

If there hadn't been that sudden incident from just now, to be honest, I see Aria so often that she's a girl whom being with her doesn't make me as agitated as usual.

That upright and unreserved personality allowed me to accept her as if I was face to face with a male friend.

If I were together with someone with a womanly character like Shirayuki or Riko, I would definitely be agitated, for fear that I would enter Hysteria Mode--

I wouldn't just talk with them like this, right?

And continuing to talk the whole day, we continued on that boring job, which seemed to have become a little more interesting...

Cleaning, just as Aria had announced at the start, was finished by 5:00.

With this, I've really fulfilled my credit necessity.

I can finally continue on to the 2nd semester.

I looked around the large lecture hall, sparkling and neat now--suddenly gazing upon Aria--

"..."

Our eyes met.

Aria was gazing upon me as well.

The summer sunlight, having become slightly red, illuminated the empty classroom...the sound of cicadas, vaguely coming from outside the walls, were clearer, in the midst of this silence.

Aria and I looked at each other for a few seconds, in complete silence.

Those camellia eyes seemed to be filled with pain--am I imagining it...?

"...Ah...It looks like we've some time left."

A little embarrassed, Aria turned her head to one side, *Shh*, straightening her twin-tails.

And, mm, she seemed to be thinking about something...

"Sit over there."

Suddenly, she pointed at one of the chairs in the front row.

"What?"

"Because I'm going to teach."

"Teach?"

"That's right. We'll pretend to be a student and teacher. You'll be the student."

Hey...We're already high school students, playing pretend...

I thought that, but, well, Aria was the person who helped me with this cleaning job after all. I'll just listen to what she says. There's nobody around, so I won't be thought of as an idiot.

"...Then, you'll be the teacher?"

"That's right, I'll be Aria-sensei. You'll be a student, Tohyama-kun. Then, let's start the exam!"

She's really enthusiastic, this Aria.

She was like this too, when I pretended to be Leopon-kun at Koumeikan in June, it looks like Aria really likes playing these kinds of pretend scenarios. Hey, how much like a kid are you, exactly?

"Alright Tohyama-kun, sit down."

Uu. Saying "Tohyama-kun" in that anime-like voice...it's embarrassing. Abnormally so.

Aria ignored me, who sat down with a weird look, and *Tap Tap Tap*, she ran up to the lectern.

"..."

But, she was too short, and only her head stuck out above the lectern.

It's almost exactly like showing off somebody's beheaded head.

As I was about to helplessly burst into laughter, I quickly cleared my throat, covering it up.

Aria, mm, just as I thought she was about to get angry, she sat on the lectern...her back facing me. She reached her hand out, drawing something on the blackboard.



A room. In the room there's a person. On top of the person, there was a label which said "Killed".

Afterward, she twisted around, standing on the lectern, her shoes still on.

"Then, a locked room incident has occurred."

She announced strictly.

"...That?"

"--How did the culprit kill the victim? Alright, Tohyama-kun, please answer!"

Answer?

You've given too little clues, right? Actually, does this question even need a picture?

Thinking this in my heart, I understood that if I angered Aria--hime, who had completely entered her role as a teacher, guns would appear...So, I helplessly started thinking.

"...Does his house have a letterbox?"

"It does."

"Then, poison gas was introduced through there, right?"

"Bu-Bu-"

Aria exposed her canines in a smile, and her fingers formed an X.

Annoying.

"...The culprit entered the room to kill the culprit first, and afterward, he took the key with him."

"Then?"

"He locked the door from outside, putting the key into the mailbox to make it look like a locked room incident. This is a real case."

"Wrong--"

Wrong?

This isn't something that's decided to be right or wrong based on what you feel, right?

"Give me a little more hints. How did the victim die?"

"Mm-. He died from a dagger to the chest."

You just made that up, right?

"...If humans are stabbed in the chest, they can still stay alive for a while. So, the victim was stabbed at the door, and trying to keep the culprit out, he closed the door, and after he locked it-- he died."

"Wrong~"

Annoying, Annoying.

"...You're not going to say that the house was built after the person was killed, right?"

"Oh, that's good too. But, it's wrong."

