



神永
学

心霊探偵

八

PSYCHIC DETECTIVE

YAKUMO

ШПАРАВУ КАМИПАГА

雲



裁きの塔

角川文庫

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時計塔の亡霊

File 01: The Ghost Of The Clock Tower

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That clock tower stood in the centre of the university campus –

The fifteen-metre tall brick tower had a room on the top floor. It was constructed like the lookout of a mediaeval castle.

However, the needles of the clock were stopped pointing at eleven fifty-five.

Though it was said that it had broken in an air raid or had been struck by lightning, few knew the truth.

There was a strange old rumour about this clock tower –

There was a large full-length mirror in the small room at the top of the tower.

It was said that the mirror was a doorway to the underworld and that you could reunite with the dead if you stood in front of that mirror at eleven fifty five –

However, nobody had ever confirmed that mirror.

Because those that reunited with the dead were taken away to the underworld

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1

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The man silently climbed the stairs –

The stairs within the clock tower.

There was an atrium inside the tower with stairs that circled the walls.

With just the faint light of the torch in his hand, he went up the stairs one step at a time.

The smell of dust and mould assaulted his nose.

After reaching the midway point, the man stopped, feeling like somebody had called out to him.

He turned around and looked down the stairs, but it was dark and he couldn't see below him. He didn't plan on going back even if somebody had called him anyway.

– I need to confirm the truth.

That was the man's strong will.

There was a room at the top of this clock tower. He had heard a rumour that there was a large full-length mirror there which you could meet the dead with if you stood in front of it.

The man wanted to confirm the truth of that rumour.

He knew that most of these rumours were false, but he had still stepped into the clock tower.

The man had somebody he wanted to meet no matter what. That person was somebody no longer in this world. A resident of the underworld.

After some time, he reached the top –

Unlike the stairs, there was a window that let in the light. Though it was night, the moonlight made it possible for him to see fairly well.

A circle had used this room in the past.

They had left behind an assortment of clutter, of course including things like desks and chairs.

In the front of the room – the wall with the clock – stood the full-length mirror, alone.

The oval mirror, supported by a pedestal, had curling ivy decorating the frame. It appeared fairly old.

The mirror's surface was dirty with dust, but it let out an unsettling presence which made you think the rumour might be true.

However, there wasn't anything strange about the mirror itself.

The man checked his wristwatch. It would soon be eleven fifty-five.

The man stared at the mirror.

In the gloomy world of the mirror, all he could see was the dreary room and his own face.

– So it was just a rumour, like I thought.

Just as the man gave up and was about to turn around, he thought he saw something move in the mirror.

He turned around with a start.

However, he didn't see anybody there, of course.

'Just my imagination...'

The moment he turned towards the mirror again, there was a loud thump and the window on the side opened.

A cold wind blew in.

Dust got in the man's eyes, so the man covered his face.

He blinked a few times and looked up, and then he noticed that there was a dark silhouette in front of the open window.

It was probably human.

They wore something like a black hood over their head, so he couldn't see their face.

The man backed away in shock.

'Please... I... was...'

The shadow spoke.

It was a voice so hoarse you couldn't tell if it was a man's or a woman's.

'Wha...'

The man was so terrified that he tried to run away, but he stumbled and fell.

He bore with the pain and stood up, but the silhouette came to block his way, along with a foul smell.

The man held his breath and froze.

'Don't be afraid... I... am your...'

The silhouette spoke.

When he heard the voice up close like this, he could determine its gender, even though it was hoarse.

'C-could it be... you're...'

He could just see lips under the hood. Plump, bewitching lips turned up in a smile.

'I...'

The silhouette confessed the truth in the man's ears –

Though they were shocking words, they deserved the man's belief.

'You really are...'

Just as the man spoke, his consciousness slipped away into the dark –

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2

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Ozawa Haruka was on the south end of campus, heading for the prefabricated building behind Building B.

The autumn sky spread above her, no clouds to be seen.

The wind was chilly. With her short hair, her neck felt cold.

– Should I let it grow out a bit?

She had that on her mind as she reached the building in question.

The prefabricated two-storey building had ten small rooms on each floor and was lent out by the university for circle activities.

Haruka stood in front of the door to the Movie Research Circle at the very end of the first floor.

She wasn't a member of the Movie Research Circle. The Movie Research Circle didn't even exist.

The owner of the room, Saitou Yakumo, had tricked the faculty and had made the room his own – he was actually living here.

'Hey.'

Haruka called out as she opened the door.

Yakumo was sitting in the chair in front of the door while reading a book.

His skin was pale. Though he had a handsome profile, his hair was a mess, making him look wild.

Even though he must have noticed that Haruka had come, he didn't even look up from his book, let alone greet her.

It wasn't that he was in a bad mood. This was how Yakumo always acted.

Haruka sighed and sat across from Yakumo, but Yakumo still didn't look away from his book.

'Hey. You could at least greet me,' grumbled Haruka, at which point Yakumo finally looked up.

His almond eyes looked straight at Haruka.

'Was that a greeting?'

'Eh?'

'“Hello” or “How are you?” – I would recognise those as greetings, but all you uttered was “Hey” in a strange voice.'

'Strange voice...'

'Strange voice, as in a voice that is strange.'

'I know that.'

– He says such awful things.

'Then you have no right to complain.'

Yakumo looked back to his book.

Haruka wanted to argue, but there was a reason she couldn't today.

'Um... There's something I want to ask you about...'

As Haruka started to speak, Yakumo waved his hand to cut her off.

'I refuse!'

'I haven't said anything yet...'

'It's definitely some sort of trouble again,' Yakumo said brusquely.

'Why do you think it's trouble?'

'You don't know?'

'I'm asking because I don't know.'

'Because you're a natural-born troublemaker.'

That's not true – is what Haruka wanted to say, but Yakumo had hit the bullseye.

She had brought Yakumo a lot of trouble up until now. Trouble was the reason she had met Yakumo.

Haruka's friend, Miki, had been possessed by a ghost, so she had gone to

Yakumo, who was knowledgeable about ghosts.

Normally, Yakumo hid it with a black contact lens, but Yakumo's left eye was dyed a vivid red.

Though Haruka thought there was no need to hide it since it was beautiful, people loathed those who were different from themselves – or so Yakumo always said.

Yakumo's left eye wasn't just red. It could see the spirits of the dead – that is, ghosts.

With that unique ability and his unusually bright mind, he hadn't just expelled the spirit possessing Miki – he had even solved the murder case surrounding the issue.

Ever since then, Haruka had experienced various cases with Yakumo. They weren't all ones that Haruka had brought to him, but it was true that many of them had been.

There was no helping being called a troublemaker.

Furthermore, she had indeed been planning on talking to Yakumo about some trouble, just as he had expected. And one related to spiritual phenomena at that –

'I know...' Haruka said with a sigh.

'If you know it yourself, get rid of that trouble already. You probably just stuck your neck in yourself, right?'

Yakumo waved his hand as if brushing away a fly.

'Even if you tell me that, my friend looked really troubled... I can't just leave them alone...'

'People call that meddling.'

'I know that.'

She understood that even without Yakumo telling her, but she just couldn't say 'No' once somebody asked her anything.

Though part of it was just her concern, it was also related to how she had lost her older twin sister when she was younger.

In contrast to her older sister who was kind and could do anything, Haruka had always felt inferior. After her sister died, Haruka's inferiority complex had evolved in this unexpected way.

Nobody said this.

But still, she felt like it would have been better if she had died, instead of her sister –

She was afraid of being told that she was unnecessary.

She always stuck her neck in like that, but she couldn't do anything on her own, so she always ended up relying on Yakumo.

– For some reason, I want to cry.

After a while, Yakumo said with a sigh, 'So what happened?'

'Eh?'

'You probably plan on telling me anyway even though I refused – '

Yakumo propped up his chin with his hand, looking bored.

Haruka didn't know what had brought about this series of events, but it looked like Yakumo would listen to her.

Though Yakumo said a lot of things, he was the type of person who couldn't leave somebody who was troubled alone. That was one of Yakumo's good points.

'What are you grinning about?'

Haruka hurriedly made herself look more serious.

'Thank you,' Haruka said honestly, which made Yakumo frown at her look he was looking at something filthy.

'That's creepy.'

'Creepy.... Don't you think that's rude?'

'I said it because I don't.'

'Ah, of course.'

Haruka had tried to tell Yakumo off, but he didn't care at all.

Though there were many things that she wanted to say, it would be troublesome if she made Yakumo's mood darken.

'So?' urged Yakumo.

'Actually... I don't know the details either. I wanted you to come with me to listen...'

'So you took on the trouble without even knowing what it was?'

'Sorry...'

She couldn't rebut that either.

'Honestly,' said Yakumo with a sigh.

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3

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Ishii Yuutarou sat in his seat while facing some documents.

Ishii's department, Criminal Affairs Division: Unsolved Cases Special Investigations, was in the detectives' jurisdiction and investigated unsolved cases.

Though the name was splendid, in reality, they mainly did paperwork that piled up due to change of leadership or downsizing departments.

Of course, Ishii knew that paperwork was also very important, but it was depressing when that was all he was doing.

Though he knew it was imprudent, he still wanted something more exciting.

However, he wanted that to be as safe as possible.

He would rather not face knife-wielding suspects and be possessed by a ghost again, thank you very much.

'Tonkotsu[1], of course!'

The sudden yell made Ishii jolt.

He turned his gaze towards Gotou Kazutoshi, his senior detective, who was snoring away on a row of chairs.

It seemed like he had been talking in his sleep.

The documents Ishii had asked him to file were still on top of the desk.

Gotou was a man who believed in doing rather than thinking.

Ishii had a great deal of admiration for Gotou, who was a man of men. In the future, he wanted to be a reliable and broadminded detective just like him.

However –

Recently, perhaps because they hadn't had any cases recently, Gotou did come to work, but he was always sleeping.

Since Ishii knew that Gotou did not like paperwork, he tried to make up for his usual uselessness here.

That said, the work would never be finished if Gotou didn't help a little bit.

'Detective Gotou – '

Ishii tried calling out to him, but there was no response.

'Detective Gotou.'

This time, Ishii shook Gotou a little.

'I can't eat any more.'

Gotou shook off Ishii's hand while saying something nonsensical, which made Gotou lose his balance and fall from the chairs.

There was an incredibly loud thump.

'Ow...'

Gotou sat up, rubbing his back.

'Are you all right?' asked Ishii, but Gotou glared at him with the face of a demon.

'Was it you?'

'Yes?'

'Did you make me fall?'

Gotou walked right up to him.

Gotou already had a frightening face usually – seeing him up close like this doubled the intimidation factor.

Ishii let out an 'Eek!' and backed away.

'Tell me – did you push me?'

'No, I... That wasn't what happened!'

'What happened then?'

'I didn't try to push you or anything, Detective Gotou – you just fell...'

'Stop mumbling!'

A fist crashed down on Ishii's head. The shock made him see stars.

He wanted to explain, but saying something unnecessary to Gotou just after he woke up would only worsen his mood.

He decided to be happy it had ended with just one fist to the head.

With a sigh, Ishii went back to his seat – just as the internal line rang.

He picked up the phone and said, 'Criminal Affairs Division: Unsolved Cases Special Investigations Department,' but he almost fumbled his words.

He wished that they'd make the name easier or more stylish, like something in a TV show.

<It's Miyagawa.>

He heard Miyagawa Hideki, chief of the detectives, through the phone.

Though he had a small frame, with his fierce face and bald head, he was frightening enough that you might mistake him for a yakuza if you met him in the streets.

However, he wasn't just frightening – he was a man so compassionate he wouldn't lose to Gotou.

'Hello, sir.'

<You busy now?>

Though there was an incredible amount of paperwork that had to be organised, if Miyagawa was going out of his way to call them, it had to be a case of some sort.

'No, we're fine,' Ishii replied, glancing at Gotou. Gotou rubbed his eyes and lit a cigarette.

<Actually, there's a case I want you guys to take care of.>

– As I thought.

'What is it?'

Ishii felt himself growing excited – it had been a while since the last case.

<Go to the address I give you.>

'What happened?'

<Detectives are on the scene already, so ask them the details.>

'Ah...' replied Ishii, though h was confused, and Miyagawa quickly gave him the address.

Ishii hurriedly wrote it on a memo.

<I'll leave it to you then.>

Miyagawa said just that and hung up.

Ishii couldn't explain it, but an unpleasant feeling was growing within Ishii's chest.

'Who was that?' asked Gotou, startling Ishii into a jump.

'Ah, er, it was Chief Miyagawa. He told us to investigate this place.'

Gotou friend and clicked his tongue.

'That guy's definitely just pushing trouble he doesn't want to deal with towards us.'

'I wonder about that.'

Gotou and Miyagawa had known each other for a long time and both casually spoke ill of the other, but Ishii had nothing he could say from his position.

'Well, we've got the free time anyway. Let's deal with it,' Gotou said carelessly. He grabbed the jacket hung on the back of his chair and strode out of the room.

Ishii hurriedly chased after him.

He fell –

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4

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Hijikata Makoto sat at a table in the lounge of Meisei University.

It was just past the front entrance of Building A.

It was an atrium with a ceiling that went up three storeys and a large window that let in the light – it felt very open.

When she looked out the window, she could see an old brick clock tower. Even though the sun was so bright, it felt a bit creepy.

The passing students were energetic, with an innocent and refreshing air to them.

Watching them made Makoto feel like she had returned to her school days.

Though they hadn't all been good memories, it was still moving.

'What sort of person are they?' asked Makoto to Iwata Kunihiro, who sat next to her.

Iwata was a senior from when Makoto was in university. He had soft features and sometimes seemed a bit absentminded, but he was quite a shrewd man.

'Hm... They look like a regular university student, but they can be a bit strange... Well, I think it'd be better for you just to meet them rather than to listen to my explanation,' Iwata said so quickly it was hard to hear.

'You're making quite a big thing out of this,' said Makoto, which made Iwata laugh dryly.

Well, Iwata's words made sense. If she was going to interview him afterwards, it would be better to listen to him with a blank slate rather than any preconceptions from information she had heard beforehand.

Iwata, who worked a publishing company, had contacted her a week ago for the first time in a while.

He had asked her to interview an author.

Makoto worked at the culture department of a newspaper company. Though she was in charge of a culture column, she would publish an interview with

an author about once a week. Iwata wanted her to put an interview with this author there.

Makoto had thought the work that Iwata sent was rather interesting and decided to interview the author.

The author was a university student – that was one of the points that had caught her interest.

Iwata had arranged things and chosen the interview location, which was why they were in the lounge of Meisei University.

'Hello.'

Makoto turned around and saw a young man there.

Because of his small frame and round, childish face, he could have been mistaken for a middle schooler, but his black eyes alone had a strong volition within them.

'Hi, Sakurai-san.'

Iwata stood up with a smile.

It seemed that the young man in front of Makoto was the author Sakurai Itsuki.

'It's nice to meet you. I'm Hijikata from Hokutou Newspaper.'

Makoto stood up and held out her business card.

'Sorry, I don't have a business card...'

Itsuki replied in a clear voice that contrasted with his appearance.

'Please don't be concerned about that. I look forward to our interview today.'

'As do I –'

With simple greetings finished, they all sat down. Makoto and Iwata sat next to each other with Sakurai opposite them.

'Makocchan, you thought that the person who wrote this was female, didn't you?' said Iwata smugly as he tapped Sakurai's book, *The Ghost of the Clock Tower*, which was on the table.

'I did,' Makoto replied honestly, now understanding why Iwata hadn't wanted to talk about the author.

He had probably wanted to surprise her.

Just as he had planned, she was surprised. *The Ghost of the Clock Tower* had a female protagonist who used the pronoun 'watashi'[2].

The story was written as the diary of the protagonist, who had accidentally killed someone and was tormented by that guilt, falling apart psychologically.

The story described the woman's mental state with such expression, so it had to be written by a woman – so Makoto had thought.

It hadn't helped that the name Sakurai Itsuki could have been that of a man or a woman.

'I thought that he was a woman at first too, so I was shocked when we met,' Iwata said with an amused smile.

'Yes, you were.'

'And on top of that...'

'Since we're all here, would it be all right if we started the interview?' interrupted Makoto before Iwata got started.

Once he began to speak, he never stopped – that was something troublesome about Iwata.

Iwata frowned, looking like he still wanted to talk, but in contrast to that, Sakurai smiled and responded, 'Yes, of course.'

He seemed like a pleasant young man, unlike his writing style.

Makoto got Sakurai's permission to use a voice recorder, pressed the record

button and began after preparing herself.

'The Ghost of the Clock Tower was very interesting.'

'Thank you very much.'

Sakurai looked rather nervous, perhaps because he was feeling conscious of being recorded.

First, Makoto would need to make him relax.

'I read it all in one go. It was thrilling experiencing the everyday slowly go out of control.'

'I'm glad to hear it.'

'The setting is novel too.'

'Is it?'

'Yes. I've never read anything like this before – '

As Makoto said that, even Sakurai looked a bit embarrassed. His expression was a bit more relaxed now.

Makoto wasn't just giving him lip service though.

Sakurai's work, *The Ghost of the Clock Tower*, really contained a unique world.

The protagonist opened her eyes and realised that she had killed someone the night before – that was where the story began.

It was never explained why the protagonist had killed someone or how she had done it – none of the concrete questions.

Readers were drawn in by how the collapse of her everyday was expressed.

'I feel a bit embarrassed,' said Sakurai, closing his eyes.

'The descriptions are fantastic as well. Is this your first work?'

After getting Sakurai to go at her pace, Makoto asked him a question.

'No, I'm part of the literature circle.'

'The literature circle? What sort of activities do you do?'

'Normally, we just get excited talking about authors we like, like Akutagawa or Dazai, but we regularly publish something like a fiction magazine.'

'A magazine? That's rather full-scale.'

'Calling it a magazine would be a bit much. It's more like a booklet –'

Makoto thought it was quite something already for the circle to create something that had actual form, when many circles just played around.

'Are your works published there as well, Sakurai-san?'

'Yes...'

'I'd love to read them.'

After Makoto said that, Sakurai shook his head.

'No, they really aren't anything that I could show anyone.'

'You don't have to be humble.'

'No, they really are awful.'

'But you've written such a wonderful book...'

Makoto looked at *The Ghost of the Clock Tower* on the table.

'I didn't write that –' said Sakurai, looking troubled.

'Eh?'

Makoto looked at Iwata in shock.

Iwata seemed to already have known that, as his expression was just as cool as before.

'What on earth did you mean by those words?' asked Makoto, choosing her words carefully.

'Exactly what I said,' Sakurai said matter-of-factly.

Makoto was even more confused.

'Sakurai-san, you didn't write this work – is that what you're saying?'

'Yes, that is what I'm saying.'

– A ghost writer?

Makoto shook away the suspicion that came to her.

Celebrities might use ghost writers, but that was only after they had built up popularity with their own name.

It would be strange if that were the case here.

'Are you saying that this was plagiarised or that there was a ghost writer?'

'Yes,' said Sakurai with a nod.

This would completely change the direction of the interview.

Makoto looked beside her again. Iwata looked as cool as always. He even looked like he was enjoying the situation.

If what Sakurai said was true and there really was another author, the editor wouldn't be able to stay calm like this.

'Who wrote it?' asked Makoto after taking a deep breath to calm down.

Sakurai looked at the clock tower outside the window. The smile left his face.

After a silence, Sakurai said just this.

'A ghost.'

'By ghost, do you mean the spirit of somebody who died?' repeated Makoto.

Sakurai responded with another nod. 'Yes.'

– Is he one of those?

Makoto understood now, though she lamented it.

Though it was the first she had heard of a ghost writing something, she had often heard things like 'I saw the words in a dream' or 'I felt like somebody else was in my head when I was writing'.

It was impossible from a normal point of view, and it was never actually like that. It was just that the writer fell in a sort of trance when they started writing.

'A ghost? That's an interesting feeling,' said Makoto, but Sakurai shook her head.

'No, it wasn't just a feeling. A ghost really did write this.'

'But...'

'Look, you can see that clock tower, right?'

Sakurai pointed at the clock tower outside the window.

'Yes.'

'The ghost living in that clock tower made me write that work –'

Sakurai's trancelike expression made a chill run down Makoto's spine.

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5

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Haruka sat next to Yakumo at a table by the window in the canteen.

It was already past lunchtime, so there were few people and the kitchen was closed.

'Why do I have to come all the way out here?' grumbled Yakumo as he propped his chin up with his hand, looking bored.

'It's nice sometimes as a change of pace, isn't it?' said Haruka with a shrug.

She had thought about meeting in the Movie Research Circle room, but

Yakumo had complained when they had done that during the 'tree of deceit' case.

In the end, Yakumo complained no matter what she did.

Just as Yakumo was about to complain again, a female student entered the canteen.

She was the person they were waiting for – Koike Kanae.

'Kanae – '

Haruka raised her hand and Kanae's expression brightened immediately when she noticed. She ran over.

Though she had beautiful features, her shoulder-length hair was ink-black and she had little makeup on, so she left a plain impression.

She had a reserved personality as well, so she didn't stand out much.

However, that was just her being considerate of others. She was a woman with incredibly firm beliefs.

Haruka liked that part of Kanae.

'This is Koike Kanae-san, who is in the same lecture as me. This is Saitou Yakumo-kun – '

Haruka introduced the two to each other.

'Hello,' said Kanae, but Yakumo gave no response at all.

Kanae looked troubled, so Haruka said, 'This is how he always is,' urging her to sit down.

Yakumo still looked displeased, chin in his hand.

Perhaps because of his attitude, Kanae was nervous. That said, if Haruka pointed that out, it would only make the mood worse.

'So, we'd like to hear your story in detail,' said Haruka.

Kanae nodded and started speaking, though she looked concerned about Yakumo.

'Have you heard the rumour about that clock tower?' Kanae looked outside the window.

From where Haruka was sitting, the other school buildings got in the way so she could only see the very top of the tower.

'Rumour?'

Haruka cocked her head.

She had been at this university for almost three years, but she couldn't remember hearing any rumours about the clock tower.

'Yes. People say there's a big mirror in the room at the top of the tower, and that it's connected to the underworld...'

'The underworld?' asked Haruka, which made Yakumo snort derisively.

'The underworld is believed to be the place where the dead live.'

Yakumo's explanation brought a memory back to Haruka.

Even in the Izanagi and Izanami legend, the underworld was where the dead Izanami was said to live.

'So it's connected to the world of the dead?' asked Haruka, to which Kanae nodded.

'Can you really have something like that?' said Haruka in her shock, at which point Yakumo's cold gaze turned her way.

'Are you serious?'

'What?'

'Not even elementary school kids would believe that now.'

It was exactly as Yakumo said, but there had to have been a nicer way of

putting it. However, it was pointless to expect that from Yakumo.

That said, after Yakumo said that, Kanae had gone silent and was looking down. They would get nowhere like this.

'Putting aside whether the rumour is true or not, could you tell me the rest?' urged Haruka.

Kanae nodded and continued, 'There's more to the rumour surrounding the clock tower – '

Haruka felt like a shadow covered Kanae's eyes as she said that.

'More?'

'Yes. If you stand in front of that mirror at eleven fifty five, you can see somebody who's died once more.... but....'

Kanae dropped her gaze to the table.

'But what?' asked Haruka, but Kanae said nothing. She just kept looking down.

How much time passed? After a long silence, Kanae looked up suddenly.

'You get taken to the underworld too – '

Kanae's eyes were strangely bright now, as if something had possessed them.

Haruka glanced at Yakumo.

She was sure that he would be smirking as if to say it were all a joke, but unexpectedly, he was listening carefully as well.

Putting aside whether Kanae's rumour was true or not, she wouldn't have come for advice just after hearing a rumour.

'Could it be that you went to that clock tower, Kanae?' asked Haruka.

Kanae nodded. 'About two weeks ago, I ended up going to check whether the rumour was true...'

Kanae's voice grew quieter.

'How pointless – you got wrapped up in trouble because you went to a place like that just to amuse yourself.'

Yakumo's words dripped with disgust.

From Yakumo's perspective, since he could see the spirits of the dead, going to spiritual spots for fun was unforgiveable.

Kanae looked down, perhaps sensing the unpleasant mood.

At this rate, the conversation would stop. 'So did you go yourself?' asked Haruka, forcing the conversation to go forward.

'I went with a senior from my circle...' replied Kanae in a quiet voice.

'And you saw something on top of the clock tower then?' asked Haruka

Kanae shook her head, still looking down. 'I didn't see anything. At first, I was too afraid to go inside... but Nishizawa-san, who was with me, went to the very top.'

'Is Nishizawa-san the senior you went with?'

'Yes.'

'And Nishizawa-san saw a ghost there?'

'I was waiting outside the tower when I heard a scream...'

'A scream?'

'Yes. I was afraid, but I thought that something might have happened to Nishizawa-san so I went inside the clock tower. I went up the stairs to the very top room, and then...'

Kanae bit her lip, looking pained. After a silence, she said, 'Nishizawa-san was collapsed there...'

'How was Nishizawa-san?' asked Haruka as she held her breath.

'It looked like he had just fainted, so I kept asking him if he was OK, but at first there was no response at all. After a while though, he woke up.'

'And that senior said he saw a ghost then?' asked Haruka.

Kanae nodded. Her lips were trembling slightly. Haruka placed a hand on Kanae's shoulder.

Kanae had experienced something so frightening two weeks ago, but Haruka hadn't noticed at all until Kanae had told her. She felt pathetic.

'There's still more to the story, right?' asked Yakumo with a yawn, sounding bored.

Kanae looked up slightly.

'What do you mean?' asked Haruka. Yakumo sighed.

'I mean what I said. If that were the end of the story, we wouldn't need to be here.'

That was true. Right now, the story was just about a ghost sighting. Though that was frightening, that would also be the end of the story.

'Ever since then, Nishizawa-san has been strange.' Kanae's eyes were slightly wet with tears.

'What do you mean by strange?' asked Haruka.

Kanae bit her lip before continuing. 'No matter what anyone asks him, it's like he's somewhere else, and he doesn't eat at all. Though he's always been thin, he keeps getting thinner... At this rate, Nishizawa-san might...'

Kanae clutched her hand to her chest, as if to stop her trembling.

According to the rumour whispered about the clock tower, those who reunited with the dead were taken to the underworld themselves – in short, they died.

Kanae was probably worried about that.

'Hey, Yakumo-kun, let's do something for her,' said Haruka, which just made Yakumo let out a dramatic sigh –

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6

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'Man, what a pain,' grumbled Gotou as he lit his cigarette from the passenger seat.

In the driver's seat, Ishii just gave a vague 'Mm' in reply.

'Who just tells somebody to go to a case without explaining anything?'

'S-sorry.'

'And you should've asked about the details.'

'Even if you tell me that, I was told to ask at the scene...'

'You were told to? Think for yourself sometimes!'

Gotou hit Ishii's head.

'Sorry,' repeated Ishii.

Though he had a slender face and wore silver-framed glasses that made him look intelligent, Ishii was incredibly timid.

Even though everything would be fine if he could just be confident and say what was on his mind, he always backed down, too concerned about what others were thinking.

Gotou always felt somewhat irritated when he saw Ishii like that. If only Gotou could teach him – but no, Gotou, clumsy himself, just ended up reprimanding him.

Sometimes he thought that it would be better for Ishii if he were paired with somebody else.

'This appears to be the place.'

While Gotou was thinking thoughts that were unlike him, they had reached the location. Ishii parked the car by the road.

Gotou got off the car and saw that they were at an intersection at the foot of a slope –

If they kept going up, they would reach Meisei University, the school Yakumo and Haruka went to.

He saw two men in suits at the traffic light. One was tall with a firm body and chiselled features – Shinoda Hisao.

Shinoda had been with Gotou when he was in investigations. They were about the same age.

Though he looked like a nice middle-aged man on the outside, on the inside he was arrogant, delighted in others failures and sucked up to his boss. Gotou couldn't get along with men like him.

Gotou had never talked to the other man, but if he remembered correctly, his name was Onodera. He was a pale, small-framed and slender man in his late twenties.

Gotou walked towards them.

'Oh, it's you, Gotou? Looks like you're doing well,' Shinoda said, noticing Gotou.

It was a sticky and disagreeable voice. He was probably mocking Gotou, who had been thrown into the Unsolved Cases Special Investigations department after causing a number of problems.

However, Gotou didn't care at all.

'That's the only good point.'

'I'm glad. I wish I could transfer over – I'm so busy I can't even sleep.'

Shinoda's smile was mocking as well. It looked like he really wanted to make fun of Gotou.

'I'm glad you're busy, though I heard that your solve rate is rather low... Slacking off?' said Gotou, which made Shinoda's face twitch.

Though the Unsolved Cases department was a plum job, they had solved quite a few cases.

Of course, it wasn't just Gotou. It was because they had had Yakumo's cooperation and his power to see the spirits of the dead. It was still true that he had results though.

'It's because you go over people's boundaries like that that you get demoted.'

Shinoda's tone was much rougher now, probably because Gotou had really got on his nerves.

– What a simple guy.

'It's no help if you worry about boundaries and just increase the number of unsolved cases.'

'What?'

'What? Wanna go?'

Ishii interrupted just before it became a fight.

'Detective Gotou, let's calm down.'

'Shut up. He's the one who tried to start a fight.'

'But fighting here will solve nothing.'

'I know that.'

It was just as Ishii said though.

They'd get nowhere fighting with a detective whose only skill was his pride. Gotou's fist had nowhere to go though.

There was no helping it – he dropped it on Ishii’s head.

‘Why me...’ said Ishii, looking like he might cry at any moment.

Why? Because Gotou was in a bad mood, that was all. Gotou snorted and looked the other way.

‘What happened?’ asked Ishii, bringing up the matter at hand.

Shinoda had his arms crossed and looked displeased, perhaps still holding the earlier altercation in his mind. He made no move to speak.

Onodera smiled wryly at Shinoda and then said, ‘Rather than explaining, it would be better if you took a look – ’

Onodera pointed at the traffic light.

‘What’s that?’ asked Gotou without thinking.

He hadn’t noticed because of his argument with Shinoda, but the area around the light was on was in a terrible state.

It was dyed red, as if – it had been dyed with blood.

‘Eek!’ shrieked Ishii as he leapt back.

‘Don’t make a fuss!’ Gotou hit Ishii’s head and bent down to look.

‘This blood?’ asked Gotou.

Onodera shook his head. ‘Forensics sent a report earlier. It appears to be oil-based paint.’

‘I see,’ said Gotou. When this was discovered, people had probably thought it was blood. There was no sign of an accident, so there was a possibility that there was a case somewhere.

But this wasn’t blood – it was just paint. This was just an ill-natured prank then.

And the Unsolved Cases Special Investigation department had been dragged

into this.

– Don't screw with me!

Just as Gotou was about to complain, Shinoda and Onodera left the scene.

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7

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Haruka, who had stopped in front of the clock tower, looked up at it towering over her.

It was made of brick. The square tower had a red triangular roof. The clock on top was stopped at eleven fifty-five.

Perhaps it looked more unsettling than usual because of Kanae's story.

'What are you spacing out for?'

Yakumo didn't seem anxious at all even though they were about to go towards a clock tower rumoured to have ghosts.

However, now that Haruka thought about it, Yakumo saw ghosts every day. This was probably nothing to him.

At the same time, a question came to Haruka.

'Hey, Yakumo-kun, have you ever seen a ghost in the clock tower before?'

If the rumour was true, it wouldn't be strange if Yakumo had seen a ghost there in the past.

'Never.'

An immediate reply.

'So the ghost thing must be just a rumour?'

'You really are hasty.'

Yakumo shook his head in exasperation.

'Hasty... You've never seen a ghost there, so there aren't any there, right?'

'Sorry, but I've never gone up the clock tower.'

The university campus was fairly large. There were many places you would never go if you had no need to. The top of the clock tower wasn't a place you would just pass by.

But –

'There's a window.'

Haruka pointed at the window at the top of the clock tower.

It wouldn't be strange if you saw somebody's figure from there.

'I can't see anything with the window low that,' said Yakumo, still exasperated.

It was true that the window Haruka had pointed at was cloudy with dirt.

'You're right...'

Yakumo had already started walking towards the clock tower while Haruka was still talking. Haruka ran after him as if she were being dragged along.

In front of the clock tower, there was a large wooden gate. The double doors had rusty handles.

Yakumo reached towards one of them.

Haruka felt nervous, hands sweaty with the prospect of entering the tower imminent.

'What are you doing?'

Haruka leapt at the sudden voice.

She turned around and saw a uniformed university security guard.

He was probably in his mid-twenties, young for a guard. He had hollow

cheeks and was very thin.

'We just thought we'd take a look inside,' Yakumo said calmly, in contrast to Haruka who was at a loss for words.

'Entry is prohibited because an accident occurred there previously,' declared the guard in a very businesslike voice.

'An accident?'

'I only came recently so I don't know the details either, but it seems a female student fell to her death – '

Haruka felt a jolt upon hearing the guard's words.

Perhaps the ghost of the tower was the women who had fallen.

'That's too bad. I just wanted to explore a bit...' said Yakumo with a smile.

'In any case, the gate is locked, so you can't go in.'

The guard said just that and turned on his heels to leave.

A woman had fallen to her death here – they had received this new information, but they couldn't go in if it was locked.

'What are we going to do?' Haruka asked Yakumo.

'Go in, of course.'

'But it's locked...'

'Did you forget? Your friend still went inside despite that.'

That was right. Kanae had gone inside the clock tower. But from where?

Before Haruka could ask, Yakumo began to walk around the tower.

Though Haruka didn't understand, she followed Yakumo anyway.

Haruka hadn't noticed at a distance, but up close, she could see that the walls of the clock tower had an emergency ladder built in.

'Are you going to climb this?'

Yakumo sighed.

'I wouldn't do something so troublesome.'

'Then what are you going to do?'

They had reached the back of the tower. There was a small steel door there.

A chain and padlock were at the foot of the door.

Somebody might have forced it open. Kanae had probably gone in this way.

'Let's go.'

Yakumo said just that and slowly opened the door.

There was the unpleasant sound of rusted metal grating.

