

心霊探偵

八

PSYCHIC DETECTIVE
YAKUMO

Manabu Kaminaga

雲

失意の果てに

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神永学



角川文庫

PSYCHIC DETECTIVE YAKUMO

ИПАПАВУ КАМИТАГА

06.

VOL.2

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彷徨・陽

第二章

02
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file 02: fluctuation (yang)

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Ishii parked the car in the parking lot behind the hospital.

Just as he put the car into park, he let out a sigh.

– Yakumo would return soon.

When he thought about that, he felt like they had taken a big step towards the solution, even though nothing had started yet.

Gotou, in the passenger seat, probably felt the same way.

Though he was blowing out cigarette smoke in a displeased manner, he might have been the most relieved, since he had been so personally worried.

Just as Ishii was about to get off the car to look around, Gotou's mobile rang.

'What?'

Gotou answered the phone in his usual manner.

'Eh? What? I can't hear you... Where are you?' said Gotou, sticking his neck out the window to look around.

He was probably talking to Yakumo. Ishii also looked for Yakumo, as Gotou was doing.

'I'm over here.'

Ishii heard that directly. Then, the backseat door opened and Yakumo came in.

Ishii leapt up in surprise.

Gotou dropped his cigarette onto his lap in surprise and started flailing about the small car, yelling, 'Hot, hot!'

When Yakumo saw that, he laughed aloud.

To be honest, Ishii had thought Yakumo would be more depressed. To perform a prank like this – Ishii felt a bit let down.

On top of that, the red left eye he always hid with a black contact lens was out in the open. Since even Ishii was used to it now, he wouldn't shriek, but it felt like it had more pressure than usual.

'You bastard! Did you call on purpose to do that!?!'

'That doesn't matter, does it?'

Yakumo ignored Gotou's shout and ran a hand through his messy hair.

'It does! You just do whatever you want without consulting anybody!' snapped Gotou, even though it would have been better for him to step down.

'Please don't be so noisy. I hope you don't behave so disgracefully in front of Nao.'

'What the hell do you mean by disgraceful?'

'I'm talking about your awful attitude. Don't you understand?'

'Y-you bastard...'

Gotou bit his lip painfully.

There was no way for him to challenge Yakumo in an argument. Even Ishii understood that.

'Ishii-san, leaving aside this hibernating bear, let's go.'

Yakumo didn't seem to pay Gotou's anger any attention as he said that with a yawn.

'Er, even if you tell me to go, where are we heading?' asked Ishii as he turned around.

'First, please go to the detention house where that woman is being held.'

For a moment, Ishii felt like Yakumo's expression was wiped from his face.

'Oi, Yakumo. You can't really be planning on meeting that woman, right?' said Gotou, surprised. He turned towards the backseat.

Ishii had the same opinion. He felt like it would be extremely dangerous for Yakumo to meet Miyuki at this stage.

'Of course.'

Yakumo was nonchalant in the face of their anxiety.

'Look who's talking now!'

'There isn't anything strange about it. If I don't meet with her, nothing will start, correct?'

'But...'

'She wants to meet as well, doesn't she?'

It was almost like Yakumo was talking about meeting up with an old friend.

Gotou seemed to have nothing to retort after hearing that much, so he gave an order to Ishii: 'Step on it.'

'Is it really OK?'

Ishii checked once more with Yakumo before starting the car.

'Gotou-san, could you tell me all the information you know regarding the case?' said Yakumo after the car went onto the main thoroughfare.

'How much do you know?' said Gotou, returning the question.

Ishii wanted to know as well. They hadn't been in contact with Yakumo since Isshin was stabbed. Since it was Yakumo, he wouldn't have been doing nothing during that time.

Perhaps he had much more information than they did.

'Nothing,' said Yakumo with a yawn.

'Really?'

– There's no way.

Ishii unconsciously returned that question.

'Yes. All I know is that Nanase Miyuki declared she would kill Uncle from the detention house and that Uncle was stabbed.'

'Doesn't that mean you don't know anything?'

Gotou's voice was ragged.

'Didn't I just say that?'

Yakumo didn't sound guilty at all.

'You should've prepared a bit.'

'Was it written in a textbook somewhere?' replied Yakumo, exasperated.

It was their usual exchange.

'Honestly... Ishii, explain.'

With a sour look on his face, Gotou said that in a sulk. He crossed his arms and closed his eyes.

It appeared that he really had no intention of explaining.

'I'm sorry, Ishii-san, but could you explain instead of the bear?' asked Yakumo seriously.

'Ah, yes.'

Though Ishii replied, so much had happened that he wasn't sure where to start the explanation.

'Ishii-san, there's no need to dramatise the story like a certain bear would. Just explain in chronological order.'

Gotou twitched at Yakumo's words, but since he was pretending to be asleep, he stayed silent, unable to wake up.

Just as Yakumo said, there was no point thinking so much about it.

Ishii decided to explain it in order.

'The day after the incident, we received a report that the fingerprints on the knife were found to be a match with Miyuki's.'

'I see.'

Though that should have been a forceful fact, Yakumo's reaction was unexpectedly weak.

It made Ishii think that he might have already predicted that.

'There was another thing that caught our interest...'

'Something that caught your interest?'

'Yes. Actually, when we first went to talk with Nanase Miyuki, there was a guard there.'

'A guard...'

'That guard stayed silent even when Nanase Miyuki was talking about murder.'

'That is strange.'

Yakumo's eyes suddenly became energetic.

As expected, as a university student who had been involved in so many cases, he was sensitive to such oddities.

'Then we looked into that guard's background.'

'Did something come of it?'

Yakumo crossed his arms and looked straight forward.

'Yes. His name is Yamamura Mikio. He lived right by Nanase Miyuki's home.'

'That man named Yamamura might be related to the case somehow – you think that then, Ishii-san.'

While nodding, Ishii looked at Gotou in the passenger seat.

At some point, he had really fallen asleep.

'Yes. There is another thing. On the night of the incident, Nanase Miyuki was carried to the infirmary.'

'Your theory is that she had Yamamura's help and escaped the detention house that way...'
continued Yakumo.

Having Yakumo read so far ahead made explaining considerably easier.

'Yes. Then, Detective Gotou and I went to talk to Nanase Miyuki and the medical officer at the infirmary to gather evidence, but we were unable to attain our goal.'

'I see,' said Yakumo with a nod.

Perhaps because Ishii had said too much at once, but his throat felt dry, so he took a gulp from his bottle of mineral water before continuing.

'At first, we were investigating how she escaped from the detention house, but a different possibility came into our perspective.'

'A different possibility.'

Yakumo's brows were slightly furrowed.

'Yes. She may have committed the crime by using some sort of trap that she set ahead of time – that possibility.'

'Trap...'

At this stage, Yakumo's response was rather disappointing.

'Actually, a wire with blood on it was found at the temple.'

After Yakumo heard Ishii's explanation, he sighed and pinched his brow.

He appeared to be thinking.

– What on earth is he thinking about?

'Er... Yakumo-shi, which method do you think she used?'

Ishii knew that the answer wouldn't come so easily, but he still tried asking.

He thought that Yakumo might ignore him, but unexpectedly, Yakumo looked up and hmm-ed before starting to speak.

'If she escaped the detention house, I don't know what method she used.'

'That's right.'