That isn't good at all! Why don't you try answering this kind of adjustable quiz yourself.

"Then, did the culprit pretended to be the first witness to the scene? He hurried to the scene along with the police, pretending to break the lock before opening it. In truth, it wasn't locked, so it wasn't a locked room murder."

"...I don't really get it, but it's wrong."

"...He made a backup key, and after killing the victim he left it locked...there have been cases of a backup key being thrown away, too."

"That's too cunning, right?"

"Yes, that's a characteristic normally associated with murderers."

"It's wrong. Alright, we don't have much time left. *Tick Tock Tick Tock*"

Aria imitated the sound of a clock.

Hey, you're not a teacher like this, you're more like a quiz game host.

Anyways, you didn't even tell me the time limit at the beginning.

Well, after all, it was just decided based on how she felt.

"Beep Beep! Time's up!"

See, I told you.

Whatever.

I don't have the motivation to argue with you anymore.

"...Then? What's the answer?"

Aria, *Bang*, jumped off the lectern, her skirt fluttering, in front of me, who was sighing.

"The culprit escaped by teleporting!"

She thrust her flat chest forward, announcing that.

--Cheated.

Suddenly feeling weak, I slid down my chair.

"That's way too unfair!"

"Yes, that's a characteristic commonly associated with murderers."

Seeing Aria, who was laughing, walking this way, I had nothing to say.

"To tell the truth, I fought with an offender that had a similar ability. So, you have to be able to notice it too, you know?"

Whoosh Looking at Aria, who had raised her eyebrows pushing her face towards me--

I smiled bitterly and nodded.

"...Well, that's true. We've seen enough supernatural scenes to last us a lifetime."

Suddenly, Aria's forefinger, which had emitted that magical light before, stabbed directly at me-- that finger touched my forefinger, as if trying to pull it back like a magnet.

...Finger to finger.

Those fingers of ours, which had pulled triggers hundreds of times, were together.

Seeing that--I could feel a tremor run through the deepest reaches of my heart.

(...*Rakushi*[\[16\]](#)...?)

I learned this in Assault.

This movement, called Rakushi, was only performed between Butei in Assault--a symbol of farewell.

Noticing that my face had frozen, Aria closed those double-fold eyelids...

"--There's something I have to say, come to the roof with me."

She said that, softly.

We arrived on the empty rooftop, standing together by the west fence.

--The last sunset of the summer holidays was setting.

The clear and fresh sea breeze, as if making all the exhaustion and fatigue fade away, washed over us.

The days may be hot, but in the morning and at night, it's still quite cold.

--Summer--huh?

A lot of things happened. But, that has all ended.

"...What a beautiful sunset, it feels like we're being sucked into it."

"Then grab onto my sleeve or something. Then you won't be pulled in."

A little unhappy, I made a sarcastic comment towards Aria, who was saying some poetic words...but she chuckled, as if she thought it was funny. Then, she really took my sleeve, gently.

"...Actually..."

Looking around at Tokyo, which was slowly brightening up, Aria's other hand pressed onto the fence.

"Today, I helped you...not only because of your credits, but for two other reasons."

"Two other reasons...?"

"Yeah. The first is, I wanted to have more time to speak with you. There are still many things I need to tell you. But, I wasn't brave enough...and I talked with you about those things the whole time. But, having fun wasn't bad."

"--Something about...the Hidan?"

Hearing me say that, Aria didn't turn her head.

"Well, that too."

"Then after...what was it? Can you shoot that bullet of light and control your hair like Riko?"

I asked directly...Aria, *shh*

She shook her head.

Her pink twin-tails moved naturally, just like normal.

"Actually, I tried. But I couldn't do it."

"...Is that so..."

"Probably because I need to meet some conditions still. I thought that it would be a great counter to Choutei too."

Hearing her say that while shrugging her shoulders--

My heart settled a little.

Buried inside Aria's body is an unknown metal named "Irokane"...It looks like that enables her to use unnatural abilities, just like Shirayuki and Jeanne.

And this kind of thing, if I were standing in Aria's shoes...I would be afraid.

But from the way she spoke, at least, Aria isn't afraid of the "Hidan"

"You know...Great-grandfather..."