'Are you really going to go?'

Yakumo ignored Haruka's question and went inside.

Haruka hesitantly followed.

She felt the urge to cough immediately.

The air was stagnant. It was like they had stepped into a different world.

She could barely see anything with just the faint light from the door.

'It's pitch black.'

'I know that without your saying it.'

Yakumo took a pen light out of his pocket and turned it on.

Though it wasn't much help, it was better than nothing.

Haruka could see stairs in the gloom.

'Be careful,' said Yakumo, turning around.

Haruka felt happy that Yakumo, who was always so brusque, was being

considerate.

'Ah, OK.'

After Haruka replied, Yakumo started climbing the stairs. Haruka followed him.

There were no windows to light the way. Even though it was day, Haruka wouldn't have been able to see her feet without the pen light.

Step by step, it grew harder to breathe.

'Why did they build a clock tower anyway?' asked Haruka as she paused for breath.

'To see the time, of course,' Yakumo replied flatly.

Though Haruka could only see his back, she was sure that his expression was mocking.

'I know that, but you don't need to go and make a tower, do you?'

'Do you know how many years ago this tower was made?'

Even though Haruka was the one who'd asked a question, a question came right back to her.

'I heard it was when the university was founded...'

'Correct. This university was founded about eighty years ago. Do you understand what I'm saying?'

'No.'

'Eighty years ago, people didn't have a way to tell the time easily – '

'Oh!'

Finally, Haruka understood what Yakumo was saying.

Now, everyone had a wristwatch or mobile phone to check the time, but that hadn't been the case in the past.

That was why they needed a tall clock tower that people could see from a distance.

'Without anyone noticing, we've stopped looking far away... It's kind of sad.'

Yakumo stopped in his tracks.

'That's unusually philosophical for you.'

When Yakumo turned around, his expression was blatantly scornful.

'That's not what I...'

Haruka felt embarrassed, as if she had said something cheesy, and looked down.

Yakumo went back to climbing the stairs.

'Honestly,' muttered Haruka with a sigh before she went after Yakumo.

Finally, they reached the end of the stairs and arrived at the room at the top.

There were windows on three of the four walls, so it was fairly bright. When Haruka looked up, she saw a ceiling with naked beams and a hanging light bulb.

There were desks and chairs in the corner of the room with other mysterious clutter.

'It's a bit of a letdown,' said Haruka.

Yakumo looked disgruntled.

'Letdown?'

'I mean... I thought it would be more frightening since a ghost was supposed to be here...'

'What is your standard for frightening?'

'Standard? Well, dark and gloomy... anyway, that sort of atmosphere.'

Yakumo glared at her.

'What do you think ghosts are?'

'Dead people...'

'Yes. The spirits of people who've died. In short, ghosts aren't monsters.'

Haruka could understand what Yakumo was displeased by now.

Thinking that ghosts came out in dark and gloomy places was the same as treating them like monsters.

Yakumo, who could see the spirits of the dead, didn't treat them that way.

Though the living and the dead were different, they were both human – that was what Yakumo thought. Haruka felt ashamed of what she had said, which had been close to prejudice.

'Sorry...'

Though Haruka gave an honest apology, Yakumo didn't reply. He just looked at the mirror against the wall with no windows.

It was an old mirror, with an ivy decoration entwining the frame.

It was dirty and dusty, so their reflection looked like it was in fog.

'This is the mirror connected to the underworld then,' said Haruka, which made Yakumo sigh dramatically.

'You still believe that joke?'

'That's not it. It's just kind of creepy...'

Though Haruka didn't believe the door, in an unsettling atmosphere like this, she could understand why a rumour about the underworld would come about.

'In the past, people thought that mirrors didn't reflect but rather showed another world.'

'Really?'

'That was why they would be put on altars or used in rites. Rumours like this one about a connection to the underworld have been around for millennia.'

'Oh?'

Haruka looked at the mirror again.

It was strange how the mirror looked almost divine after hearing what Yakumo said.

'So could you see anything?' asked Haruka as she stared at the mirror.

'No, nothing...'

'Then there's no ghost here?'

'Why do you rush to conclusions?'

'But...'

'I just don't see any now. It might be different at a different time.'

'That's true.'

It was just as Yakumo said.

Ghosts didn't always stay in the same place.

'Furthermore – the ghost may have possessed a student that has been acting strange.'

Haruka felt a chill run down her spine.

If that was the case, they had to hurry or that student would be in trouble, just as Kanae feared.

When Haruka told Yakumo that, he ran a hand through his hair in irritation.

'First, we need to go meet that man – '

'Right.'

'Bring him to my room.'

After Yakumo said that, he started walking towards the stairs.

Haruka could probably bring the student if she talked to Kanae again, but –

'Yakumo-kun, what are you going to do?'

Yakumo could just go with her to make this less complicated.

'I'm going to investigate from a different angle.'

'Different angle?'

'Yeah. If there really was a ghost here, then perhaps...'

Yakumo turned around and looked at the mirror again.

Though it was just for a moment, Haruka thought that she saw a dark shadow move inside the mirror.

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8

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'Who on earth did this...' murmured Ishii as he looked at the splattered red paint.

The traffic light covered in red paint looked unsettling, aided perhaps by the sunset.

The cars on the road continued, either unconscious of the paint or ignoring it.

'Some random guy,' Gotou said carelessly. It looked like he had lost his interest in the case.

He took a cigarette case out of his jacket pocket and took out just one cigarette.

'It's illegal to smoke on the road,' said Ishii.

'I know that,' Gotou replied with a click of his tongue. He just held the unlit cigarette in his mouth.

'I wonder why they did this.'

Ishii looked at the red paint on the traffic light pole.

Though he often heard of people drawing or writing with spray paint, what was the meaning of just splashing paint like this?

Ishii just couldn't think of a reason.

'Is this...'

Gotou's mobile phone rang, interrupting Ishii.

'Who is it?'

Gotou answered the phone without checking the display.

It wasn't that he was in a bad mood – this was how he always answered the phone.

'What? Shut up! You can't say anything about other people either!'

From the tone of Gotou's voice, he was probably talking to Saitou Yakumo.

Even though they argued like that, they still relied on each other. It was strange.

Ishii's eyes wandered to the intersection.

There was a woman standing there.

As she was turned away from him, he couldn't see her face, but she was slender and tall.

She didn't cross the intersection. She just stood there.

– What is she doing?

While Ishii was pondering this, the light turned from green to yellow.

Still, the woman didn't move. If she didn't hurry, the light would change.

'It's dangerous!' Ishii called out.

The woman didn't move at all, as if she hadn't heard Ishii's voice.

The light turned red.

Soon, the lights for the road in the other direction would turn green.

Though there were no cars waiting there, it wouldn't be strange if she got hit standing in a place like that.

'Please cross already!' shouted Ishii.

Still, the woman didn't move.

– Why?

Ishii anxiously looked left and right.

He saw a large truck coming.

The truck didn't slow down, as if the driver hadn't noticed the woman standing there.

– This is bad!

Ishii reflexively ran towards the woman.

He tried to grab the woman's arm and pull her back to the side of the road, but –

Ishii's hand went straight through the woman.

'Eh?'

The woman had disappeared.

– What on earth just happened?

Ishii heard a horn going off in his confusion.

When he looked up, he saw the truck coming near him.

'Eek!'

Ishii ran back. In his rush, he lost his footing and tumbled on the asphalt.

He heard the sound of screeching brakes and tires.

– I'm going to die!

Ishii was sure of it.

He didn't know what happened, but he found himself curled up on the side of the road.

'Idiot! What are you doing!?' yelled the truck driver, before driving away.

Ishii was still in shock as he watched the truck go.

What on earth had just happened? There had definitely been a woman in the intersection, but she had disappeared. Had it been an illusion?

As if to respond to Ishii's question, he suddenly felt a warm breath on his ear.

A chill ran down his spine. He turned around.

Standing there –

The woman from earlier.

'Ah...'

Ishii was so frightened he couldn't breathe.

He hadn't seen it when she was turned around, but –

The woman's face was half crushed, with an incredible amount of blood pouring out.

Drip, drip, drip –

Dark red blood fell from her chin.

<...>

The woman said something in a thick voice.

It was like a damaged CD, choppy and impossible to make out.

Still, Ishii could understand the feeling behind it.

'Aaaahhh!'

Ishii covered his ears and shut his eyes as he screamed as loud as he could.

He felt like the woman in front of him would draw him into a deep and growing darkness if he didn't do that.

Thump –

Suddenly, a dull pain ran through Ishii's head.

'Ow!'

He opened his eyes. Gotou was standing right in front of him.

'Eh? Detective Gotou...'

'Don't just say "Eh"!'

Gotou hit Ishii's head again.

'Er, um...'

'What are you doing? You suddenly ran into the middle of the road. You were about to be run over.'

'No, that's not it. Just earlier, a woman was...'

'There's nobody there!'

Another fist came down.

Ishii hurriedly looked around. Just as Gotou said, there was nobody there.

'But I'm sure...'

'Stop babbling nonsense!' said Gotou with a click of his tongue.

This made no sense. Ishii had seen her. Perhaps she had been –

'Let's get going already.'

Gotou said just that and started walking.

'Going? Where to?'

Ishii hurried after Gotou.

'Request from Yakumo.'

'From Yakumo-shi?'

If Yakumo was asking, it was probably something to do with spiritual phenomena.

'His usual "Check if anybody died here" thing.'

'That's fine, but what about this case?'

'After, after – '

Gotou waved a hand as if brushing away a fly and walked off.

'But...' Ishii was hesitant and stopped walking, but then the woman from earlier came across his mind.

He definitely didn't want to stay here alone.

'Please wait!'

Ishii hurriedly ran after Gotou.

– He fell.

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9

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'Hello – '

Makoto visited the Movie Research Circle room.

She had made an appointment beforehand, so the person she was looking for was in his usual seat.

'Come in,' Yakumo said casually.

Though he had beautiful features, he always looked like he had just woken

up. With his distant attitude, it was hard to guess what he was thinking. Makoto usually came to this room when Haruka or Gotou and Ishii were here.

Being here one on one with Yakumo made her feel strangely nervous.

'Sorry for coming so suddenly...' said Makoto.

She had met Yakumo because of a certain case.

During that case. Makoto had the unusual experience of being possessed by a ghost. She could have died then, but Yakumo had saved her.

Ever since then, she often met up with Yakumo, helping out with cases Yakumo was investigating or discussing spiritual phenomena.

'Please sit down,' urged Yakumo, so Makoto sat opposite him.

'I wanted to ask your opinion about something.'

'It is a request from none other than you, Makoto-san. If my opinions are acceptable, I will listen to anything you have to ask,' Yakumo replied politely.

Since he said it so flatly, Makoto couldn't tell if he meant it or not, but she would just feel awkward if she left without saying anything now.

'Actually,' Makoto began, 'this just happened earlier, but I was interviewing an author.'

'Is that so?'

'The author is still new with only one book, so you might not recognise the name. Sakurai Itsuki.'

After Makoto said that, Yakumo slowly stood up and moved to the corner of the room to take a book from the top of the refrigerator.

'This is the book in question then – '

Yakumo placed Sakurai Itsuki's *The Ghost of the Clock Tower* on the table. Things would go quickly if he had already read the book.

'What did you think of the book?' asked Makoto, which made a difficult expression appear on Yakumo's face.

'Do my feelings have something to do with the matter?'

Though they weren't directly related, Makoto wanted to discuss the work's author today. She wanted to know what Yakumo felt before she gave him any preconceptions.

After Makoto told Yakumo that, Yakumo thought for a moment before saying, 'This is just my opinion, but – it is a very interesting idea. Though it's rough, the prose is detailed and sucks you in. However...'

'What is it?'

Makoto leant forward slightly.

'Something bothers me.'

What is it?'

'I'm rereading the book because I can't explain it well,' said Yakumo with a shake of his head.

To be honest, that was how Makoto felt as well. Something bothered her – she had thought that the interview would explain it, but now she had a new question.

'So what is it about this novel that brought you here?' asked Yakumo.

She didn't come to review the book. Makoto opened her mouth once more.

'The author of this book is a university student. A fourth-year in the literature circle.'

'Is that so...'

Yakumo opened the book to the back of the cover with the author profile.

'Are there no rumours on campus?'

'There are very few people now that are interested in books. There wouldn't be a rumour unless the author went around declaring it.'

'That's true...'

Just as Yakumo commented, it was a simple fact that nowadays many young people were not interested in books.

Furthermore, though there were many students at university, if you weren't in the same seminar or circle, everyone was a stranger, just like a passer-by you might meet in town.

Like Yakumo said, unless the author declared it himself, most people probably wouldn't notice.

'So what about this author then?' asked Yakumo.

'The author said something strange during our interview.'

'Strange?'

'Yes. "I didn't write this book. A ghost made me write it." That's what the author said.'

'A ghost?'

'Yes.'

'It isn't just some performance?' said Yakumo, running a hand through his hair.

'That's what I thought too at first, but...'

'What is it?'

'Something didn't click for me.'

'Didn't click?'

'I thought that a woman wrote this novel, but...'

'It was actually written by a man,' finished Yakumo.

'Yes.'

There were some authors who wrote like women while being men, and vice versa.

However, Makoto just couldn't accept that a man had written this.

It was just a gut feeling, so she couldn't put it into words, but that was something she just couldn't accept – it just felt a bit off.

'Makoto-san, could it be that you already have a theory about this case?' said Yakumo, almond eyes narrowed.

That was Yakumo's perception for you. Makoto couldn't hide her thoughts in front of him.

A theory had come to Makoto after hearing Sakurai's story. It was so odd, but she just couldn't stop thinking about it.

'Would it be impossible for a ghost to really have written it?'

Makoto asked the question just as it came to her.

That was what she had come to ask Yakumo.

She couldn't just write an article without proof about how Sakurai had had his story written by a ghost.

'In short, you think that a ghost possessed Sakurai-shi and made him write the novel,' said Yakumo.

Makoto nodded.

She knew it was crazy, but she had still it, perhaps because Sakurai hadn't looked like he was lying.

Yakumo crossed his arms.

It wasn't that he had lost his interest. He was probably thinking.

Makoto held her breath as she waited for Yakumo's answer.

It was likely that Yakumo was the only person who could answer this question, as somebody who could actually see the spirits of the dead.

'I can't deny the possibility – '

Yakumo said just that after a long sentence.

'Is it really...'

Makoto couldn't hide her surprise, even though she was the one who had asked the question.

'I am just talking about the possibility. During possession, the spirit's memories and feelings flow through the person being possessed. It isn't impossible if we think of it as an extension of that.'

Makoto understood after Yakumo explained.

She had been possessed by a ghost before too. She had shared the ghost's memories and feelings then.

'Then...'

'In any case, it is too early to come to a conclusion. In order to confirm this, it would be necessary to meet Sakurai-shi himself.'

'Could I ask that of you?' said Makoto, leaning forward.

Yakumo smiled dryly. 'I wouldn't mind.'

'Thank you very much.'

'However, there is something I want to check before meeting him.'

'Check?'

'Yes. You said that Sakurai-san was in the literature circle. I would like to read his past works if there are any.'

Makoto understood after hearing that.

By reading Sakurai's past works, Yakumo could probably gather some information.

'Furthermore, I'd like to know if there were any changes in his life.'

It was true that if Sakurai had been possessed that he must have acted differently in his day-to-day life.

'Understood. I'll ask around – '

Makoto stood up, but Yakumo called out to stop her.

'Did Sakurai-shi say that he saw the ghost which made him write the novel?'

'I don't know about that, but he said that the ghost in the clock tower at this university wrote it.'

After hearing Makoto's words, Yakumo's expression grew grim.

'The ghost of the clock tower again...' murmured Yakumo in a low voice.

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10

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Haruka sat at the same table by the window in the cafeteria as earlier and looked at the clock tower, with the sunset lighting it –

However, she wasn't just idling time away.

After parting with Yakumo, she contacted Kanae. She was going to bring Nishizawa, who had gone up the clock tower and was possibly possessed by a ghost.

Though nothing big had happened yet, Haruka felt unsettled.

She couldn't explain why she felt that way.

Her heart was beating strangely, and she just had a bad feeling about this.

'Haruka – '

Haruka looked up and saw Kanae standing there.

She had brought a young man with her. This was probably Nishizawa.

He was incredibly thin with hollowed cheeks. His eyes were a bit bloodshot and he had shadows underneath them.

He was pale as well – he looked sick. Haruka understood why Kanae was worried.

'This is Ozawa Haruka-san. Nishizawa Yasunobu-senpai – '

Kanae neatly introduced them to each other and urged Nishizawa to sit with her opposite Haruka.

'So what did you want to talk about?' said Nishizawa, brows furrowed in suspicion.

The atmosphere grew heavy just from those words.

'Um.... Haruka knows somebody who's knowledgeable about ghosts... so I thought maybe we could get him to look at you, Nishizawa-san...'

'You're still on about that? Kanae-chan, you're a bit strange,' Nishizawa interrupted.

'Eh?'

Haruka was at a loss for what to say.

It seemed like Kanae had brought Nishizawa here without explaining the situation.

'Sorry,' Kanae said quickly with her head hung.

Haruka didn't know who that apology was directed to, but the mood was terribly dampened.

'Sorry for taking up your time. Kanae-chan believes this rumour, see, and

she's just a bit too worried,' said Nishizawa after a silence, shaking his head.

'Excuse me... but what are you talking about?' asked Haruka.

Nishizawa sighed. 'I climbed the clock tower with Kanae-chan. It's true that I saw something like a ghost then, but that's all.'

'Eh?'

'But Kanae-chan got really worried and seems to think I've been possessed...'

'Is that so...'

Haruka was a bit confused about where this conversation was going.

'Does it look like I'm possessed, anyway?' said Nishizawa, spreading his arms wide.

Though he did seem a bit too thin, from how he was talking, Nishizawa didn't look possessed.

Haruka couldn't see ghosts like Yakumo so she couldn't be certain, but she had seen many possessed people before. When she compared Nishizawa to those people, she felt that he was a bit different.

'You don't,' said Haruka, which made Kanae look up.

'But I have a bad feeling. Like something really bad is going to happen...'

'You're thinking too much,' said Nishizawa, seeming half-exasperated.

'I want to think that was as well, but I'm sure...'

'I said it's fine. I'm really OK. I only saw something that looked like a ghost anyway – I didn't see it clearly...'

'But you fainted, didn't you?'

'Yeah, but... nothing happened after that, right?' said Nishizawa nonchalantly.

Haruka wanted to speak up for Kanae, but since she wasn't saying anything, Haruka felt like she'd just be meddling if she said anything else. It wasn't like she had the right to say anything, but –

'I understand. Thank you very much.'

Haruka bowed her head politely to Nishizawa.

Continuing this wouldn't get them anywhere.

'No, not at all. Sorry if I worried you or anything,' Nishizawa said cheerfully as he stood up.

Nishizawa was about to leave, but then he turned around, like he had remembered something.

'If you find anything out, tell me, OK? I'm interested too – '

Nishizawa said just that and left.

'Sorry...' Kanae said quietly.

There wasn't anything to apologise for. It wasn't like Kanae had lied, and Haruka could understand why she would believe the rumour and feel anxious.

However, Nishizawa himself didn't seem to think there was any problem and didn't want any help, so there was nothing else they could do.

'Don't worry about it. Anyway, we're in the cafeteria, so want to eat something?' said Haruka to cheer Kanae up. Kanae smiled slightly.

Kanae didn't usually show much emotion, so the smiles she sometimes showed made her seem very cute.

Then, the two of them bought sandwiches and began an early dinner.

'Hey, Haruka, that person you brought – '

'Ah, Yakumo-kun?'

'You like him, right?'

It was so sudden that Haruka almost spat out the sandwich she was eating.

'No, no. It's not like that.'

Kanae laughed as she watched Haruka fervently deny it –

-

11

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Makoto stood in front of the door of the research room on the fifth floor of Building A, Meisei University.

When she knocked on the door, a man's voice replied. 'Come in.'

'Pardon my intrusion – '

Makoto opened the door and went inside.

The room was small, just four tatami mats in side, and kept clean, with only bookshelves and a desk.

The man sitting at the desk looked up.

He was probably about forty. Though he had a long face, he had well-defined features. He was the Japanese literature associate professor, Onda Shuusuke.

'If it isn't Hijikata Makoto-san – '

Onda gave her a friendly smile.

'You remember me?' said Makoto, surprised.

After leaving Yakumo's room, Makoto had gone to the faculty area to investigate the literature circle.

She had been surprised when she saw Onda's name under faculty member in charge.

When Makoto had been a university student, she had been in Onda's seminar. It was a surprising coincidence.

The nostalgia had helped bring her here this quickly.

'Of course I do. You were a great student, Hijikata-san.'

'I won't give you anything even if you flatter me.'

'You got me,' said Onda with a laugh.

Makoto felt relieved seeing that he hadn't changed.

The last time she had seen him was since her graduation, but she had seen his name on the news when she was still a new employee at the newspaper company.

The painful memory flashed back in her mind, but she shook it away.

'Professor, when did you come to this university?'

Onda hadn't been at Meisei University before.

'Ah... About two years ago, I think. A number of things happened.'

'I see...'

Though Makoto understood, she felt like the mood had grown heavier.

'So why are you here today? You're not the type to come all the way just to talk about the old days.'

'Even I feel nostalgic every once in a while,' objected Makoto, making Onda smile slightly.

'It looks like your need to object is the same as ever.'

'Is that how you saw me, Professor?'

'Am I wrong?'

Onda laughed again. His friendliness was what had made him so popular with the students when Makoto was at university.

'I'll confess. I actually heard that you're in charge of the literature circle, Professor – '

After Makoto said that, Onda nodded. 'Sakurai-kun then.'

'You knew about it?'

'Of course. A student in my circle debuted as an author. And while still at school, at that,' said Onda with a smile.

The university had a lot of students, so lecturers and students often didn't have a close relationship, yet Onda was a professor who looked after his students well.

When Makoto had been worried about employment, Onda had called out to her, saying, 'Is something bothering you?'

Makoto pushed away her nostalgia and looked at Onda again.

'Actually, I came to interview Sakurai-san earlier.'

'Is that so? He's an honest and serious student. He's very fervent during circle activities too,' Onda said, smiling.

'Did he consult you while writing his novel?'

'No, since I leave the circle on its own a lot of the times. There's not much I need to say.'

'That's true...'

Just as Onda said, faculty in charge of circles usually just dealt with necessary paperwork and stamped things when necessary.

'What about him?' asked Onda.

'It isn't anything important... But he said something odd...'

'Odd?'

'Yes. He said that he didn't write The Ghost of the Clock Tower – that it was

written by the ghost living in the clock tower.'

Makoto's words made Onda laugh aloud.

'That is really strange.'

'Isn't it?'

'But you don't have to take that seriously. He probably just wants to stand out.'

'Perhaps,' agreed Makoto, but she didn't really believe it.

Perhaps it was because Yakumo's words from earlier were sticking with her.

'But wow, Hijikata-kun, you really are a journalist – '

After a silence, Onda said just that.

'What do you mean?'

'I specialise in Japanese literature. I tend to investigate works from the words within them, but Hijikata-kun, you look from who made it and how it was written.'

'Now that you mention it, it's true,' said Makoto with a wry smile.

Even though it would be fine if she just enjoyed reading and talking about how wonderful the story was, she always ended up following cases around.

'If you're interested, want to read Sakurai-kun's old work?'

'Do you have it?'

'Our circle puts out a literary magazine every quarter. Though it's more of a booklet than a magazine '

Onda stood up and pulled a few volumes from the bookshelf. One of them had Clock Tower written on the cover.

'This is...'

'The name of the magazine.'

'Why is it called Clock Tower?'

'Before I came here, the circle room was the top of the clock tower.'

'Is that so?' said Makoto in surprise.

'Yes. Perhaps that's related to why Sakurai-kun mentioned the ghost of the clock tower.'

'Perhaps,' repeated Makoto, though she was thinking of another possibility.

-

'Sorry to bother – '

Gotou opened the door to the Movie Research Circle room.

'If you know you're a bother, please go home,' replied Yakumo, the owner of the room, with an incredibly annoyed expression.

– What an irritating guy.

'You're the one who told me to come!'

'I don't remember telling you to come. I just requested that you investigate something.'

What kind of quibbling is that? After I've gone out of my way to help, he gives me this attitude –

'You really say whatever you want.'

'Because I'm talking to a bear. I don't mind keeping you company if you learn how to speak human.'

'You... Just because I give you the chance, you say anything you want...'

Gotou raised his fist, but Yakumo was relaxed –

'What will you do? Would you like to see what will happen is a detective currently on the force assaults a civilian?'

Yakumo's light tone got on Gotou's nerves.

'Yeah, I'll try it – '

Just as Gotou was about to let his emotions get the better of him, somebody grabbed him from behind.

It was Ishii.

'Detective Gotou, you can't!'

'Shut up! I won't feel better until I punch this guy!'

'Please calm down!'

Yakumo was smiling, seeming to enjoy seeing Gotou and Ishii fight with each other.

It just made Gotou's anger wither. He flung Ishii's hand away from him and sat opposite Yakumo.

Ishii fell to the ground and rubbed his back while saying 'Ow', but he got up as well as sat next to Gotou.

'Ishii-san, what's the matter? You look a bit off-colour...' asked Yakumo once they had settled down.

Even though Yakumo seemed apathetic, he was always watching people carefully.

'Ah, er, no...' Ishii tried fruitlessly to hide it.

'He said he saw a ghost earlier,' Gotou replied.

'A ghost?'

'Yeah, when we were investigating another case, he saw a ghost at the intersection. He panicked and almost got hit by a truck.'

'Sorry,' said Ishii. He looked small and ashamed.

'I see. Let us confirm that afterwards. That would make you feel at ease, wouldn't it, Ishii-san?'

'R-really!?' exclaimed Ishii, almost leaping up.

Even though Yakumo was always so slow to act, he was strangely quick sometimes. Another thing that made Yakumo Yakumo.

'So how about the request I made?' asked Yakumo.

Finally, they reached the topic at hand. Gotou hand Yakumo a file.

'It took some time,' Yakumo said without holding back.

It was past ten at night. It was true that it had taken some time. But Gotou and Ishii hadn't been playing around. They had been caught in a traffic jam on the way back from the slope.

Yakumo wouldn't care even if Gotou talked about that.

'My bad.'

'My, aren't you being honest today?'

'Don't need to hear that from you.'

Yakumo chuckled slightly and then started looking through the files with a serious gaze.

Yakumo had requested a record of people who had died within the university in the past. Though there had been no murders, there was just one suicide.

It had happened three years ago –

A woman named Mizuhara Noriko, who had been nineteen at the time.

To be honest, it was intolerable. Why did she kill herself when she had her whole future in front of her –

It was too late to think about that now, but Gotou couldn't help but think about it anyway.

'What is it?'

Yakumo looked up at Gotou.

'Nothing. More importantly, is this another case from Haruka-chan?' asked Gotou, leaning back on the chair.

Yakumo was investigating the case because it had something to do with ghosts.

'Well, something like it. She always picks up trouble, after all,' said Yakumo with a sigh.

Ishii didn't seem to like Yakumo's tone and had a discontent expression on his face.

'So what trouble is it this time?'

'Two students experienced a spiritual phenomenon. One of them has been acting strange ever since, apparently,' replied Yakumo, eyes still on the materials.

'That's kind of vague.'

'I haven't met the student myself yet.'

'Why not?'

In cases like these, Yakumo always met the person first thing.

'It wasn't a request from the person himself. One of his friends asked her to ask me.'

'What a pain. Why not just meet the guy and get it over with?'

'I understand that without having to hear it from you, Gotou-san.'

'Ah, that so.'

Yakumo always spoke in a way that got on Gotou's nerves.

Gotou thought about complaining, but he decided against it. He didn't want to think about what Yakumo would retort with.

In any case, this case was probably why Yakumo was investigating deaths at

the university.

Yakumo had said this before.

Spirits of the dead were bound to places they had feelings for or the places they died at.

'The clock tower – '

After a while, Yakumo shut the file and said that.

'What?'

'You really are an idiot. That's where the woman in the files committed suicide,' said Yakumo in exasperation.

'How can I tell if you only say half the sentence?'

'I don't know about that,' Yakumo said, looking at him mockingly.

Gotou had glanced at the file before coming, so he knew the basics.

Mizuhara Noriko, the woman who had committed suicide, had been found, bloody, by a male security guard.

Though she had been taken to the hospital immediately by ambulance, she was confirmed dead.

The window of the top room of the clock tower was open, so it was determined that she had fallen from there. There was no sign of a struggle, and she had appeared to be troubled, so the police determined it a suicide –

'Could it be that the ghost in this case is said to appear at the clock tower?' asked Ishii, who had been silent up until now.

'It appears that way.'

'Then that woman...'

Ishii's voice shook.

It was true that it was likely from the evidence they had.

'We can't confirm that yet.'

Yakumo shook his head.

'Too early, eh?'

'Well, yes. Furthermore... The rumour about the clock tower also bothers me – '

Yakumo propped up his sharp chin with his hand and let his gaze wander as he thought.

'It's not just a rumour about ghosts?' asked Ishii.

'It isn't. There is a large mirror in that clock tower which is said to be connected to the underworld. If you go there at eleven fifty-five, you can reunite with somebody who is dead. However – '

There, Yakumo stopped. The atmosphere grew heavier in that instant.

Unable to bear with the silence, Gotou and Ishii exchanged a glance.

What was the condition to meeting the dead person? Gotou couldn't think of anything.

'It is exchange for your own life – '

Yakumo had perfect timing.

Ishii let out a shriek and looked like he might faint at any moment.

'I said, shut up!'

Gotou hit Ishii, but he had been about to shout himself. The way Yakumo had spoken had been really frightening, maybe because Gotou had been so focussed.

'Do you plan on going to the clock tower?' Gotou asked.

Yakumo smiled. 'Of course.'

'Is it OK?'

'Gotou-san, are you also the type of person who believes in rumours?

'No, that's not it... but I just have a bad feeling...'

Gotou couldn't explain it, but it was a fact that his heart was beating strangely.

'Gotou-san, nothing is ever more wrong than your gut.'

'What!?' shouted Gotou, but Yakumo just raised a hand.

'It's a little noisy...' he said with a stern expression.

Gotou held his breath and tried to listen, but he heard nothing.

'Aren't you imagining things?'

Yakumo ignored Gotou and stood up, leaving the room.

– What the hell is he doing?

Gotou exchanged glances with Ishii and then stood up to follow Yakumo.

'What? What is it?' said Gotou once he went outside.

He saw a red lamp in the distance. It was just under the clock tower.

'Is it some sort of incident...'

While Ishii was light-heartedly speaking, Yakumo had already started running.

'Let's go!'

Gotou ran after Yakumo.

– What the hell happened?

This was just after Yakumo had started looking for the ghost of the clock tower. Gotou didn't want to think about it, but he definitely had a bad feeling.

No, he'd think about it later. Right now, he had to hurry –

Gotou reached the clock tower and was at a loss for words.

The inside of the clock tower was lit up by the lights set up by the police.

It was surrounded by yellow tape that read NO TRESPASSING.

Since it was late at night at the university, there weren't many curious onlookers, but security stood guard.

Something big must have happened.

'What happened?' Gotou asked a nearby guard, showing his police ID.

'It's a murder.'

The moment the guard said that, Yakumo's face paled.

It would be absolutely correct to say his face turned white. He immediately ran under the yellow tape and tried to go inside.

'You can't enter.'

The guard immediately pushed Yakumo back.

Still, Yakumo tried to force himself in. He pushed the guard back.

– I can't watch.

'Wait!'

Gotou grabbed Yakumo's arm and pulled him back.

'Calm down!'

'...'

Gotou knew what Yakumo was imagining even without his saying it, but that was exactly why he had to stay calm.

'I'll go look at the scene. You wait here.'

If Yakumo acted up here, it would just delay them from getting to the scene. He had to bear with it for now.

It looked like Yakumo wanted to say something, but finally, he said quietly,

'All right.'

'Let's go!'

Gotou called out to Ishii behind him and then went past the yellow tape.

In that instant, he felt something strange, as if he had stepped into a different world.

His heart started beating more quickly. His palms were sweaty.

The detectives appeared to be gathered behind the clock tower.

Gotou walked around and found a woman sitting with her back to the wall.

'H-Haruka-chan!' Ishii said in shock.

Gotou sighed in relief upon seeing that, but noticed immediately afterwards that something was strange.

She was as expressionless as if her face had frozen. Her eyes were hollow, looking into the distance.

Now that he looked more carefully, he saw something like red paint on her cheeks.

'Oi! Haruka-chan!' Gotou said, but she didn't move, let alone respond.

– This is strange. What the hell happened?

Gotou was about to walk up to her, but two men in suits got in his way. He had just met them earlier this evening – Shinoda and Onodera.

'What are you doing here? This isn't your place,' said Shinoda, high and mighty as always.

It wasn't something that had just started now, but it seemed like he really did hate Gotou.

'Shut up. That girl's an acquaintance of mine.'

Gotou tried to push pas, but Shinoda wouldn't budge.

'Then I really can't let you go,' said Shinoda with a glare.

'What?'

'She's a suspect in this case.'

Gotou was stunned by Shinoda's words.

Earlier, the guard had said it was a murder. If Haruka was a suspect, that meant there was a possibility that she had killed someone.

'Haruka-chan would never do that!'

Ishii rebutted before Gotou could.

'Yeah! There's gotta be some mistake!' added Gotou.

Shinoda sighed in exasperation as he looked at the two of them.

'No matter what you guys say, there was a witness.'

Shinoda turned his gaze towards a man talking with detectives a little ways away. The man was in uniform, probably a security guard.

'Don't be ridiculous!'

'I know how you feel, but please calm down.'

Onodera spoke calmly, the complete opposite of Shinoda. However, Gotou couldn't just calm down because he was asked.

'Shove off! I'm going to talk to her!'

Gotou pushed Shinoda away, but this time Onodera stood in his way.

'Please stop. If you are an acquaintance of the suspect, you really shouldn't meet with her now!'

'Shut up! I told you to shove off, so shove off!'