'Furthermore, it is strange that no blood was found on her clothes, and why didn't she land the finishing blow – those questions remain.'

– I see.

Ishii was filled with admiration. Yakumo's logical words were persuasive. The important questions of lack of blood and not landing the finishing blow remained.

Which meant –

'So she really did use a trap?'

'If she used a trap, the questions I mentioned earlier would be solved, but another important one is left instead.'

'What trap did she use – is that what you mean?'

'Yes. If she made the knife fly like an arrow, it would require much calculation to ensure it hit the person accurately.'

'Yes.'

Ishii had used the cabinet's glass door as a simulation multiple times, so he felt that difficulty dearly.

'As she was trying to hit a moving person, she would need to predict those movements to prepare

the trap.'

That was another problem.

Even if there was a trap in the door, some people might open the door from the front, while some people might open it from the side.

If she couldn't control the target's actions to a certain extent, it would be impossible.

But –

'Though it is difficult, I don't think it's impossible,' said Ishii, giving his own opinion.

Right now, he was leaning slightly towards the trap theory in his head.

'That isn't the only problem.'

'Meaning?'

'If she set the trap before the event, that would mean it was before she was arrested. Don't you think it's unnatural that the trap didn't set off by accident in that time?'

All Ishii could do when he heard Yakumo's words was nod.

It wasn't as if the day before yesterday was the first time Isshin had entered the temple.

Since he meditated every day, he went in and out every day. It would be difficult to think that the trap had coincidentally set off the day Miyuki announced her plans for murder.

Ishii felt a bit like his flame of hope had been cut off.

It felt like both methods had been deemed impossible in the end.

Though he had been leaning towards one method earlier, now they were balanced again.

– What on earth is correct?

'Ishii-san. Forward –'

Ack! Ishii hurriedly stepped on the brakes.

If Yakumo hadn't spoken up, they would have plunged into the traffic jam.

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Haruka sat on the bench in front of the ICU as she mulled over her thoughts.

It was a question she had not thought about seriously before.

– What happens when you die?

In her daily life, living like this seemed natural, so she didn't think about it.

However, death came to everyone.

– The spirits of the dead are clusters of people’s emotions.

Yakumo had said that before. However, those emotions wouldn’t last forever either. They would come to an end somewhere.

She had seen many wandering spirits up until now with Yakumo.

Those emotions were regrets left behind in this world –

But if those regrets were severed, that spirit would disappear. It had been that way for Haruka’s older sister.

Where did those spirits go after they disappeared?

Probably the world after death – but was there such a thing in the first place?

She suddenly felt a chill down her spine.

It felt like a warning against thinking in a domain she shouldn’t, but also an absolute fear brought about by uneasiness towards the unknown.

The only thing she knew was that thinking about it wouldn’t bring about an answer.

Perhaps Yakumo, who could see the spirits of the dead, knew the answer.

– Ah, this is no good.

Haruka stood up to try to clear her mind. Then, the ICU door opened. The doctor Sakakibara came out from inside.

When Sakakibara saw Haruka, he just nodded and tried to leave.

'E-excuse me...'

Haruka recalled her original goal and hurriedly called out to stop Sakakibara.

'What is it?'

Though Sakakibara stopped, it was obvious that he thought it a bother.

Faltering at this wouldn’t get Haruka the information she needed though, so she decided to continue talking regardless.

'How is Isshin-san's condition?'

'Didn't you hear from Doctor Mao?' said Sakakibara, narrowing his eyes.

He was busy, so he didn’t want to waste time talking. It was like he was saying that.

'I heard that there was a problem with his brain, but not in detail...' said Haruka vaguely, looking for Sakakibara's reaction.

'What a nuisance.'

Sakakibara took off his mask and put it in his pocket.

'What do you mean?'

'To put it nicely, Doctor Mao has a kind heart, so she ends up choosing the things she should say.'

Haruka felt like she understood what Sakakibara was saying.

'Er, I heard that Isshin-san and Doctor Mao were friends, but...'

'Seems that way.'

'What sort of relationship did they have?'

'I don't... I'm not the sort of person who talks about the past, so... ' said Sakakibara with a shrug.

Haruka couldn't decide whether he really didn't know or just didn't want to say.

'I see...'

'Well, I'll take my leave then.'

Sakakibara tried to walk away.

'Will Isshin-san's organs been transplanted?' said Haruka, trying to continue the conversation.

'If his relatives consent to it.'

'That's...'

Hearing it again from the doctor really was a shock.

No matter how desperate the situation, she still wanted Isshin to live.

'Are you against organ transplants?' asked Sakakibara, perhaps sensing Haruka's inner turmoil.

She couldn't answer immediately. If she was asked whether they were necessary, she would probably say they were.

But if they had to be taken out of Isshin's body, she couldn't help but object.

Families probably had that dilemma.

'I...'

'Without organ transplants, there are children who will die,' said Sakakibara while raising an eyebrow, as if reprimanding her.

Haruka didn't deny it, but –

'Isshin-san is still breathing.'

'He isn't. We are making him breathe using a machine. If we cut the switch, he would die immediately.'

'How can you say that so calmly?'

Even though Haruka thought she shouldn't, she ended up angry.

It wasn't like Sakakibara was at fault. He was just saying something natural as a doctor. However, even if her head understood it, her heart wouldn't accept it.

'Do you think we're calm?'

Sakakibara looked depressed.

Haruka couldn't say anything more under that gaze.

As a doctor, Sakakibara had probably seen many people live and die. He had to know all too well how valuable life was.

Accordingly, he knew how important transplants were.

Haruka felt very small in her shame.

'I understand how you feel, but please face reality.'

Sakakibara said just that and walked away.

– Face reality.

Would they be able to do that?

There was no way for Haruka to know then.

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– Now, what's going to happen next?

Gotou sat next to Yakumo on the chairs in the detention house's visiting room.

He didn't bring Ishii, since he was investigating something else. Gotou had decided that since Ishii would probably be too scared to be useful.

Gotou crossed his arms and looked sideways at Yakumo.

Yakumo's face was stiff and blank, like a Noh mask.

– Is he nervous? That's unusual. Or is he angry that Isshin was stabbed?

Gotou couldn't read Yakumo's true feelings.

Finally, the door on the opposite side of the glass opened and Miyuki came in, led by Yamamura.

With a straight back, she slowly walked towards them. She glanced at them to confirm that Yakumo was there and then smiled.

It was an uncanny smile – like that of a vampire sucking out blood.

The moment Gotou saw it, a chill ran down his spine.

When he looked at that triumphant face, he doubted – have we fallen into a trap?

– No, there's no way.

Gotou rejected the thoughts in his head.

Yakumo wouldn't be played around with so easily. Even if this was a trap, he'd flip it around and aim for a chance to strike back.

– Right, Yakumo?

Gotou looked at Yakumo again, but his face was still blank.

'Oh my, it's been a while, Yakumo-kun,' said Miyuki, sitting down on the chair for interviews.

Even though she had checked when the door opened, she was talking like she had just realised now.

Yakumo said nothing, just looking – not even glaring – at Miyuki's face.

– Just like an empty shall.

'What's wrong? Is it OK not to hide your left eye?' said Miyuki provocatively as she looked at Yakumo's red eye.

However, Yakumo didn't respond.

'That isn't it. He broke it earlier and doesn't have a spare.'

– Why do I have to listen to her talk?