Hearing Aria's words, I turned towards her.

Sherlock Holmes.

He is Aria's great-grandfather, I-U's leader, the world's strongest detective--

"As he himself said, has disappeared. After that incident, no matter what country it was, there was no news of him. But, great-grandfather has a habit of making everyone believe that he is dead, then reappearing afterward--Reichenbach, Hong Kong, Calcutta, New York. He's done this many times before."

"Are you saying...he's still alive?"

I said in response, and Aria, *Shh*

Nodded violently.

As if saying--That's what I believe.

"I-U...as a group, has splintered. It appears that before, they decided that if the seat of leader remains empty, the "Hidan" given to someone else, they would separate. However, originally, they were only a kind of group that came together for the sake of their own goals."

"Yeah. I know. But in the end, it was far too easy."

Saying this, I felt a little surprised by my own words.

I-U's dissolution was easy...Too easy, so much so that it makes one feel that there's something else...

No--Don't think about that group anymore.

"Also...I've already gathered a lot of evidence from I-U, mother's trial is about to start."

Hearing this, I couldn't help but think about Aria's mother, who was framed by I-U--Kanzaki Kanae-san.

"Because they're using the normal trial isolation procedures, if they're fast, within 9 months she will receive the maximum sentence. As long as she can be sentenced as not-guilty within that time, and we appeal to the public procurators--Mother will be released."

"Is that so...Then you're about to succeed."

"Thank you Kinji. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart. You were the reason I could get so far."

Turning her head, Aria's smile--made me, who wasn't very good with this kind of thing, twist my head away.

"It's nothing, why are you thanking me so seriously? I'm just keeping Butei Charter article 1."

Which is to say, I'm just keeping the "help each other". Just doing something like that.

I'm sorry, those people who came up with the Butei Charter.

This time, I'm going to hide behind those words.

"...When mother is sentenced as not guilty, I..."

Aria spoke up to that...then paused...

Chh...

Her nose making a soft sniffing sound.

"...?"

"I..."

Those eyes, looking at me...

Were shining in the light of the sunset, which had nearly faded away.

Tears...

"--will go back to London."

Hearing those words, I--

-wasn't surprised.

Because...I knew that one day, this would come to pass. What is happening right now.

"I don't think I'll come to school anymore. Because I'll be busy with the trial, this could be...today could be the last time I'll meet you."

The sounds of the cicadas, reaching our ears from some faraway place, seemed to overshadow what Aria had told me.

"Originally, my contract with you should have only gone on until the end of the "Butei Killer" case. So, it ended when I received Riko's testimony in June. But...I...still pulled you in forcefully. And because of that, I even caused you to have not enough credits."

...Aria.

You, actually, already noticed...that because of your mother's sentence, you pulled me into your situation...

You really...did care about me.

"But, during the festival in July...when you said, 'So until we completely resolve the matter with I-U, I will always remain by your side.'...I was so happy that I could cry. I felt that, you, Kinji, was such a...compassionate person..."

Aria dipped her head slightly, *shh*, placing her forehead on the fence.

"In I-U, for the idiotic me, you gave all you had, you gave even your life, to fight...At that time, I...understood that you really were my best partner...But...precisely for that reason...I don't wish to trouble you any longer..."

Aria raised her head, once again looking at Tokyo, continuing to speak.

Those eyes, hidden by her fringe, on that head, turned towards me, Aria...her expression was full of pain and sadness--

-But she still forced herself to smile, and turning here, she said in a tearful voice...

"Do-don't make that kind of expression, as if the world has collapsed, Kinji. It's a horrible expression."

"I-I'm not. The question is, what are you crying about?"

"I'm not crying."

Baring her canines at me, from Aria's eyes, *Drip*, tears just began to fall.

Catching them in the air, Aria made an expression which said, "Look, I'm not crying."

According to Aria's rules, it appears that if your tears don't hit the ground, you're not crying.

"So...this .1 credit assignment...is our last commission together. Well, this really fits us, doesn't it. Now that I think about it, our first commission together was also for .1 credits, finding that lost kitten in Oumi."