Gotou started fighting with Onodera.

Soon, Shinoda joined in, and before anyone noticed, the detectives in the area

had joined in as well in the commotion.

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Notes:

[1] Tonkotsu is a type of ramen broth made with pork bone. It is rather thick and looks a bit creamy.

[2] 'watashi' is a pronoun that can be used by men and women, but is more common among women in casual situations than with men. For reference, (if I remember correctly,) Haruka and Makoto both use 'watashi', Yakumo and Ishii use 'boku', and Detective Gotou uses 'ore'.

第二章 FILE:02
誰がために

File 02: For Whom

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All Ishii could do was watch as Haruka was put into the police car and taken away.

He had never imagined that he would ever see such a sight.

'They're just screwing around!' shouted Gotou beside Ishii. His voice was filled with frustration.

Ishii understood his anger as well.

Haruka would never kill someone, but Sonoda and Onodera were already calling her the perpetrator.

'Haruka-chan really...'

'Of course not!' yelled Gotou, interrupting Ishii's words.

Ishii's shoulders jolted as he looked at Gotou, whose face was lit up with anger. He was probably so angry because he believed in Haruka.

'But... there's testimony...'

That was the biggest problem.

Though the details were still unclear, according to Sonoda, a guard had seen Haruka commit the murder.

There was no way to escape that.

'The guard's gotta be wrong! Must've been too dark to see properly!'

That was possible.

If they checked the testimony thoroughly, there might be a hole in it.

However – the more Ishii tried to believe, the greater the suspicion in his heart grew. That was a fact.

The reason Ishii felt that way was Haruka.

Haruka hadn't responded at all even when Gotou and Ishii arrived. She hadn't been unconscious or anything, but her eyes had been unfocussed and seemed hollow.

Could it be that Haruka had killed somebody instinctively and was now in shock?

If that was the case – no, of course it wasn't.

Ishii shook away the thoughts in his head. This was no time to think about that. HE had to confirm the situation first.

'Eh?'

Ishii noticed something odd.

'What?' asked Gotou.

'Yakumo-shi – where did he go?'

Gotou had explained the situation to Yakumo after he was kept out of the scene of the crime.

Ishii had worried that Yakumo would be shocked or go on a rampage, but unexpectedly, he had only replied curtly, 'Is that so?'

His words had been so weak and emotionless. He hadn't even seen Haruka off – he had just disappeared.

– How will Yakumo-shi take this case?

Ishii didn't know.

'It's him. He's gotta have some sort of plan.'

Ishii couldn't simply believe Gotou's words. Was that really true? Ishii couldn't shake that question away.

'Anyway, we've gotta go too,' said Gotou.

'Eh? Go? Where to?'

'Obviously to find out what happened!'

Gotou's fist came crashing down.

'But... I don't think they'll give us any information...'

Those were Ishii's true feelings.

Sonoda and Gotou had a terrible relationship. It would be hard to believe that Sonoda would just give information to Gotou.

'Stop thinking about it. We're going to get the info no matter what!'

After declaring that, Gotou strode away.

Ishii tried to follow him, but he immediately tripped on something and fell.

'What are you doing!?!'

With Gotou urging Ishii to rush, Ishii hurriedly stood up, but he suddenly felt a strange presence as he looked up.

He saw a person in the shadow of the school building looking up at the clock tower. Since they were at a distance, Ishii couldn't see their face, but it looked like a small-framed student.

– A curious onlooker?

'Ishii, what are you doing!?!'

Gotou's yell made Ishii jump up and hurry over.

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2

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Yakumo sat with his legs out in the dark room.

His head felt heavy.

It was hard to breathe, perhaps because his breaths were short.

Gotou had told him something shocking.

Haruka was a suspect in a murder case.

To be honest, he couldn't believe it, but he also couldn't firmly deny it.

His thoughts wouldn't let him.

– Did you do it?

Though Yakumo could just meet her and confirm the truth, he had returned to this room, as if running away.

Perhaps he was afraid of finding out.

If Haruka replied, 'Yes,' he felt like something important within him would break.

– No, it can't be! She would never kill someone!

Though he denied it loudly in his heart, his thoughts stopped him once more.

– What do you know about her?

There was a voice in the back of his head.

It was correct.

He knew almost frighteningly little about the person called Haruka.

What kind of friends she had, what she liked, what kind of life she had walked – he had never asked her anything.

Though they had solved many cases together, that was all.

No matter how his heart tried to deny it, he had no evidence to declare so.

Gotou, the complete opposite of Yakumo, was furious.

Haruka was under suspicion, but there was no way that she'd've done it – that was what he said.

To Yakumo, that was so strange he couldn't understand.

Why did he believe so much in somebody he didn't know that much about? Even if they did have a close relationship, people changed depending on the environment and situation.

There was no way to grasp every action that somebody else took, so believing in somebody – that was nothing but ego.

Yakumo ran a hand through his hair and looked up at the low ceiling.

The Movie Research Circle room which always felt small felt incredibly large.

He even felt like he himself had shrunk.

– Why did this happen?

To be honest, when Yakumo took the case from Haruka and Kanae, he hadn't thought it was that serious.

From Yakumo's perspective, as somebody who had a red eye that could see the spirits of the dead and always saw ghosts, he didn't understand people who made such a fuss, saying ghosts were behind things.

He had planned on just fixing things up and brushing it off, so he had told Haruka to bring Nishizawa, the young man who was thought to be possessed.

– Had I been wrong to do that?

If he had gone together with her, perhaps this wouldn't have happened.

– What do I mean by “this”?

Yakumo realised that in his thoughts he had already determined Haruka to be the perpetrator.

– Do I think of Haruka as somebody who would hurt other people?

Yakumo thought about it, but he couldn't come up with an answer.

He knew nothing about Haruka, so he had no way of answering.

It was like he knew, but he knew nothing. She was only a stranger. He didn't even know himself that well, so how could he believe in a stranger he knew nothing about?

Yakumo held his head in his hands.

– What should I do now?

Yakumo had lost his grip on the situation.

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3

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The next morning, Gotou went to the general hospital.

He found the person he was looking for after he went through the entrance.

It was Miyagawa, the chief of the detectives. He was talking to two guards about something – probably last night's case.

Before Gotou could talk to him, Miyagawa noticed Gotou and waved.

'How is the situation?' asked Gotou immediately, at which point Miyagawa stuck out his chin as if to say 'Follow me'. He probably didn't want to talk in front of the guards.

They went out the entrance to the courtyard. Miyagawa sat on the bench.

Gotou sat next to him.

'How'd you know I was here?' said Miyagawa.

'Heard from some detectives that you were looking at the victim...'

Gotou and Ishii were completely kept out of the loop regarding last night's case.

No, kept out wasn't the right expression. It was out of the Unsolved Cases

jurisdiction anyway.

Gotou couldn't leave the situation as it was though, so he had gone around trying to get information.

First, he got some detectives to try to get them to tell him how the investigation was going, but they just kept saying, 'We have nothing to discuss.'

Gotou wasn't on this case, so he was nothing more than smoke, but it was also probably because he knew the suspect, Haruka.

He somehow managed to find out that Haruka was being held in detention and would be interrogated in the morning.

There, Gotou changed his method and asked where Miyagawa was.

Miyagawa had been paired up with Gotou when Gotou had just joined up, with Miyagawa a veteran detective who acted as his teacher.

He worked the scene hard and tended to get emotional, but he was somebody who you could trust. Most importantly, he was one of the rare people who didn't ignore Gotou and Ishii in the Unsolved Cases department.

Gotou had gone to Miyagawa, thinking that he might tell him something.

'So you want me to share info...' murmured Miyagawa, leaning forward.

'Yes.'

'Honestly... You really won't listen to anyone once you've had your say.'

'That's what you taught me, Miyagawa-san.'

Gotou's words made Miyagawa smile.

'What do you want to know?'

'Is the autopsy finished?'

That was Gotou's first question.

Since it was a murder, the female victim would be sent to autopsy. If Miyagawa was at the hospital, that meant that there were autopsy results.

'Cause of death was cerebral contusion. One hit to the head – '

Miyagawa's tone was heavy.

'Which meant she had been hit pretty hard,' said Gotou.

Miyagawa smiled bitterly.

'Well, yeah.'

'Then wouldn't it be likely that the perp is a strong man?' objected Gotou, but Miyagawa frowned.

'You know the suspect, right?'

'Yes.'

'Is it true that a friend of that kid?'

The kid Miyagawa was referring to was Yakumo.

Miyagawa was one of the few people on the force who knew Yakumo could see ghosts with his left eye and believed him.

Miyagawa had met with Yakumo before too.

'Yes.' Gotou nodded.

Yakumo and Haruka were friends – was something he couldn't just say with their relationship, but it wasn't something Gotou needed to explain now.

'I understand why you don't want to believe it, but you're a detective. Don't have any preconceptions.'

'I don't,' objected Gotou, but Miyagawa didn't accept that.

'Really?'

'Eh?'

'Think about it. The perpetrator didn't assault the victim barehanded. They used an iron pipe.'

'But...'

'Even somebody who doesn't have a lot of strength can kill.'

Gotou understood what Miyagawa was saying.

But that wasn't the only reason Gotou was saying Haruka wasn't the perp.

'Haruka-chan isn't the sort of girl who would wave around an iron pipe.'

Gotou had met with Haruka countless times through cases.

She was the type of person who would never harm somebody else, no matter what happened. She'd put herself in danger first – that was her strength.

'That's a preconception.'

'Maybe, but there's no motive either.'

'Can't say that.'

'Why not?'

'The victim, Koike Kanae, twenty-one years old, was in the same seminar as Ozawa Haruka, the suspect. There's the possibility that they had a disagreement about something.'

Suspect – that word left an unpleasant feeling in Gotou's heart.

He had never thought that Haruka would be called that.

'Even if there was some sort of trouble, she wouldn't go hitting somebody with a pipe.'

'I'm saying that's a preconception. People sometimes do things you don't expect. People who are normally quiet suddenly going on a violent rampage – there's countless cases of that,' said Miyagawa hotly.

It was true that Gotou had seen several cases like that too. When going

around questioning afterwards, people would always say, 'I can't believe that person would...'

But still Gotou couldn't accept it.

'I accept that, but this time is definitely different. There's got to be some sort of mistake.'

'Why are you going that far to cover for her?'

Gotou hadn't thought Miyagawa would ask that, so he wasn't sure how to answer.

'Do I need a reason to believe in her?' said Gotou, which made Miyagawa sigh.

'Even if you say that, there is evidence. The suspect's fingerprints were on the iron pipe.'

'She might have just picked up the weapon at some time.'

Gotou was still objecting.

He knew it was a weak excuse, but he still didn't want to accept it.

'Maybe if there were only the fingerprints, but there's a witness too.'

'The guard?'

'Yeah. The guard reported the incident and arrested the suspect. He had heard a woman scream on his rounds, and when he went to the scene, he saw the suspect hit the victim with an iron pipe.'

You could call it incriminating.

If he had come later, it would have been a different story, but if he had seen the moment of the attack, there was nothing that could be said. But still –

'He might've been mistaken. It was dark, right?'

'Unfortunately, that's unlikely. The guard had a torch.'

'I still won't believe,' Gotou said forcefully, standing up.

'Calm down. You're too emotional right now. Keep a cool head –'

Gotou felt Miyagawa's words were strange.

In the past, Miyagawa wouldn't try to politely convince his subordinates – he'd just drop his fist on them and scorn them.

Though sometimes Gotou resented that, it was because Miyagawa was that way that he relied on and respected him.

That was the case with investigations too.

If Miyagawa didn't accept something, no matter what the higher-ups said or how the evidence looked, he would keep going anyway.

And yet –

'I misjudged you.'

'What?'

'I've never kept a cool head, now or in the past. I always ran forward, emotions first.'

Gotou puffed out his chest, which made Miyagawa smile in exasperation as he stood up.

'What are you boasting about that for?'

'That's what you taught me, Miyagawa-san.'

When Gotou said that, Miyagawa frowned.

'That's different from this situation.'

Miyagawa's objection was terribly weak.

He must have understood himself what was really important, but now that he was in management, he couldn't act as freely as he had done before.

Gotou couldn't blame Miyagawa.

People had their own positions, and there were roles to go with that. In that sense, Gotou wasn't bound in anyway, which was why –

'No matter what anybody tells me, I'm going to do things my way until I'm satisfied.'

'What are you going to do?' asked Miyagawa.

Miyagawa had to know even without Gotou's answer.

'I'm going to believe in Haruka-chan and do all I can. That's all – '

Saying just that, Gotou put the hospital behind him.

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4

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Ishii sat on the bench in the corridor and stared at the interrogation room door

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On the other side of that door, there was an investigation going on right now. When Ishii thought about that, an indescribable pain ran through his chest.

Last night, Haruka had been taken into custody as a suspect in a murder case, and Ishii had been fervently trying to gather information with Gotou.

Though he had barely slept at all, he didn't feel sleepy or tired.

Perhaps he was running on adrenaline.

He had to clear Haruka's name no matter what. He wanted as much information as possible now to do that.

After a while, the interrogation room door opened –

Ishii stood up immediately.

Sonoda and Onodera came out. It was probably their break.

'E-excuse me...'

Ishii called out to the two of them, who had started to walk down the corridor.

Sonoda and Onodera turned around at the same time.

The moment Sonoda saw Ishii, he made a very obvious click with his tongue.

'You're Gotou's partner, right?' said Gotou, his detest clear.

'I'm Ishii of the Unsolved Cases Special Investigation department.'

'What do you want?'

Sonoda glared at Ishii.

I want you to tell me about the interrogation – it would be easy if Ishii could just say that, but he ended up biting his tongue.

'Unlike you, we're busy. If you need something, say it already,' Sonoda said.

He didn't speak so provocatively when Gotou was here. He was probably looking down on Ishii now that he was alone.

'Er, um... I...'

Ishii tried to speak, but his mouth wasn't working in his anxiety.

He hated how he couldn't act strong at times like this. He was such a weak and cowardly good-for-nothing.

'I can't hear what you're saying.'

Sonoda smiled mockingly.

'Er, um...'

'What? Looks like Gotou can't even teach his subordinates properly.'

– I don't care what you say about me, but I can't forgive anybody who makes fun of Gotou!

Anger welled up within Ishii, but he couldn't put it into words properly.

He had come to get information, but it was impossible in this situation. Just as he was about to give up and leave, Sonoda called out to him.

'Come to think of it, you guys know the suspect, right?'

Sonoda had a thin smile on his face.

Ishii felt unsettled just from looking at it, but of course he didn't have the guts to say that.

'Y-yes.'

After Ishii nodded, Sonoda snorted loudly.

'She went and hit her friend with an iron pipe. What a crazy woman – '

'You're wrong!'

Even Ishii had to shout at this. His voice was so loud he even surprised himself.

'What am I wrong about?'

Sonoda seemed shocked, but he got over it immediately and retorted.

Haruka wasn't that sort of woman.

When Ishii first saw Haruka, he had thought that an angel had come to earth.

That was what a pure, sweet and lovely woman she was. Since then, Ishii had met with Haruka through numerous cases, but that first impression hadn't changed. Rather, it had grown stronger.

Haruka would never hurt anybody.

'Haruka-chan would never do that!' insisted Ishii, but Sonoda just laughed.

'What a simple guy you are.'

'I'm just saying the truth...'

'Too bad for you, but the suspect confessed.'

'Eh?'

For a moment, Ishii didn't understand Sonoda's words.

'I'm saying that the suspect confessed to the crime.'

– Haruka confessed to the crime?

Why? That was the question that kept coming to Ishii.

'That makes no sense. There must be some mistake, right?' Ishii asked Onodera, clinging to a last hope.

'Just earlier, she confessed that everything was her fault,' Onodera said flatly, looking bitter.

'But that's...'

Ishii felt dizzy and backed away, slumping onto the floor.

'How pathetic.'

Sonoda looked down at Ishii with scorn.

Though Ishii felt angry and frustrated, weakness came over him. He couldn't even stand up.

'I...'

'We got the suspect's confession, so that's the end of the investigation. Don't go messing around with things –'

Sonoda said just that and walked away with Onodera.

Ishii vacantly watched them leave.

– It's a lie! It's a lie! This has to be a lie!

Ishii held his head in his hands and screamed in his heart, but doing that didn't change the truth.

'What am I...'

– What am I supposed to do now?

He had been running around since last night with Gotou because he'd believed in Haruka's innocence, but if she had confessed, nothing they did would change anything.

Ishii wasn't sure how long he had just sat there in a stupor. Somebody was calling his mobile.

Gotou's name was on the display. Ishii answered the phone in desperation.

'Hello, Ishii Yuutarou speaking – '

<I know that, idiot?>

He heard Gotou's displeased voice from the phone.

'S-sorry.'

<I heard a few things from Miyagawa-san – ?

Gotou quickly told Ishii what he had heard from Miyagawa.

However, barely any of it reached Ishii. It didn't matter how much information they had now. It was useless.

<And on your end?>

Gotou asked that after he had finished his explanation.

He had to tell Gotou what he had heard from Sonoda – Ishii knew that, but the words wouldn't come out.

'Er... um...'

<Can't you say things clearly? >

'Sorry.'

<If you have the time to say sorry, tell me already.>

Ishii took a deep breath to calm himself down before speaking.

'It seems H-Haruka-chan confessed to the crime – '

<What?>

Gotou's voice came back like a beast's growl.

'I said, Haruka-chan confessed to the...'

<There's no way she did that!>

Gotou's yell rang in Ishii's ears.

Gotou's voice, filled with fiery rage, made Ishii shudder.

'B-but...'

'Shut up with your "but"s! Why did things end up that way?>

'I-I don't know, but I just heard it now.'

His voice was shaking.

<What do you mean, you don't know!?!>

'Even if you say that...'

<There's no way Haruka-chan would confess!>

'But...'

<Find out why that happened!>

'Even if you tell me to "find out", how am I...'

<Figure it out yourself!>

Gotou hung up.

For a while, Ishii just sat there in shock, head in his hands.

He felt like he might cry.

Though part of it was fear from Gotou's terrible rebuking, there was also

frustrating, misery, sadness – a mixture of emotions.

His heart was over capacity, and felt like it was just under breaking point –

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5

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'Ishii-san – '

Makoto spotted Ishii from behind and called out to him. He was walking down the precinct corridor with shoulders slumped.

She had actually just come to meet Ishii and Gotou in the Unsolved Cases Special Investigations room.

'Ah, Makoto-san...'

Ishii slowly turned around and replied in a hoarse voice.

His face was as lifeless as a corpse's.

'Are you all right?' asked Makoto, but Ishii just let out a weak 'Ah...' and smiled awkwardly.

'What are you here for today?' asked Ishii, cocking his head in confusion.

It was like his heart was elsewhere. He had to be very troubled.

'About Haruka-chan – I hear she was arrested as the perpetrator in a murder case.'

When Makoto said that, Ishii let out another weak 'Ah...'

It wasn't something to discuss in the corridor, so Makoto suggested, 'Shall we move elsewhere?'

Makoto led them to the Unsolved Cases Special Investigations room.

Ishii walked like he was drunk and then slumped into a chair.

He was in a worse condition that Makoto had imagined.

'Has Haruka-chan really been arrested?' asked Makoto.

Ishii looked pained. 'She hasn't been officially arrested yet, but I think it's just a matter of time.'

'I can't believe it. Isn't it some kind of mistake?'

'I want to think that too, but there's a witness – '

'Couldn't it be some sort of mistake there?'

The incident had happened at night. An eyewitness might have mistaken something in the dark.

'That isn't all.'

Ishii's voice went slightly higher.

'Meaning?'

'Earlier, Haruka-chan confessed to the crime – '

Ishii's words were so unexpected that Makoto needed some time to understand.

'But – that makes no...'

'I can't believe it, but that's the information I received.'

Ishii's shoulders slumped.

His hands were gripped into tight fists and were shaking. He probably couldn't keep the emotions raging within him in order.

'And you accepted that, Ishii-san?'

'I can't accept it...'

The moment Ishii said that, he dropped his head to the desk.

It felt like he was berating his own powerlessness. Makoto understood that

feeling so well it hurt, but wallowing here would solve nothing.

'Then let's investigate.'

Makoto walked up to Ishii.

'Investigate what? She's confessed. I can't believe it, but it's a fact,' replied Ishii in a thick voice, his head still on the table.

The incident was so unexpected that he couldn't deal with it and was holing up within himself. When Makoto looked at Ishii, pathetic – was not the word that came to mind.

Ishii was too sensitive and kind to be a detective.

At the same time, Makoto knew that Ishii would not crumble here. Ishii had the strength to keep standing up. So –

'It doesn't matter whether she confessed or not,' said Makoto, placing a hand on Ishii's shoulder.

Ishii's body jolted in surprise and he lifted his head.

'Doesn't matter?'

'It doesn't. Ishii-san, you believe that Haruka-chan wouldn't ever hurt anybody, right?'

'Of course I do...'

'Then I think you should continue to believe her. Or are your feelings towards Haruka-chan so weak that they can be shaken by somebody else's words?'

Even as Makoto said that, she felt a prickling pain in her chest.

She had noticed a while back that Ishii had feelings for Haruka. At the same time, Makoto also felt –

This wasn't the time to think about that. Makoto shook away those thoughts and smiled at Ishii.

'I...'

'It's OK. Ishii-san, you aren't alone. There's Gotou-san, and I'll help as well, though there isn't much I can do.'

Perhaps Makoto's words reached Ishii, as the light in his eyes behind his glasses seemed to have returned.

'But we've been left out of the investigation.'

'Eh? Ishii-san, you worry about that sort of thing?'

Makoto spoke with exaggerated surprise, which made Ishii's brows furrow in confusion.

'What do you mean?'

'Haven't you ignored that sort of thing up until now?'

The Unsolved Cases Special Investigations Department only had Gotou and Ishii, but they had solved many cases up until now, and they had done it without caring at all about the other investigation units.

'That's right, you're completely right – '

Finally, a smile appeared on Ishii's face.

Makoto sighed in relief. Even though it put her in an unfavourable position, she didn't care if she could help Ishii.

'But what on earth should we do?'

That was the problem. Even if they said things like the other investigations didn't matter, if they stepped over too many lines, they might run into unexpected obstacles.

Makoto wasn't sure where they should start.

'Wasn't there anything that bothered you about this case?' asked Makoto.

For a while, Ishii let his gaze wander as he thought, but then he said, 'Ah!'

'What is it?'

'No, I just thought that I wouldn't be able to think of anything on my own, but if it's him...'

Ishii's eyes seemed to glitter behind his glasses –

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6

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Gotou was headed for the prefabricated building behind Building B at the university.

He was here to tell Yakumo that Haruka had confessed.

'Yakumo! You here?' yelled Gotou as he swung open the door to the Movie Research Circle.

Yakumo was sitting in his usual chair.

He looked sleepy as usual with his messy hair as he read a thick book.

Even though he had to have noticed that Gotou had come in, he didn't even look up, let alone respond.

Though he was acting the same as usual, that was strange in this situation.

'Yakumo. You...'

'Please leave if you don't have anything to say. I'm busy,' interrupted Yakumo.

Though they always had this conversation, it felt incredibly unnatural.

'I do have something to say. It's about Haruka-chan,' said Gotou, feeling irritated.

Yakumo lifted his head slightly.

'Ah, that...'

His uninterested expression made Gotou lean forward without thinking.

Up until now, even when Yakumo's eyes were sleepy, they had always had a sharp glint to them, but Gotou couldn't see that in Yakumo today.

– Is this really Yakumo?

It was strange enough that Gotou wanted to ask.

'Don't just say "Ah, that"! We have to hurry and do something for Haruka-chan.'

'Why?'

Yakumo cocked his head like he was confused.

'What are you saying?'

'That's what I want to ask you, Gotou-san.'

'What?'

'She's a suspect in a murder case. The police determined that, so it isn't my place to say anything. I'll leave the investigation to the police,' Yakumo said flatly. He clapped the book shut.

'You... Are you serious?' asked Gotou, his voice shaking.

Maybe Gotou was afraid of hearing Yakumo's answer. Depending on what Yakumo said, Gotou's emotions could explode at once.

'Of course I'm serious,' Yakumo said casually.

'What's wrong with you?'

'Nothing. I'm the same as usual.'

'No. This isn't like you.'

'Gotou-san, what do you know about me?'

Yakumo narrowed his eyes at Gotou. They were cold, emotionless eyes.

'I know tons. How many cases do you think we've solved together?

'That doesn't count as knowing a person.'

Yakumo let out a yawn, as if bored.

'Don't say that. Apparently Haruka-chan confessed earlier. If we don't hurry and do something – '

'If she confessed, she's the perpetrator, isn't she? There's nothing for me to do now,' Yakumo said flatly. He opened the book again.

– What's with his attitude?

'Do you think Haruka-chan's the culprit?'

'She confessed, so wouldn't she be?' Yakumo replied quietly, eyes on his book.

'Of course she isn't!'

Gotou lost the fight against his anger. He grabbed Yakumo's book and threw it at the wall.

The book made a loud thump and fell.

Still, Yakumo didn't move from his chair.

'People are foolish – ' said Yakumo with a slight sigh.

'What?'

'Even though they don't know someone, they get trapped by their own illusions, thinking that the other person is a certain way, no doubt about it.'

'What are you trying to say?'

'That you are doing exactly that right now, Gotou-san.'

'Me?'

'Yes. Why are you making such a fuss about how she would never commit a crime?'

'Obviously because I believe in her,' declared Gotou, which made Yakumo laugh.

'That isn't belief. You've just gone and created a version of her that you like inside of you. What you really believe isn't her but the image you have of her.'

– What the hell is he saying?

Disappointment was growing rapidly within Gotou.

– Since when did Yakumo start being like this?

No, Yakumo would just say that that was Gotou's image of him too. When that thought came to Gotou's mind, he shook his head.

'No!'

He had already yelled before he'd noticed.

'What are you objecting to?'

'It's not just an image inside me. I believe in Haruka-chan.'

'Idiotic...'

Yakumo snorted aloud.

The anger that had been welling up inside Gotou exploded.

'You bastard... Get a grip already! You should know best that Haruka-chan would never do something like that!' shouted Gotou, grabbing Yakumo's lapels over the table.

Even though Gotou was glaring at Yakumo with all his anger, Yakumo just looked at him coldly.

'Please don't be so loud...'

'You're the one who made me!'

'Why do you believe in her so much?' Yakumo asked coldly.

'Why?'

'I don't know anything about her...'

Yakumo's sentence felt somewhat sad.

'Of course you do!'

'I don't. I don't know what seminar she's in. What friends she has. What she wants to do in the future – and that's not all. Her likes. Her dislikes. How she was raised. I don't know anything about her.'

After saying all that, Yakumo's eyes were unsettled. Sad eyes that seemed to swallow all of Gotou's anger.

'You...'

'Isn't it the same for you, Gotou-san? How much do you know about her?'

'I...'

– I know nothing.

He had been on several cases with Haruka, and through them, at some point, he had thought that he had grown to know her.

Just as Yakumo said though, he knew frighteningly little about Haruka's personal life.

Even though they had talked so much, why hadn't he ever asked – it was almost strange.

That was probably because they had always had a case on.

Yakumo had probably reached the same conclusion with this case and lost his understanding of the person called Haruka.

'You understand now, don't you? We don't know her well enough to declare that she isn't the culprit –'

As if that was conclusive, Yakumo shook off Gotou's hand. Gotou staggered

backwards and stared at Yakumo in shock.

It was faint, but Yakumo's eyes were wet.

Maybe Yakumo regretted it. Regretted that he hadn't got to know Haruka better –

Gotou felt the same way. They had always had a case on, so he'd never really talked about normal things with Haruka.

He knew nothing about Haruka, and that had ended up being normal.

He felt incredibly pathetic now.

This was probably how Yakumo felt too.

It was quiet, as if everything had been drowned by water –

Just as Yakumo said, maybe they didn't know anything about Haruka. But did that mean Gotou couldn't believe in her?

'No!' shouted Gotou.

Yakumo had a red left eye which could see the ghosts of the dead.

Because of that, he had experienced heartbreaking pain countless times and carried more sadness than other people could even imagine.

He had hated himself and grown afraid of rejection from others, so he had shut himself in his own shell.

The person who had opened Yakumo's heart was none other than Haruka.

She had called the red eye that Yakumo had hated so much beautiful.

How much that one word had saved Yakumo – Yakumo himself had to know better than Gotou.

'What do you mean, no!?'

Yakumo's voice was loud as well.

'Maybe we don't know anything about Haruka-chan!'

'That's what I said!'

'But! Those are just facts that you can write down!'

'Facts that you can write down are what make up a person!'

'Don't be an idiot! Like you can know what makes a person from stupid stuff like that!'

Gotou grabbed Yakumo's lapels again.

Yakumo glared at him fiercely, but Gotou wasn't afraid at all.

'OK, listen up! You and me, we don't know anything about Haruka! But we know her heart better than anyone else!'

Gotou had only met Haruka through cases, but – because of that, there was something he knew.

What Haruka would think and do in situations when her life was in danger – Gotou had seen that up close.

That was the person Haruka was.

Gotou and Yakumo had both seen Haruka's pure heart, which held no lies.

'You're just lining up nice words...'

Yakumo's words fired up Gotou's anger again.

Before he'd notice it, he had shoved Yakumo.

Yakumo's back hit the wall, and he sat down right there.

'Lining up nice words!? Open your eyes already! Haruka-chan believes in you right now! But what are you doing!?'

Gotou went up to Yakumo and yelled with all his strength.

Yakumo glared up at him, still sitting.

It wasn't the same cold gaze as earlier. His eyes were fiery and sharp.

'Talking like you know everything...'

'You fool! Do you still not get it!?'

Gotou lost himself to his anger and raised his fist to punch Yakumo –

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7

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Ishii was brought to his senses by the sudden yell he heard.

He and Makoto had just reached Meisei University's Movie Research Circle room.

That had probably been Gotou's voice.

Ishii and Makoto exchanged a glance and then opened the door to run in.

Ishii was stunned by what he saw.

Gotou had his fist raised to punch Yakumo, he was slumped against the wall.

'Detective Gotou! Please calm down!'

Ishii clung to Gotou and frantically tried to stop him.

'Shut up! Let me go! I need to punch him!'

'You can't!'

'I said, let go!'

Ishii tried to stop Gotou, but he had no way to beat Gotou in strength. Ishii was thrust away and rolled across the floor.

His head slammed into the wall, and stars blinked in front of him.

'Ishii-san, are you all right?'

Makoto rushed towards him.

Though it hurt, Ishii couldn't just sit here. He got up immediately to step

between Gotou and Yakumo.

'Move!'

Gotou glared at Ishii.

It was a gaze so frightening it made him shudder, but he couldn't back down. Gotou's eyes were clearly different from usual.

He could have actually killed Yakumo with those eyes.

'I-I can't do that. What on earth happened anyway?' asked Ishii, even though his voice was shaking.

'I'm going to fix this guy!'

Gotou tried to punch Yakumo again.

Ishii frantically pushed Gotou back, but Gotou didn't move at all. This would just be a repeat of earlier at this rate.

Just as he thought that, Makoto stepped between Gotou and Yakumo as well.

'Gotou-san, please calm down first.'

Even Gotou couldn't just push Makoto away, so he finally backed down, though not without a click of his tongue.

Ishii sighed in relief.

He had really been nervous there for a moment.

'What happened?' Makoto asked Gotou.

'This idiot...'

Gotou started to speak, but Yakumo stood up, interrupting him.

'Nothing happened,' said Yakumo, with his usual expressionless face and flat tone.

He was so calm that it was like the earlier commotion had never happened.

'Of course something happened,' said Makoto, sounding half-exasperated.

Yakumo ran a hand through his messy hair and then righted the chair to sit in it.

'While I was thinking about how to solve this case, that bear suddenly assaulted me,' said Yakumo, pointing at Gotou.

'That wasn't what you said earlier!' shouted Gotou, but Ishii hurriedly stepped in between them.

If this continued, Ishii would need doubles of himself to fix this.

'Gotou-san, I understand how you feel, but let's calm down and talk first,' urged Makoto.

Gotou looked displeased, but he sat down.

Really, thank goodness for Makoto. If Ishii had been alone, he didn't know what would have happened.

'So what really happened?' asked Makoto with a sigh.

'I said, nothing happened – '

Yakumo was nonchalant, like nothing really had happened.

Gotou tried to interrupt, but just as he had half-got up to say something, Yakumo stopped him.

'I know, I know. Please be quiet,' Yakumo said curtly.

For a while, Gotou just glared at Yakumo, but then he smiled and sat down.

'Yeah, it was nothing really. Just the usual lovers' quarrel.'

'Please don't say something so disgusting,' rebutted Yakumo immediately.

'What?'

'A lovers' quarrel refers to a quibbling fight that occurs due to some romantic entanglement. I would be very troubled if anybody mistakenly thought that I

had anything like that with you, Gotou-san.'

'I would be too!'

'You're the one who said it, Gotou-san.'

'Just shut up!' shouted Gotou. He crossed his arms and looked away.

Ishii didn't know what had happened between the two, but it looked like they were finally back to normal.

Ishii and Makoto looked at each other and sighed in relief.

'Ishii-san, Makoto-san, I apologise for asking this so soon after your arrival, but could you tell me all that you know?'

Yakumo tapped his brow with his finger. His eyes had a glint in them.

Though Ishii was frightened by that glint, he spoke.

That said, all Ishii knew was that Haruka had confessed, so Gotou started speaking halfway through.

Gotou shared the information he had got from Miyagawa, like how Haruka's fingerprints had been on the weapon and that the eyewitness, the guard, had seen her hit the victim with a metal pipe.

The victim was a woman named Koike Kanae, who was a student in the same seminar as Haruka.

The cause of death was a cerebral contusion with no other injuries that stood out.

'How about you, Makoto-san?'

After Gotou finished, Yakumo turned to Makoto.

'Me...?'

'Yes, regarding that author.'

– What on earth does he mean by author?

Ishii was confused, but he didn't say anything. It was Yakumo. He would never talk about something if it wasn't related.