In his irritation, Gotou responded for Yakumo.

'Oh, is that so? Well, I don't care about that. What is it you're here for today?'

Miyuki slowly crossed her legs.

The action of a prideful woman evaluating men.

– Now, Yakumo. What are you planning on getting out of this woman?

Gotou waited for Yakumo to speak.

However, nothing came out of Yakumo's mouth no matter how long he waited.

– Oi, oi. What's wrong?

Yakumo was the one who said he'd meet with Nanase Miyuki. Gotou had thought Yakumo had some sort of plan, but what was he doing?

Gotou elbowed Yakumo.

However, Yakumo's body just shook a bit. He said nothing.

'Was the thing with Isshin such a shock?' said Miyuki, like she was asking a child. She stifled her giggles.

Yakumo still didn't say anything.

He just looked at Miyuki dumbly.

– Damn it! What are you doing?

'Shut up, you vixen! Your ulterior motive is obvious!'

Gotou stood up, unable to stop himself.

'Oh my, you're so excited. What's wrong?'

Miyuki was unruffled.

'Don't think you can get away! Did you escape the detention house? Or did you use a trap? Eh? How the hell did you stab Isshin? Tell us!'

Gotou said that all at once.

However, he didn't think doing that would get anything out of Miyuki.

As expected, Miyuki smiled, like she enjoyed this.

'Who knows? I wonder what method I used. Will you be able to solve the mystery?'

Miyuki licked her full lips provocatively.

'We will. Right, Yakumo?'

Gotou asked for Yakumo's agreement, but Yakumo remained silent.

Miyuki laughed aloud when she saw that.

Her voice kept growing louder, shaking Gotou's earlobes.

'Oh my, I can't do this. It seems like Yakumo-kun's been broken. It must have been a shock that Isshin-san was stabbed. It was sad, right? It was painful, right?'

Miyuki raised her eyebrows and put her nose to the glass.

'Shut up!'

'But that was all your fault too. You know that, right?'

When Yakumo heard Miyuki's last words, he slumped, like the energy had left him.

– What the hell?

Gotou had thought Yakumo was doing OK until earlier, but it was like his soul had left him completely.

'Shut up! This guy isn't broken! He wouldn't lose to the likes of you!'

Gotou knew he was just putting up a strong front as he hit the protective glass.

'You're bluffing.'

'What?'

'Truth is, Yakumo-kun is already no good.'

Miyuki laughed scornfully.

Gotou looked over to see Yakumo covering his face with both hands and bent over at the waist.

'Yakumo, you...'

'What a pitiful man.'

Miyuki's scornful gaze pierced Gotou.

'You monster...'

'Seems like he's got nothing to say, so I'll excuse myself then,' said Miyuki happily. She stood up and turned her back to them.

'It's a bit unfortunate – I thought I'd be able to have some more fun.'

Miyuki left those words and then exited the room, waving at them as she did so.

When the door closed, Gotou's anger filled his right fist and he punched the protective glass.

A sharp pain ran through his bone, making Gotou cower while holding his right hand.

There wasn't even a crack in the protective glass.

'It's obvious that hitting something like that would hurt. What a blockhead, as usual.'

Yakumo, who had been silent since earlier, sat up to make fun of Gotou.

'W-w-w-what did you say?'

Gotou was so surprised by Yakumo's about face in behaviour that he shouted.

'I called you a blockhead because you're a blockhead.'

Yakumo stood up and stretched.

– What the hell is this bastard thinking?

'Oi, Yakumo! What are you doing? I brought you here 'cause you said you had something you wanted to ask that woman!'

Gotou spoke up since he didn't understand, but Yakumo just rubbed his eyes sleepily.

'Who said that?'

'Hah?'

'I just said I wanted to meet her.'

'Well... that's true, but...'

'I have no questions to ask her. If you ask that woman anything, she would just lead you

somewhere unexpected. You've experienced that yourself, haven't you?'

It was certainly as Yakumo said, but Gotou was still unsatisfied.

'Then what'd you come here for?'

'You'll understand soon enough. That woman's confidence will be the death of her.'

As Yakumo said that, a fearless smile graced his lips.

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Ishii curled up in his seat in one of the conference rooms at the detention house.

– Is there any evidence that Miyuki had contact with the outside?

In order to pursue that evidence, Ishii was going to meet with the guard in charge of general affairs.

The guard who had responded was called Kobayashi. He was thin and had kept his gaze on his feet the whole time – a shady man.

'Did she ever have contact with the outside in some form?'

In answer to Ishii's question, Kobayashi had said faintly, 'Please wait here.' Then, he had left the room.

It had been more than thirty minutes since.

Ishii had thought about going to search for Kobayashi, but this was a detention house.

If he moved unwisely, it would gather unnecessary suspicion, and since he didn't have a key, he couldn't even go into the other ways.

'Haah.'

Just as Ishii sighed, the door opened and Kobayashi came in with an envelope under his arm.

Even though he had been gone for over thirty minutes, he didn't even say 'Sorry for the wait' – he just sat on the opposite sofa.

This lack of etiquette would garner animosity for the citizens. Ishii thought that, but he didn't say it aloud.

He was more interested in the envelope Kobayashi had brought.

'Did you find something?' asked Ishii.

Kobayashi silently took a sheet of paper from the envelope and placed it on the table.

The sheet of A4 paper had various information listed on it for visits, such as dates, names, occupations and addresses.

It was probably a list of the people who had visited her.

On the dates for yesterday and the day before, Gotou's and Ishii's names were both listed. Most of the others were from a man named Shimazu, with lawyer written in the occupation column.

For a vicious criminal like Miyuki, nobody would take up her case.

Since it was in the news, it would probably help sell their name, but the risk was higher because of it. A double-edged sword.

Shimazu was probably a court-appointed attorney.

– Other people who came to visit...

Ishii checked the names, following the list with his finger.

He gasped when he spotted a name he knew.

– I can't believe it!

He checked it once more, but he hadn't been wrong.

Name: Saitou Isshin. Occupation; Priest. Relationship: Acquaintance.

The address was his as well. The date was right after Miyuki had been sent here.

– What was Isshin's goal in meeting with Miyuki?

Ishii didn't know Isshin's intentions. If it were him, he wouldn't have wanted to meet Miyuki ever again.

'Could I take this?'

'Please go ahead,' Kobayashi replied bluntly.

'Er, is there any evidence that she contacted anybody else from the outside?' asked Ishii as he folded the list and put it in his pocket.

Still silent, Kobayashi took another sheet of paper out of the envelope and placed it on the table.

It appeared to be a copy rather than an original. There were handwritten words on the letter.

They were delicate and beautiful words.

The sender was Nanase Miyuki.

Did Miyuki really write this – it was so unlike the image Ishii had of her.

There was just one line on the document.

<The goal of all life is death.>

Ishii recalled seeing that phrase before.

They were the words of the famous Freud, who founded psychoanalysis.

– Why this document?

Though sending letters from the detention house was allowed, the guards went over the contents.

It was because there were cases of prisoners using letters to contact people on the outside to request the destruction of evidence.

If the case was not settled yet and the evidence was destroyed, it would become a grave problem.

Miyuki probably only wrote the one line because she knew it was going to be inspected.

Even if it was inspected, others wouldn't understand its meaning.

However, there was no doubt that the document had some sort of meaning.