"Aah...That's right, it was."

"Lo-look. Don't look this way, smile! This is a happy end, so you have to smile!"

Aria's hands clasped my face, forming it into a smile.

"Aha, that's a horrible face."

Saying something terrible, Aria appeared to be really amused by my face--

She no longer cried, and "Ahaha," she started laughing.

Doing the same, I laughed as well, and Aria, satisfied, released her hands.

Silence once again settled around us, like a blanket--

"Hey...Kinji, you're going to quit being a Butei in the March of next year, right? It hasn't changed, right?"

From a position half a head lower than me, Aria looked up at me, asking.

I--

-nodded lightly.

Aria answered with "I see", that one sentence, and she dipped her head...And once again, she used those sparkling eyes to look at me.

"Kinji. But, I have a small suggestion."

Straightening her forefinger and saying that, Aria's expression looked like she was joking.

"Before March of next year, come to London Butei High as well. Not only will you be able to train at places like the GBDA and the SAS, I'll teach you English myself."

Ah, hey, hey...That isn't just "a small suggestion," right? So, you wanted me to study abroad.

It appeared that my thoughts had appeared on my face, as Aria--

"...Just joking..."

Smiling bitterly, she dipped her head.

She had some hopes that I'd accept, right? That expression seemed to be full of regret.

Both our gazes returned to the sunset, which had already sunk to the horizon, in the midst of the high-rise buildings.

As if representing some sort of time limit.

"Also, the second reason I came here today was because...I wanted...memories."

"?" appearing on my face, I looked down at Aria, who was speaking very softly.

But, Aria didn't look back at me.

Her face, looking so red, didn't seem...like it was red from the sunset.

"From the beginning, a Butei that could become my true partner--Kinji, you're the only one. I probably won't be able to find anybody better than you, even if I were to spend my entire life searching. So, I don't want to forget you. And...if it were possible, I wish that Kinji too...would not forget about me."

Aria, hesitated, embarrassed...

"So, I wanted to spend some time with you now...and my memories..."

Saying that, her feet seemed to be moving slightly...They paused,

Shhh

Shhh Those tiny knees were trembling.

...What's wrong?

"Fa-face that way."

Aria hid her eyes in the shadow of her fringe, caused by the sunset, her gaze fixed on the floor.

With no other choice, I turned away, not understanding anything.

For a little while, the time of silence flowed past...the sun had sank a little bit.

Shh...There's something...

Something as light as velvet, something smooth, brushed around the back of my hand.

I turned my head around, only to see that, while she was still averting her gaze away from me, Aria's...

Twin-tail, shining like a pink diamond in the illumination of the fading sunset--was touching my hand.

Aria took a step towards me. Just one step. But in this one step...she had arrived by my side.

Her expression showed that she seemed to be agitated about something, that she was determined about something.

"..."

Aria's gaze, still avoiding mine, looked northwards...looking at the wide "Empty Island", on the other side of the fence.

That gaze seemed to be filled with some sort of message.

"..."

Seeing that Aria had blushed to a degree that was slightly worrying, I followed her gaze intently...

Over there was the place where the Boeing 737 we had crashed had disintegrated.

My mind thought back to what had happened inside that plane.

It may have been for the sake of my life, but at that time, Aria and I--together, we...

Had had our first...

Kiss.

...I won't forget. I couldn't possibly forget. That memory.

The words that Aria had spoke earlier echoed around in my head, and for some reason, the memories from that time blended together with those words.

"Ki...Kinji, I'm sorry. I-it looks like...I suddenly said some weird things..."

Saying this, Aria, who was by my side...fell silent.

Aria.

What did you want to say?

What meaning does it have? Those memories you spoke of.

...No.

Somehow, I understand. Really.

Earlier, since we did Rakushi...I really did understand.

Because at that time, had we gone with the flow...Our hands would have come together. Probably.

Perhaps, it could be that Aria...wanted me to do so.

But, I had tore my finger away.

--Hysteria Mode--

Because I have that special attribute, which could be called a disease. Because of that.

(...Aria...)

Aria, silent and afraid, was waiting for my reaction. Waiting for my next action.