'So it's related somehow?' asked Makoto, looking troubled.

Yakumo nodded.

'Wait. What are you talking about?' interrupted Gotou, unable to stop himself.

Yakumo looked incredibly annoyed as he ran a hand through his hair and said, 'Makoto-san is investigating an author who says he was made to write a novel by the ghost in the clock tower.'

'W-what!?' shouted Gotou, standing up from his chair.

Ishii didn't express his feelings aloud, but he felt the same surprise.

'The trouble she brought me had something to do with the clock tower – '

Yakumo had said that last night.

That was why he and Ishii had been investigating if anybody had died on campus.

'Furthermore, the victim of this case is the person who asked for her advice about the spiritual phenomenon – '

'What!?'

Gotou reacted strongly to the words Yakumo had spoken so casually.

'Please don't speak so loudly.'

Yakumo frowned, looking fed up.

'Anybody would want to after hearing that news. Why didn't you say that earlier?'

'You didn't ask.'

'You...'

Gotou lifted a fist, but Ishii hurriedly pacified him.

As a result, Ishii received a fist to the head.

'This case is centred on the clock tower. The key to solving this case must be there – '

Yakumo put his finger on his brow and narrowed his eyes.

Though I was a frightening expression, Ishii saw hope there.

'Right! Let's prove Haruka-chan's innocence!' shouted Gotou, raising his fist.

Yakumo sighed in mock disappointment.

'Please don't say such stupid things. It's possible that she did it,' Yakumo said coldly.

'Are you going to start saying that again!?' said Gotou angrily.

Ishii felt the same way.

– Didn't Yakumo believe in Haruka?

They were together so often.. He had to know that Haruka wouldn't hurt anybody.

'Please cool off your head. You won't be able to see the truth if you look at the case with preconceptions.'

'I know that, but...'

Yakumo raised a hand to stop Gotou's objections.

'No, you don't know anything. Sometimes people behave in ways you don't expect.'

'Impossible.'

'How can you say that for sure? There's been a case like that before, right? A sad incident in which somebody killed somebody without wanting to...'

After Yakumo said that, everyone present said, 'Ah!'

'The tree of deceit – ' said Ishii.

Yakumo nodded.

A sad incident in which the players' emotions had entangled in a terrible way –

Somebody had been possessed by a ghost and killed somebody despite their own intentions.

'Are you saying that that's what happened this time?' asked Gotou in a hoarse voice.

'I'm just saying that it's a possibility – '

After saying that, Yakumo's gaze fell to his feet.

'But if that's the case...' said Makoto, but Yakumo interrupted her.

'Let us think about that later. First, we find the truth behind the case – '

Ishii agreed to Yakumo's suggestion.

But if Haruka had really committed the crime while being possessed, there would be no way to save her –

That thought seemed to be pulling Ishii's heart into a deep darkness.

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8

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Haruka was in a small room with no windows.

There was a steel desk in the middle of the room, and Haruka sat on a folding chair in front of it.

Two men sat opposite her.

They were detectives. One was Sonoda. The other was Onodera.

– Why am I here?

Haruka didn't understand.

At some point, she had found herself sitting here. She couldn't believe it, but her hands were cuffed.

The cold metal felt terribly heavy.

'So what was your motive?' asked Sonoda brusquely, his legs stuck out in front of him.

'Eh?' said Haruka, not understanding.

'I said motive. Why did you kill your friend?'

The continuous stream of unexpected questions put Haruka at a loss for words.

Killed a friend? Haruka had no idea what he was talking about.

She had never even been violent towards anyone, and yet –

'Tell us the reason!' said Sonoda, sounding impatience. He hit the table with his fist. Even if he acted intimidating, Haruka couldn't reply to something she didn't know.

'There must be some mistake,' said Haruka desperately.

'What?' Sonoda looked at her suspiciously.

'I don't understand what you're talking about at all.'

'Of course you understand! Don't think I'll play nice just because you're a woman if you keep saying whatever you want!' threatened Sonoda.

'Now, now...' said Onodera sitting next to him.

Sonoda made a click with his tongue, seeming incredibly displeased, but he didn't say anything else.

'You must be a bit confused,' Onodera said gently.

'Um... What's happened? This is an interrogation room, right? Why am I

here?’

After Haruka let out a list of questions, the detectives looked at each other, seeming troubled.

Even if they looked like that, Haruka didn’t think she’d asked anything strange.

‘Please tell me,’ Haruka pleaded, leaning forward.

‘You hit your friend Koike Kanae-san with a metal pipe. You remember that, right?’

‘I did that to Kanae?’

‘Yes.’

Onodera nodded.

Haruka wanted to ask why they believed that, but more importantly, she wanted to know about Kanae.

‘What about Kanae? How’s Kanae doing?’

‘She passed away...’

‘No...’

Haruka started shaking.

She had met Kanae after they were in the same seminar, but at first, they hadn’t talked about anything in particular.

Kanae wasn’t the type to talk on her own to people around her, and Haruka was the same way.

They had become friends about three months in –

Though Haruka usually walked home, it had been raining that day, so she had gone to the bus stop at the front gate.

At that time, Kanae had been sitting on the bench under the shelter while

reading a book.

– She’s in the same seminar as me.

That was all Haruka had felt, but she had seen the book she was reading before.

‘The Count of Monte Cristo – ’

When Haruka said the name aloud, Kanae looked up.

‘I’m surprised you know,’ said Kanae, smiling despite looking puzzled.

‘Eh? Ah, actually I’ve never read it...’ Haruka said hurriedly.

Then, she explained how she had had to look for a paperback copy of the book with Yakumo because of a certain spiritual phenomena-related event.

Kanae had seriously listened to a story that hadn’t been that interesting at all.

Ever since then, they began to talk about various things whenever they meant.

Haruka really liked Kanae’s soft and gentle mood. She was one of the few people that Haruka could be herself around without worrying.

And yet –

‘You did it, correct?’

Onodera’s voice interrupted Haruka’s thoughts.

‘Me?’

‘Yes. You’re the one who killed Koike Kanae-san, right?’

‘That’s... I would never do that...’

‘But you said you did earlier.’

‘What did I say?’

‘That it was all your fault.’

Haruka felt her consciousness slipping away from her upon hearing Onodera's unexpected words.

She couldn't remember saying anything like that. She didn't even remember doing anything. She had actually just found out that Kanae had died now.

– What's happening?

Haruka frantically went through her memories.

When did she last meet with Kanae?

Right. She had listened to her worries and gone to the clock tower with Yakumo. Then, she had met Kanae once more at the cafeteria.

She had met with Nishizawa, who had experienced the spiritual phenomenon with Kanae. After that, they had eaten sandwiches and parted ways –

Then, she had had to hand something in and went to her circle, and she'd thought she would go to Yakumo's room afterwards to report on what had happened.

She had spotted Kanae in front of the clock tower on the way to Yakumo's room. After that – it was no good. She couldn't remember.

The more she tried to think, the more it felt like her mind was being split apart.

No. Her consciousness was definitely being swallowed up by the darkness now –

– Yakumo-kun! Help me!

Haruka screamed desperately in her heart, but her scream didn't reach anyone

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9

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Gotou looked up once more at the tall clock tower.

He had come to Meisei University countless times. The clock tower had always stood there as a symbol, but he had never cared much about it until this case.

But maybe that was just how people's impressions were.

They only noticed something after something happened. That was probably exactly how Yakumo felt now.

He looked beside him and saw Yakumo looked up at the clock tower.

'Are you OK?' asked Gotou.

Yakumo narrowed his eyes slightly.

'What do you mean?' he said, playing dumb.

'What? I'm worried about you.'

Yakumo had been obviously off when they had been talking earlier.

Though it had looked like things had calmed down when Ishii and Makoto came, that didn't mean Gotou's anxiety had left him.

He didn't know if Yakumo had really dealt with his feelings to look at the case clearly.

'I haven't fallen so far that I need a single-celled bear's concern.'

Though Yakumo was saying that aloud, he had to be exhausted inside.

'Don't put up a strong front.'

'I'm not. From my perspective, I'm more concerned about you, Gotou-san.'

'What?'

'Since when have you been so violent?'

'You're the one who made me!'

'Putting the blame on others? How childish.'

Yakumo shrugged for effect.

Gotou thought about hitting him, but he decided against it. He didn't want to think about what Yakumo would say if he did.

'More importantly, let's go.'

After declaring that, Yakumo started walking straight towards the clock tower.

The tower still had No Trespassing yellow tape all around it, but there were no guards.

Yakumo and Gotou went under the tape to the clock tower.

The events of last night suddenly flashed back in Gotou's mind.

Yakumo had fought with a guard in front of the tape. It was incredibly rare for Yakumo to lose his cool like that.

Perhaps he had sensed something.

If Gotou had known this was going to happen, maybe he should've dragged Yakumo along even if he had to force the guard away.

'Was the gate locked at the time of the incident?'

Yakumo's question interrupted Gotou's thoughts.

He looked forward and saw Yakumo standing in front of the gate.

'Probably.'

'Please don't be so vague,' Yakumo said curtly.

'Is it important?'

'In order to determine whether it is important or not, we need accurate information.'

When Yakumo was like this, he seemed more like a detective than Gotou.

'Got it,' Gotou said with a nod.

Yakumo briskly walked towards the back. Gotou followed him immediately.

When they got to the back, Gotou saw a metal door. It was rusty and looked very old.

Yakumo slowly opened the door.

Even though it was daytime, it was dark inside –

Yakumo took a pen light out from his pocket and illuminated the interior.

It wasn't a very big door Gotou couldn't see much past Yakumo.

Yakumo seemed to be thinking for a while, but then he went inside.

Gotou followed him.

Yakumo silently began to climb the stairs up the clock tower.

The interior of the clock tower, about fifteen metres tall, had a staircase inside that went along the walls. By the time they reached the top room, Gotou was out of breath.

'Are you already worn out?' asked Yakumo, voice full of malice.

'Shut up. This is nothing,' spat out Gotou, wiping the sweat on his forehead.

The top room was much smaller than Gotou had expected. Desks and chairs. Some old machine things. That was all.

Yakumo slowly looked around. His eyes stopped beside the stairs.

There were significant bloodstains there. You could tell a lot of blood had been spilled.

Yakumo crouched there to look at it carefully.

'Find out anything?'

'Nothing...' Yakumo replied curtly. Then, he walked up to the mirror and looked at that carefully.

This looked fairly old and was covered in dust.

Yakumo stared in the mirror for a while, but then he went to the window on the wall, perhaps having lost interest.

The glass was as dirty as the mirror so you couldn't see outside clearly.

Yakumo unlocked it and pushed open the casement window.

Cold air from outside rushed in, mixing with the mouldy air within.

'This is probably the window – ' murmured Yakumo.

'What?'

'I had you investigate this, right, Gotou-san? The woman who committed suicide by jumping from the clock tower – '

Right. Haruka's case had been so shocking that Gotou had forgotten, but Gotou had gone to see Yakumo to talk about that. But –

'How do you know it's that window?'

'It was written in the documents. Please read them properly.'

Though it was Gotou's fault for missing it, he didn't like Yakumo's tone. He thought about complaining but decided against it.

He had no way of beating Yakumo in an argument.

'Could I ask one thing?'

After looking out the window for a while, Yakumo asked him that.

'What?'

'How can you believe in someone without proof, Gotou-san?'

Gotou couldn't reply to Yakumo's question immediately.

Part of it was that he didn't understand why Yakumo cared, but mostly it was that he didn't know how to answer.

'I don't know.'

'That's not an answer,' interjected Yakumo immediately.

That was true, but –

'I don't know why I believe people either. Do you need proof to believe in people? Believing or not believing – it's a matter of feeling.'

That was Gotou's straight response.

He had never thought about a reason to believe in somebody. Rather than thinking about it, he decided with his heart.

'It must be nice to be so simple...' said Yakumo, and then he turned around to face Gotou, sitting on the windowsill with a smile.

It was a sad smile, as if a hole had been left in his heart.

'Do you still not believe?'

'In what?'

'In Haruka-chan –'

The moment Gotou said that name, Yakumo stopped smiling and looked down slightly. His shadowed face looked troubled.

Just as Gotou thought, Yakumo probably hadn't dealt with his feelings yet.

'To be honest, I don't know. I know too little about her –'

Yakumo's voice was unusually weak.

Though earlier, Gotou had gone on a rampage because of his own emotions, he could accept Yakumo's pains now.

Yakumo had to be feeling terrible regret about this case.

– Why hadn't he talked to Haruka more?

He had thought that Haruka would always be there and had never tried to get

to know her. He was blaming himself for that now.

'You know more than enough about her.'

'No, I know nothing... That's why I don't know...'

Yakumo bit his lower lip.

'Then you can get to know her better from now on.'

'It's too late...'

Yakumo's face twisted like he had eaten something bitter. The incident has already happened – is probably what he wanted to say.

'It's not too late. And getting to know someone is different from believing in someone.'

'It's the same. If you know more about somebody, you can use that to understand their thought pattern.'

Gotou couldn't help but laugh at Yakumo's words.

'What's so funny?' asked Yakumo, looking a bit sulky.

'Thought pattern? Don't talk about people like data. You can't use that to understand people's feelings, right? You said yourself that people sometimes do things you don't expect – '

'What are you trying to say?'

Yakumo stood up from the sill.

'I'm saying that you're thinking too much. Doesn't matter what people are doing where – their core doesn't change.'

'What a stupid answer.'

Yakumo gave him a mocking glance.

Strangely, that attitude didn't annoy Gotou now. He even thought it cute.

'Yeah, but that's why I'm saying it. You're thinking too much. Doesn't matter

what friends Haruka-chan has or what she likes. She's her.'

'Have you never been betrayed by your simple logic?' asked Yakumo.

'I have,' Gotou said with force.

It wasn't just once or twice that he'd believed in people and been betrayed. There were many incidents he didn't want to remember.

'Then maybe you should learn from it.'

'I've learnt to believe in people from it. Like I believe in you – '

'I might betray you too, Gotou-san.'

'If it happens, it happens,' said Gotou with a shrug.

Yakumo laughed.

'You really are simple.'

'Won't deny it,' said Gotou.

Yakumo turned towards the window again.

Gotou didn't know what was on Yakumo's mind as he looked out the window, but he was sure that Yakumo now wanted to move forward.

That was enough for now. One day, Yakumo would be able to believe in somebody without any conditions too.

'Shall we get going?' Yakumo said suddenly, turning on his heels.

'Get going? Where to?'

Yakumo ignored Gotou's question and briskly walked down the stairs.

– He really does whatever he wants.

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10

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Makoto went to Onda's research room.

When she contacted him earlier, Onda had immediately made time for her, even though she had just met him yesterday.

That said, today she wanted to ask about the incident, not the novel. The atmosphere would be a bit heavier.

Makoto took a deep breath before knocking on the door and going in.

'Thanks for coming,' Onda said with a smile. Makoto went inside and sat diagonally from Onda.

'I apologise for coming when you're busy,' said Makoto.

'Don't worry about it,' Onda replied.

'Actually, I'm here today about yesterday's incident...'

When Makoto said that, the smile left Onda's face.

It was a natural response. The victim, Koike Kanae, had been in the literature circle. Even if Onda didn't talk to her much, he would have at least known her.

'Why did this happen... I don't know what to say...'

Onda leant back on his chair and looked up at the ceiling. It looked like it had been quite a shock for him.

'Were you close to the victim, Koike-san?' asked Makoto.

Onda sat up to look at Makoto.

'The police asked me the same thing.'

'The police?'

For a moment, Makoto was surprised, but it was natural for the police to question people close to the victim.

'I want to be of help if I can, but I only knew her in the circle. There isn't

much I can say.'

'That's fine,' Makoto said with a nod.

Onda cleared his throat and began to speak.

'To be honest, she was a student that didn't stand out much. Like I said yesterday, the literature circle regular puts out a literature magazine, so the students in the circle tend to like to write, but...'

Onda paused, but Makoto could guess what he was going to say.

'She wasn't the type to proactively participate.'

'That's how she looked to me. Though she had been in the circle for three years, she had never written anything to publish in the magazine.'

That was a bit strange.

Makoto understood since she wrote articles, but writing wasn't something anybody could do easily. There were people who were inclined towards and against it.

Maybe she realised that she wasn't inclined towards writing after joining the circle – but after Makoto thought about that, it was also unnatural.

If that were the case, she could have just quit.

It wasn't as easy for seminars or classes, but you could quit as many circles as you wanted.

'I wonder why she stayed in the literature circle,' Makoto said to herself.

'I wonder too. I didn't know either. Maybe I should have asked...'

Onda's words were filed with regret.

This was another point which made Onda different from the other lecturers. He didn't just lump all the students into one group – he thought of them all as individuals and interacted with them that way.

He was the type of person who would think about what he could do and act on it.

'I can't believe this happened... It's too terrible...'

Onda put his hands together as if in prayer.

It didn't just sound like a platitude – it felt like he meant it.

'Um... I want to ask one more thing, but...'

Makoto was hesitant, but she spoke anyway.

'What is it?'

'I heard that there is a student named Nishizawa-san who is also in the literature circle.'

'Ah, I think he's in fourth year.'

'Were Nishizawa-san and Koike-san close?'

This was something Yakumo had told Makoto to ask.

Kanae had brought the issue about the clock tower to Haruka, and Nishizawa was the one she had thought to be possessed.

'Hm, I think they were fairly close.'

'Were they dating?' asked Makoto.

Onda's brow furrowed.

'Unfortunately, I'm a bit slow with that sort of thing. Maybe they were, but maybe they weren't – that's all I can say.'

Onda was young for an associate professor, but he was already in his early forties. It made sense that he didn't know much about his students' love lives when they were twenty years younger than him.

'I see – was there anyone else Koike-san was close with?'

'Close with?'

'Yes.'

'Hm... Ah, right. The person we discussed the other day, Sakurai-kun, was fairly close to her.'

– Sakurai Itsuki.

The hopeful newcomer who had debuted as a novelist while still a student.

'How were they close?'

'It's hard to say, but I think they were just normally close.'

If Yakumo was right and the clock tower was at the heart of this case, then Sakurai, who claimed that he was made to write his novel by the ghost of the clock tower, could easily be connected to the case somehow.

However, it would be dangerous to have any preconceptions.

Furthermore, a question had come to Makoto.

'Have you ever seen Nishizawa-san and Koike-san talking to each other?'

'Hm... Maybe, but Sakurai-kun's presence left a stronger impression...'

'I see. By the way, were Sakurai-san and Nishizawa-san close?'

When Makoto asked that, Onda looked troubled and he put a hand on the back of his neck.

'Those two, eh... They had different ways of thinking.'

'How were they different?'

'Sakurai-kun is the type who perceives things through feeling, but Nishizawa-kun is the opposite, taking things logically. That's why they like different works and always had different opinions.'

'Did they ever fight?'

'A number of incidents like that happened. I would always be called into mediate, but the two are both stubborn...'

Onda smiled wryly.

From that response, it was probably a rather frequent occurrence.

Perhaps the friction between the two had something to do with the case.

'Does it have something to do with this case?'

Onda's question interrupted Makoto's thoughts.

'Ah, I...'

'Do you suspect Sakurai-kun or Nishizawa-kun? I heard that the culprit has already been arrested, but...'

It was true that the way Makoto had spoken now would make anyone think that Sakurai or Nishizawa was under suspicion.

'No, that isn't the case,' Makoto hurriedly objected, regretting the way she had spoken.

She had been intending on gathering information fairly without any preconceptions, but she had been biased.

Haruka wasn't the culprit – that thought might have made her that way.

Believing in someone meant that there was the danger that biases like that would arise. Was it more important as a person to believe or to clear away all biases in order to solve a case?

Perhaps this was the true nature of Yakumo's worries –

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11

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Ishii visited the security room by the university's front gates.

It had a large window for a good view of people coming in and out with a

counter and a chair.

It was a simple construction and had a break room in the back where there was a table and chairs.

Ishii had come to the break room.

After waiting in a chair, a man who looked to be in his late twenties wearing a navy uniform came in.

'Hello, I'm Ishii from the Setamachi precinct.'

Ishii stood up and held out his police ID.

'My name is Seo.'

The man who called himself Seo gave Ishii a quick bow with his hat still in.

Ishii couldn't say it was a very friendly reception.

'I would like to ask about the day of the incident...'

After they had both sat down, Ishii took out a memo pad.

Seo was the eyewitness to the incident as well as the person who had contacted the police. Ishii had come for some of Seo's time so that he could reconfirm what had happened.

'I've already told the police everything. Even if you keep coming back...'
mumbled Seo.

He probably was feeling uncharitable because of how many times he had undergone questioning. Perhaps his attitude couldn't be helped.

However, Ishii couldn't back down here.

He needed to gather as much information as he could to prove Haruka's innocence.

'I apologise, but it is necessary.'

Seo sighed.

'Why did you go to the clock tower on the day of the incident, Seo-san?'

'Why? Just because it's the last route I take on my rounds...' replied Seo, rubbing his eyes.

He was probably very tired because he had been questioned until late at night. Ishii felt bad, but he still had to ask.

'Is the clock tower included in your route?'

'Ah, it isn't, but...'

'What is it?'

'I said this late night. When I passed by, I heard something like a woman's scream.'

Seo wiped sweat off his forehead with a handkerchief.

'What did it sound like exactly?'

'What did it... It's hard to explain with words. Something like "Aaah", I think.'

'What did you do then, Seo-san?'

'I thought it was strange so I went to the clock tower. Then, I heard some noises... I went inside because I thought somebody was there.'

Seo scratched under his nose.

It was normal for a guard to go check if they heard something like a scream, but –

'Did you go alone?'

'Yes,' Seo replied matter-of-factly.

'Didn't you think about calling for help?'

If Ishii had been in the same situation, he definitely wouldn't have gone alone.

'I wasn't sure I heard a scream then and the university campus is large. Everyone is working in different areas. It would take too long if we went and called for someone else every time anything happened.'

Perhaps it was just as Seo said.

Meisei University had a large campus with many buildings. It had differences in elevation as well, so it would take a lot of time to call for anybody.

'I see... Where did you enter the clock tower from?'

'From the back entrance.'

'Why did you go from the back?'

A guard would have the key. It would be more effective to enter from the front.

'I wasn't planning on going in at first.'

'Is that so?'

'I was sure that it was just some students playing around, so I thought I'd just go around the clock tower once to check.'

'Then why did you go inside?' asked Ishii, which made Seo sigh.

'Detective, do you suspect me?'

'No, that's not it...'

Though Ishii hurriedly denied it, Seo's anger wasn't settled.

'This happened last night too, but I just reported the crime, and yet you detectives are saying this and that about...'

'I apologise...'

Ishii bowed his head.

Seo wasn't the first to react this way.

As a detective, you had to check every detail to find out the truth. However,

many people took that as their being under suspicion.

Perhaps Ishii would feel that way himself if a detective did the same thing to him. That said, he couldn't just stop here.

'We don't suspect you, but in an investigation, we need to ask for every detail. Could I ask for your cooperation for just a bit longer?' Ishii asked formally.

Seo let out a deep sigh, but since he didn't stand up from his seat, Ishii took that as agreement.

'Was the back door open?' Ishii asked.

Seo put his chin in his hands as he thought.

'It was open.'

'I see. Then what did you do?'

'I turned on my torch and went inside. Then, I heard people arguing from the room on top so I went up the stairs. There...'

Seo stopped talking.

Ishii gulped. He wanted to know what happened next, but at the same time, he didn't want to.

Ishii still thought that there had to be some sort of mistake. Haruka would never hurt anyone.

However, once he heard the words from Seo's mouth, there was no going back. He was afraid that what he had believed in would crumble.

'I saw a woman hit another woman with a metal pipe,' said Seo.

The moment Ishii heard that, his head went blank. For a while, he was in shock.

Seo was speaking, but nothing went into Ishii's ears.

He had believed that pursuing the truth would bring him to Haruka's innocence, but he had been given evidence proving her crime instead.

Why did Haruka do something like hitting Kanae with a metal pipe?

No matter how much Ishii thought, he couldn't find an answer.

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12

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Gotou and Yakumo headed for the north side of campus – about ten minutes from the clock tower.

Gotou always just went straight for Yakumo's hideaway when he came to Meisei University. He hadn't thought that the place was this huge.

The incline was sharp too – it was pretty tough.

Yakumo stopped in front of a three-storey building.

'So what's inside?' asked Gotou as he looked up at the building.

It looked like it had been built recently, with a concrete construction.

'This building has rooms for circle and club activities.'

'That all?'

'That's all.'

Gotou clicked his tongue without thinking.

Making such a big building just for circles – this was completely different from Yakumo's little prefab.

'Why don't you move here too?'

Yakumo shook his head.

'I don't like noisy places.'

Gotou didn't think it was that noisy, but before he could say that, Yakumo had already gone inside.

'Honestly,' muttered Gotou, though he followed Yakumo in.

After Gotou stepped inside, he immediately understood what Yakumo had meant by 'noisy'.

Right inside, there was a large lounge. A male student was lying across one of the sofas there while playing acoustic guitar. Two female students were sitting there, entranced as they listened.

A little further away, six students were playing some sort of game loudly.

Furthermore, there were students working on something on their laptops and a young man and woman playing hide and seek.

'It is pretty noisy...'

'That's what I meant.'

Yakumo glanced at the commotion behind him before going up the stairs.

'So where are you going?' asked Gotou as he followed Yakumo, which made Yakumo stop halfway up the stairs.

'You came without knowing?' said Yakumo with a dramatic sigh.

'Since you didn't explain.'

'What kind of excuse is that?'

'Just explain already.'

'You'll find out if you follow me.'

Yakumo began walking up the stairs again.

When Yakumo got like this, there was no point trying to get an answer out of him. Gotou gave up and followed Yakumo.

In the corridor on the second floor, there were doors with small windows

lined along the wall, like karaoke boxes. There were probably the circle rooms Yakumo had mentioned.

Gotou realised Yakumo's goal upon seeing the nameplate on one of the doors.

The second door from the end read <Literature Circle – The Clock Tower>. If Gotou remembered correctly, Kanae, the victim, had been in the literature circle.

Yakumo knocked on the door.

After a while, a young man who was pale and thin opened the door.

His hair was unkempt and his almond eyes looked very intelligent – he felt kind of like Yakumo.

'Is somebody named Nishizawa-san here?' Yakumo asked in a flat tone.

The young man who had opened the door looked suspicious. 'That's me...'

'So you're Nishizawa-san. That's perfect. Would you talk to us?' as Yakumo said as he tried to go inside.

'Hey.' Nishizawa pushed Yakumo back out.

'What are you here for so suddenly?'

Nishizawa's suspicion made sense.

Yakumo normally did this sort of thing more skilfully, but this was too forceful.

'My name is Saitou Yakumo. Koike Kanae-san consulted me about the ghost that appears in the clock tower.'

'Ah, that... Come in. Nobody's here right now...'

Nishizawa opened the door wide to let them in.

Gotou and Yakumo nodded at each other and then went inside. The room was

probably about ten tatami in size. It was bigger than Yakumo's room and was clean, since it was new.

There was a table in the middle of the room, and the walls were lined with full bookshelves.

'Who's that?'

Nishizawa looked at Gotou.

Gotou was about to introduce himself, but Yakumo stopped him.

'Though this person looks the way he does, he is a famous medium,' said Yakumo, pointing at Gotou with his chin.

Yakumo probably thought that they would get more information if Gotou didn't say that he was with the police, but medium? Gotou didn't like it, but he nodded confidently and in a way he hoped was medium-like. 'Yes, my name is Gotou.'

'I can't believe this happened...' said Nishizawa as they sat down at the table.

His voice was filled with frustration.

'Yes...' replied Yakumo, looking down.

'When I met that girl yesterday, I didn't think that she would kill Kanae-chan...'

Nishizawa sighed slightly.

Though Gotou was irritated that Nishizawa was already sure that Haruka had killed her, he bore with it. They wouldn't get any information if he made a fuss now.

'Did you meet the two of them yesterday?' asked Yakumo in a flat tone, like he wasn't really interested.

'Kanae-chan called me out to the cafeteria... Then, she said she thought I was

possessed by a ghost and wanted me to meet with somebody who was knowledgeable about them...'

After Nishizawa said that, Gotou finally understood some of the background of the case.

'But you didn't come to me in the end.'

Yakumo gave Nishizawa a sharp gaze.

'I said no. Since I'm not possessed by any ghost – '

'It appears that way.'

'Eh?'

Yakumo's words seemed to have surprised Nishizawa.

'I can see the spirits of the dead – that is, ghosts.'

'You being serious?'

'Yes. It doesn't bother me if you don't believe me. In any case, you aren't possessed.'

'As I thought.'

It wasn't clear whether Nishizawa believed Yakumo or not, but he laughed slightly, before looking sad again

'Putting aside the possession incident, did you actually see a ghost in the clock tower?' asked Yakumo.

For a moment, Nishizawa looked troubled.

'I said I saw one then, but now that I think about it, I feel like I just saw something like it.'

'In short, you didn't see clearly.'

'Yeah, which is why I said... ' murmured Nishizawa.

'What is it?' asked Yakumo.

'Ah, Kanae-chan was worried about me, but I kept telling her that it was nothing. And yet...'

Nishizawa's voice was filled with frustration.

Though it was faint, there were tears in his eyes.

'Did you meet with Kanae-san after that?'

'That was the last time – '

Nishizawa shut his eyes tightly and sniffled.

He had to be regretting what happened. Maybe he was thinking that this might not have happened if he had talked to Kanae more.

'I apologise for asking, but what relationship did you have with Kanae-san?'

Gotou had the same question as Yakumo.

'What do you mean?'

'Was it just that she was your junior in the circle? Or did you have a personal relationship?'

Nishizawa frowned.

'There was nothing like you're imagining. She was closer to Sakurai than to me...'

'Do you mean Sakurai Itsuki-san?'

'Yeah.'

The moment Sakurai's name came up, Nishizawa's face twisted in dislike.

Even without his saying it, Gotou could easily tell that they didn't get along.

'Were Sakurai-san and Kanae-san dating?'

'Who knows? I never heard anything about that... I'm going to change the topic, but...'

Nishizawa paused.

'What is it?' Yakumo asked, leaning forward.

Nishizawa seemed hesitant, but then he said, 'The girl named Ozawa-san. I don't know her well, so maybe it's not something I can say, but I feel like she isn't the one who killed Kanae-chan...'

Those words hit Gotou with impact.

'What is your reason for thinking that?' asked Yakumo.

Nishizawa looked wry. 'I don't have any proof or anything. I just feel that way...'

After saying that, he looked out the window.

Was he really saying that just from a feeling?

'Do you perhaps have any hints of a reason for thinking that way?'

Yakumo asked Nishizawa what Gotou was thinking.

'Nothing really, but... since something similar happened before...'

Nishizawa's voice was shaking slightly.

'When you say before – do you mean when Mizuhara Noriko committed suicide?'

Nishizawa's eyes went wide.

'You know?'

'Yes. I think that the ghost wandering the clock tower is hers.'

After Yakumo said that, Nishizawa murmured something.

Gotou didn't hear it. He asked about it, but Nishizawa just denied saying anything.

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Ishii looked up at the looming clock tower.

The clock's needles were stopped and no longer served their purposes, but the tower was still a symbol of the university.

It was mysterious how the clock tower seemed intimidating now when Ishii hadn't paid it any attention before.

It was different since he knew something had happened there.

'Don't space out.'

His head was suddenly hit from behind.

He knew who it was without turning around.

'D-Detective Gotou...' said Ishii while holding his head.

Gotou was there, with Yakumo standing next to him. Though Yakumo normally had a sharp glint in his eye even when he seemed distant, he seemed terribly unreliable now.

Though he was forcing himself to look expressionless, Ishii could tell he was shaken underneath that mask.

It wasn't just Yakumo.

Ishii was still shaken now. He would believe in Haruka – he had decided to do that, but still, everything shook him up.

'How was it?' asked Gotou, interrupting Ishii's thoughts.

'Eh, ah, yes...'

Ishii cleared his throat, pushed up his silver-framed glasses and explained in detail what he had heard from the guard named Seo. According to Seo, he had clearly seen the moment when Haruka hit Kanae. In short, no matter the

reason, Haruka had hit Kanae with a metal pipe – that was fact.

That was the biggest reason for the doubt Ishii had.

'Impossible,' said Gotou in a dark, low voice.

Ishii wanted to think that too, but wishing for something wasn't going to change this.

'B-but...'

'To hell with your "buts"! That guy's lying, no doubt about it!' Gotou roared.

'Why would a guard lie like that?' said Yakumo.

That's...'

Gotou's fury instantly died down.

Ishii felt the same way. There was no reason for the guard named Seo to lie. Saying that he had lied just because they wanted to believe Haruka was innocent would make it impossible for them to find out the truth.

'That means there's one possibility – ' said Ishii. Gotou and Yakumo both turned to look at him.

This made Ishii strangely nervous so he couldn't speak like he wanted to.

'Please let us here your opinion, Ishii-san.'

It was incredibly unusual for Yakumo to ask for an opinion.

Perhaps this incident had made him lose confidence in his own thoughts.

That said, Ishii was hesitant to share his opinion, since there was a fatal flaw in his theory.

'Just say it.'

Gotou hit his head.

'There was a rumour about a ghost in the clock tower. Perhaps that ghost possessed Haruka-chan and assaulted...'

Ishii gulped after saying that much. It was one of the possibilities Yakumo had mentioned before.

He felt like it had become real now.

The same thing had happened in the case of the Tree of Deceit, which had been very close to Ishii's heart.

'Idiot! That doesn't help clear Haruka's name!' yelled Gotou.

Ishii knew that, and that was the problem in his theory.

If Haruka had really committed the crime while possessed, it would be impossible to clear Haruka's name.

With the police and courts currently, nobody would accept that a crime was committed by a ghost. Even if it was true –

'It hasn't yet been determined that she didn't do it...'

Yakumo was the one who spoke.

Ishii turned his surprised gaze towards Yakumo. Gotou looked just as shocked.

'You...'

Gotou started to speak, but Yakumo interrupted him.