Perhaps it was something like an anagram, where switching the order of the letters would bring about another meaning.

'Death is life all of goal the.'

Ishii tried reading it backwards, but it became even more cryptic.

Feeling a cold gaze, Ishii came to his senses and looked up.

Kobayashi was looking at Ishii strangely.

'Do you know who the recipient of this letter was?' said Ishii, after clearing his throat to cover up his weird action earlier.

In response to that, Kobayashi just said, 'Back.'

Ishii didn't understand, but he turned around. However, there was nothing there. What was going on?

He looked towards Kobayashi again.

'Back of the paper,' said Kobayashi, sounding irritated.

– Ah, I see. The back of the paper.

Ishii turned the paper around.

Written on it was the name of a woman.

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27

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Haruka was still sitting on the bench in front of the ICU.

The conversation she had had with Sakakibara earlier was whirling around her head.

– Please face reality.

Sakakibara had said that, but Haruka just couldn't do it easily.

After a while, Furukawa came out of the ICU.

'Excuse me...'

Haruka shook off her mood and spoke up.

Furukawa seemed to recognise Haruka right away and stopped in her tracks.

'How is Isshin-san's condition?'

'I can't say...' said Furukawa vaguely, looking away.

From that, Haruka imagined that his condition wasn't very good.

'I see...'

Yakumo had asked her to get information, but she couldn't do that when all she was doing was getting depressed.

All that came out of her mouth was a sigh.

'So that rumour really was true...' said Furukawa with a shiver as she hugged her shoulders.

'Rumour?'

'You know, the one about the ghost in the hospital.'

'Ah,' said Haruka, though it had no meaning.

So many things had happened that she'd forgotten, but the reason for her first visit to this hospital was an investigation of spiritual phenomena.

A girl's ghost was walking around the hospital, asking, 'When are you going to die?' The people who heard it would die soon after.

Haruka had seen a ghost of a girl like that, but the truth wasn't clear.

At the same time she remembered that, a question came to her.

'Isshin-san saw that ghost too – is that what you're saying?'

'I don't know, but he must have.'

Furukawa probably liked this kind of story.

She appeared to be excited in a way that was inappropriate for the situation.

She had decided on something that wasn't certain and was talking about it. Haruka realised that this was how rumours spread.

'I'm sorry. Even though you were asked to investigate...'

'It's fine. A lot of things happened.'

Furukawa nodded with a strange expression on her face.

'Er, Furukawa-san, you're in charge of emergency, right?'

'Yes.'

'Why did you consult Doctor Mao about a ghost sighting?'

That suddenly seemed odd to Haruka.

The first time they met, she hadn't been concerned since she hadn't known her position, but now that she thought about it, it was unnatural.

'I consulted Doctor Sakakibara about it first, but... He seems to be in great difficulties with his daughter.'

'Did something happen?'

'He had a divorce three years ago, and a number of things have happened since...'

Furukawa trailed off that.

It felt like she didn't want to talk any more.

'Huh...'

Though Haruka was curious, she gave a vague reply since it felt like she couldn't poke her nose in too deeply.

'I was under Doctor Mao for a while, so I consulted her.'

'I see.'

'Though Doctor Mao nags, she's considerate.'

'Is that so?'

They were words from the heart.

Though Haruka had only met Mao a number of times, she felt like she understood too.

'Well, it seems like it's tough for her since she has bad luck with men.'

'Bad luck with men?'

– What could she mean?

Saying bad luck with men could have a number of meanings.

'Yup. She's too nice so she gets tricked.'

'With money, for example?'

'Right, right. A few years ago, she got involved with an unusual man.'

'Unusual man?'

Though Haruka felt like she couldn't ask questions recklessly about a topic like this, she urged Furukawa to continue to get information.

'Her lover back then said he wanted to do something so she kept lending him money. Then he ran

away with it.'

Haruka felt depressed just from listening to it, but Furukawa was talking like she enjoyed it.

It appeared she was the type who took pleasure in other people's misfortune.

'Furukawa-san.'

Somebody interrupted the conversation.

Haruka looked to see another nurse calling Furukawa from the other side of the corridor.

'Sorry, I have to go,' said Furukawa quickly. Then, she ran off.

With depressed feelings, Haruka watched her go.

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Gotou sat on the car hood and looked up at the sky as he blew out a puff of smoke.

The sun was low in the sky, dyeing the sky a reddish purple. Together with the lines of clouds, it was a gradation of colour.

He had tried to smoke inside the car, but he was forced out: 'This car is non-smoking.'

Now that he thought about it, that was strange.

A university student had no right to tell a policeman what to do in a police car.

Gotou looked inside with the intent of complaining.

Yakumo was sitting in the backseat.

He lay across the seat, exhausted. At first glance, he looked out of it, but his eyes were the picture of seriousness.

Gotou was irritated, but he'd hold out until the end of the case.

It pained him to acknowledge it, but without Yakumo, they couldn't reveal Miyuki's crime.

Gotou looked up at the detention house building again.

It had an oppressive presence, towering over its surroundings. Like a fort from a sci-fi movie.

If Miyuki had escaped the detention house, there would probably be a huge fuss.

– Even if the case is solved, it probably won't be swept aside just like that.

While Gotou was thinking, he saw somebody come out of the detention house.

With that narrow frame, it was probably Ishii.

He was walking so casually even though he'd made them wait – the guy had no sense of urgency,

as usual.

'Ishii, run!' shouted Gotou.

Ishii started running reflexively.

– He fell.

'Don't know how you're a detective with that sluggishness of yours,' grumbled Gotou as he put his cigarette out in his portable ashtray.

'I-I-I apologise for that.'

Ishii reached the car, gasping for breath.

'Ishii-san, how was it?'

Yakumo had gotten off the car at some point and called out to Ishii with a yawn.

'Ah, yes. There are two important points.'

Ishii took two sheets of paper from the envelope he was holding and gave them to Yakumo.

When Yakumo took it, his brows furrowed as he looked at the papers with a serious gaze.

'The first is the name of Nanase Miyuki's visitors,' said Ishii, continuing his explanation.

Gotou looked at the papers Yakumo was holding too.

Most of the visits were from one person, probably a lawyer, but he found just one name he recognised.

'Oi, Yakumo!'

'Please don't speak loudly into my ear. I don't need you to tell me.'

Yakumo stuck his fingers into his ears as he complained.

However, that didn't restrain Gotou's agitation.

'Why did Isshin meet Miyuki?'

'It's simple, isn't it?'

'Eh?'

'Uncle is that sort of person,' said Yakumo carelessly.

Isshin's face came up in Gotou's head, and he strangely felt like he understood.

Isshin had probably met with Miyuki to preach about the importance of life or something like that.

However, Miyuki wasn't the sort of person who'd listen to that honestly.

'What is this other sheet?' pressed Yakumo while brushing aside his fringe.

'That's a letter Nanase Miyuki wrote, but...'

Ishii trailed off, like he was some kid who'd been scolded.

'The goal of all life is death – a quotation from Freud.'

Yakumo raised his gaze.

'Freud? Who's that?'

'An Austrian neurologist who studied psychoanalysis. He is the founder of current psychiatry.'

Yakumo was the one who answered.

'So what do the words of that esteemed doctor mean?'

Gotou lit a new cigarette.

Since Miyuki had gone out of her way to write it, it had to have some sort of special meaning.