As I noticed that, I--

...became scared.

(This won't do.)

I heard that voice, coming from the deepest reaches of my heart.

(...This won't do, Kinji...)

I...had forbidden myself to do that kind of thing.

No matter how subtle the movement, I did not wish to do anything that clearly delineated each other as boy, and girl.

Up till now...in battle, there were a few times that I had no choice but to go into Hysteria Mode.

But, I had never had enough bravery to bring myself into that mode when no one was in danger.

My father and Nii-san, even in Hysteria Mode, they won't lose themselves--they can keep themselves from hurting women, touching them. They can control their own impulses, keeping calm.

But, that's only because adults can do that, right?

--And I...

I still was unable to do that.

I had no way of controlling the me in that mode.

If because of that, Aria and I did something that we could never take back...

And in the end, I hurt Aria...

Both of us would regret it as long as we lived.

Once I thought of that, I became scared.

And, not only that, tonight, Aria and I were the only ones here. Shirayuki wasn't here to interfere once Aria and I were together, and Riko wasn't here to do something stupid in front of Aria, angering her.

If in this sort of situation, where there was nothing like a failsafe, Aria took another step closer to me--

I might just take advantage of the night, and push the boulder that was teetering on the top of the hill.

"..."

So, I just remained silent.

And silence could only express my refusal.

One minute, 2 minutes, Aria continued to wait for me in silence...

And--the scarlet sunset sunk beneath the horizon.

Unconsciously filling the air...was the feeling that this was the end.

"As I thought...It's really embarrassing, this atmosphere."

Smiling bitterly and saying those words, Aria shattered the silence.

"...Yeah."

Only able to respond with this, I understood that, in the end, I had still hurt Aria.

The childlike Aria, only because she did not know what to do, had decided to leave everything up to me.

But, I had ignored it all. Not even explaining why.

I felt as if I had humiliated Aria.

(...Aria...)

This...is disgusting.

Using this kind of method, that can only hurt, to end the time that I had spent with my partner, with whom I had tread the line between life and death.

If I don't state my reasons, I'm too irresponsible.

So...

Because this is the last.

It should be fine if I tell her everything.

--about Hysteria Mode.

I turned to Aria, who had started to talk about petty matters while we were living together, and my solemn gaze cut her off--

"Aria. What I'm about to say now...Don't be shocked."

Using that as a basis.

Aria had grown serious herself--and she nodded lightly.

I took a deep breath,

"Actually, I..."

As I was about to--

Confess about Hysteria Mode.

"... ...?"

Aria and I noticed that abnormality in unison.

--We noticed that the sound of cicadas had stopped.

Cicadas, flies, Brown cicadas--the cries of all the insects had stopped.

It's not just because of the sunset, right? Because, those cicadas that had been calling out the whole night were not few in number.

That's right, it feels like every bug in a 2 meter radius...

Had felt something at the same time, cutting their cries--

--The next moment, I felt someone's breathing.

Aria and I looked eastwards together.

On the eastern fence of the roof--

A girl was standing on it, as if it was a balancing log, staring at us, unmoving.

The thing she was shouldering was a shining [SVD](#).

Slender, lightweight, durable, it was a conceptual weapon used on the actual battlefield.

"...Reki."

I called out her name.

She's Snipe's S rank Butei--Reki.

Standing in that kind of place, what is she doing?

No, I should say...when did she start standing up there?

Not only me, even the S rank Butei, Aria, had not noticed her presence at all.

"...Ah, ah...Umm, Reki. Th-that's not it. This is...um..."

Stepping away from me, her footsteps a little panicked, Aria pointed at me nervously.

Fyuuuuuu

Even in the darkness, I understand. Steam was rising from those reddened cheeks.

"Th-this isn't anything. We-we're just working together. So, um..."

It looks like she thinks that...Reki had seen us when we were alone together.

No, it might be that that really is the case. Before, Reki had used her scope to spy on my room.

Nobody is perfect. Although it looks like she's very disinterested, Reki might be a peeper.

"..."

Next to me, who was watching Reki, Aria's gait had become completely agitated.

"Ah...Ripobitan D!"

She shouted out as if singing some magical incantation.