'Please don't make me keep repeating myself. If we do not consider all possibilities, the truth will be warped,' Yakumo said without interest.

Gotou grabbed Yakumo by the lapels.

'You – I thought you believed in her!'

'Who said that?' Yakumo said calmly.

'Then why are you even investigating? Aren't you investigating for Haruka-chan's sake!?'

Gotou's face was bright red, but Yakumo looked as calm as usual.

However, there was no resignation or sorrow in his expression. Rather, Ishii thought Yakumo looked strong, but kind.

Perhaps it was determination that he saw.

'I am investigating this case for my own sake,' said Yakumo, at which point Gotou let go.

'For your own sake?'

'Yes.'

'What do you mean?'

'I don't care whether she's a murderer or not. I just want to know what happened.'

Yakumo's calm words made gave Ishii gooseflesh.

That was Yakumo's determination.

Ishii and Gotou were worried about whether Haruka had killed somebody. The truth of that would determine how Haruka was treated and how their relationship with her would change – those details were their concern.

However, Yakumo was different –

Yakumo still didn't believe in Haruka, but that was why he was trying to find out what happened.

Even if the results weren't something he wanted to here, he was probably determined to accept them in their entirety.

– I can't win.

It was frustrating, but Ishii felt that.

He felt like he had just seen how accepting the person named Yakumo was.

'I get it.'

After a silence, Gotou laughed wryly and said that.

Gotou had probably felt Yakumo's determination too.

'Then, I have one request...'

Yakumo narrowed his eyes.

Ishii prepared himself immediately. When Yakumo looked like that, it was always an unreasonable request.

'What?' asked Gotou, whether he understood that or not.

'Let me meet with her –'

Ishii couldn't hide his agitation.

To be honest, it was near impossible for Yakumo and Haruka to meet in this situation.

It would have been different perhaps if they were in charge of the case, but Shinoda and Onodera wouldn't accept a request like that.

'What'll you do if you meet her?' asked Gotou, looking troubled.

'There are a number of things I want to confirm. It would be quickest for me to meet her directly to confirm whether she is possessed or not.'

That was true.

Yakumo, who could see the spirits of the dead, would be able to tell immediately if he met Haruka whether she was possessed or not.

However, the only people in the force that believed in Yakumo's special ability were Gotou, Ishii and Miyagawa.

Saying that he wanted to see if Haruka was possessed wouldn't work.

'That's true, but... getting you to meet her would be...'

Even Gotou looked bitter.

'Would it be difficult even for you, Gotou-san?'

Yakumo gave Gotou a cold glance.

It was a question made by somebody who knew Gotou well. Yakumo knew that if he asked Gotou a question like that, it would light a fire behind him.

'No, I'll do something about it,' said Gotou, puffing out his chest with confidence.

Meanwhile, Ishii just held his head in his hands.

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14

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Makoto joined up with Yakumo after talking to Onda.

It felt strange. She always met with Yakumo in the Movie Research Circle room. She couldn't remember ever walking around campus like this with him.

Yakumo walked with his shoulders rounded and head down.

It was posture that avoided other students' gazes.

He probably did this not because of the cold but out of habit to hide his red eye.

And now, the only person who had accepted that red eye, Haruka, was the suspect in a murder case.

His refined profile looked distant as usual, but his heart had to be in a storm.

Makoto couldn't find the words to say.

After walking for a while, they reached the same lounge Makoto had been in yesterday.

Today, Sakurai was there already and stood up to bow politely upon seeing Makoto.

'I apologise for taking so much of your time when you're busy.'

'No...' Sakurai replied in a hoarse voice. There was none of yesterday's refreshing manner.

According to Onda, Sakurai had been close to the murder victim, Kanae. The death of somebody close to him had probably cast a shadow on him.

'This is a Meisei University student...'

'My name is Saitou Yakumo,' said Yakumo, continuing Makoto's words.

Sakurai looked suspicious, and Makoto and Yakumo shared a glance.

When Makoto had arranged to meet with Sakurai, she had only told him that there was something she really wanted to ask.

He must have thought it was something to do about yesterday's interview, so now he was confused about why a student from the same university was here.

'Actually, I want to ask you about yesterday's incident,' Makoto said once they had all sat down.

Sakurai's expression looked pained.

'I... To be honest, I still can't believe it...'

Sakurai's fists were gripped tightly on his lap. Veins bulged in his thin arms.

He appeared to be desperately trying to keep in his overflowing emotions.

'I heard that you were very close to Kanae-san,' said Makoto.

Sakurai sighed. 'Yes, well...'

'What sort of girl was Kanae-san?'

'She didn't speak up much, but she was a very kind girl.'

'In what way?'

'When we went out to drink, she would go and ask for everyone's orders, and she would watch over those who had drunk too much. She was just really kind. I've never seen her angry...'

As Sakurai spoke, his sniffled.

The tears in his eyes looked like they might fall out at any moment.

It hurt to watch him.

It was natural, but in a case, there were perpetrators and victims. Perhaps they hadn't been looking properly at the victims since Haruka was the suspect in this case.

Makoto felt that terribly now.

'I see...'

'Why did Kanae-chan have to be killed?'

Sakurai turned his gaze towards the clock tower outside the window.

'Do you have any ideas along that line?' Makoto asked directly.

Sakurai thought for a moment, but then he shook his head.

'I can't think of anything. Actually, I heard the perpetrator was a student in the same seminar...'

Sakurai didn't know that Makoto knew Haruka. He probably didn't even know the suspect's name.

Still, Sakurai's words struck deep in Makoto's heart.

'Actually –'

Yakumo, who had been silent until now, suddenly began to speak.

'Yesterday, before Kanae-san passed away, she consulted me about a spiritual phenomenon.'

'A spiritual phenomenon?'

Sakurai cocked his head.

'Yes. Do you know a person in the same circle by the name of Nishizawa-san?'

'Yes,' responded Sakurai.

There was no change in his expression. Onda had made it sound like they were at it like cats and dogs, so it was a bit of a let-down, but Sakurai was probably too mature to show anything in front of a stranger.

'Apparently, Nishizawa-san experienced a spiritual phenomenon when he went to the clock tower. Did you hear anything about that?'

Sakurai shook his head slightly.

'I haven't.'

'Kanae-san said that Nishizawa-san had been acting strangely ever since... It appears she thought that he was possessed by a ghost.'

'I see...'

'Did you feel anything?'

'Eh?'

'In regards to Nishizawa-san's behaviour. Did you think he was acting differently than usual, as Kanae-san did?'

Sakurai's expression turned severe.

'I didn't notice anything in particular. Actually, Nishizawa and I don't talk much...'

'Are you on bad terms?'

'To say it clearly, yes. Though I feel like I'm just being hated in a one-way fashion...'

'Has it been that way ever since you enrolled here, or was there some sort of impetus?'

Yakumo kept asking questions.

Makoto didn't know what he was thinking, but it was clear he was going

somewhere.

Makoto swallowed and watched the two of them talk.

'Even if you ask about an impetus...' said Sakurai.

'Wasn't there something? Perhaps three years ago –'

The moment Yakumo said that, the blood left Sakurai's face.

Three years ago – that was when a student in the literature circle had committed suicide by jumping from the clock tower.

'What are you talking about?' asked Sakurai, his brow furrowed.

Perhaps he was trying to play dumb, but he wasn't very good at acting.

'You don't know?' asked Yakumo.

Makoto felt that Yakumo really was amazing at talking.

'I don't.'

'I see... That's when a student in your circle committed suicide by jumping,' said Yakumo, as if to remind Sakurai, at which point Sakurai finally acknowledged it.

'Ah, that...'

Though he was acting like he'd just remembered, it was far too unnatural.

'Did you really forget?' asked Yakumo, eyes narrowed.

'Rather than forgetting it... I didn't realise what you were talking about since you just said three years ago.'

Sakurai smiled wryly.

'You said that you were made to write a novel by the ghost of the clock tower.'

'Yes.'

'I thought that the ghost in the clock tower was the student who jumped from there to kill herself, but am I wrong?'

Yakumo was smiling.

It was a frightening smile that made a chill run down Makoto's spine.

'What on earth are you talking about? I don't understand at all... Please excuse me.'

Sakurai stood up as he said that, clearly upset, and he left, just like that.

Makoto didn't feel like following him.

She was more interested in why Yakumo had asked that.

'Makoto-san, you have the previous things he's written, yes?'

Yakumo spoke before Makoto could.

'I have the previous magazines published by the literature circle.'

She had the volumes she had borrowed from Onda before the incident.

'Would you mind lending them to me?'

'I don't mind, but...'

Yakumo's mobile phone rang, interrupting Makoto.

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15

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Haruka sat on the chair in the interrogation room, half in shock.

It had been a chain of shocking and unbelievable events.

She had still been trying to accept the fact that Kanae had been killed when she was told that Haruka herself had killed her.

Furthermore, Haruka herself had confessed.

She didn't remember saying anything like that. She had just found out that Kanae was dead.

She felt like she had fallen into another universe. She kept hoping that she would wake up from this dream.

Though part of it was because of the unbelievable situation wherein she had been turned into a murderer, more than anything else, she couldn't accept that Kanae was dead.

She didn't even have time to grieve with the interrogation.

Furthermore, she couldn't remember any of what the detectives were telling her, but they didn't believe her when she told them that.

Her chest hurt.

She felt as though her organs had been carved out of her while she was still alive.

She hadn't known that not being believed would hurt so much.

She even felt that it would be easier to just accept that she had done it, as everyone was telling her, if she was going to suffer so.

Somebody who had been framed and claimed their innocence had said something similar before.

Now, Haruka understood.

At this rate, she felt like her very existence would be shaken.

– Yakumo-kun, help me.

Just as Haruka murmured that in her heart, the investigation room opened.

It was probably those two detectives again. Haruka didn't feel like lifting her head.

Somebody sat in front of her.

The air that came in had a familiar smell. A warm, pleasant smell that seemed to melt her frozen heart.

The smell made Haruka look up and she held her breath unconsciously.

Somebody she knew well was in front of her – Yakumo was sitting there.

His usual sleepy eyes and messy hair. It felt so nostalgic.

'Are you doing OK?' said Yakumo in his flat tone.

It was, without a doubt, Yakumo's voice –

Haruka didn't know why Yakumo was here, but she didn't care. She was so happy to see him.

'Yeah...'

As she nodded, tears started pouring out.

All the emotions she had been keeping in came out in a surge, and her tears wouldn't stop falling.

– I can't see Yakumo through the tears.

As Haruka sobbed, she rubbed frantically at her eyes.

'It's OK...' said Yakumo, placing a hand on Haruka's shoulder.

That was enough to make all the pain and sadness go away.

Haruka wanted to just hug Yakumo tightly and cry until she felt better.

'I don't have that much time. Let me ask you a few questions – ' said Yakumo quietly.

When Haruka heard those words, she understood what Yakumo was here for.

'OK...'

Haruka nodded and took deep breaths to calm down.

'Did you go to the clock tower that night?'

'Yes.'

'Why?'

'I was going to your place when I saw Kanae walking near the clock tower.'

'Was she alone?'

Haruka shook her head.

'She was alone, but it looked like she was following somebody...'

'What happened after?'

'I don't remember... Sorry...'

The memories after that were vague. Before she'd noticed it, she was being interrogated as a murder suspect.

Haruka bit her lower lip.

Even though Yakumo had come to see her, all she could give him was vague information. She wasn't helping at all.

She felt so frustrated that tears started to well up again.

'I see... So it was you...'

Yakumo suddenly started to murmur.

'Eh?'

Haruka began to ask a question, but Yakumo stopped her.

'Why are you here?'

'I...'

When Haruka tried to respond, Yakumo shook his head. It was a strange conversation, but there had to be a point to it.

Haruka shut her mouth and watched.

'I see... That was taken as a confession...'

After saying that, Yakumo let out a long sigh.

Suddenly, there was a commotion on the other side of the door. Somebody was arguing.

'There's no time. Last, I want to hear just one thing from your mouth – '

Yakumo looked at Haruka with serious eyes.

'What?'

'Did you kill her?'

Yakumo's words stabbed Haruka in the heart.

She couldn't believe that Yakumo would suspect her too – for a moment, she was disappointed, but that changed when she saw Yakumo's eyes.

Yakumo wasn't asking because he doubted Haruka. It was because he was trying to believe in her.

'It wasn't me... I don't remember... but it wasn't me...'

After Haruka said that, Yakumo smiled slightly.

'I'll believe in you.'

Those words were enough to make Haruka's heart feel lighter.

She felt like she would be able to bear whatever anybody told her now.

'Yakumo-kun...'

'Can you believe in me?' asked Yakumo as he slowly stood up.

He didn't even have to ask. Haruka had always believed in Yakumo.

'Yes.'

After Haruka nodded, Yakumo smiled wryly and ran a hand through his messy hair.

'OK. I'll hurry. Deny whatever anybody asks you.'

'OK.'

Just as Haruka nodded, the door burst open, and Gotou and Ishii along with the detectives who had been interrogating Haruka, Shinoda and Onodera, came rushing in.

'What are you doing here!?' yelled Sonoda as he went up to Yakumo.

However, Yakumo wasn't disturbed.

'Sorry. I was looking for the washroom, but it seems I'm lost,' said Yakumo, playing dumb.

'Like that excuse would work!'

Shinoda tried to grab Yakumo, but Gotou stepped in the way. Onodera joined the fray and Ishii tried to stop that.

In the scrabble, Yakumo casually opened the door and stepped outside.

Just before Yakumo left, he turned around once and gave Haruka a small nod.

Though he didn't speak, it felt like he was saying, 'Believe in me.'

Haruka replied with a big nod.

That was enough for her to believe in Yakumo, no matter what happened next

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第二章 FILE:03

裁きの塔

File 03: the Tower Of Judgement

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'Sorry to bother – '

The next morning, Gotou went with Ishii to Yakumo's hideaway, the Movie Research Circle room.

Yakumo looked sleepy as always and was in his usual chair, reading a book.

'Coming even though you know you're a bother – is this some kind of harassment?' Yakumo asked lazily as he lifted his head.

That attitude really got on Gotou's nerves. He wanted to punch him right now.

'And you're just reading a book in a time like this – feeling pretty laidback?' retorted Gotou.

Yakumo sighed and put the book he was reading on the table. It was a rather thin book – more a booklet than anything.

On the front, there was a picture of the clock tower which was the start of this incident, and the title was just that – the Clock Tower.

'I'm reading it because it's necessary to the case.'

'Necessary? That is?'

'This is something published by the literature circle that the victim Kanae-san was in.'

'I don't think reading that'll solve any cases,' Gotou said cynically. Yakumo gave him a cold glare.

It was an almost frightening level of pressure.

'It will solve the case – absolutely.'

Gotou felt like it was the first time in a while that he had heard strength in

Yakumo's words.

He had probably done away with his doubts after meeting Haruka yesterday.

The current Yakumo had to have the strong will to solve the mystery of the case no matter what.

Maybe he had finally decided to believe in Haruka.

After that, Shinoda and Onodera had rebuked them plenty. There had been a big fuss about what sort of punishment they'd go under, but Miyagawa had come in and dealt with it somehow.

It had been troublesome, but if that had brought Yakumo back, Gotou was glad he got Yakumo the chance to see Haruka.

'Then what should we do next?' said Gotou as he sat down.

Right now, they had solved nothing about the case. They didn't even have a lead.

They couldn't just keep sitting around.

Yakumo put his left index finger on his brown and narrowed his eyes. The faint smile on his lips was uncanny.

'Three years ago, a woman committed suicide by jumping from the clock tower – '

Yakumo spoke slowly.

'Yeah.'

The incident had occurred when Gotou had brought the files on that case at Yakumo's request.

'I want to know more about the incident.'

'Those files not enough?'

'They aren't. I want to know what happened at the time, what sort of situation

it was – more detail than is in the files.’

‘Does the woman who committed suicide have something to do with this case?’ asked Ishii, his voice shaking.

‘Yes, she does. Like I said before, the victim Kanae-san and her friend Nishizawa-san experienced a spiritual phenomenon in the clock tower. That was probably – ’

There, Yakumo stopped, but Gotou understood even without his saying.

He was probably saying that the ghost in the clock tower was the woman who had killed herself, Mizuhara Noriko. But –

‘There’s no ghost in the tower, right?’

There had been no ghost when Yakumo went there with Haruka or with Gotou.

Though Gotou had just asked a normal question, Yakumo laughed.

‘Ghosts don’t always stay in the same place.’

‘Aren’t they bound to the place they died or have strong emotions for?’

That was what Yakumo always said.

The spirits of the dead were bound to the place they died and places that they had exceptionally strong emotions for. If that was the case, the ghost wouldn’t be able to move from the clock tower.

‘I only say that is often the case. There are exceptions to everything.’

Gotou couldn’t retort to that.

Well, there were many things he didn’t understand, but all he could do was agree to do what Yakumo said now. If he didn’t, Haruka would be arrested as the culprit.

‘Got it. First, I’ll see who was in charge...’

'I already know,' Yakumo replied easily.

'What?'

'I said, I already know. It was written in the file. It's amazing how you can be a detective while being so careless,' Yakumo said mockingly.

It made Gotou angry, but at the same time, he felt happy, since it felt like Yakumo had finally come back.

'Who is it?' asked Gotou.

Yakumo smiled faintly.

'The detective who was very angry yesterday. If I remember correctly, his name was –'

Yakumo looked up into the air.

– Oi, don't kid around.

Though feeling weary, Gotou said the name.

'Shinoda.'

'Yes. According to the files, it was Shinoda.'

– This is the worst.

If Gotou went to talk to him now, it would just be a repeat of yesterday's fight. That said, he couldn't just keep quiet and do nothing.

Well, he had come this far – he had to just go on without grumbling.

'Got it, but don't expect much.'

Gotou got up, but his heart was heavy.

He didn't think Shinoda would just talk. He might have to be a bit forceful.

'Ishii! Let's go!'

When Gotou called out to Ishii, he leapt up. 'Yes sir!'

The two of them were about to leave when Yakumo called out to him.

'Sorry, but please leave Ishii-san behind.'

'What?'

'There is something else I need investigated, so I'd like Ishii's help there.'

Yakumo looked straight at Gotou.

Gotou didn't know what Yakumo was thinking, but Yakumo's gaze was always on the truth. Gotou had come this far believing that, and he would continue to –

'Got it. Do what you want,' Gotou said brusquely, and he put the Movie Research Circle room behind him.

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2

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'Hello – '

Makoto stepped into the Meisei University cafeteria and spoke to a couple chatting at a window seat.

The two looked youthful but serious.

'Me?' said the man, looking suspicious. The woman seemed on guard as well.

It made sense for them to feel that way since Makoto had suddenly called out to them.

'My name is Hijikata. I'm a reporter for Hokutou Newspaper. I would like to talk to you...'

Makoto quickly took out her business card with a smile.

The two exchanged a glance and then nodded.

'Is it about that incident?' asked the man.

Haruka's incident was in the news, so it was probably such a big commotion that everybody on campus knew about it.

'Yes,' said Makoto with a nod. The two looked excited.

They were probably happy that they were going to be interviewed about the case. Makoto couldn't think well of that, but this often happened when she went around interviewing people.

People wanted something exciting in their peaceful lives. If it didn't have anything to do with them, they ran about irresponsibly.

'It's a bit scary. I hear the girl was killed by a friend.'

'The person who killed her's in the orchestra circle, apparently.'

'Seriously? Then maybe it's somebody you know, Miki-chan.'

'Maybe.'

'Maybe they were fighting over a man?'

'That's possible.'

The two seemed to be enjoying themselves.

– Don't just go making things up!

Makoto fought down the urge to yell that.

They could say whatever they wanted because they didn't know. They just repeated the face of the facts they heard without trying to find out if they were true or not.

It was terrifying.

However, the students wouldn't recognise that at all even if Makoto told them that now.

If they weren't involved, they really wouldn't try to understand.

'What I want to ask about is the clock tower where the incident occurred – '

Makoto interrupted the two of them, who had continued talking.

The two of them looked up at Makoto.

'There is a rumour that a ghost appears in that clock tower, but have you two heard of it before?' asked Makoto.

The two looked at each other again.

'I've never heard that,' replied the man with the shrug.

'I've never heard it either.' The woman shook her head.

'I see...'

'Does that ghost have something to do with the case?' the man asked. That question had been asked many times before.

– It does.

Makoto wanted to say that, but they probably wouldn't believe her anyway.

'I heard a rumour. If it had something to do with it, I thought I'd be able to write an interesting article, but it seems I'm off the mark.'

Makoto ended the conversation and left before the two could ask any questions.

After leaving the cafeteria, her mobile rang. It was Yakumo.

'Hello, Hijikata speaking.'

<It's Yakumo.>

She heard Yakumo's clear voice from her phone.

Even though Yakumo had been acting calm yesterday, he had seemed weak, as if he might collapse at any moment.

However, the call Makoto received this morning felt like it was from the usual Yakumo.

Perhaps he had come to terms with his emotions, or something else had

happened – in either case, Makoto wanted to do whatever she could to solve the case.

<How was it?>

'I asked about ten people, but nobody's heard about it before,' reported Makoto.

Yakumo had asked her to find out when the rumour about the ghost in the clock tower had started, but so far, she hadn't met anyone who knew the rumour.

It made her doubt there was even a rumour in the first place.

However, that made something else confusing. Sakurai had said that the ghost of the clock tower made him write his novel.

It would have made sense if there had been a rumour, but why would he say it otherwise?

<I see. Thank you very much. That's enough for that.>

'It looks like I couldn't help much.'

<No, that was very helpful. I apologise for asking for your help again right afterwards, but I have another request.>

'What is it?'

<It is – >

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3

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Ishii walked the campus with Yakumo.

Yakumo had been on the phone with somebody this whole time. Though Ishii couldn't hear the voice, it was probably Makoto.

What on earth was Yakumo thinking? To be honest, Ishii had no idea.

Still, he was cooperating with Yakumo. It was Yakumo. Ishii believed in him to solve the case.

It was a mysterious feeling.

Since Ishii only ever interacted with Yakumo on cases, he knew practically nothing about him. Not only that – Ishii never knew what Yakumo was thinking, so it was frightening.

And yet – he believed in what Yakumo was trying to do and was going forward.

– I wonder what the root behind people's belief is.

'Ishii-san.'

After finishing his call, Yakumo called out to Ishii as they walked.

'Y-yes?'

'Thank you for yesterday.'

'Eh?'

Ishii stared at Yakumo's profile.

He didn't understand why Yakumo was thanking him. Actually, it was unusual for Yakumo to thank anybody at all.

'You stopped me when I was arguing with Gotou-san.'

Yakumo awkwardly looked down and scratched the tip of his nose.

'Ah, no, er... My body just moved on its own...'

Before Ishii had noticed, he had stepped in between them. He hadn't done it consciously – you could call it habit.

'If you hadn't stopped me then, I don't know what would have...'

Yakumo stopped walking and turned his eyes towards the line of clouds in

the perfectly blue sky.

– Ah, even he worries about things.

Even though it was such an obvious thing, Ishii felt like he had just realised it.

Yakumo and Gotou had definitely not been normal then. It hadn't been their usual argument – it had felt like they were clashing with the emotions hidden at the bottom of their hearts.

Though fighting with no guards was ghastly, it was true that Ishii had felt envious as well when he saw them.

Would he ever be able to yell out his true feelings like that to anybody?

'I...'

'Let's go – '

Yakumo interrupted Ishii and started walking again. After a quick 'Yes', Ishii started walking diagonally behind Yakumo.

Soon, they reached the security room that Ishii had visited yesterday.

When they went inside, Seo was waiting, since they had asked for an appointment in advance.

They were taking to the same table as Ishii had been yesterday and sat down.

Though Ishii had been worried about how to explain Yakumo, Seo didn't ask, so Ishii left it as is. Seo probably thought that Yakumo was another detective.

'To be honest, it's hard to get any work done when you keep coming...'

Seo had his hat on still, like last time, and grumbled while looking down.

Ishii understood how Seo felt, especially since other detectives had probably come to talk to him too.

'I sincerely apologise.'

Ishii bowed his head and then looked at Yakumo.

Actually, Ishii had nothing to ask. Yakumo had been the one who said he wanted to meet Seo. What on earth was Yakumo thinking?

As if to respond to Ishii's question, Yakumo started to speak.

'About the day of the incident, you said that you heard something like a woman's scream.'

'Yes.'

Though Seo looked fed up, he still answered.

'How many times did you hear a scream?'

'Er... Once, I think...'

After Seo responded, Yakumo stood up and then moved towards the wall, where there was a map of the university campus.

'Where did you hear the scream from?'

'I heard it just as I walked in front of the clock tower.'

'Would that be around here?' asked Yakumo as he pointed at the map.

'I think so.'

'I see. Were you on your rounds when you heard the scream, or were you on your way back?' Yakumo asked in a flat tone.

Ishii didn't understand why he was asking, so all he could do was watch silently.

'On the way back.'

'Then, that would mean you passed by the clock tower once before the incident.'

'That's right...'

Seo looked confused. He probably didn't understand what Yakumo was

trying to get at either.

Yakumo didn't seem to care. He continued, 'When you first passed it, did you see any students loitering on campus?'

'Hm... I don't think I saw any...'

'Are you certain?'

'I said "think", didn't I? I don't remember clearly,' Seo said impatiently.

Yakumo smiled slightly at the response.

Ishii didn't know what, but Yakumo had definitely got something out of the conversation. To prove that, Yakumo said, 'Thank you. That was very helpful.' Then, he started to leave.

If Ishii just stayed here, he would be left behind.

He hurriedly stood up as well, but Yakumo suddenly sopped and turned around.

'One more thing.'

Yakumo put up his index finger.

'What is it?'

'On your waist – is that a transceiver?'

Yakumo pointed at the device about the size of a cigarette box on Seo's belt.

'Ah, yes, something like that...' responded Seo.

Yakumo looked satisfied and murmured, 'I see – '

He left the room, but then he came back again.

'Sorry, but one more thing – '

'Ah...'

Seo sounded fed up.

'That clock tower – it seems there's a rumour about a ghost there.'

'Eh?' Seo said, seeming uninterested at the sudden mention of a ghost.

However, perhaps this was important. A guard that went around the campus at night might have seen a ghost at the clock tower.

'Have you ever seen it?'

'What?'

'The ghost.'

'No.'

'I see. Have you ever heard the rumour?'

'The rumour about the ghost?'

'Yes.'

Seo put his chin in his hand and seemed to be thinking as he cocked his head, but then he said, 'Ah! Come to think of it, I've heard a rumour like that before –'

'I see,' said Yakumo. He seemed satisfied with Seo's answer, as he briskly left the room.

'I apologise for taking up your time. That was very helpful,' Ishii said quickly. He went out of the room after Yakumo –

'Do you understand more now?' asked Ishii once he caught up with Yakumo.

'No, not yet...'

Though Yakumo shook his head, Ishii was sure that Yakumo was hiding something.

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4

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'Oi! Gotou!'

The moment Gotou returned to the precinct, Shinoda came up to him with an amazing expression.

His face was bright red – he had to be furious. Normally, Gotou would just go elsewhere to avoid dealing with such trouble, but he was just thinking about going to see him.

'If you get so angry all the time, you'll die early,' Gotou said spitefully, which made Shinoda turn a shade redder.

'You – what are you doing!?'

Shinoda glared at him fiercely.

Gotou didn't mind taking that, but they were at the ground floor reception. Regular citizens came here to renew licences and to report lost items.

'Let's go elsewhere,' declared Gotou, and he briskly walked away.

Shinoda seemed to understand the situation as well, as he reigned in his anger and followed Gotou.

They went up the stairs and inside the Unsolved Cases Special Investigation room. Nobody was here. They would be able to talk without worrying about anybody around them.

'So what are you so angry about? I think we cleared up yesterday's issue,' said Gotou. He sat on the desk and crossed his arms.

He needed to hear something from Shinoda, but first he would probably have to endure everything Shinoda wanted to say.

'Cleared it up? Don't screw with me! Thanks to you guys, the suspect's attitude has made a complete 180!' shouted Shinoda, stamping the ground.

It was like watching a child throw a tantrum.

'What're you talking about?'

'Don't act innocent! We got a confession, but now she's saying she can't remember!'

– I see.

Haruka must have burst through after seeing Yakumo too.

She was probably trying to push through with how she thought because of her belief in Yakumo.

'Oh?'

'What's so funny!?'

When Shinoda said that, Gotou noticed that he was smiling.

'Nothing,' he replied, quickly hiding his smile.

'You must've told her that! Stop fooling around!'

That seemed to be why Shinoda was so angry.

No matter how Gotou denied it, Shinoda would never believe him – there would just be a fight.

'When did you become like this?' asked Gotou.

Shinoda frowned. 'What?'

'Don't you think this case is strange?'

'What about it?'

'Do you think a completely normal girl would suddenly kill somebody?'

'What are you saying? Normal people kill people all the time. Even you have to know that, since you've been on the force this long.'

Just as Shinoda said, Gotou had seen countless situations where somebody who looked completely normal had suddenly killed somebody.

However, that was only a mask they put up.

'You don't get it.'

'What did you say?'

'What you're saying is only for people who look normal.'

'...'

It looked like Shinoda didn't understand what Gotou was getting at. He seemed confused.

Just as Gotou had planned, going with a different approach had calmed Shinoda down.

'When you investigate, you find out that people who look normal actually have a lot of problems, like money or grudges or other things.'

'That's...'

It looked like Shinoda understood what Gotou was trying to say.

Killing somebody just wasn't normal.

Even if somebody looked like they would never kill anybody, as the investigation went on, you would find darkness deep within.

Any detective would understand what Gotou was saying.

'Did you see that darkness in her?' asked Gotou.

Shinoda looked bitter. 'I just haven't found it yet.'

'Then don't you want to know?'

'Know what?'

'Cases aren't just about arresting a guy and calling it quits. Why did the incident occur? If you don't reveal the truth, the case isn't solved.'

'I know that even without your saying it,' said Shinoda with a click of his tongue.

'Then investigate until you're satisfied. You've got to think something strange

about this case too, right?' said Gotou to convince Shinoda.

Shinoda had thought the case strange but determined it a simple case because of the eyewitness testimony and physical evidence, and Haruka's confession on top of that.

But if Shinoda was a detective too, he had to want to know why this had happened.

'What are you thinking?' asked Shinoda with a sigh.

His eyes were different from earlier – sincere and steady.

The police went through a lot of cases. Even if they tried to face them all earnestly, when they were swamped with work, they could lose themselves.

That must have happened to Shinoda too.

'I want to ask a few things. To solve the case.'

'What do you want to know?'

After saying that, Shinoda sat down on the nearby chair.

The two of them had always got on each other nerves, so they had never spoken properly before. Gotou felt like he could finally face the man named Shinoda.

In the past, Gotou would probably have just cut ties with the people he didn't like. He didn't want to understand the people he disliked, and he didn't want to try either.

He could probably sit like this today because of the case with Kirino.

He never wanted to make the same mistake again.

'About three years ago, a female student jumped from the university's clock tower and committed suicide – '

When Gotou said that, Shinoda murmured, 'That...?' Then, he said, 'What do you want to know about that now? It's not even related. That was definitely a

suicide, from the situation.'

'I know that, but it bothers me a bit.'

He thought about explaining about Yakumo, but he decided against it. They were talking properly now. He didn't want to say something unnecessary and make Shinoda angry.

'Do you think that the woman who committed suicide has something to do with this case?' said Shinoda after thinking for a while. He had given Gotou a good explanation.

'Well, something like that,' replied Gotou.

Shinoda looked up at the ceiling, perhaps thinking about the past. After a while, he suddenly said, 'Ah!'

'What?' pressed Gotou.

Shinoda looked troubled, but he said, 'Somebody had been saying that it definitely wasn't a suicide.'

'Family member?'

That was Gotou's first guess.

'No, not family.'

'Who was it?'

'Can't remember the name, but it was a man in the same year...'

Shinoda's words gave Gotou a number of theories. What if Mizuhara Noriko, thought to have jumped to her death, had been killed by someone?

That could be a clue to unravel this case.

'That was really helpful – '

After telling Shinoda that, Gotou left the room briskly. Just as he had started to walk down the corridor, his mobile rang.

It was from Yakumo –

'What?'

<How was it?>

Yakumo immediately asked that. It was perfect timing, as if he had been watching Gotou from afar.

That there was no doubt about Mizuhara Noriko's death being a suicide. That a man in the same year had made a fuss about it not being a suicide. Gotou told Yakumo in much detail as he could what he had heard.

<I see – >

After Gotou finished, Yakumo said that and was silent for a while.

Gotou stopped walking and waited for Yakumo's response.

To be honest, Gotou didn't feel like he would be able to work out what was happening no matter how much he thought.

But Yakumo. Yakumo would be able to put all these truths together and bring them to the truth.

<Gotou-san, there's one more thing I'd like you to investigate...>

'What?'

<I would like you to investigate a certain person's history...>

The name that came out of Yakumo's mouth was not one Gotou had expected.

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5

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Makoto went to the cafeteria once more –

Since it was lunchtime, it was bustling with students, unlike how it had been

earlier.

She went straight to the table at the back.

There was a male student there. He was thin and looked a bit boorish – there was no innocence there.

He had left the cafeteria tray on the table as he read a book of some kind.

'Are you Katou Shigetomo?' asked Makoto.

The male student looked up and replied, 'Yes,' in a thick voice.

'I think you've heard from Professor Onda, but I'm Hijikata from Hokutou Newspaper,' said Makoto as she held out her business card.

'Ah, yes,' Katou replied in a flat tone as he took the business card.

Yakumo had asked her to talk to various members of the literature circle. He had also told her what to ask.

That said, she didn't know who the members were, so she had asked Onda to introduce her to a few.

Now, she was talking with Katou, the president of the literature circle.

'It's about Kanae-chan, right?' said Katou in a low voice as he put his book away in his bag.

'Yes, well...'

'I can't believe she was killed...'

After saying that, Katou's eyes looked distant.

His attitude and his words made him seem like he was trying to act mature.

'How was Kanae-san like in the circle?'

'How...? Well, she was normal.'