'Just as it says. People live heading towards death. No living creature can escape it.'

'Isn't that exactly what it says?'

'Didn't I say that?' said Yakumo, sounding annoyed.

'Excuse me...'

Ishii raised his hand to ask for permission to speak.

'What?'

'I was wondering if this was some sort of code...'

Though Ishii said that without confidence, Gotou understood.

That was very possible.

'Yakumo, what do you think?'

'I can't deny the possibility that it is a code, but at the current stage, I cannot say anything.'

Yakumo shook his head with a brooding expression.

'Do you know who this letter was sent to?' Gotou asked Ishii.

This was a letter. Even without deciphering the contents, they could just capture the recipient and make them cough it up.

'It's written on the back,' replied Ishii, pointing at the piece of paper.

Yakumo flipped the paper around. An address and name were written there.

'OK, let's go catch this guy.'

'Please wait a moment,' Yakumo said, interrupting Gotou's high spirits.

He looked like he was looking at some difficult algebra.

'What?'

'Don't you think it's strange?'

'What is?'

'Nanase Miyuki must have known that we would find out about this letter, right?'

'That's true,' agreed Ishii as he adjusted the position of his glasses.

Gotou understood too after Yakumo said that.

Miyuki was a very calculating woman. She could probably guess the police's movements. But –

'That's why she used a code, right?'

Gotou was confident, but Yakumo's doubtful attitude did not change.

'I think she would have seen past that.'

'Past what?'

'Our solving the code.'

Yakumo handed the letter back to Ishii.

It wouldn't be strange for Miyuki to read that far ahead, but –

'Then what are you planning to do?'

Gotou approached Yakumo.

'It would be better to watch silently until we clearly understand the goal.'

Yakumo ran a hand through his messy hair.

It made sense. If they didn't know how she committed the crime, they might destroy evidence by moving already badly and end the thing there.

'Ah, also, the recipient may be somebody I know,' added Yakumo, as if he had just remembered.

'W-w-what!? Who? Who the hell is it?'

'Please don't make a fuss over every little thing. It's just that the family name is the same. I don't know the given name.. Anyway, Gotou-san, please look into that.'

Gotou replied, 'Got it,' but then he stopped.

'You're not coming with me?'

'I have other things to investigate.'

'What other things?'

'Anyway, please don't slack off because I'm not there,' said Yakumo disagreeably.

Gotou buried the anger boiling up within him in the bottom of his stomach.

'Ah, also, please drop me off at the hospital I was at earlier,' said Yakumo with a yawn.

– What the hell does this guy think the police are?

Ignoring Gotou's anger, Yakumo briskly got into the car.

'What are you waiting for? Please start the car already.'

Yakumo stuck his head out the window.

– I can't hold back any longer.

After the case was over, this time he'd really give Yakumo a good punch.

With that determination, Gotou got into the car.

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29

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– It's a bit cold.

Haruka sat on a bench in the hospital courtyard.

The sun was low in the sky; dark had started to swallow up the surroundings. The air was much cooler too.

Haruka looked up to see a lamppost beaming down on her. Bugs flew about the streetlights, as if drawn in by the brightness.

When she looked up, she could see the window of the fourth floor where Isshin was hospitalised.

Within that light, Isshin was in the narrow area between life and death.

Haruka didn't want to believe that Isshin was brain-dead. She felt like he might wake up even now.

Even if it was just a fleeting hope, all Haruka could do now was believe in it.

'You were here?'

Yakumo appeared out of the darkness.

He had returned as promised. It wasn't that Haruka had doubted him. There were things that made you anxious even if you believed in them. Humans were weak creatures.

'You're slow,' she said, testing out a slightly angry tone.

It wasn't like they'd set a time, so she had nothing to complain about, but every time she met Yakumo, she just wanted to say something.

'The only thing you could call slow is a turtle,' said Yakumo, exasperated, as he sat next to Haruka.

He was really good at coming up with things to put her down. In a way, it was amazing.

'Who's a turtle? You're the fickle cat,' said Haruka with a pout.

It looked like Yakumo really did not like being retorted to, because he raised his left eyebrow and

glared intimidatingly.

'Who's a cat?'

'You are. You're moody and do whatever you want. The picture of a cat.'

'Better than being a turtle.'

Yakumo snorted.

'Yeah, yeah, I'm a turtle,' said Haruka, gritting her teeth.

However, Yakumo just yawned, seeming bored.

'So how was your investigation?'

Yakumo brought up the topic at hand.

'I tried asking, just like you said, but...'

Her words trailed off since there hadn't been much of a result.

'There's no need to think about it too much. Just tell me what you heard. I'll decide whether anything's important.'

Yakumo rubbed his eyes sleepily.

'OK.'

After replying, Haruka started to talk.

She explained what she'd heard from Sakakibara and Furukawa with her own thoughts.

Since she gave her own opinions and thoughts on things like organ transplants, it took much longer than she thought it would.

Yakumo didn't interrupt regardless, just sitting there and listening carefully.

'I see. It seems you've got a considerable amount of information,' said Yakumo.

– Really?

Haruka cocked her head, unconfident.

She didn't think anything she said was connected to the case.

'What information?' she asked, though she knew there wouldn't be a response.

Yakumo's eyes were narrowed as he looked into the darkness.

– What is he looking at?

Haruka was always just looking from the side. Even if she tried to see the same things Yakumo did, it was impossible.

Though she was close to him, she felt like there was a wall she couldn't pass between them.

'You'll find out soon enough,' Yakumo finally murmured.

'You never tell me anything...'

She hadn't planned on saying anything, but it slipped off her tongue.

She felt a bit gloomy.

'I don't know everything clearly yet, so I can't say.'

Yakumo looked down with a wry smile.

To Haruka, it just sounded like an excuse.

She wanted to ask him more, but she knew from experience that he wouldn't say any more even if she did.

– I'm always left behind.

Haruka looked up to clear away her feelings of depression.

At the same time, the lamppost that had been lighting up the bench went out –

Everything was blanketed in darkness.

She had been able to see Yakumo earlier, but he was swallowed by the darkness.

– Yakumo, where are you?

Haruka was looking around frantically when something touched her hand, which was on the bench.

'Eh?'

'It's OK.'

She heard Yakumo's voice.

Yakumo's fingers were touching Haruka's hand.

Even though only a bit of their skin was touching, warmth slowly came through.

Her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, so she could see Yakumo's profile.

'It was time for the lights to turn off. It's about time.'

Yakumo slowly stood up.

Haruka stood up too, as if pulled by a magnet.

'What do you mean?' she asked Yakumo, who was looking up at the hospital building.

'There's one more thing I want to check.'

Without explaining further, Yakumo walked deliberately, one step at a time, towards the hospital.

Haruka hurriedly followed him so that his back wouldn't disappear into the darkness.

Ishii looked up at the apartment building from the driver's seat of the car.

His gaze was on the corner room on the fourth floor.

However, the lights in the room were off.

He had pressed the intercom button about an hour before, but there was no response. It seemed like nobody was home.

After dropping Yakumo off at the hospital, Ishii had gone to the apartment where the recipient of Miyuki's letter lived and begun his stakeout.

Right now, that person was the key.

– The goal of all life is death.

That sentence circled his head.

What code is in that sentence – no matter how much Ishii thought about it, he couldn't find the answer.