"Ju-just now I lost to you, I'll go buy some quickly...!"

Using that as an excuse, quickly escaping from this embarrassing situation, Aria--

Shh, Tap Tap, Tap Tap Tap Tap! Not stopping to look back at me, her footsteps continuing without pause, she crossed over the roof.

Afterward, she rushed down the stairs so fast that her twin-tails were nearly hanging in the air.

"..."

Reki was silent.

Behind her, in the sky of the east, as if replacing the scarlet sunset which had already sunk below the western horizon--

There was an abnormally large moon, scattering its rays.

--Scattering a glaring, bright blue light.

NOTES

16. Lit. Finger Contact/Connect

GO FOR THE NEXT! HELLO REKI.

"Did I interrupt the two of you?"

Under the moon, Reki, who was watching the shadow left by Aria, finally opened her mouth.

She quickly walked on top of the fence like a cat towards me.

I didn't answer her.

"...What did you come here for?"

I responded to Reki, who was walking towards the top of my head, with a question.

"I've read it."

"Read it...? Say, you don't have any books, do you?"

"It isn't a book."

"Then, what did you read?"

With those kind of cryptic words, I couldn't help but question her again.

"—The wind,"

Reki answered, while her short hair—was moving gently in the cold sea breeze.

Shaa, the skirt of her uniform was also moving... My face turned red, and I turned my head so I couldn't see Reki, who was above me.

"...Come down here. It's not polite to look down at someone else while talking."

As I finished talking...

Since I didn't sense any movement at the time, I looked up again to the top of the walls...

But Reki was already gone.

".....!"

The me who turned my head, slightly took some cool air.

I don't know when but—

Reki, who got down from the walls silently, closely stuck to me, standing behind my back.

"The wind has begun to become frenzied..."

That Reki, she was talking to herself.

"...What did you say?"

I couldn't help but ask her, while feeling some kind of chill going down my spine.

Because Reki's eyes emitted a kind of distant, void feeling.

She... how can I put it, emits some radio waves.

"Kinji-san."

That kind of glass-like eyes, looked at me.

What, what do you want.

As I was slightly retreating from her, at that moment——

Making the distance between Reki and me zero, shaa——

She stood on her tiptoes and——

"——"

—Kissed—

Me.

(...It isn't real, is it?)

This is really...

It is really, really unexpected.

I foolishly stood there... I could only feel my own lips, locked with Reki's, which surprisingly were as smooth as silicone gel.

With a bit of mint flavor, Reki's—kiss.

——Crack.

The sound of glass being shattered made me let go of Reki's shoulders and turn my head around—

Aria, is it.

On the stairs leading to the roof, two broken bottles fell at that place.

"...Ah..."

Her crimson-colored eyes wide open, Aria, who lost her words——

Her gaze met mine, and her mouth kept opening and closing.

"So-sorry. I, um...didn't, didn't know that you two...!"

She finally managed to bring out with her seiyuu-like voice from her throat.

"...Y-yeah, Kinji. I'm sorry, I...I, didn't know that it would be like this, ah, no, nothing, this isn't wrong. Because, since you're already a high-school student, you would have a lover...that's, that's why just before...you, would be like this——"

Aria, who's losing her head in panic, her entire body was slightly trembling—

—Without even allowing me to explain the situation, her twintails soared as she turned around.

"I...I'm sorry! I'm really sorry, Kinji...!"

Letting out that shrill as if she has been betrayed, she ran off like a rabbit.

Tatatatatatatata...! The sound of her plunging in the stairs was more and more distanced.

"...Aria...!"

As I was thinking of chasing after her, behind me—

Klang, a sound rang.

Even though I didn't want it, I still gained some sensitivity while in Assault, enough which forced me to shift my body around.

I only knew what I deduced from my hearing...Reki, took her gun from her back.

She held her long 120 centimeter sniper rifle close to her feet.

As if, she was a guard protecting an invisible gate.

"Kinji-san."

Reki, who once more called my name, shaa, trained her sight on me like the lens of a camera.

That gaze made me turn my attention to her by instinct.

That gaze.