“Normal” was the most troubling response. Since people had different definitions of normal, it was hard to imagine.

That said, thinking about that wouldn't get Makoto anywhere.

'Do you mean that she didn't stand out?'

'Well, something like that.'

'I heard that she was on good terms with Sakurai-san...'

'Ah, Sakurai...'

Makoto didn't miss how Katou's expression twisted in dislike.

'Is there some problem with Sakurai-san?'

'Not a problem, per se... It feels like he's getting ahead of himself, calling himself an author after just publishing one book, doesn't it?'

– So that's how it is.

People at this age sometimes found it hard to honestly be happy about other people's achievements. Especially if they were in the same age and aiming for the same genre.

No, it wasn't just people at this age. Jealousy was probably everywhere.

'Were you on good terms with Sakurai-san before?'

'Well, just normal.'

– Normal again.

'Did you spend time in each other's company?'

'Never just the two of us, though we went out normally for drinks with the circle...'

Makoto would get no information like this.

Though Makoto felt slightly irritated, she bore with it and went back to the topic at hand.

'So Kanae-san and Sakurai-san were close.'

'Maybe not.'

'Were they dating?'

'Who knows? They never said... Ah, but Nishizawa, maybe.'

'What about him?'

Makoto reacted to that name.

Nishizawa was the person who had experienced the spiritual phenomenon in the clock tower with Kanae. Kanae had consulted Yakumo through Haruka because she had thought that Nishizawa was possessed.

'There was a rumour that Nishizawa was after Kanae-chan.'

'That would mean that Sakurai-san and Nishizawa-san were interested in the same woman.'

Though Makoto had only ever seen Kanae in pictures, it was true that she looked lovely.

That wasn't all – there was a fleetingness there that made you want to protect her.

'No, I don't know. It was just a rumour, but something similar happened before, so...'

'Before?'

Makoto furrowed her brow.

'No, just ignore that.'

Katou frantically waved his hand in front of his face.

Even if he said that now, Makoto couldn't help but want to know after hearing that.

'What happened?' pressed Makoto.

'No, it was nothing,' repeated Katou, but Makoto didn't give up.

She forcefully pressed him for an answer, so Katou finally said, 'Don't tell anybody,' and then started to speak in a heavy tone.

'When I was in first year, there was a cute girl in the circle that people were fighting over. Of course I don't participate in things like that.'

Makoto didn't like how Katou was trying to excuse himself, but she didn't say anything about it and urged him to continue.

'Sakurai and Nishizawa were worked up about her too, but... a lot of things happened...'

Here, Katou stopped speaking again, but Makoto had a guess about what he wasn't saying.

'Could the name of the girl be Mizuhara Noriko-san?' asked Makoto.

Katou's expression stiffened.

'Why do you know?'

'Actually – I've been researching a number of things about the woman who committed suicide by jumping from the clock tower.'

Yakumo had requested that Yakumo investigate what happened before and after Mizuhara Noriko's suicide.

Putting aside what had brought the conversation here, she had managed to bring up the topic of Noriko.

'So you think Noriko-san's incident has something to do with Kanae-san's?'

Katou looked fairly shaken, but he asked that after he calmed down.

'I can't say anything at this stage... But that is why I think it is worth investigating,' said Makoto, full of fervour.

'I don't know that much.'

'That's fine. I'd like you to tell me what happened before and after Mizuhara-san committed suicide.'

Katou looked like he was wavering for a while, but he finally gave Makoto a small nod.

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6

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Ishii stood in front of the clock tower –

Yakumo had said he wanted to look at it once more.

Now, Yakumo was standing where Seo had said he'd heard the scream.

He stood still, looking up at the clock tower.

The brick clock tower looked like it had been left behind by time. The clock, needles stopped at one time, was perhaps what made it feel that way.

'Did you find out anything?' asked Ishii.

Yakumo turned his way. Unusually, there was urgency in his expression. It was probably because he was worried about Haruka.

Ishii felt the same way.

There was no time to investigate everything carefully. They needed to prove Haruka's innocence as soon as possible.

Yakumo opened his mouth to say something, but then his mobile rang.

Yakumo answered the call. Though Ishii couldn't hear the voice clearly, it was probably Gotou.

Ishii sighed and looked up once more at the clock tower.

– Will things really be OK?

That anxiety had reared up within Ishii.

Even though Ishii had decided to believe in Yakumo in order to prove Haruka's innocence, that determination was shaken by every little thing.

He hated how indecisive he was.

He felt like he wouldn't have to worry so much if he could just go straight forward like Gotou.

Ever since this incident happened, Ishii had been wavering the whole time.

'Ishii-san!'

Ishii jumped up when somebody suddenly called out to him.

He turned around and saw Makoto there.

'M-Makoto-san.'

'You look down,' said Makoto, seeing right through Ishii.

'No, er... Well...'

'It's fine. Things will turn out OK.'

In completely contrast to Ishii, Makoto was smiling and she put up her fist confidently.

'I'm envious of you, Makoto-san.'

'Why?'

'You're going forward without any doubts on the path you believe in even at a time like this. Detective Gotou is the same way. But then there's me...' said Ishii in a hoarse voice.

Makoto smiled. 'To be honest, I'm unsure myself.'

'It doesn't look that way...'

'In the past, a teacher told me something.'

'What is it?'

'Rather than worrying about a future you can't see the end of, it's more fun to keep going forward towards a result you believe in.'

Makoto really looked happy as she said that.

Though those words were incredibly optimistic, Ishii felt like he could understand.

Worrying now would solve nothing. It was more important to think about what to do to solve the issue and move towards that.

Though it was just slightly, Ishii felt like some of his anxiety had lightened.

'Thank you very much.'

Just as Ishii said that, Yakumo finished his call and walked towards them.

'Makoto-san is here as well now, so let's move elsewhere.'

The three of them went to the nearby school lounge.

There were no windows and felt like a cellar. Few students passed by. They would be able to speak easily here.

'Makoto-san, how was it?' asked Yakumo once they had all sat on the sofas.

Makoto nodded and opened her memo pad before speaking.

'I heard a number of things about Mizuhara Noriko-san, the woman who committed suicide... It seems she was acting strangely before her suicide.'

'What do you mean by strangely?' asked Yakumo, his brow furrowed.

'Though she never talked much, one day, she seemed to shut up inside herself and wouldn't answer even if somebody talked to her, as if she couldn't hear them.'

'Isn't that kind of like the symptoms of the person named Nishizawa?' said Ishii as the thought came to his mind.

'It is similar,' replied Yakumo, chin in his hand.

'Could it be that Mizuhara-san also saw the ghost in the clock tower and started acting strangely?'

After saying that, Ishii regretted his words. They were just too off-base.

A mirror that was connected to the underworld. Meeting with a ghost, only to be taken away to the underworld in the same way – it was just impossible.

'I can't deny the possibility.'

'Eh?'

Yakumo's words were so unexpected that Ishii was the one who was surprised.

'If we casually say something is impossible, we will lose sight of the truth.'

'That's true, but...'

Even though Ishii had suggested it himself, he felt it was a bit improbable.

'Well, putting theories aside... Makoto-san, did you hear anything about the reason for Mizuhara-san's suicide?' continued Yakumo.

'About that... It appears Mizuhara-san was a very delicate woman. She was very sensitive and had a strangely fleeting impression to her.'

'I've only seen her from pictures, but I felt the same way...'

responded Yakumo. Ishii agreed.

Perhaps the fact that she had committed suicide was clouding his perception, but he had felt like she was so fragile she could disappear at any moment.

'Because she was like that, everyone kind of just accepted it when they found out she had committed suicide. But as for an actual reason...'

'How about those two?'

Yakumo sent a gaze so sharp it was frightening Makoto's way.

'The two of them were both friendly with Mizuhara-san, though nobody knew what exactly their relationships were...'

Makoto appeared sorry that she didn't have any specifics, but Yakumo didn't

seem to care.

'I see.'

After saying that expressionlessly, Yakumo crossed his arms and looked down. He was probably thinking over the case.

Ishii wished that he could express a smart opinion to help Yakumo organise his thoughts, but Ishii couldn't think of anything.

He didn't even know who Yakumo suspected or where he was aiming.

Makoto looked frustrated as well as she bit her lower lip, perhaps feeling the same way.

Yakumo thought silently for a while, but then he suddenly lifted his head.

'Makoto-san, I have one more request – '

As Yakumo said that, his lips turned up into a smile.

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7

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Gotou stopped his car in front of the Meisei University gates. Yakumo and Ishii immediately walked over.

They looked considerably worn out.

It made sense. They had been working ever since the incident occurred.

Yakumo sat in the backseat as usual. Ishii went to the door on the driver's side and fidgeted.

'E-er... I'll take over for you,' said Ishii, sounding apologetic.

Now that Gotou thought about it, Ishii always drove. It had become habit, so Ishii himself probably thought that it was his job.

That said, with Ishii looking this exhausted, there could be an accident.

'Just get in the passenger seat.'

'But...'

Ishii was fidgeting even more now.

'Stop fidgeting!' yelled Gotou.

'Yes sir!' Ishii replied with a jump. He hurriedly ran towards the passenger side.

He fell –

'So how was the investigation?' asked Yakumo once Ishii had managed to get in.

'I got a bunch of info.'

Gotou tried to hand over the files, but he couldn't.

Gotou had put the files on the passenger seat. Ishii was sitting on them.

'Move over,' said Gotou, grabbing the corner of the files that were sticking out from under Ishii.

'Eh?'

'You're sitting on the files.'

'Eh? Ah! I see! Sorry!'

Even though Ishii could have just sat up slightly, he stood up in a fluster and hit his head against the top of the car.

'What are you doing?'

'S-sorry.'

With Ishii slightly off the chair, Gotou managed to save the files.

Such a big fuss just to hand over some files.

As Yakumo watched from the backseat, he was smiling. Gotou felt like it was

the first time he'd seen that smile in a while.

If Yakumo, who had been pressed psychologically because of Haruka's incident, felt just a little bit better, Gotou didn't mind.

'Here – '

Gotou handed over the files and Yakumo started looking through the files, devouring them with his eyes.

'What files are those?' asked Ishii as he fixed the position of his glasses.

'Hm,' Gotou replied brusquely, too bothered to even give a response.

Yakumo was reading files regarding a certain man.

That man had caused some trouble for the police three years ago.

However, it had nothing to do with this case. That said, Gotou couldn't ignore it.

Yakumo had known beforehand that the police had this man on file.

– What incident had he been in?

While Gotou was thinking, Yakumo lifted his head. His gaze was unusually fierce.

It looked like he had found something important in those files.

'Oi, Yakumo...'

Gotou tried to ask, but Yakumo interrupted him.

'Ishii-san, you said that you saw a ghost before the incident occurred, didn't you?'

Yakumo's words made both Gotou and Ishii confused for a moment.

– What's he talking about?

Gotou didn't understand, but then he remembered. The prank that had occurred at the intersection near Meisei University.

When they went there, Ishii had made a big fuss about seeing a ghost.

Ishii had talked about that when they visited Yakumo afterwards too, but then Haruka's incident had occurred and Gotou had completely forgotten.

'Y-yes, I did see a ghost,' said Ishii, though he sounded confused.

– Why's Yakumo talking about that now?

Ishii had to be thinking that. Gotou was thinking the same thing.

'Did you see that ghost's face?'

Yakumo continued asking questions, ignoring their feelings.

'Not clearly...' replied Ishii, his voice a bit nervous.

'Was that ghost a man? Or was it a woman?'

'A woman.'

Yakumo nodded, seeming satisfied with Yakumo's reply. Then, he frowned slightly.

– What on earth is he thinking?

Before Gotou could ask, Yakumo said, 'Please go there now.'

'You... What are you saying? Do we need to go there now?' said Gotou without thinking.

He didn't know what Yakumo was planning, but they had to solve Haruka's case first. They didn't have the time to look for some ghost Ishii saw.

'I'm saying it because it's necessary,' Yakumo said, incredibly brazen.

'Why?'

'You don't know?'

'I'm asking because I don't!' shouted Gotou.

Yakumo sighed in a dramatic manner.

It made it seem like Gotou was the weird one.

'Gotou-san, I've mentioned this before, but you should get into the habit of reading files more carefully,' said Yakumo, his tone pointed.

Gotou knew he couldn't focus on files. That's why he hated paperwork.

But it was really grating having Yakumo point that out.

'I don't need your concern! Stop talking and just explain already!'

Though Gotou yelled, only Ishii was surprised. Yakumo just smirked calmly.

– I really hate this brat!

'I'll explain once we arrive.'

After saying that, Yakumo turned towards the window.

He probably wouldn't say any more no matter what Gotou said.

'Honestly...' grumbled Gotou, though he started the car.

He didn't know what Yakumo was thinking, but he felt like he was getting closer to the truth.

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8

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Makoto stood in front of a house.

It was about fifteen minutes by bus from Meisei University at the corner of a residential street. The area, built by a railway company, had lines of nearly identical houses.

Makoto checked the name plate and pressed the intercom button, though her heart felt tight.

After a while, the front door opened and a woman appeared. She was probably in her mid-fifties.

She was small-framed with friendly eyes – she seemed like the sort of woman who liked people. However, there was an indescribable shadow in the back of her eyes.

She was Yasue, the mother of Mizuhara Noriko, who had committed suicide three years ago.

'I'm Hijikata of Hokutou Newspaper. I called earlier.'

Makoto held out her business card.

'I'm Mizuhara. I apologise for asking you to come all this way,' the woman said and bowed politely.

Yakumo had asked Makoto to investigate something at Mizuhara Noriko's house, but to be honest, Makoto didn't really want to.

She didn't know what expression to make before meeting a parent who had lost their daughter, and she didn't think they would accept a sudden visit.

However, when she called, Yasue had immediately agreed.

Though Makoto had explained that she was gathering material for an article on suicide, but that wasn't true. Makoto found it hard to breathe with the guilt of lying pressing down upon her.

That said, she had already talked to her. She had to go through with it.

'First, would you allow me to burn incense?' asked Makoto, which made Yasue smile faintly as she nodded.

Makoto went inside the Yasue household and was brought to a Japanese-style room in the back.

There was a small altar there with the photo of a smiling woman.

Mizuhara Noriko –

She was a very beautiful woman, but now that Makoto looked at the photo again, there was a certain fleetingness there.

Makoto placed a lit incense stick and put her hands together in front of the photo.

Why had she chosen to die when she was so young? That question bothered Makoto.

Makoto's student life had not been fun. There had been more bad things than good.

Still, with the support of many people, starting with Onda, she had managed to come here.

Had Mizuhara Noriko not had these people? When Makoto pondered that, she felt very sad.

'Sometimes, students in her grade come as well,' Yasue said.

'Is that so?' asked Makoto, turning in Yasue's direction.

'Yes, students from the same circle.'

'Would you happen to know their names?'

'Unfortunately, I don't know, but there are a few. It makes me very happy that they haven't forgotten her.'

Yasue's words were accompanied with wet eyes.

'Is that so...'

That was probably why Yasue had so quickly agreed to Makoto's request.

She was afraid that her daughter would be forgotten, so she wanted people to remember, no matter in what form – and so she had accepted.

'Noriko – was a very kind girl, but she was shy and didn't like expressing her opinion.'

Yasue began to speak.

'Before she committed suicide, I knew that something was strange. But my

daughter always bore with things on her own... And I had been thinking too lightly that she was an adult already. I never thought that she had been so troubled that she wanted to die...'

Tears began to fall from Yasue's eyes. She didn't wipe the tears. She just looked at the photo on the altar. That made Makoto's hurt even more.

'Do you know what Noriko-san was troubled about?'

Even though Makoto knew it was a cruel question, like salt in somebody's wounds, she asked it.

Yasue looked down and shook her head.

That was the same response as Katou, the circle president.

Though Noriko had definitely been troubled, it remained unknown what she had been troubled about.

– What cornered her so?

It bothered Makoto, but she didn't think that finding out would solve the case.

However, Yakumo felt something from her suicide. He probably saw something different than Makoto and the others.

'Um... If you wouldn't mind, I would appreciate it if you allowed me to look at Noriko's things...' asked Makoto, watching Yasue's reaction.

That was the biggest reason Makoto had come. Yakumo seemed to think that the key to unravelling this case lay in Noriko's belongings.

'Please go ahead. Her room has been left as is.'

Yasue slowly stood up and took Makoto to the door right beside the top of the stairs to the second floor.

The room was about six tatami in size with wooden flooring. On one side of the room, there was a bookshelf. There was a desk along the wall with the

window and a bed in the back.

It was a clean and well organised room, but it didn't feel much like the room of a girl.

'Would you mind if I went inside?' asked Makoto.

'Please go ahead,' Yasue replied in a hoarse voice.

The moment Makoto entered, she felt it hard to breathe. Perhaps she felt Noriko was closer by touching the remnants of her life.

There was a laptop on top of the desk.

'May I look at this?'

After Yasue gave her permission, Makoto turned on the computer. The login screen appeared. It needed a password.

She wouldn't be able to look inside this way.

She thought about asking Yasue, but it was likely she didn't know. Just as she had half-given up, a word suddenly came to Makoto's head.

Perhaps – she typed in <CLOCKTOWER>.

It wasn't just the name of the magazine that Noriko's circle put out. It was also where they did their circle activities.

It was also the place she had jumped from to commit suicide.

It looked like Makoto's guess was correct, as the computer showed the desktop screen.

She probably must have loved writing. There were many files that looked like they might have been drafts.

– This is...!

Makoto was stunned when her eyes fell on one of those files.

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Gotou stopped his car near the intersection.

This was where the prank with the red paint near the traffic light had been yesterday. Ishii claimed to have seen a ghost here.

Yakumo had told them to come here. Gotou didn't know why they'd had to.

It didn't seem to have anything to do with this case, at least.

'We're here. So what are you going to do?' asked Gotou.

Yakumo got off the car silently.

– This guy.

Gotou wished that Yakumo would try being in his shoes for a change, just being told to do things without any explanation at all.

While grumbling internally, Gotou got off the car.

Ishii did the same from the passenger side.

Yakumo was crouching in front of the traffic light, which still had paint on it.

It was like he was looking for something.

'What're you doing?' asked Gotou.

Yakumo slowly stood up. He opened his mouth to speak, but then his mobile rang.

After Yakumo answered, he moved slightly away and started talking.

– What bad timing.

'I wonder what Yakumo-shi is thinking,' said Ishii as he pushed up his silver-framed glasses.

'Who knows?'

Gotou wanted to know too.

It was always like this, but Gotou had no idea about the case. He wasn't sure doing this would really solve the case.

But just like every other time, Yakumo took things that seemed completely unrelated and tied them together to carve out the truth.

That was why –

'It'll work out somehow.'

After saying that, Gotou took a cigarette out of his pocket.

'It's illegal to smoke on the road. Are you really a police officer?'

Yakumo had finished his phone call. His tone was incredibly disagreeable.

'Shut up. I know that – I'm just biting it.'

'Really now.'

'And you...'

'Could you be quiet?' Yakumo said curtly.

Yakumo had been the one who'd started talking on that topic in the first place. It made Gotou angry, but it was pointless when facing Yakumo.

Gotou sighed and put the cigarette in his pocket.

Yakumo waited for the light to turn green and started walking across the intersection.

'Something there?' Gotou asked, but there was no response.

Yakumo crouched in the middle of the intersection and stroked the asphalt there. Then, he looked at the traffic light with the paint on it.

As he was doing that, the light turned from green to yellow.

Maybe Yakumo hadn't noticed, because he didn't budge.

'The light changed!'

Even after Gotou yelled, Yakumo didn't move.

'Has he not noticed?' Ishii said anxiously.

That was likely. When Yakumo focussed on something, he lost sight of everything else.

'Oi! Yakumo!'

When Gotou yelled once more, the light turned red.

The opposite traffic light turned green.

Fortunately, there were no cars at the intersection, but Gotou saw a bus coming.

'What are you doing!?! A bus is coming!?' screamed Gotou.

Yakumo finally stood up and looked at the sky.

The bus drew closer.

'Oi! Hurry and cross the road!'

As Gotou yelled, there was a gust of wind.

The sand that was blown up got in Gotou's eyes and blocked his vision.

'Yakumo! What are you doing!?!' Gotou yelled frantically even as he rubbed his eyes.

He somehow managed to get the sand out of his eyes. When he looked at the intersection, the bus had passed.

– Where's Yakumo?

Gotou spotted Yakumo on the opposite side of the road. It looked like he was OK.

'That was dangerous!' bellowed Gotou, but Yakumo just casually, almost mockingly, walked back across the road.

The smile on his face was almost bewitching.

'Gotou-san, I have a request,' Yakumo said calmly.

'What?'

'Please bring every related party to the scene of the crime.'

'You can't mean...'

'Yes. I've solved every mystery of this case – '

As Yakumo said that, his voice was brimming with confidence.

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10

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'Nishizawa-san.'

Nishizawa stopped walking when somebody called out to him.

He was about to go home, heading for the bus stop.

When he turned around, he saw a young man there. It was the man who had come to ask about Kanae's incident yesterday.

'You...'

'My name is Saitou Yakumo. We met yesterday, yes?'

The young man who called himself Yakumo smiled, but the smile was clearly fake.

'What do you want?' asked Nishizawa.

Yakumo nodded. 'I just wanted to ask one thing.'

'What?'

'Nishizawa-san, you definitely saw a ghost in the clock tower, correct?'

Nishizawa didn't know why Yakumo wanted to know.

'I just saw something like it...'

Kanae had believed in the clock tower rumour and had thought that Nishizawa had been acting strange, but she had been mistaken. Nishizawa was the same as he had been before he'd seen the ghost. He was completely normal.

'You saw it, didn't you?'

Yakumo's eyes narrowed.

Nishizawa had thought this the first time he'd seen this guy, but he had scary eyes. It felt like they could see to the bottom of your heart.

'Why do you care?' asked Nishizawa.

Yakumo smiled slightly.

'According to the rumour, you can reunite with the dead. The word "reunite" suggests somebody you know.'

'Well, yeah.'

'However, you didn't see the ghost clearly.'

'I didn't.'

'I see. That's fine. Thank you very much.'

Yakumo said just that and turned on his heels to leave, but he seemed to remember something as he stopped in his tracks.

With the dark of night falling, his figure seemed to let out a strange, almost murderous atmosphere.

'Right, one more thing.'

After a silence, Yakumo spoke, his back still facing Nishizawa.

'What?'

'You said that somebody else killed Kanae-san, right?'

'I did.'

Nishizawa had said something like that.

'At that time, though you didn't say it, you thought that the person who killed Kanae-san was Sakurai-san – am I wrong?'

Nishizawa jolted at Yakumo's words.

That was exactly what he had been thinking. No matter the result, Nishizawa was certain that Sakurai had been the one who cornered Kanae to her death.

However, he didn't say that aloud.

He was thinking about how to explain, but it would just sound like an excuse.

'I won't say anything...'

'I see. Actually, I came to the same conclusion. That Sakurai-san had something to do with Kanae-san's death,' Yakumo said calmly.

'What?'

'I can't see the reason now, but... I think it's the same as it was with Mizuhara Noriko-san.'

'So Noriko didn't commit suicide?'

'That's what I think,' Yakumo said firmly.

'Why do you think that?'

Nishizawa's heart was racing and it was hard to breathe, but he still asked.

Finally, Yakumo turned around.

His face was as expressionless as a Noh mask, so Nishizawa had no idea what he was thinking. However, it felt frightening.

'I can't say right now. Just one thing – '

There, Yakumo stopped.

Nishizawa was caught in the glitter of Yakumo's narrowed eyes. He forgot to breathe.

'The Ghost of the clock Tower that Sakurai-san wrote is without a doubt plagiarised – '

After saying just that, Yakumo slowly walked away.

Nishizawa couldn't move for a while, just watching Yakumo leave.

Why had he suddenly said that? Nishizawa had no idea. However, it seemed he had come to the same conclusion as Nishizawa had.

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11

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Shinoda and Onodera took Haruka down the precinct corridor.

The weight of the handcuffs felt like it would chain her down.

She had only been told that they would investigate the scene of the crime – no other details.

– Why did this happen?

It was a bit late for her to think about that.

Even though her friend Kanae had died, she couldn't even be sad about it – she had been interrogated as the suspect in her murder case.

To be honest, nothing had seemed real since the incident had occurred. She felt hollow.

While she was thinking that, they passed through the back exit and left the precinct.

There was a blue prisoner transport vehicle with a white line across it, like the ones often seen in movies[1].

The door opened and she was old to go in.

She had never imagined that she would ride one of those.

With heavy feet, she stepped into the vehicle.

The seats faced each other, like they did in a train car. Two men were already sitting there.

– Did they commit some sort of crime?

'Eh?'

The moment Haruka saw the two men's faces, she spoke up without thinking.

The two of them were people Haruka knew well.

'Gotou-san! And Ishii-san too!'

Gotou and Ishii were sitting there.

'Haruka-chan! I'm so glad you're OK. I thought that something might happen...' said Ishii in a tearful voice as Haruka ran up to them.

'What on earth...'

Haruka looked at Gotou in confusion.

Since Gotou and Ishii knew Haruka, they should have been left out of the investigation.

'You didn't hear? We're going to investigate.'

'I did hear that, but...'

'Sorry, could you sit down?'

Shinoda came in after her and spoke in a displeased voice.

Haruka sat next to Gotou, and Ishii sat on the other side of Gotou. Shinoda and Onodera sat opposite them, and the prisoner transport vehicle began to move.

'Um... What's happening?'

After the vehicle had been driving for a while, Haruka asked Gotou this question.

'I asked Miyagawa-san to pull a string or two and got him to let us investigate the scene,' said Gotou with a shrug.

'A string or two? It was a completely absurd request!' shouted Shinoda.

'What? You still talking?' rebutted Gotou.

'Say what you want. If anything happens, it's all your responsibility.'

'I know that. I'll resign if I have to!'

'I don't think your resignation would be enough,' said Shinoda with a click of his tongue.

Though Haruka didn't know the details, Gotou and Ishii must have done a lot to get Haruka out.

She was happy they had done so much for her, but she also felt apologetic.

She wouldn't be able to apologise enough if Gotou and Ishii had to undergo some punishment because of her.

'Don't you ever shut up!?!'

'What!?!'

Shinoda and Gotou were both standing, while Ishii and Onodera frantically tried to calm them.

Meanwhile, the vehicle drove into Meisei University.

The scenery Haruka was so accustomed to seemed a bit different from usual. Perhaps it was because she was looking at them through metal bars.

Finally, the vehicle stopped and the door opened.

Gotou led them out of the vehicle. When Haruka stepped out, she saw somebody in the darkness. Could it be –

'Yakumo is the one investigating today,' Gotou whispered in Haruka's ear. The meaning of those words warmed her heart.

The figure slowly walked towards them.

His face became clear, floating up from the darkness.

Pale skin. Handsome features. Messy hair. And those languid eyes – it was Yakumo, no doubt about it.

'Yakumo-kun...'

The moment Haruka said that, she couldn't hold in her tears any more.

She wanted to rush over and hug him, but she couldn't.

Her handcuffs were in the way. Both her movements and her heart were bound.

'I really made you wait...'

Yakumo awkwardly scratched the tip of his nose.

Haruka wipes away her tears and shook her head. It didn't matter how long it took. She was just happy that he'd come.

No, she had been sure he would come eventually.

That was why she had been able to bear with the painful and suffocating reality.

'I believed in you...'

The words came out of her mouth unconsciously.

Yakumo smiled slightly and placed a hand on Haruka's head.

'I know.'

It felt like those two words had saved Haruka's heart. Even though

everything wasn't over yet, she felt a sense of safety spreading within her.

'Let's go then – '

After saying that, Yakumo turned on his heels and started to walk.

As Haruka followed, her feet didn't feel heavy any more. With Yakumo, she felt like she could walk forward, no matter the outcome.

Perhaps that was what you called belief.

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12

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'Oi! Why's this brat here!?' Shinoda yelled at Gotou.

Gotou had somehow got Shinoda to accept allowing Haruka to come along to the investigation, but Gotou hadn't mentioned Yakumo.

He had known that Shinoda would make a fuss if he did.

'Well, something like a helper,' said Gotou.

Shinoda's expression became more suspicious.

'What are you planning?'

'Nothing. We need him to solve the case.'

'Stop screwing around!'

Though Shinoda was ready to fight, Gotou didn't feel like responding.

Shinoda was worked up, but it was clear he had started to doubt some of the particulars of this case too.

That was why he had agreed to Gotou's request, though he did have Miyagawa as support. It would normally be impossible to have an investigation with so few people.

'I'm not. I'm always serious. That guy's absolutely necessary to solving the case.'

'Police relying on civilians... It's over,' spat out Shinoda.

'What are you saying? Police investigations always start with us relying on civilians.'

In order to solve a case, they needed to get information from civilians. That was why they wore away the soles of their shoes questioning people on the streets.

'You're just quibbling!'

Shinoda was right. It was quibbling. But still –

'You have to understand too. There's definitely another side to this case. Don't you want to know what really happened?' asked Gotou.

Shinoda stopped talking.

There was doubt on his face.

Gotou hadn't expected this, but perhaps Shinoda was rather like him. The proof was that he didn't stop Yakumo and Haruka from walking on.

'What are you going to do? You don't have to come if you don't want to,' Gotou said. Then, he ran after Yakumo.

Yakumo had been looking at his mobile screen for the past little while.

'Wait!'

Gotou turned around and saw Shinoda following.

Onodera had stayed in the prisoner transport vehicle. It looked like Shinoda had chosen to come alone.

'What? You coming?'

'It'll be a mess if you let the suspect get away.'

'Like I'd do that.'

'I'm coming because I think you would!'

'Could you be a bit quieter?' asked Yakumo, giving them a scornful glance as he stood in front of the clock tower.

'What?'

Even though Gotou had been trying to get Shinoda to accept Yakumo, Yakumo was mocking him.

'Our guests are already in the clock tower. It'll be the end if they notice.'

Yakumo pointed at the clock tower as he said that.

– Guests?

'What are you talking about?'

'I don't like using this sort of method, but we have no time. I may have shaken them up.'

'Shaken up?'

'The rest is your job, Gotou-san. Please hurry up the clock tower.'

Yakumo pointed with his chin to tell Gotou to go ahead.

Gotou didn't understand, but Yakumo was saying this sort of thing, something was definitely going to happen.

He looked at the clock tower again.

The clock tower, looming in the darkness, let out a strange atmosphere. It felt like it was a huge monster.

'Ishii!' Gotou yelled. Ishii ran over.

He fell –

'What are you doing?'

'S-sorry.'

Ishii hurriedly stood and ran up to Gotou's side.

He looked a bit depressed. Maybe he was depressed about going into a clock tower rumoured to have ghosts, or –

Anyway, he didn't have the time to think now.

'Let's go!'

Gotou ran towards the clock tower.

He tried to open the gate, but it was locked. Right. He went to the back entrance.

When he reached the backdoor, he looked at Ishii to tell him to open it.

However, Ishii just furrowed his brows and smiled nervously.

'This isn't the time to be afraid!'

'B-but...' pleaded Ishii with wet eyes.

He couldn't be a detective if he was such a coward. Gotou thought about dropping a fist on Ishii's head, but then he heard a scream.

Then, there was the sound of fighting –

'Let's go!'

Gotou opened the door as quickly as he could and ran in.

'W-what are you doing!?'

'You! It's your fault!'

Gotou could hear shouting. It was from the room at the top.

Then, there was the sound of something falling.

Gotou didn't know why, but it seemed there were already people in the clock tower, just as Yakumo had said.

Gotou wanted to run up right away, but it was too dark to see the stairs.

Just as he made a click with his tongue, Ishii came with his torch. Gotou grabbed it, turned it on, and rushed up the stairs.

Something was definitely happening on the top floor. Though Gotou was heaving and his thigh muscles felt like they might cramp, he ran up.

When he finally reached the top floor, he saw something he did not expect with the light of the torch.

A tall and thin man was collapsed on the floor. He had seen the man before. If he remembered correctly, he was the student named Nishizawa that he had talked to with Yakumo.

The other person was small-framed and had a round face. He was holding something like a knife and was about to bring it down on Nishizawa's head.

'What are you doing!?' shouted Gotou.

The man holding the knife froze.

He appeared shocked by the unexpected visitor.

Gotou used this chance to tackle the man with the knife and force him to the ground.

'Let go! It's not me!' shouted the man as he waved the knife madly.

It looked like he was in a panic.

'Calm down!'

Gotou straddled the man, grabbed his arms and forced him down.

'Urgh!'

The knife slipped from the man's hand.

Gotou quickly turned the man around, pulled his hands together and cuffed him.

The man finally stopped wriggling.

'You're wrong... I just...'

'I'll listen to you later,' said Gotou, forcing the man to stand up.

He turned to see Ishii rushing towards Nishizawa and asking, 'Are you all right?'

He looked injured all over, but he responded to Ishii, so it didn't look serious.

Just as Gotou sighed, the naked lightbulb hanging from the clock tower ceiling turned on.

He had to blink a few times because it was so bright.

Just as Gotou's eyes grew accustomed to the light, Yakumo came up the stairs and into the room.

Yakumo didn't look surprised at the situation. It was as if he had expected this.

'So it really was you two,' Yakumo murmured, putting his index finger to his brow –

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13

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'What on earth happened?' Ishii asked Yakumo, who had calmly arrived.

Now that Ishii thought about it, Yakumo had told them what would happen before coming here, but Ishii didn't understand any of this.

Yakumo gave Ishii a faint smile and slowly stepped into the centre of the room.

Just as he opened his mouth, Shinoda arrived with Haruka. He was shocked by the scene.

'What is this!?' shouted Shinoda, his forehead damp with sweat.

'Your voice is loud, just like a bear I know,' said Yakumo, running a hand through his hair.

'What?' retorted Shinoda, who didn't seem to like Yakumo's rude attitude. However, Yakumo didn't care.

'Before I explain, I should introduce everyone. There are probably some people who are meeting for the first time here – '

As Yakumo said that, he walked up to the man Gotou had arrested.