'She's not coming back.'

Ishii rested against the wheel and looked at Gotou in the passenger seat.

'She'll probably be back soon.'

Gotou blew out smoke, looking displeased.

There were shadows under his eyes, and the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes looked deeper than usual. It was like he had suddenly aged in these two days.

– He's probably tired.

After the incident, Gotou had ended up taking Nao in.

Even though following such a complex case was arduous already, his exhaustion was naturally doubled since he was taking care of a girl who couldn't hear.

'Please rest a bit,' said Ishii.

One person was enough for a stakeout. Ishii simply wanted Gotou to rest, even if it was just for a short time.

However, Gotou didn't accept it.

'Stop nagging! Do you think I'd be worn out from something like this?'

'No, that isn't what I...'

'The incident was my fault.'

Gotou irritably pressed his cigarette into the ashtray.

'Eh?'

'I couldn't protect Isshin. The least I could do to make up for it is catch the culprit.'

'If you put it that way, I am also at fault.'

Ishii took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes.

Gotou was not the only one responsible. Ishii had been at the scene too. He had even been the one closest to Isshin. Despite that, Ishii hadn't been able to protect Isshin –

'Don't be impertinent.'

Gotou hit Ishii's head.

'No, but...'

'Nothing would've changed if somebody like you were there or not... It was my fault.'

Gotou put a new cigarette in his mouth, biting the filter tightly.

– Why are you taking everything on yourself?

Ishii asked that in his heart.

He wanted to be like Gotou. He wanted to become a proper man as Gotou's partner. Ishii did his best for that goal.

However, no matter how hard he tried, Gotou took everything on by himself.

– Does he hate me?

Ishii even thought that way sometimes.

Ishii had just put his glasses back on when light flooded in from behind them. The headlights of a car.

He turned around and saw a car coming up towards them.

A navy blue SUV.

It passed Ishii's car and stopped in front of the apartment.

A woman got out of the passenger's seat. She looked like she was in her late twenties. She wore a denim skirt and was on the chubby side.

The moment Gotou saw her, he hurriedly got off the car.

'W-what's wrong?'

'Quiet.'

Ishii had hurriedly followed Gotou off, but Gotou cut him off.

Gotou hid behind a telephone pole and watched the woman. Ishii did the same, standing behind Gotou and looking at the road.

The woman waved goodbye to the man in the driver's seat and went towards the apartment entrance.

'That woman...' growled Gotou.

– Do you know her?

Ishii had that question in his head when he recalled something Yakumo said.

– She may be someone I know.

From this response, it appeared that the recipient of the letter really was someone Gotou and Yakumo knew.

The car turned off its hazards and left.

'Number.'

As instructed by Gotou, Ishii hurriedly wrote the licence plate number in his notebook.

The woman went through the apartment's glass entrance, took something from the post box and got into the elevator.

'That was some unexpected information.'

Gotou let out his breath as he left the shadow of the telephone pole.

Ishii followed him.

'What do you mean?'

'I've met that woman before.'

– So it really was like that.

Ishii's eyes went bright. If it was somebody they knew, the investigation would advance more quickly.

'Where did you meet her?'

'The hospital.'

Gotou lit his cigarette.

– Hospital.

After hearing that word, Ishii also remembered who the woman was.

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Haruka followed Yakumo down the dim hospital corridor.

Even though there should have been many people inside the hospital, it was surprisingly quiet. It felt like they were going through an underground tunnel.

However, Haruka knew where Yakumo was headed.

If they continued forward, they would reach the ICU where Isshin was.

– There's one more thing I want to check.

Yakumo had said that earlier. What was he planning on checking when he went to Isshin?

'Hey, Yakumo-kun, what are you going to check?' asked Haruka towards Yakumo's back.

'You'll find out soon enough.'

Yakumo stopped firmly in front of the ICU.

His back looked somewhat nervous.

Haruka could see Isshin through the glass. Life support was keeping him alive.

Every time she saw Isshin like this, her chest felt tight and the hope that had welled up within her was cut.

'So you're checking how Isshin-san is?'

'That's right,' replied Yakumo, looking straight down the dark of the corridor.

Haruka took a step forward to stand next to Yakumo.

I might be able to see something else if I stand in the same place – is what she thought, but nothing came back to her eyes. Just the cellar-like corridor.

'Hey, Yakumo-kun.'

Haruka looked at Yakumo's profile.

He looked like something that was created – there was no life there.

'Don't move from here,' Yakumo said briefly. Then, he slowly stepped forward.

Haruka thought about following him, but she was frozen there by the unusual air emitting from Yakumo.

– Yakumo's red left eye can see something.

Haruka was almost certain of it.

With his chest out and back straight, he took careful steps forward, as if he were walking on a tightrope.

After walking about five metres, Yakumo suddenly stopped.

'You're there, right?' said Yakumo, as if beginning a speech.

– Is somebody there?

Haruka focussed her gaze.

After a while, though it was faint, something appeared in the darkness.

It was the girl with the dark face.

This was the third time Haruka had seen her. She was probably the female ghost said to appear in the hospital –

'What are you looking for?'

Yakumo knelt in the corridor as he started to speak quietly.

The ghost of the girl just stood in front of Yakumo –

'I see... That's why you're wandering...'

Only Yakumo's voice echoed through the corridor.

Haruka couldn't tell what the girl was saying.

She felt the impulse to move closer to her to listen, but she couldn't – she felt like the ghost of the girl would disappear if she did.

'I understand your feelings, but I want you to wait a bit longer.'

Yakumo reached out, like he was asking for help.

The ghost of the girl just stood there without moving.

The tense atmosphere continued –

'Please.'

Yakumo lowered his head, pleading.

Then, the girl nodded slightly and finally disappeared into the darkness.

Haruka released the breath she had been holding, as if she had just raised her head out of water. She had been so focussed that she had forgotten to breathe.

Yakumo slowly stood up and turned around.

His eyes were narrowed and his brows were lowered – Yakumo's expression was sadder than she had ever seen it.

– What happened?

Haruka wanted to ask out, but she just couldn't in this situation.

Yakumo didn't do anything. He just stood there.

It felt like Yakumo was going farther and farther away. I don't like it. Don't go –

'Yakumo-kun.'

Haruka called out to hold on to him.

In response, Yakumo's expression softened.

'It's just as I thought,' whispered Yakumo as he came back.

'What do you mean?'

'I've solved it...'

Yakumo put his left index finger to his brow.

His eyes looked different now – they were triumphant.

'Eh?'

'I've solved the mystery of the case.'

As Yakumo said that, his red left eye trembled slightly.

決別

第三章

FILE:
03

file 03: separation

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1

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Gotou rubbed his eyes as he got up.

He looked at the clock. It was just past seven in the morning.

– It's morning already?

It appeared that he had fallen asleep at some point.

Ishii was sleeping on the desk in front of him. He was probably tired.

Gotou decided to let him sleep a bit longer.

Gotou stretched out, making his bones crack loudly. A sharp pain ran through his back. It was probably because he had slept sitting down.

Gotou took one cigarette out of the case, bit the filter and had his first puff of the day.

He watched the trailing smoke.

– Wonder how they're doing now?

Suddenly concerned, Gotou took out his mobile and called home.

<Hello, Gotou speaking.>

After two rings, Atsuko picked up.