It was almost like—as if she was something looking at its prey, like a hunter—

"You can't be with Aria-san."

"...Wha..."

What was that.

What are you saying, Reki.

"From today onwards, I'll be your partner. "

"Ah, hey....."

Thump—

I, who just had an abnormal feeling in my heart...

As if trying to prevent the prior kiss, I press the back of my hand against my mouth, taking a step back from Reki.

"You've become strong,"

Reki, as if she was playing a previously recorded speech, emotionlessly said.

"If it was an enemy of I-U, it would already be enough. In fact, with Kinji-san like this and me battling against each other——nine out of ten, Kinji-san would win."

She—*does she know?*

Does she know about I-U?

Also, does she know about me?

"But, all the enemies from now on won't only rely on pure strength. That's why you should know that there are people who can easily destroy your existence through other means."

You said from now on....enemies?

This is not something which I can neglect—

But Reki didn't even give me time to react to this, and continued.

"For example, a sniper. If he conceals himself long enough, and shoots us from a long range...it would be easier to finish you guys off than a short time fighting supernatural power bearers or some close-range fighters."

Reki, while saying that, took out a bullet from her sailor uniform.

"—An armor-piercing round..."

Reki didn't respond to me, who couldn't help but let out these words.

The head of that ammo and its flash was different from normal sniping ammo.

It was—

Similar to what Sherlock used to attack Kana, an armor-piercing bullet.

"From now on, I'll teach you about the other side."

Pulling the magazine as smoothly as water—*clang,* in front of Reki, who was pushing the deadly bullets inside...

I felt energy, finally surging inside my body.

—Hysteria mode.

This, triggered by sexual arousal, can bestow thirty times the strength of an ordinary person.

"It should be about time."

Seeing the magazine being loaded again and Reki, holding the sniper rifle—

In my heart, I was scolding myself for my foolishness.

Yeah. This is something like the setting of my entire life.

After resolving something, I relax whenever I found the solution to something, and after that, a new troublemaker emerges. Shirayuki at one time, Riko at another, but I still have been caught off my guard.



Well, I seriously didn't think that this time it would be Reki.

Clang — Seeing Reki pointing her sniper rifle toward me, I bitterly smiled.

"Kinji-san."

"...What?"

"Please marry me."

Saying these unexpected words—

Ha!?

Made so that I couldn't help but make me shout out.

"...Reki, I surely heard wrong...just now, what did you say.....?"

"I was proposing marriage. To you."

Kona...Konayuki, I'm sorry that I doubted you.

You were right. I would, in this month...be proposed to, huh. It was correct, it's still August 31.

"Wait, please wait a moment, Reki. It's too sudden. You could have at least led into it."

"I believe I already did. Didn't I say, 'From now on, I'll be your partner.'?"

Facing Reki, who calmly said those words—the speed of thoughts running through my head, which was looking up terms like ['marriage by capture'](#) and ['forced marriage'](#), was sufficient to rival a computer.

Well, but whatever it is, it's always men who do that.

"That, that's really an honor...but Reki. I don't think that should be said with a gun pointing at someone."

Facing her with Hysteria mode blood circulating in my head, I tried to calmly take a step back—

"I won't let you flee."

Reki, already emitting an aura as if she became one with the Dragunov, again pointed at me with the rifle's muzzle.

You are really, really the unexpectedly passionate type.

Reki's eyes were glaring at me as if they could penetrate through my back.

"If you refuse—"

Today, at this moment, has started the new prelude to the real thing, and it has been opened by this sentence.

It was the catchphrase taken from Aria.

"—I'll blast a hole in you."

Go for the NEXT!!!!

といったところでV巻もおしまいです。また、次の季節にお会いしましょう。では！



2009年12月吉日

あかまつちゅうがく
赤松中学

祝!!
5巻
発売

こんにちはこぶいちです。
今回は本編でも衝撃発言を
連発してくれたレキ。
せっかくのおまけページなので
髪型も変えてみました。

レキは常にヘッドフォンと
ドラッグフがセットなので
地味に手のかかる子なのですが
その分描いた後の達成感は
一番だつたりします。

今後どう活躍してくれるのか
非常に楽しみですネ!