'This is Sakurai Itsuki. He is a fourth-year student at this university and is a member of the literature circle. He wrote a book called The Ghost of the Clock Tower, received a newcomer's prize and debuted – '

'This person...' said Ishii as he heard Yakumo's explanation.

This person is the one who claims a ghost living in the clock tower made him write a novel –

Now he had a face to match the information, but another question came to him.

'Why was Sakurai-san...'

– Waving a knife around?

If Gotou hadn't stopped Sakurai, the young man standing next to Ishii might have been stabbed to death.

'I will explain later,' Yakumo said. He walked up to the young man beside Ishii.

He was tall and abnormally thin young man with a gloomy air to him. He was pale, but Ishii couldn't tell if that was from fear after almost dying or if he was always like that.

'This is Nishizawa Yasunobu-san. He is also a member of the literature circle.

He also experienced a spiritual phenomenon in this clock tower.'

'Eh?' said Ishii in surprise.

He had heard about Nishizawa from Yakumo. This was the person who might have been possessed by a ghost. When Ishii thought about that, Nishizawa seemed creepy, so Ishii took half a step away.

'You introducing us so we can have a party?' interjected Shinoda.

Shinoda didn't know how Yakumo unravelled cases, so it made sense for him to be confused. He probably couldn't even accept how Yakumo, a university student, was leading the investigation.

'Just shut up for a bit.'

Gotou sent Shinoda a sharp glance.

However, there was no way Shinoda could accept that.

'Like I could! I don't even know who this brat is!' said Shinoda, pointing at Yakumo.

However, Yakumo didn't pay Shinoda any attention. He looked at the stairs.

'Perfect timing. It seems the audience has arrived –'

As Yakumo said that, a man and woman came up the stairs.

One was somebody Ishii knew well – Makoto. The other was a man he didn't know. He had manly features and was probably in his early forties.

'This is Hijikata Makoto-san, from Hokutou Newspaper.'

Yakumo introduced them as they came into the room. Makoto looked confused at the sudden introduction, but she quickly greeted them.

'Why's a journalist here? Isn't this an investigation?' Shinoda questioned Gotou.

It made sense for him to feel that way. If a journalist was at an investigation,

they might leak information.

'It isn't an investigation – '

The one who spoke was Yakumo.

'What?'

Shinoda looked at Yakumo suspiciously.

'I am trying to reveal the truth.'

Yakumo returned Shinoda's gaze.

The sparks in the air even reached Ishii.

'You're just a student – what are you saying?'

Shinoda walked up to Shinoda, but Yakumo didn't budge.

'I understand your dissatisfaction, but wouldn't you keep silent for a bit? It's fine. I won't cause you any trouble. That bear will take responsibility if anything happens – '

Yakumo looked at Gotou.

'Yeah, I'll take all the responsibility and everything else too.'

Though Gotou spoke casually, it was with pride.

Shinoda shut up and crossed his arms when faced with that confident demeanour. He had probably chosen to be quiet and watch for a while.

Gotou and Yakumo looked at each other and nodded.

Though they didn't speak, it felt like there was an absolute trust between them.

Would Ishii ever be able to believe in somebody like that? Would anyone ever believe in him like that?

Ishii wallowed in those thoughts.

No, he would stop thinking for now. Ishii looked towards Yakumo. As if Yakumo had been waiting for that, he took one step forward.

'I was in the middle of introductions. This man is an associate professor at Meisei University as well as the faculty member in charge of the literature circle, Onda Shuusuke – '

Yakumo introduced the man who had come with Makoto.

The man named Onda looked around the room and sighed.

'Sorry, but what is this? I don't understand,' said Onda, looking suspicious.

To be honest, Ishii felt the same way as Onda. HE had suddenly seen Sakurai waving a knife and Nishizawa under attack.

He had no idea what was happening.

'Before I explain the situation, let us put facts in order – '

After Yakumo said that, he slowly looked at the faces of everyone in the room. His speech, movements and pauses felt dramatic.

However, that was probably on purpose.

By doing that, Yakumo took the role of the leader into his own hands.

'It began when Koike Kanae-san came to consult me, through her, about a certain spiritual phenomenon.'

Yakumo looked at Haruka.

Haruka looked down slightly. She was probably sad about Kanae's death.

'Kanae-san, along with Nishizawa-san, went to the clock tower, and Nishizawa-san saw a ghost...'

'Are you telling horror stories?' Shinoda interrupted.

'If you don't shut up and listen, I'll kick you out,' threatened Gotou.

'Well, aren't you confident.'

'That's how prepared I am.'

It felt like they would fight, but unexpectedly, Shinoda gave in and said, 'Go on.'

Perhaps he had been swallowed by the unusual atmosphere Yakumo had brought about.

'Kanae-san was worried that Nishizawa-san was acting strange ever since he saw the ghost.'

Next, Yakumo looked at Nishizawa, who stood beside Ishii.

'I'm not strange at all,' Nishizawa objected immediately.

Yakumo shook his head.

'Your opinion doesn't matter right now. I am only saying what Kanae-san thought.'

Nishizawa couldn't respond to that.

This time, Yakumo walked towards Sakurai, whom Gotou was holding on to.

'Sakurai-san debuted as an author, but in an interview, he said that he hadn't written the work – that the ghost in the clock tower had made him.'

Sakurai just looked down without saying anything.

A drop of sweat fell from the tip of his chin.

'There was a rumour about this clock tower – '

As Yakumo said that, he pointed at the mirror in the back of the room.

Everyone's gazes focussed on the dirty mirror.

'That mirror is connected to the underworld – that is, the world of the dead – and can let you reunite with the dead.'

Ishii gulped and held his breath as he listened to Yakumo's explanation.

It was the first time he had come here.

The rumoured mirror was dirty with dust, but still, it had such an uncanny air that it made you think the rumour might be true.

'What about it?' asked Shinoda, stepping forward.

'And then – one night, an incident occurred.'

This time, Yakumo slowly turned to look at Haruka.

Though it was a sharp gaze, Haruka looked straight back.

There was no hesitation or doubt. They were eyes of pure, mutual trust.

When Ishii saw that, for some reason, his heart hurt –

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Haruka faced Yakumo's direct gaze –

She didn't know what would come out of Yakumo's mouth. Perhaps it would be a very unpleasant truth for her.

But –

If it was an answer Yakumo led her to, she was prepared to accept it.

'First, there is something I must clarify – '

Yakumo stopped.

A heavy silence fell upon the room. Haruka and everyone else were waiting for Yakumo's next words, forced to do so by the strange air Yakumo had to him now.

After a long silence, Yakumo smiled slightly.

'She did not kill Kanae-san – '

Yakumo's voice clearly rang through the room.

– It wasn't me.

Haruka felt the strength leave her limbs and just barely managed to avoid sitting on the floor.

Gotou and Ishii also smiled in relief, but Shinoda, standing next to Haruka, did not react that way.

'What proof do you have? She confessed!' shouted Shinoda.

Haruka didn't remember it herself, but Shinoda had said countless times during interrogation that she had acknowledged the murder.

Yakumo's expression didn't change. He walked straight towards Shinoda.

'She wasn't the one who confessed,' Yakumo said in a flat tone.

'What are you saying? I heard her acknowledge the crime.'

'Is that really true?'

'What are you saying?'

'Did she say "I killed her"? Or did she say something abstract like "It was my fault"?' pressed Yakumo.

'It might've been abstract, but it still means she killed her.'

Shinoda's objection had no power to it.

'When did police start using such broad interpretations?'

'Wha...'

'You were so eager to rush the case to its solution that you accepted her vague words as a confession – or am I wrong?'

Under Yakumo's sharp gaze, Shinoda took a step back. However, the wall blocked his way.

'So that's what it was...' said Gotou, his expression bitter.

'Anybody would think that in that situation. And there was a witness,'

objected Shinoda, but there was no strength in his voice.

'That's not the problem!'

Gotou was about to yell more, but Yakumo stopped him.

'Please calm down. Is that even something you said?' asked Yakumo with a faint smile.

Haruka nodded. 'I don't remember saying that.'

'Are you saying this guy falsified the testimony?' shouted Gotou. This time, Ishii stopped him.

'Don't screw with me! Of course I wouldn't do that! Don't just run your mouth off!'

'Exactly. Shinoda-san did not falsify any testimony.'

Yakumo's words made everyone go, 'Eh?'

'What do you mean?' Gotou asked, looking at Yakumo.

Yakumo ran a hand through his messy hair, looking annoyed.

'The person who testified was Koike Kanae-san, who had passed away – '

Yakumo's words made the room fall quiet.

'Kanae...' said Haruka in a tight voice.

Yakumo nodded.

'She possessed you, and she is still possessing you now – '

'Kanae...'

Even after Yakumo told her the truth, Haruka wasn't that surprised. That was because she had felt Kanae's presence this whole time.

She couldn't explain it, but she felt like she was watching from close by.

That would also explain why her memories were vague during the incident

and the interrogation.

When Yakumo came to the interrogation room, he had asked a number of strange questions. Now that Haruka thought about it, those questions had not been for Haruka but for Kanae, who was possessing her.

'In short, her words – Kanae's words, when she said she was at fault, were spoken to you, for involving you in this case.'

'I...'

Even though Kanae had been killed, she was still so concerned about others – that was just like Kanae. Haruka suddenly felt once more the reality of Kanae's death. Her chest hurt, like it had been wrenched open.

'Don't be stupid...' muttered Shinoda.

Haruka, Gotou, Ishii and Makoto all understood Yakumo's unique ability and so could believe his words, but it wasn't the same for other people.

'Ah, yes, I haven't explained – '

After Yakumo said that, he looked down slightly, took the contact lens out of his left eye and looked up.

His deep red left eye made everyone hold their breath –

Though Haruka thought it was beautiful, not everyone felt the same way. Actually, more people thought it strange.

People could be terribly cruel towards people who were different.

'W-what's wrong with your ear...'

Shinoda was the first to speak. Though it was faint, his voice was shaking.

'My left eye isn't just red. It can see things others can't – '

'Things others can't?'

Shinoda's brow furrowed.

'Yes. It can see the spirits of the dead – that is, ghosts.'

'W-what...'

'He's telling the truth. I couldn't believe it at first either, but I had to after going along with him,' said Gotou.

'Of course it's not true. Don't be ridiculous.'

Shinoda shook his head.

It probably wasn't easy to accept a fact that went against your common sense.

'I don't care if you don't believe me,' declared Yakumo.

'What?'

'Since I can still prove her innocence – '

The moment Yakumo said that, a bewitching smile appeared on his lips –

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Gotou finally understood after hearing Yakumo's explanation.

When Haruka spoke during investigation, it hadn't been a confession to murder. It had been a message from the dead Kanae.

Then, Shinoda and Onodera had taken those vague words as a confession.

Gotou couldn't just blame Shinoda and Onodera. Haruka's fingerprints were on the weapon. There was an eyewitness testimony.

That had prejudiced them and clouded their judgement. There may have also been some prejudice towards Gotou from Shinoda.

However, the problem came after.

Japanese police and law did not accept testimony from ghosts. Just as

Yakumo had said earlier, he would have to prove Haruka's innocence without ghosts.

Yakumo slowly walked towards Ishii, murmured something and then walked to Sakurai.

'First, from you – '

Sakurai's face twitched under Yakumo's gaze.

Was it fear of the red left eye or something else?

'You may be the only person speaking the truth this time,' Yakumo said quietly.

'What do you mean?' Gotou asked.

Yakumo looked at Makoto.

'Makoto-san, he said that he was made to write The Ghost in the Clock Tower by the ghost there, correct?'

'Yes, he did,' Makoto said clearly.

The associate professor named Onda next to her looked discomfited.

'Just as I said earlier, Sakurai-san's words were correct.'

Yakumo looked towards Sakurai again.

'T-then he was possessed by a ghost and wrote the manuscript?' asked Ishii.

'He wasn't possessed. To be correct, he stole the work of somebody who had died. Am I correct, Sakurai-san?'

Yakumo moved closer to Sakurai.

'W-wha... That's...' said Sakurai, his voice shaking. He tried to take a step back, but Gotou stood in his way.

He wouldn't let him get away.

'Why hide it? You didn't plan to hide it in the first place, did you?'

Sakurai looked down. His small frame was shaking, though it was slight.

'Was there really plagiarised?'

The person who had spoken was Onda, who had been silent up until now.

Yakumo looked at Onda. His eyes narrowed slightly.

'Be honest, professor – you noticed, didn't you?'

'What are you saying?' Onda asked.

'I read the magazines published by the literature circle. Sakurai-san's works in the magazines are clearly different in writing style.'

'I did think so... but couldn't that just mean he improved?' Onda replied coolly.

'Are you seriously saying that?'

'What do you mean?'

'It wasn't at a level that improvement could explain away. Something was different at its core.'

'Perhaps... but people change. Sometimes mental growth plays a huge influence on a work. There have been many an author like that.'

Though Gotou didn't know much about literature, Onda's explanation made sense.

It wasn't that he didn't believe Yakumo, but he felt it was a bit hasty to say something was a stolen work just because the writing style was different.

'Well, what you say does make sense, professor.'

Yakumo smiled dryly and looked down.

For a moment, Gotou was worried that Yakumo's plan had been ruined by Onda's rebuttal, but he immediately shook that anxiety away.

Yakumo lifted his head again.

'That isn't the only reason I am saying this. That was only the cause for my suspicion.'

The way Yakumo spoke suggested –

'You saying you have proof?' Gotou asked.

'Yes,' responded Yakumo. He looked at Makoto.

'Makoto-san, please tell everyone – '

Though Makoto looked surprised, she nodded immediately afterwards.

'Actually, I went to Mizuhara-san's house. I found the original data for The Ghost in the Clock Tower on her laptop. She died three years ago. It must have been written at least before then.'

As Makoto explained, her voice was shaking slightly. She probably had complex feelings about either the dead Mizuhara Noriko or her family.

'In short, the real author of The Ghost in the Clock Tower is not Sakurai-san but Mizuhara Noriko-san – '

After Yakumo declared that, Sakurai fell to his knees.

Even if he didn't speak, his response proved that it was true.

'So you really did...'

Those words, close to a growl, came from Nishizawa. He glared at Sakurai.

Nishizawa had probably noticed earlier that the work wasn't Sakurai's but Mizuhara Noriko's.

'When Sakurai-san laid his hands on Mizuhara Noriko-san's draft, he revised it and entered it for a publishing company's newcomer's award. It won and was published. Probably Sakurai-san himself was the most surprised,' Yakumo said to Sakurai, who was kneeling.

'Why?'

Gotou understood Yakumo's explanation, but he didn't understand the ending.

– Why was Sakurai the most surprised?

He submitted the work for a newcomer's prize by a publishing company. He must have felt vain and guilty in the spotlight.

'So that really was Noriko's...'

A low growl, like that of a beast, interrupted Gotou's question.

It was Nishizawa –

Nishizawa was crying.

His red eyes, wet with tears, were staring straight at Sakurai.

'You... wanted that work, so you killed Noriko... You took Noriko from me...'

Nishizawa's voice was twisted.

Anger and hatred were mixed together – there was killing intent there. His eyes were insane.

– This is bad!

It was too late.

Nishizawa grabbed the metal pole propped up against the wall and went to attack Sakurai.

Gotou managed to stop the attack with his arm, but a shocking pain made him stumble.

'Don't get in my way! I'm going to get revenge!'

Nishizawa waved the metal pole around.

He looked mad, as if something had possessed him –

Just as he brought the metal pole down, Ishii jumped out and clung to

Nishizawa's waist.

'Let go!'

Nishizawa shook Ishii off.

Ishii, who had been flung to the side, rolled across the floor and knocked Haruka to the ground.

Nishizawa went towards Sakurai again.

'Urgh!'

– It's all over.

The moment Gotou thought that, Nishizawa suddenly collapsed sideways.

– What?

Then, Gotou saw Shinoda. He had Nishizawa on the floor, handcuffed.

'I can't believe you saved me...' Gotou said wryly.

Shinoda looked like he had eaten something sour.

'I'll regret it for the rest of my life.'

'Shut up!' said Gotou with a click of his tongue, somehow managing to stand up.

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Ishii, on all fours, lifted his head and saw Shinoda holding Nishizawa down.

Gotou looked all right as well.

Just as Ishii sighed in relief, he saw Haruka sitting while holding her leg.

When Nishizawa pushed Ishii away, Ishii had hit Haruka and they had both fallen.

It looked like he had accidentally hurt her.

'A-are you all right?' Ishii said, rushing towards Haruka.

'Yes, it's just a sprain...'

Though Haruka responded with a smile, her forehead was damp with sweat. It had to hurt quite a lot.

– What am I doing?

Ishii was ashamed of himself.

He hadn't been able to save Gotou, and he had hurt Haruka too, but the problem was something earlier.

Before Yakumo had begun talking about plagiarism, he had walked up to Ishii and warned him. 'Please don't let your eyes off Nishizawa-san.'

Even though Yakumo had warned him so this wouldn't happen, not only had Ishii not been able to do anything, he had made the situation worse.

As Ishii was wallowing in his frustration, Yakumo walked up to him.

Though Ishii expected a reprimand, Yakumo walked past Ishii towards Haruka.

'Does it hurt?'

When Yakumo asked that, Haruka replied, 'Yeah, it hurts a lot,' looking like she might start crying.

It was a shock.

He wasn't somebody whom Haruka could express her weakness to.

'Sit there.'

After Yakumo told Haruka that, he moved to stand in front of Ishii.

Ishii felt like Yakumo's gaze was somewhat cold.

'I apologise. I should have restrained him before this happened. I may have

shaken him too much,' Yakumo said quietly.

He had nothing to apologise for. It was Ishii's fault for not being able to do anything.

'No, I...'

Yakumo turned around, cutting Ishii's apology short. Then, he walked towards Nishizawa.

Nishizawa's face was filled with bitterness.

'Oi! Yakumo! What the hell is happening?' shouted Gotou as he held his injured arm.

'Exactly what you see before you.'

Yakumo ran a hand through his hair, looking incredibly annoyed.

'I don't get it.'

'Yeah, what's happening?' said Shinoda, joining in.

Yakumo sighed and slowly opened his mouth.

'When Gotou-san and Ishii-san came into this room, Sakurai-san was threatening Nishizawa-san with a knife. Am I correct?'

It had been exactly as Yakumo said.

'Sakurai-san was trying to kill Nishizawa-san.'

Though Ishii didn't know the details of the situation, it had certainly looked that way to him. Then, the situation had reversed. Ishii didn't understand why.

'It was the opposite,' Yakumo said smoothly.

That moment, Nishizawa started to grind his teeth.

'Opposite? What do you mean?' pressed Gotou.

'I mean exactly what I said. Nishizawa-san called Sakurai-san here to try to

kill him.'

'But...'

Ishii was unable to stop himself from interrupting, but Yakumo stopped him by raising a hand.

'Nishizawa-san assaulted Sakurai-san here, but Sakurai-san fought back and turned the situation around. That was when Gotou-san and Ishii-san came in.'

'What!?'

Ishii's eyes went wide in shock.

'It is just as he says. I was assaulted by Nishizawa, so I had to... And then you came in,' said Sakurai pleadingly.

It didn't sound like he was trying to make an excuse. Ishii felt that they were words cornered by the truth.

'Shut up! You murderer! You're to blame for everything!' screamed Nishizawa, his teeth showing as he tried to wrench himself forward.

Spit was flying out of his mouth and his eyes were bloodshot. Ishii faltered in front of that monstrous face.

However, Yakumo did not. He slowly crouched in front of Nishizawa and looked at his face.

'And that is how you forgot your own crime and put all the blame on someone else. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this entire incident is your fault – '

Yakumo's words brimmed with loathing.

Nishizawa bit his lip and fell quiet under the pressure.

'Explain properly,' Gotou said impatiently.

Yakumo stood up again. He looked at everyone in the room and then began to speak quietly.

'Nishizawa-san was in a relationship with Mizuhara Noriko-san. However, Noriko-san committed suicide by jumping – '

'No! That wasn't a suicide! Sakurai killed her!' shouted Nishizawa, his face red. There was a fierce anger there.

'No, that was definitely a suicide,' objected Shinoda as he pressed Nishizawa down.

Shinoda had been in charge of Mizuhara Noriko's investigation. If the verdict was changed, it would be a huge mess.

'Shinoda-san, you remember him, don't you?'

Yakumo looked at Nishizawa.

Shinoda seemed confused, but he looked at Nishizawa's face once more. Then, his eyes went wide in recognition.

'Yes, this is Nishizawa-san, the student who had made a fuss three years ago saying that Mizuhara Noriko-san's death wasn't a suicide.'

'That's right... It was him...'

Shinoda looked like he had swallowed something bitter. So did Nishizawa.

'It seems you had both forgotten. Well, let us put aside whether Mizuhara Noriko-san's death was a suicide or a murder for now,' said Yakumo.

'Eh?'

– Isn't that important?

Yakumo ignored Ishii and moved towards the mirror.

'Whatever the facts are, Nishizawa-san thought that Sakurai-san had killed Mizuhara Noriko-san.'

'Why? Why did he think that?'

Gotou immediately interrupted with a question.

'The reason is the ghost of the clock tower, its meaning twofold.'

Yakumo tapped his brow with his index finger.

'Twofold?' asked Ishii.

The corners of Yakumo's lips turned up in a smile.

'Nishizawa-san always had suspicions about Mizuhara Noriko-san's suicide. He believed that she had been murdered and that the culprit was Sakurai-san.'

Yakumo looked at Sakurai.

'N-no, it's some mistake...' Sakurai denied frantically, his face pale.

Just as Ishii thought Yakumo might say something, he turned to Nishizawa.

'Nishizawa-san had suspicions, but he had no proof. However, three years afterwards – the present – something caused his suspicion to multiply...'

'The Ghost of the Clock Tower got the newcomer's award and was published –'

Makoto continued after Yakumo.

'Correct. The Ghost of the Clock Tower was written by Mizuhara Noriko-san. Nishizawa-san sensed that it was her work from the writing style and was convinced that Sakurai-san had killed her to steal her work.'

'No! That's not why I submitted the novel!'

'Shut up! You didn't just take away Noriko's life – you took her writing too!'

Sakurai's and Nishizawa's voices grew louder.

It felt like the argument might keep growing, but Gotou and Shinoda made them be quiet.

Yakumo nodded in satisfaction.

'Then, something else caused Nishizawa-san's suspicions to cement –'

'What happened?' asked Ishii, his eyes clinging to Yakumo.

Haruka, sitting nearby, was also holding her breath with her hand on her chest as she waited for Yakumo to speak.

'One day, Nishizawa-san, who had heard the rumour about the clock tower, went there to confirm the rumour. There – he saw a ghost.'

Yakumo looked at Nishizawa.

Nishizawa's eyes welled up with tears.

'I... met Noriko here...'

'Eh!?' exclaimed Haruka in surprise.

Nishizawa sniffled and started to speak in sobs.

'Noriko said. She didn't commit suicide. Sakurai killed her... Told me to get revenge and take back her work... That's why I...'

That was all he could say.

Nishizawa fell to the ground and started sobbing aloud. Ishii listened, dumbfounded, to his crying, more like screaming than anything.

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Haruka found it hard to breathe –

Everything coming out of Yakumo's mouth was a shocking truth. Since Haruka had been in custody this whole time, she couldn't even follow the conversation.

The spiritual phenomenon Kanae had talked about was clear though.

'So when Kanae said Nishizawa-san was acting strange...'

'Yes. Ever since he saw a ghost here, he was possessed by the idea of

revenge,' finished Yakumo.

It seemed that day was filled with melancholy.

'But why...'

Haruka couldn't understand at all.

She empathized with how Nishizawa felt after losing the one he loved. The sadness and loss was probably beyond imagination.

Furthermore, the anger he felt at knowing it was a murder even though it had been declared a suicide must have been terrible. But –

It was still twisted to kill somebody for revenge.

'Kanae-san knew that he was planning revenge and tried to stop him. That was why she talked to you...'

'Why me?'

'Though part of it was your experience with spiritual phenomena, more than anything else – I think it was because she trusted you.'

Yakumo's words, unusually gentle for him, spread in Haruka's heart.

It wasn't like she and Kanae had experienced anything special together. They hadn't been together every day. And yet, they had shared something.

Kanae had also been a very dear friend to Haruka –

But Haruka hadn't been able to help Kanae at all, and Kanae had lost her life.

'Now, let us return to the original topic – '

Yakumo clapped his hands together.

That moment, it felt like the atmosphere in the room changed.

'Who killed Kanae-san?'

Yakumo's question made everyone in the room look to him. Even Shinoda, who had refused to believe in Yakumo's ability, was holding his breath as he

waited for Yakumo's next words.

'On the day of the incident, you came to this clock tower. Why?' Yakumo asked Haruka.

Though many of Haruka's memories of the day were vague, she remembered that clearly.

'I saw Kanae going inside the clock tower...'

'Was she the only one you saw?'

'I think so...'

Haruka's memories were vague so she couldn't be sure.

'This is important. Try to remember it clearly.'

After Yakumo said that, Haruka went through her memories once more. The scene ran through her head.

'Come to think of it, there was somebody else. I didn't see his face, but there was a man... Kanae was following him...'

She looked a bit odd, so Haruka followed Kanae as well.

'The man who went to the clock tower then was probably him –'

Yakumo pointed at Nishizawa.

Nishizawa looked away without answering.

'Wait. So three people were at the clock tower that day?' asked Gotou.

'Correct,' responded Yakumo confidently.

'But I...'

'You lost your memories of the event. You probably fainted upon entering the clock tower.'

Now that Yakumo said that, Haruka felt like that was the case.

'Then who killed her?' asked Gotou in confusion.

'You know already, don't you?' said Yakumo with a shrug.

However, it didn't look like anybody knew. They shared glances and shook their heads.

Haruka didn't know either.

'It's simple. It was the third person in the clock tower – Nishizawa-san,' Yakumo said in a flat tone.

– What?

Gotou, Ishii and Makoto all cocked their head. It looked like they had the same question.

Sakurai was also shocked, with his eyes wide. Nishizawa had his eyes shut tightly and looked pained.

'Why would he?'

Gotou was the first to speak.

'Let's ask the man in question.'

After Yakumo said that, he crouched in front of Nishizawa and peered at his ace.

'You were at the clock tower at the time of the incident, right?' Yakumo asked quietly.

Nishizawa opened his eyes and glared at Yakumo, but then he looked away.

'Like I know. It wasn't me...'

Yakumo looked at Nishizawa and murmured, 'I see...' Then, he went to Sakurai.

'Sakurai-san, weren't you called out to this clock tower on the day of the incident?'

Though Sakurai looked troubled, he responded, 'Yes...'

'Who was the one who called you out?'

At this next question, Sakurai looked down. It felt like he knew what his words would engender.

For a while, Sakurai did nothing, but he finally lifted his head.

'Nishizawa – he called me out. He said he wanted to talk about The Ghost of the Clock Tower.'

'The same as today, right?'

'Yes.'

Yakumo nodded in satisfaction at Sakurai's response and went back to Nishizawa.

'You said you weren't at the clock tower earlier, right?'

'Urgh...'

'Don't you think that's strange? For the person who called Sakurai to the clock tower not to be here –'

Under Yakumo's questioning, Nishizawa's forehead had beads of sweat. It was obvious that he was cornered.

Yakumo continued. This was the turning point.

'You were here, and you met Kanae-san here –'

'What's your proof for that ridiculous statement?' objected Nishizawa strongly. It was true that what Yakumo had been saying so far was only conjecture.

However, Yakumo didn't falter at all.

'I have proof. I heard it from Kanae-san.'

'She's dead. That's...'

'Have you forgotten? I can see the spirits of the dead – that is, ghosts. Kanae-san's spirit is right there.'

Yakumo pointed above Haruka's head.

Haruka looked where Yakumo was pointing. She couldn't see anything, but it was different for Yakumo.

He probably saw Kanae there.

'Will you doubt my red left eye while believing a rumour about a clock tower?'

Yakumo's question made Nishizawa let out a groan.

'I know this is a forceful method, but I had to shake you in order to get you to act,' Yakumo whispered in Nishizawa's ear.

That moment, Nishizawa's eyes went open in shock.

'Then that was...'

'Yes. I set a trap so that you wouldn't be able to escape.'

'That's cowardly.'

'I don't want to hear that from you,' said Yakumo, voice dripping with detest. HE looked at Nishizawa coldly.

'So Nishizawa killed Kanae?' asked Gotou.

'Though part of it is conjecture – ' began Yakumo. 'That day, Nishizawa-san called Sakurai-san to the clock tower. However, Kanae-san found out and tried to stop Nishizawa-san.'

'Wait. That would mean...' said Haruka.

Yakumo nodded slightly. 'Yes. She knew that Nishizawa-san was acting strangely not because of a possession but because he wanted revenge.'

This fact from Yakumo made Haruka look down.

Her heart felt heavy. It wasn't because Kanae had kept it secret. Haruka hated herself for not realizing.

'That night, Kanae-san met Nishizawa-san in the clock tower and tried to convince him not to do anything stupid. Then – '

'I went in without knowing anything,' said Haruka.

Yakumo nodded. 'Didn't you hear arguing voices from the top of the clock tower?'

– Now that he mentions it.

'I think I did. I didn't hear what they said, but I could tell people were fighting...'

Haruka held her head and went through her foggy memories.

'When you went to the room at the top, you saw Nishizawa-san inside. Of course it was too dark for you to tell who it was, but...'

As Haruka listened to Yakumo, it felt like the fog in her head was being lifted.

Finally, she saw some images in her head, though they were fragmented.

'Yes... There was somebody here. When I tried to scream, he covered my mouth... I tried to escape and grabbed a pole nearby and was waving it around, but I was pushed down...' said Haruka, her voice shaking.

That was all she could remember.

'Nishizawa-san pushed you away and you fainted after your head hit the wall – '

'Stop it! Stop just saying whatever you want!' screamed Nishizawa.

'Shut up.'

Unexpectedly, Shinoda was the one who stopped Nishizawa. He looked at Yakumo to tell him to continue.

Yakumo nodded and began once more.

'After you fainted, Kanae-san argued with Nishizawa-san. She was frantic in trying to get him to stop his revenge against Sakurai-san. She was probably also angry that you, her friend, had been hurt.'

'Kanae – '

Haruka pressed a hand against her chest. It was hard to breathe.

She didn't want to hear the rest – she really felt that. However, she felt like avoiding it would be putting Kanae's actions to waste so she bore with it.

'While they were arguing, Nishizawa-san lost himself in his emotions and hit Kanae-san with the metal pipe you had picked up earlier. After that, he wiped away his fingerprints and made you hold it once more, put blood on your face and fabricated the crime scene – '

After Yakumo finished, the room was as quiet as if it were submerged in water.

It was a heavy silence that made your breath catch.

'What are you saying!?! You have no proof!' screamed Nishizawa with a pale face.

However, his voice resounded emptily. It was clear that everyone in the room didn't believe him.

'It is true that I have no physical evidence. But that is just for now.'

Yakumo walked up to Nishizawa and stared him in the eye.

'...'

Under Yakumo's gaze, Nishizawa's lips trembled slightly.

'Have you heard of a luminol test?'

'What?'

'Ishii-san, please tell him.'

The conversation suddenly turned to Ishii, who hesitantly began to explain.

'Ah, yes. To put it simply, it's a way to see bloodstains you can't normally see with your eyes.'

'If blood gets on clothes, it won't just come out from washing, right?'

Yakumo's words were less a question than a request for confirmation.

'Yes. It would be impossible to completely rid them of blood that way.'

'Nishizawa-san, what do you think would happen if Kanae-san's blood was on your clothes? You claimed earlier that you were not at the scene on the day of the crime.'

Nishizawa's head slumped at Yakumo's final words. His shoulders were shaking too, and his eyes filled with tears.

'I didn't want to kill her... It just ended up that way... Kanae-chan was getting in the way of my revenge...' Nishizawa sobbed. Haruka felt no pity at all when she looked at him.

Nishizawa's words were too selfish.

'You just think about yourself – '

Yakumo spoke before Haruka could.

'Eh?'

'You really are selfish. You're always looking for excuses to say that you're not at fault, but you should know best the reason that Mizuhara Noriko-san killed herself – '

Nishizawa looked shocked.

'W-what are you saying!?! Noriko was killed! That's why I wanted revenge...'

'You were tricked.'

Nishizawa's face twisted further. 'Tricked? Me?'

'I'll say this first. Mizuhara Noriko-san's ghost is not here – '

'You're lying! I saw her! What do you know!?' screamed Nishizawa. His body was twisting as he did so.

Yakumo sighed slightly as he watched him.

'You must understand. Please don't make me repeat myself. My red left eye can see the spirits of the dead. Mizuhara-san's ghost is not here.'

'Then the rumour about the clock tower...' interrupted Haruka.

'There is no such rumour. Correct, Makoto-san?'

Yakumo's red left eye looked at Makoto.

'Correct. I asked many students, but none of them knew about the rumour...' Makoto replied firmly.

'But Kanae...'

Kanae had talked about the rumour of a ghost that showed up at the clock tower when she went to consult Haruka.

If there was no rumour, why would Kanae say that?

'That's the problem – '

Yakumo looked straight at Haruka.

His red left eye seemed to be asking if Haruka was prepared. No matter what truth came from Yakumo's lips – no matter how hard it was to accept – Haruka was ready to hear it.

Haruka nodded, and Yakumo began.

'Even though there is no ghost here, Nishizawa-san heard Mizuhara-san's voice. What on earth could that mean?'

'Tell us what it means.'

Gotou stomped on the ground impatiently.

'It's simple. Somebody pretended to be Mizuhara-san's ghost to fool Nishizawa-san.'

Haruka felt a burning pain in her chest at Yakumo's words. It was because she knew who it was.

'Who? Who would do that?' pressed Gotou.

Yakumo looked at Haruka again. She knew. She was prepared. Haruka silently nodded once more.

After a long silence, Yakumo said, 'It was Kanae-san –'

– So it really was her.

Now that Haruka thought over it, there had been a few strange things. Kanae hadn't seen the ghost, but she had believed the rumour.