She sounded cheerful early in the morning.

'Ah, it's me,' said Gotou, feeling awkward.

<sWhat's wrong?>

'I just wanted to know how you were doing.'

<Oh, so even you worry about me sometimes.>

Atsuko's voice sounded wry.

Gotou couldn't say anything back. He had never called home doing work to see how she was doing before.

Men were proud, obstinate, and really good-for-noting creatures. That was why they made women angry.

When Gotou kept silent for a while, Atsuko laughed aloud.

'W-what?'

<I understand. You're worried about Nao-chan, right?>

'That isn't it.'

Though Gotou denied it, he himself knew that he couldn't hide his true feelings.

<You don't have to worry.>

'I see...'

<Nao-chan's a really good girl. She even helps out.>

'She is.'

– Isn't there anything else to say?

Gotou was irritated at himself for only being able to give curt replies.

<But... she really is forcing herself.>

Atsuko spoke in a quiet tone.

It made sense. No matter how brave Nao acted, she was still seven years old.

There was no way she would be all right with Isshin like that, since he was the one who raised her. However, she was still doing her best.

It was probably tough on Atsuko to watch.

Even though she wanted to do something for Nao, there was nothing she could do.

'Right.'

Gotou wanted to say something encouraging, but since he couldn't think of anything, he just agreed.

<Oh, but are you doing OK?>

Atsuko's casual words gave Gotou a start.

Nao had brought about some sort of change in the Gotou couple – he felt it directly.

He wouldn't be able to answer if asked what had changed, but he felt like he was closer to Atsuko than he had been a few days before.

'Well, we're managing...' replied Gotou, making a conscious effort to act unruffled.

<You don't have to worry about us, so go catch the criminal for Nao-chan's sake.'

Atsuko's voice had an encouraging tone to it.

'Right.'

Just as Atsuko said, what Gotou could do now for Nao was get to the bottom of the case as quickly as he could.

<But don't overdo yourself.>

Atsuko's murmur tickled Gotou's ear, but at the same time, it felt pleasant.

She had often said things like this after they had just got married.

'Got it. I'm hanging up then.'

Gotou suddenly felt embarrassed and hung up after declaring that.

He had just let out his breath and pressed his cigarette into the ashtray when he met Ishii's eyes.

Ishii was grinning, though Gotou had no idea what he thought was so funny.

'Ishii, how long have you been awake?'

Gotou glared at him.

'J-just earlier.'

'How long were you listening?'

'I just wanted to know how you were doing – about there.'

– Isn't that all of it?

Embarrassed, Gotou's anger peaked at once.

'You bastard – if you're awake, say so!'

Gotou leant over the desk, gripped Ishii by the collar and shook him.

'D-D-Detective Gotou, your m-m-mobile is ringing.'

With a shaking head, Ishii pointed at the desk.

Gotou thought that Ishii was trying to trick him, but he was wrong. His mobile was vibrating on the desk. Gotou clicked his tongue and then thrust Ishii forward before answering the phone.

'Who is it?'

<Like I said, please fix your phone manners.>

Yakumo spoke in his usual tone.

He chose words purposefully to make people angry.

'I don't want to hear that from a contrary brat like you!'

<You're not a child, so it would be better if you stopped yelling just because things aren't going your way.>

Yakumo's smirk came up in Gotou's head.

Even if he said more, he wouldn't win against Yakumo.

'So what is it?'

It was Yakumo. He wasn't the type to call to kill time. There was what happened yesterday too. He

must have grasped a thread to solve the case.

Gotou expectantly awaited an answer.

<Please come to pick me up in three hours.>

'I've said this before, but I'm not a cab company!'

<Is that so? So you don't want to know the truth behind the case then, Gotou-san.>

'What?'

<That's too bad. I'll call the cab company.>

Yakumo hung up.

– He said that on purpose.

He really was a troublesome guy if you ticked him off.

Gotou called Yakumo's mobile.

<What is it? I'm busy – I have to call the cab company.>

Yakumo said that immediately after answering.

– What an obstinate guy.

'Where should I go?'

<What are you supposed to say if you've done something bad?>

Gotou tried to change the topic, but Yakumo said that.

– This bastard keeps making fun of me!

Anger boiled up within Gotou, but if he said anything, Yakumo would get angry again.

'S-s-sorry,' said Gotou in mortification, as if the words were being strangled out of him.

<So you can do it if you try, can't you? Please come to the hospital's front entrance. Ah, and could you also tell me Makoto-san's contact information?>

'Makoto – do you mean the reporter?'

<Is there anyone else?>

– He always says one thing too much.

Why's Yakumo need Makoto's contact information – Gotou didn't know, but since it was Yakumo, he was probably thinking of something.

Gotou took the business card he had received from Makoto in the past out of his desk drawer and told Yakumo her company and mobile phone numbers.

<Very well done.>

Yakumo said that mockingly and then hung up before Gotou could complain.

– He really just does whatever he wants.

As an outlet for his anger, Gotou hit Ishii's head.

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2

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Haruka sat on the bench in the hospital's waiting room.

She was waiting there because Yakumo had called her, but he still hadn't arrived even though it was thirty minutes past the time they'd set.

– He might not come.

Haruka looked at the courtyard scenery through the glass in her resignation.

The lawn was a vivid green.

The cherry blossom buds were bulging, like they would bloom at any moment.

It was so tranquil it made the events up until yesterday seem like a lie.

But the reality was different –

Haruka looked up and saw a girl standing there.

She had seen her before.

The girl had been standing there when Haruka was waiting for Isshin. If she remembered correctly, her name was Yoshiko –

'What's wrong?' asked Haruka.

Perhaps Yoshiko didn't hear, because she just stood there with her gaze on her feet.

– I don't know what to do.

'You could win the world championship for making stupid faces.'

Haruka looked up at the sudden voice.

Yakumo stood there, with messy hair and sleepy eyes.

– Who're you calling stupid?

What was that tone of his, when he was thirty minutes late? If this were a date, she would have gone home a long time ago.

'You're way past the time we set,' objected Haruka as she stood up, thrusting her wristwatch in front of Yakumo's eyes.

'Were you listening to me properly?'

'Eh?'

'I didn't say we'd meet up at ten – I said I'd leave house at ten.'

– What kind of reasoning was that?

In what world would somebody tell the person they were going to meet the time they were going to leave the house instead of the time they were going to meet? Haruka thought about complaining, but she decided against it.

There was no way she'd win in an argument against Yakumo.

'So who's this kid?'

Yakumo looked at Yoshiko.

Yoshiko took a step back, perhaps afraid of that red left eye.

'Probably Yoshiko-chan... right?'

Haruka called out to Yoshiko, who was looking down as she stood.

However, Yoshiko made no response.

'You know her?'

'When I was here with Isshin-san before, I saw her, so...'

Yakumo crouched in front of Yoshiko.

Yoshiko looked away, as if trying to run.

'Is the treatment tough?' asked Yakumo.

Yoshiko nodded.

'I see. Hang in there a bit longer.'

Yoshiko nodded again.

Yakumo looked like Isshin had a few days earlier.

'Yoshiko.'

Haruka heard somebody call for Yoshiko.

Sakakibara was walking towards them, searching for Yoshiko.

In response, Yoshiko looked up and mumbled something, but Haruka couldn't hear it.

Yoshiko turned on her heels and walked towards Sakakibara.