That wasn't all. Kanae hadn't said she wanted them to do something about the ghost. She had said she wanted them to save Nishizawa, who was acting strange. But –

'Why would Kanae do that?' asked Haruka.

Yakumo looked at the mirror.

'It was revenge.'

'Revenge.'

'Isn't that so – Professor Onda?'

Yakumo's words made everyone in the room swallow their breath.

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Makoto felt a quiver of fear upon hearing Yakumo's words.

She had known somewhere in her heart, but she hadn't wanted to believe it. When she looked to her side, she saw Onda standing there silently. She couldn't tell his true intentions from his fearless profile.

'Does the professor have something to do with the case?' interrupted Gotou.

'Yes, I invited him here because he is involved.'

Yakumo slowly walked towards Onda.

Onda's expression still did not change. That attitude felt incredibly unnatural.

'Are you saying I did something?' Onda asked calmly.

'Before I explain, I should say why Mizuhara Noriko-san died.'

Nishizawa immediately interrupted, 'Noriko was killed... by Sakurai...'

Nishizawa's words lacked strength, unlike how they had been earlier. The doubt within him was probably growing with no way for him to stop it.

'I have said this already, but Mizuhara-san committed suicide. There is clear evidence. Isn't that so, Sakurai-san?'

Yakumo ran a hand through his messy hair in irritation and looked straight at Sakurai.

Sakurai looked down to avoid Yakumo's gaze and bit his lip hard.

'I see – it can't be helped if you don't want to talk about it. Makoto-san.'

Yakumo looked towards Makoto once more.

'Yes.'

Makoto felt her pulse speed up as she spoke.

'There original The Ghost of the Clock Tower file was on Mizuhara-san's laptop at her house, correct?'

'Yes.'

'Was that exactly the same as the one published under Sakurai-san's name?'

Makoto felt her heart jolt at Yakumo's question.

She had had predicted this after reading the original, but the further the conversation advanced, the more she didn't want to believe it.

That said, she couldn't keep her mouth shut here.

Makoto gave Onda a quick glance before answering.

'No, the published work was a revision of the original.'

'What was revised?'

'The first half was completely cut out.'

The more Makoto spoke, the more her heart felt like it would be crushed.

'What was the content of the first half?'

'It was...'

Makoto's breath caught in her throat. She couldn't say any more.

She had never thought this would happen. She didn't know what she could believe in and what she should doubt any more.

Yakumo's eyes narrowed as he looked at Makoto. Then, he nodded.

'Fine. I will explain the rest – '

After saying that, Yakumo looked at the faces of everyone in the room, one by one.

After a long pause, Yakumo began his explanation.

'The published version of The Ghost of the Clock Tower was about a woman who unexpectedly killed somebody and gradually lost herself under the weight of the guilt. However, there was nothing about what the protagonist had experienced or who she had killed. Then, it ended in her suicide – '

Haruka looked surprised at Yakumo's explanation. Gotou and Ishii also

furrowed their brows as they looked at each other. Shinoda looked the same way.

Nishizawa was just in shock. Sakurai's shoulders were shaking in what looked like fear.

Then – Onda alone was looking straight at Yakumo with no change in expression.

'The scenes that were cut from the original work that Makoto-san discussed earlier explained why the protagonist killed someone.'

'It was us... It was our fault...'

Suddenly, Sakurai started to cry in a voice that was like a scream.

Yakumo looked at him coldly and then turned to face everyone once more.

'The female protagonist was on a drive with friends. Her boyfriend was driving, and she was sitting in the passenger seat. In the back, there was a man – an upperclassman – and a man in the same year. The upperclassman had taken a dangerous drug and was intoxicated.'

Though Yakumo's tone was flat, there was a faint anger there.

Nishizawa seemed to understand what Yakumo was talking about and said hoarsely, 'Stop...'

However, Yakumo did not stop.

'The man driving and the man in the back began to argue over something trivial. Because of that, the driver wasn't paying attention to the road. As a result, they hit a young parent and child crossing the intersection – '

'Please! Please stop!'

Nishizawa clung to Yakumo in tears, but Yakumo shook him off and continued.

'The female protagonist immediately tried to call an ambulance, but her

boyfriend, the driver, stopped her.'

'Why?' interrupted Ishii, seeming confused.

'In order to run away from their own crime. The driver and the man in the back who had argued with him moved the sleeping upperclassman to the driver's seat. Then, they took the female protagonist and ran –'

Here, Yakumo looked at Onda.

Onda said nothing. However, there was the trace of tears in his eyes.

'The parent and child who were hit struck the traffic light post. Though they were bleeding a lot, they had still been alive. However, the female protagonist was unable to fight the men and was forced to leave the scene. That is the murder in the original *The Ghost of the Clock Tower*.'

Makoto held her breath and bit her lower lip as she listened to Yakumo.

– It was too cruel and sad.

'C-could it be that the accident in the original...' said Ishii in a shaking voice.

'Yes. It was an accident that actually occurred three years ago. It was right where you saw a ghost, Ishii-san.'

'What...'

'Wait. If that was an actual accident, why wasn't he arrested?'

Gotou pointed at Nishizawa.

'Another man was made to look like the culprit,' Yakumo said in a flat tone.

'Didn't the guy say he wasn't driving?'

Gotou's comment made sense, but –

'Gotou-san, would you believe somebody who was under the influence of drugs if they said they weren't driving?'

'I...'

Gotou fell silent after hearing Yakumo's explanation.

As written in the original draft, the car was the upperclassman's, unfortunately for him. The police had no reason to suspect anything.

'Then was the novel...'

'Yes. It wasn't a novel. It was Mizuhara Noriko-san's diary.'

Makoto had thought the same thing as Yakumo.

Mizuhara Noriko's *The Ghost of the Clock Tower* was not a novel but a diary.

Because of her writing talent and the deletion of the first scenes, it had been treated as a novel, fortunately or unfortunately.

'That's... wrong...' Nishizawa said frantically.

Yakumo looked at him coldly. 'What's wrong? You looked away from a reality that you didn't like and decided that her death was a murder. Even though she was worrying and suffering right beside you, you didn't even try to notice.'

'That's not t-true... I... wanted to protect her...' sobbed Nishizawa.

Yakumo brought his face close enough to Nishizawa's for their noses to touch and glared at him with his red eye.

'What isn't true? The one who was driving was no other than you. You weren't trying to protect her – you were trying to protect yourself, weren't you?'

'...'

'Similarly, the person who killed her was no other than you yourself.'

'Aaaaahhhhhh!'

Nishizawa screamed, scratching at his throat.

He probably couldn't accept reality, but doing that would not turn back time.

'What trash...' said Gotou, spitting the words out.

Makoto felt the same way. Nishizawa had thought about nobody but himself. Even though that had led his girlfriend to her death, he blamed even that on somebody else. There was nothing to empathise with.

Makoto had one question though.

'Please explain one thing to me.'

'What is it?'

Yakumo raised his left eyebrow.

'Sakurai-san was in the same car, right? Even though he had removed the first half, submitting Mizuhara-san's diary for an award was like revealing their own crime. Why did he do that?'

Makoto couldn't understand his reason.

'It was Sakura-san's own method of memorial and atonement. Isn't that so?'

Sakurai nodded in response to Yakumo's words.

He didn't have the courage to reveal their crime now, so he had put the diary out into the world as a tribute to Mizuhara Noriko –

Sakurai had probably meant exactly what he said when he had claimed that the ghost in the clock tower had made him write it.

He hadn't had the courage to declare the truth, but he had implied in that way that it was Mizuhara Noriko's work.

'Now, let us return to the topic at hand – why did Kanae-san pretend to be a ghost and deceive Nishizawa-san?'

Yakumo turned to face each of them. Nobody responded.

However, Makoto knew.

'Kanae-san was the younger sister of the woman who had died in the accident three years ago...' replied Makoto.

Yakumo nodded.

'Really!?' exclaimed Haruka in surprise.

'In order to avenge her older sister, Kanae-san pretended to be Mizuhara Noriko-san's ghost and made Nishizawa-san and Sakurai-san hate each other.'

'But then why did Kanae ask for my help?' asked Haruka.

It was true that it was strange for somebody planning revenge to bring in Haruka and Yakumo.

'Kanae-san became afraid,' said Yakumo.

'Eh?' Haruka looked confused.

'She had just wanted to pretend to be the ghost and threaten them, so that they would reveal the truth – but Nishizawa-san actually tried to kill Sakurai-san.'

'And so she became afraid...' Haruka said in a hoarse voice.

'Correct. She couldn't bear it if another person died because of her. That was why she stopped her plan halfway and consulted you, a person she trusted, about a spiritual phenomenon.'

Now that Haruka had heard the truth, she just looked into space in shock.

'In the first place, Kanae-san did want revenge, but she hadn't pretended to be a ghost of her own volition.'

'What?' asked Gotou.

Yakumo was as expressionless as a Noh mask as he slowly walked towards Onda.

'Somebody told Kanae-san the truth of the incident and asked her to pretend to be Mizuhara Noriko-san's ghost for revenge. That was you – wasn't it,

Professor Onda?’

‘Wait. Why would a university professor do that?’ asked Gotou.

Yakumo sighed in exasperation and ran a hand through his messy hair.

‘Gotou-san, you really should change your habit of not reading files properly.’

‘What?’

‘Professor Onda is Kanae-san’s brother-in-law. In short, the people who passed away in the accident three years ago were Professor Onda’s wife, Kasumi-san, and his daughter.’

‘What!?’

Gotou was shocked into silence.

Makoto had read in her own newspaper about how Onda’s wife and child had died in a traffic accident. She hadn’t been able to contact him then, thinking that he had to be haggard.

She hadn’t been able to mention it when she went to talk to him about interviewing Sakurai either.

She had thought that he had recovered from his loss and sadness and that he was walking his own life. No, she might have just been hoping for that.

When she read the original *The Ghost of the Clock Tower*, she had understood immediately that the victims in the accident were Onda’s wife and child.

That wasn’t all. When Yakumo had asked her to bring Onda, she had realised what role Onda had played.

And yet, she had wanted to believe in him. No, that wasn’t it. She hadn’t wanted to believe that the kind Onda she knew would have been possessed by the idea of revenge.

'Professor, why...'

Somehow, Makoto managed to say just those words.

'Would you be able to forgive them?' Onda's voice, filled with sadness, echoed through the room.

Nobody could respond to his question. It was impossible to understand the true meaning of the sadness of having a loved one taken from you without experiencing it yourself.

Onda looked at everyone and the room before continuing.

'I found out the truth about the accident after reading the original *The Ghost of the Clock Tower*.'

'How did you get a hold of it?' asked Makoto.

She felt like that was all she could do right now.

'Three years ago, it was sent to me from Mizuhara Noriko-san. Of course there hadn't been a title then. I knew it was a draft, but I hadn't planned on reading it. It was the name of a woman I didn't know, and I had been mentally exhausted after losing my wife and child...'

'When did you read it?'

'I think it was about half a year ago... A certain man came to me.'

'A man?'

'The man who was said to have been driving during the accident. He said he had just been let out on good behaviour. In tears, he told me that he hadn't been driving and that the actual driver was somebody else. He told me the name.'

'You recognised the name then.'

'Yes. It was the name of a student in the literature circle. And the woman who had sent the draft – '

What amazing fate.

Onda, at his new workplace, had met with the person who had actually killed his wife and child.

'Then, I read Mizuhara Noriko-san's diary for the first time and found out the truth of the incident. I was shaking in anger.'

Onda looked at Nishizawa and Sakurai.

Under the pressure of Onda's mad eyes, the two were frozen in fear.

'It was as if they had forgotten their past crime. That wasn't all. They had to have noticed that I was related to the victims, and yet – '

Makoto could practically hear Onda's heart creaking.

Just as he said, it was terrifying. Though there was no way the two had forgotten what they had done, they had acted completely normal with Onda, as if nothing had happened.

Onda's rage upon realising that must have been indescribable.

'I gave them a chance – '

'A chance?'

'Yes. I hid Mizuhara Noriko-san's diary in the literature circle room and told them to clean it.'

Onda had hoped that they would tell the truth upon finding Mizuhara Noriko's diary.

However, Sakurai, upon finding the diary, had revised the contents and submitted it for an award.

Though Sakurai had meant that as atonement and memorial, Onda couldn't accept that.

'You were the one who covered the scene of the traffic accident with red paint.'

'Yes. I sent them a memo with the address of the scene.'

'You were making them recall the past accident.'

'Yes, but the two of them didn't care...'

Onda shook his head weakly.

Onda had given them so many warnings before acting, hoping that they would come forward on their own to atone –

But his hopes had been completely betrayed.

When Makoto thought about how Onda must have felt, she couldn't breathe.

'They didn't feel any guilt. They went on with their lives, fought about silly things. It was depraved. They had taken the lives of my child and her mother – would you be able to forgive them?'

The fury emanating from Onda made everyone swallow their breath.

Makoto thought about it. To be honest, she wouldn't have been able to forgive them. Losing both wife and child in an accident, with the culprits forgetting completely and going on with their lives. Onda had probably been burning with anger that had no place to go.

'Wasn't it yourself that you couldn't actually forgive?'

Yakumo was the one who spoke.

'What do you mean by that?' asked Onda.

Yakumo sent him a sharp gaze.

'If you only felt angry at them, you wouldn't have needed to do something so roundabout.'

'What are you trying to say?'

'You regretted that you hadn't immediately read the diary Mizuhara-san sent you – am I wrong?'

Onda looked down slightly at Yakumo's question.

'Perhaps. If I had read the diary, she wouldn't have committed suicide...'

Perhaps Onda was right.

When Mizuhara Noriko sent Onda the diary, she had probably meant to atone for what had been done.

If Onda had approached her, she might not have thought about suicide.

However, that was only a theory. Nobody could blame Onda for that, and Onda should not have blamed himself either.

'The revenge this time included Mizuhara-san's portion as well. That was why you used such a roundabout method,' declared Yakumo.

Onda smiled, rather sadly.

'Perhaps... Do you think I was wrong?' asked Onda.

'Yes, you are wrong – '

Yakumo spoke without any hesitation.

Those words, clean and clear-cut, made all the doubts within Makoto leave.

'Professor, you were wrong. There must have been countless ways to make the truth come to light without such revenge,' said Makoto.

A laugh escaped Onda's lips.

'Not everyone is as strong as you.'

'Those words are not something I would expect from a professor.'

'Correct. They aren't the words of a professor. They are the words of a husband and father who lost his wife and his child.'

There were tears in Onda's eyes.

Even if Onda understood the logic, his heart wouldn't accept it. No matter what Makoto said here, it wouldn't reach Onda's heart.

'What sophistry.'

Yakumo was the one who spoke.

'Did you not see Kanae-san? She was tormented by guilt as she cooperated with you and had tried to do something...'

Yakumo's words brought the strength back to Makoto's sinking heart.

'Yes. Why didn't you look properly at her suffering – '

After Makoto said that, Onda narrowed his eyes and looked at the ceiling.

'I did...' Onda said in a hoarse voice. Makoto didn't know what he was looking at, but she did understand one thing.

Onda truly regretted this incident.

He had involved Kanae and she had died. That wasn't all – Haruka, who wasn't involved at all, had been put in custody as a murder suspect.

It was a recreation of the accident three years ago.

Onda, who knew everything, had suffered, worried and fought himself just as Mizuhara Noriko-san had done.

That was why he had come here with Makoto and told the truth without protest.

Tears fell from the corners of Onda's eyes –

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'So it's over...'

After a silence, Gotou spoke as if the words had been wrung out of his throat.

The truth that had come out of Yakumo's mouth ran through Gotou's confused head and shook his heart.

Nishizawa and Sakurai both had their heads hung low. It looked like they didn't have the energy to speak.

Ishii and Haruka were in shock. Shinoda was stunned as well.

'Not yet,' Yakumo said in a sharp tone.

In this room, Yakumo was the only one who had not relaxed his attention.

'What do you mean?'

'Exactly what I said. There was one other conspirator in this case.'

After declaring that, Yakumo moved to stand in front of the mirror –

It was as if a violent fire of anger had engulfed his back.

'You can see from there, right?' Yakumo said to the mirror.

It was said that the mirror in this room was connected to the underworld.

From how Yakumo was speaking now, it was as if it was true.

'See? What do you mean?'

'I mean exactly what I said – '

After Gotou asked that Yakumo picked up a block of wood that was nearby.

'That's not an explanation!'

'I'll show you now.'

The moment Yakumo said that, he threw the block at the mirror.

The mirror cracked with a piercing noise –

'Somebody has been looking through here this whole time.'

Yakumo was pointing at a small camera. The mirror was probably a one-way mirror.

There was an antenna on the camera to send data wireless.

'Who on earth...' said Gotou.

Yakumo smiled faintly. 'You don't know?'

'I'm asking because I don't know.'

'The other conspirator – the person who was blamed for the accident.'

Yakumo's explanation made even Gotou understand the situation.

Gotou had investigated the man's history without knowing why, but in an accident three years ago, there had been a man made to look like the perpetrator. That was –

'What's that?' asked Shinoda, seeming to sense something.

Gotou looked and saw smoke coming from downstairs, along with the smell of burning.

'It seems he's set a fire. To think he would take such drastic measures...' said Yakumo bitterly.

This was bad. They were on the top floor of the clock tower. If they didn't run before the fire got worse, they would all die here.

'Shinoda! Take him! Ishii, you get those two!' ordered Gotou. Shinoda covered his mouth and nose and brought Nishizawa down the stairs.

Ishii took Onda and Makoto after them.

Yakumo lent his shoulder to Haruka, who had hurt her foot, and helped her up.

'Please go first,' Yakumo said.

Gotou nodded and dragged Sakurai down the stairs.

When he glanced back, he saw that Haruka couldn't walk on her own, and Yakumo was having trouble.

'I'll help.'

Gotou held out a hand, but Yakumo refused it.

'It's fine. Please go first.'

'But...'

'Quickly! Or it'll be too late!'

Yakumo's voice was ragged.

It really wasn't the time to be hanging around here. It would probably be faster to take Sakurai down and come back to help Yakumo and Haruka after.

'Wait!' shouted Gotou, and he dragged Sakurai down the stairs in a rush.

The farther down he went, the thicker the flames became, but fortunately, the flames hadn't spread that much.

'Hurry!' shouted Gotou as he ran down the stairs.

Sakurai stumbled a few times, perhaps because the handcuffs were making it difficult for him to walk, but Gotou kept forcing him back up to run.

When Gotou got to the ground floor, he pushed Sakurai out the backdoor and tried to go back up the stairs.

However, something jumped out from behind the stairs and blocked Gotou's way.

Though it was too dark for Gotou to see the man's face clearly, he could guess who it was from the uniform.

'You...'

Before Gotou could finish, the man raised something that looked like a pickaxe and attacked –

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'Yakumo-kun... go first...' said Haruka even as she coughed.

Though Yakumo was trying to support Haruka as they walked, it wasn't going well. They hadn't even reached the stairs yet.

At this rate, the two of them would die either because of the smoke or the fire.

Haruka didn't want to die, but Haruka wouldn't be able to bear it if Yakumo died because of her.

'Don't talk. You'll breathe in the smoke,' Yakumo said sharply.

It looked like he had no intentions of leaving Haruka behind.

'But...'

'I proved you were innocent. Don't give up until the end. And...'

'What?'

'I still have things I want to ask you.'

'Things you want to ask me?'

Yes. So don't give up yet – '

Even as Yakumo supported Haruka, he desperately walked forward.

However, the floor suddenly shook underneath them.

Perhaps part of the clock tower had collapsed.

Haruka lost her balance and fell.

She tried to stand up, but she couldn't. She felt like the pain in her foot was getting worse.

'Are you all right?'

Yakumo looked at Haruka's face.

There was unusual uneasiness in his expression.

The room was getting hotter, and the smoke was growing thicker. At this rate, even if they did reach the stairs, they might not be able to go down them.

'Yakumo-kun, please. Go first... I'll be fine...' said Haruka, pushing Haruka away. She didn't want Yakumo to die.

'I'm definitely taking you with me.'

'You can't.'

'Just be quiet for a second!' shouted Yakumo.

Haruka's shoulders jolted at Yakumo's voice, which sounded so different from how it usually did.

Though Yakumo opened his mouth to say something else, he suddenly stopped.

Yakumo's gaze went through the air as if following something.

'I see... That's right...' Yakumo murmured. He was smiling faintly.

'Eh?'

'It's Kanae-san – '

'What about Kanae?'

Yakumo stood up without answering Haruka's question.

He must have decided to go on by himself – so Haruka thought, but she was wrong. Yakumo walked to the window on the side of the room.

He unlocked it and opened it. Then, he leaned through it and looked down.

– He can't be planning to jump, right?

They were fifty metres up. It had been proven three years ago that this wasn't a height you could jump from and live.

Haruka thought that maybe they could put a rope through, but they didn't have a rope around.

Yakumo walked back to Haruka and said, 'Can you believe in me?'

His deep red left eye had the light of strong determination in it, different from

earlier.

'Yes.'

Haruka responded with a firm nod.

Haruka hadn't doubted Yakumo once since the beginning of the case – no, since much earlier than that.

Yakumo didn't talk about himself much.

Haruka often didn't know what he was thinking, and there were tons of things she didn't know about him, but – she felt like she had seen what sort of person Yakumo was from the closest vantage point.

She felt that she knew what rooted his heart.

That was why she had never doubted him at all.

'All right.'

With a smile, Yakumo said that and held a hand out towards Haruka.

Haruka took the hand and gripped it tightly.

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21

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Gotou just barely managed to avoid the pickaxe and he turned to face the man again –

'Seo Minoru.'

When Gotou said that name, the man replied with a click of his tongue.

He was right. The man in front of him was Seo Minoru, the university security guard.

Gotou hadn't understood when Yakumo told him to investigate Seo's history.

Even after finding out that Seo had caused an accident three years ago and had been in prison until half a year earlier, he hadn't been able to connect it to this case.

But now he understood.

The man whose life had been ruined after he was made to take the blame for Nishizawa and Sakurai –

And, as Yakumo said, the other conspirator in this case.

Seo had been watching the situation in the clock tower through the camera hidden behind the mirror. Probably on the day of the incident too –

Seo had been the one who'd testified that Haruka had killed Kanae.

Why had he lied? Because if Nishizawa had been arrested then, he wouldn't have been able to complete his revenge.

Not just Nishizawa. He had to take revenge on Sakurai too.

Seo, watching through the camera, knew that Haruka had fainted before Nishizawa killed Kanae.

Then, Nishizawa had fabricated the crime scene to make it look like Haruka had killed Kanae –

Seo testified that he saw Haruka hit Kanae and probably had said that Haruka had fainted when he caught her.

'I know how you feel, but stop it already,' said Gotou, but Seo took that moment to bring down the pickaxe again.

Gotou rolled to the side to avoid it.

Just as he'd said, he understood how Seo's felt, but that didn't mean he could forgive him.

'You must've felt so awful you wanted to die when you were blamed for a crime you didn't do! You understand that pain, so why would you do the

same thing!?’ screamed Gotou.

Seo stopped. Whether it was the smoke or his feelings of sudden emptiness, tears fell from Seo’s eyes.

‘They didn’t even notice when they saw me...’ said Seo hoarsely.

Not only were the people who had completely ruined his life living peacefully, they had completely forgotten what they’d done.

It hurt Gotou just thinking about how awful that had to feel. That was probably what brought Seo to revenge.

But –

‘But what you did is still wrong!’

‘What do you know!?’

Seo raised the pickaxe again.

– This is bad!

The moment that thought flashed through Gotou’s mind, something jumped out at Seo, fought with him, and fell to the ground.

– It was Ishii.

Ishii was doing well at first, but in no time at all, the situation was reversed.

Seo sat on top of Ishii and held up the pickaxe.

‘Get a hold of yourself!’

Gotou kicked Seo’s face as hard as he could.

Seo’s eyes went wide and he fell, splayed out on the floor. He stopped moving.

‘Ishii! Take this guy outside!’

‘Y-yes sir.’

Ishii tried to take Seo out on Gotou's orders, but he was too weak to do it.

– Honestly.

Gotou helped Ishii and they somehow managed to pull Seo out of the clock tower.

– Next is Yakumo.

Gotou tried to go back inside the clock tower, but then a portion of the ceiling collapsed and blocked the exit.

– What now!?

Gotou still tried to go inside, but Ishii clung to him.

'Let go! Yakumo and Haruka-chan are still inside!'

'B-but... if you go inside, you'll die too, Detective Gotou!'

'Shut up! I'm going! I won't let anyone die in front of me!'

Gotou forced Ishii away, but this time Shinoda came and forced Gotou down.

'Stop!'

'Let go! Yakumo!'

A loud noise interrupted Gotou's shout. A portion of the clock tower crumbled and bricks came crashing down.

– I couldn't save them.

'Damn it!'

Gotou's scream echoed through the night.

'Please don't speak so loudly.'

Just as Gotou was falling into despair, he heard a familiar voice.

He turned and saw Yakumo standing there. He was carrying Haruka on his back. His face was dirty with soot and his usual white shirt was in an awful

state. It looked like they were alive.

'You... You're OK...'

'Yes. There is an emergency ladder on the side of this tower,' Yakumo said casually.

'Why didn't you say that earlier!?'

'I'd forgotten myself, but she told me.'

'Haruka-chan?'

Gotou looked at Haruka. She shook her head slightly.

– Then who?

'Kanae-san did.'

'I see...'

'In any case, this is finally over.'

As Yakumo said that, he let Haruka off and sat her down.

Shinoda, who had walked over, silently uncuffed Haruka's wrists.

It really was over now – that feeling spread through Gotou's chest.

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Notes:

[1] [Here](#) is an example of one of those vehicles.

終章 EPILOGUE

その後

Epilogue

-

'Sorry to bother – '

Gotou and Ishii had come to Yakumo's secret hideaway, the Movie Research Circle room.

'If you know you're a bother, please leave.'

Yakumo sat in his usual chair and let out a bored yawn.

'You're the one who called us here!'

'Is that so?'

'You!'

Gotou was about to hit Yakumo, but Ishii hurriedly stopped him.

'Honestly...' grumbled Gotou as he sat on a chair.

Though he didn't like Yakumo's brazen attitude, he was also relieved that Yakumo was back to normal.

To be honest, he'd been worried for a moment there.

If Haruka had been arrested as the perpetrator of a murder, Yakumo would probably never have trusted anyone again.

Now that Gotou thought about it, he himself might have only been able to continue believing in Haruka because he just couldn't accept the other possibility, just as a child refused to believe things that weren't pleasant.

That was fine though.

Even if belief was just putting people into your own image of them, there had to be people who could be saved that way.

Gotou knew it was a selfish way of thinking, but still –

'So how is the investigation going?' asked Yakumo, crossing his arms.

'Nowhere,' replied Gotou with a sigh.

It was great that they had cleared Haruka's name, but the various facts were all jumbled. They had also proven that the culprit for the traffic accident three years ago was somebody else. The investigation department was in a clamour.

'That isn't a response,' Yakumo said, displeased.

Gotou didn't like Yakumo's response, but it was true.

Gotou explained the current situation. Nishizawa, Sakurai, Onda and Seo were all giving testimonies without fuss.

It was exactly what Yakumo had revealed in the clock tower. Though things were still confusing, it looked like the case was coming to a close.

After Gotou finished, Yakumo said curtly, 'Is that so?' and narrowed his eyes.

Gotou didn't know what Yakumo was thinking now that the case was over, but he felt like his expression was gentler than it had been in the past.

Then, Gotou recalled something. 'Right. Shinoda has a message for you.'

'What is it?'

Yakumo frowned in displeasure.

'Sorry for everything – that's what he said.'

To be honest, Gotou had never expected that Shinoda with his pride would ever apologise.

'I think he was probably speaking to you, Gotou-san, rather than me.'

Yakumo let out a chuckle.

Gotou didn't understand. There was no reason for Shinoda to apologise to him.

'Um – '

As the conversation siled, Ishii spoke.

'What is it?'

Yakumo raised his left eyebrow.

'What happened to the ghost at the intersection?' Ishii asked timidly.

Gotou wanted to know too. Ishii had seen the ghost of Onda's wife, who had died in a traffic accident there.

Was she still wandering there?

'I will go confirm that now – ' Yakumo declared.

-

2

-

Makoto placed flowers by the traffic light –

There was still red paint on it.

She shut her eyes, put her hands together and prayed.

Onda's face suddenly came up in her head. Makoto had looked up to him, a dignified man who always took care of others.

Why had Onda done something like this for revenge?

Makoto had thought about it for a long time, but she had not reached a conclusion.

Perhaps losing somebody you loved could change you that much.

'Makoto-san, you came as well.'

Makoto looked up at the voice and saw Ishii.

Yakumo and Gotou were there as well.

'Hello,' said Makoto.

'Hey,' Gotou replied, raising his hand. Yakumo gave her a lazy 'Hello' as well.

'Why are you here together?' asked Makoto.

'Ask him,' Gotou replied, pointing at Yakumo.

'Professor Onda's wife was wandering this place, so I came to confirm what she is doing now,' said Yakumo, running a hand through his hair in irritation.

'Is that so?'

Makoto wanted to know as well.

What was Onda's wife's spirit doing now? Was she still wandering?

Yakumo suddenly turned his gaze towards the intersection like he had noticed something there.

Makoto looked as well, but she saw nothing there. However, it was different for Yakumo. His red left eye could see things they couldn't.

For a while, Yakumo just looked at the intersection, but his expression suddenly softened.

'What is it?' asked Makoto.

Yakumo looked up at the blue sky.

'She's gone – '

'I see...'

Makoto-san, could I request one thing?' asked Yakumo, still looking at the sky.

'What is it?'

'I want to give Onda-sensei a message.'

'A message?'

'Yes. "Our daughter and I will always be looking over you."'

Yakumo turned a sad but gentle face towards Makoto.

'Is that...'

'Yes. It's a message from Professor Onda's wife.'

'All right,' Makoto said with a nod.

Onda was in questioning, she didn't know what he would be charged with, so she didn't know when she would be able to see him.

No matter how much time it took though, she felt like she should give this message herself.

Makoto felt it was her duty.

-

3

-

Haruka looked up at the clock tower covered in soot –

When she looked at it again like this, it felt like that night was a long time ago.

'I hear the clock tower will be torn down,' said Yakumo, standing beside her.

'Eh?'

'Well, it can't be helped. The building is in a terrible state because of the fire, and an incident like that happened – '

Yakumo looked down slightly.

If the clock tower stayed up, it would become the symbol of a detestable incident. Perhaps there was nothing they could do but tear it down.

Even though Haruka had never given it much thought before, for some reason, she felt incredibly sad now that she knew it was going to be torn

down.

'Are you thinking about her?' asked Yakumo.

'Eh? Ah, yeah.'

That had been on her mind ever since the incident.

Though Haruka's name had been cleared, Kanae would not come back. She would never see her again.

Perhaps Haruka's sadness about the tearing down of the clock tower had something to do with Kanae.

This was where Kanae had died.

When Haruka thought about how she would never meet with Kanae again, her heart prickled with pain.

'She has a message for you.'

'A message?'

'Yes. "Sorry".'

'No, I'm the one who should apologise.'

Haruka shook her head.

'Why?'

'I... didn't notice. Even though Kanae was suffering and worrying... Even though she relied on me... I couldn't help her at all...'

As Haruka spoke, tears fell from her eyes.

If she had looked at Kanae more, she might have been able to stop her before the incident occurred. When Haruka thought about that, she felt so frustrated and useless –

'Don't blame yourself,' said Yakumo gently.

'I can't help it... I...'

'All you ever think about is other people.'

Yakumo chuckled quietly.

'Eh?'

'You always try harder for other people than for yourself. That's why you're a troublemaker.'

'Sorry about that...' said Haruka, wiping away her eyes.

'But... Perhaps it's because of how you are that people can believe in you...'

After saying that, Yakumo looked up at the top of the clock tower.

'What do you mean by that?'

Was he talking about how Kanae believed in Haruka? Or did he mean –

'The meaning doesn't matter. More importantly...'

Here, Yakumo dropped his gaze to his feet.

It was unusual for him to hesitate. It felt a bit strange.

'What?' asked Haruka.

Yakumo looked wry.

'It's nothing.'

'It'll bother me if you don't say it.'

'It's fine.'

'It's not fine!' pressed Haruka.

Yakumo looked away and ran a hand through his messy hair.

He really was acting different from usual.

'It's nothing important. Just...'

'Mmhm.'

'Would you tell me a bit more about you?'

'About me?'

Haruka looked at Yakumo.

She didn't know why, but she felt like Yakumo was somewhere closer to her than usual. Her chest felt warm, and even the silence felt comfortable.

'Never mind,' Yakumo said suddenly. He turned around and walked away briskly.

– He really just does whatever he wants.

'Hey, wait!'

Haruka, though half-exasperated, ran after Yakumo.

しんれいたんてい やくも
心霊探偵八雲

ア ナ ザ ー フアイル さば とら
ANOTHER FILES 裁きの塔

かみながまなぶ
神永 学

角川 KADOKAWA
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Afterword

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Thank you for reading *Psychic Detective Yakumo: ANOTHER FILES – The Tower of Judgement*.

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This work has a shocking development wherein Haruka is suspected of murder.

Haruka is put into custody, which shakes the hearts of the characters, like Gotou and Ishii.

In particular, Yakumo struggles more than he ever has before.

When I write the *Psychic Detective Yakumo* series, I don't just focus on how the cases are solved. I take great care in drawing out what the characters think and feel through the case.

I think that may be more pronounced in this case than usual –

Even I, as I wrote this, feel that I now understand Yakumo's inner self more through this case.

Of course it isn't just Yakumo. Haruka, who faces the dangerous situation head on. Gotou, who pushes forward awkwardly while encouraging those around him. Ishii, who tries to advance even with his doubts. I feel like each of the characters shows a face they have not shown before.

-

Yakumo and the others have taken another step forward through the case. What will they show us next?

Perhaps I am the one looking forward to it most.

-

Wait! And look forward to it!

-

Heisei 27[1], summer – Kaminaga Manabu

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Notes:

[1] Heisei 27 is 2015 in the Gregorian calendar.