'Let's go then.'

Perhaps Yakumo had lost interest, because he started briskly walking away.

'Where to?'

Even though Yakumo had called Haruka to the hospital, she hadn't heard anything about their plans.

'I have something to discuss with Doctor Mao.'

Yakumo ran a hand through his hair and walked at a leisurely pace down the corridor.

– It seems he really does suspect Mao.

Haruka felt that as she followed Yakumo's back.

When Yakumo reached Mao's examination room, he opened the door without knocking and stepped inside.

Haruka followed after him timidly.

'Yakumo-kun, you're just on time.'

Mao smiled from her seat at the desk.

– Just on time?

That meant that Yakumo hadn't been late- he really had planned on leaving his home at ten from the start.

Haruka really wanted to complain, but Mao was in front of her too.

Instead, Haruka poked Yakumo in the side.

Yakumo leapt like a cat, stuck out his chin and glared at her, as if to ask 'What the hell are you doing?', but Haruka ignored it and sat on a chair.

'Yakumo-kun, you sit down too,' Mao urged.

Yakumo looked dissatisfied, but he reluctantly sat on a chair.

'You have something to discuss with me, yes?' said Mao after Yakumo had settled in.

Mao had been looking back and forth for a while now, unable to relax.

'Yes. There is something I would like to confirm about my uncle.'

'Confirm?'

Mao cocked her head at Yakumo's words.

'Yes?'

'What is it?'

'It is about when my uncle was carried to this hospital.'

'What do you want to know?'

'You said that he stopped breathing for a while, but is that true?'

Though Yakumo's tone was disinterested, it still sounded intimidating.

'It's true. He had already stopped breathing,' replied Mao after clearing her throat once.

Though she was acting calm, she was becoming visibly paler.

'There isn't any doubt about it?'

'No, there isn't.'

Mao's lips were trembling slightly.

'I talked to the detective who had been in the ambulance with him. According to him, my uncle was unconscious on the ambulance, but he was breathing.'

'... What do you want to say?'

Beads of sweat were on Mao's forehead.

'Doctor Mao, if both your testimony and that detective's testimony are correct... that would mean that Uncle was breathing in the ambulance but stopped breathing when being carried to the surgery room.'

Yakumo's eyes were clearly full of suspicion.

However, Haruka didn't think that the conversation was that strange.

'That would be the case,' replied Mao, licking her dry lips.

'I see. Assuming that was the case, please let me ask one more thing.'

'What?'

'Why can you declare that my uncle had stopped breathing?'

'What do you mean?'

'You aren't in charge of emergency. You're not the detective in charge. In short, you weren't present. Then why?'

'That's...'

Yakumo's sharp gaze was piercing, as if he had caught his prey. Mao hesitated.

Haruka's heart was pounding.

She finally understood what Yakumo was trying to get out of Mao.

'Doctor Mao, please answer honestly. Were you in the surgery room that day?'

Yakumo's eyes were even more forceful.

Mao bit her lower lip and looked up at Yakumo.

It was a bitter expression.

'On that day, I was...'

After saying that much, Mao paused.

No matter how she tried to hide it, it was obvious that she wasn't sure how to continue.

'I wasn't there. I was at home when I heard that Isshin-kun was carried in.'

Mao leant back on her chair, seeming exhausted, and looked up as she said that.

– She's lying.

Haruka felt that in her skin, but she didn't dare to say it.

Yakumo must have realised it too. Haruka was sure that he would question Mao and reveal that lie.

However, contrary to her expectations, Yakumo stood up while running a hand through his hair.

'I see. That was all I wanted to confirm.'

After saying that, Yakumo turned his back to Mao.

– Why aren't you questioning her more?

Haruka had that question as she stood up like Yakumo.

'Ah, that's right.'

Yakumo had reached out to open the door, but he suddenly stopped.

'Eh?'

Mao lifted her haggard face.

'I forgot to say something. About Uncle's organ donation...'

Mao held her breath.

'I absolutely refuse. Uncle's soul is still alive.'

After a long silence, Yakumo said that forcefully and left the room.

Haruka bowed to Mao and ran after Yakumo.

– Uncle's soul is still alive.

Yakumo's words went deep into Haruka's heart.

Yakumo really hadn't given up yet. Isshin would definitely come back from the dead. When Haruka thought that, tears welled up in her eyes.

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3

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Ishii drove into the hospital's front entrance and saw Yakumo waiting there.

Haruka was there too.

She was in skinny jeans and a white lace dress. It had an incredibly spring-like vibe.

– She really is cute.

So many things had happened that he hadn't had many chances to talk to Haruka, even though she had been nearby.

'Ishii-san, you're right on time.'

Yakumo got into the backseat just as Ishii parked.

'Ah, yes...'

'Before that, explain what's going on.'

Gotou turned around from the passenger seat and glared at Yakumo with the face of a demon.

However, Yakumo ignored Gotou and put his head out the window.

'I'm counting on you then,' said Yakumo.

'Eh, wait.'

Troubled, Haruka's brows furrowed.

– What's going on?

'Ishii-san, please start the car,' said Yakumo, closing the car window.

Haruka pressed up against the window and tried to say something.

'Is it OK?'

'Yes.'

'Understood.'

Ishii nodded at Haruka and started the car.

He saw Haruka's shocked figure in his rear-view mirror. When he looked at her sad expression, his chest felt tight.

'Excuse me... Did something happen to Haruka-chan?' asked Ishii after driving onto the main road.

'Nothing at all.'

Yakumo yawned, seeming bored.

'But...'

'She's much stronger than you think she is, Ishii-san.'

I know her better than you – though Yakumo might not have had that intention, that was what it sounded like, and Ishii was left with complicated feelings.

He wanted to say something, but in the end, he couldn't think of anything.

'So where're you planning to go today?' interrupted Gotou, changing the topic.

'Please head to the detention house,' Yakumo said, face blank.

'Hah?'

'I'm going to meet with Nanase Miyuki.'

'W-what!?' howled Gotou.

Though Ishii didn't let out his voice, he felt just as surprised.

'Please don't speak so loudly.'

Yakumo stuck his fingers in his ears.

He didn't seem nervous at all.

'How could I be quiet!? And you always...'

'I'm going to explain, so could you be quiet?' said Yakumo, interrupting Gotou. He ran a hand through his hair.

Gotou looked like he wanted to say something, but he collapsed back into the passenger seat, like he thought it would be pointless to retort.

Yakumo started his explanation after Gotou had calmed down.

'First, it is necessary to organise everything that we know so far.'

'Organise, is it...' said Ishii, hands on the wheel.

'To explain this case simply, Nanase Miyuki declared that she would kill somebody from inside the detention house, and my uncle was actually stabbed.'

'Yes.'

Just as Yakumo said, that was where the case started.

'The problem there is how on earth a crime was committed from inside the detention house, from which it is impossible to explain.'

'That is the biggest problem,' replied Ishii, looking at Yakumo's face through the rear-view mirror.

His eyes seemed filled with confidence.

– Have you already solved the mystery behind the case?

Yakumo's expression made Ishii think that.

'I know the method behind the crime,' said Yakumo, as if he had sensed Ishii's thoughts.

'Oi! That true?'

Contrary to Gotou, who was agitated, Yakumo seemed bored as he yawned.

– How can you be so calm?

Ishii didn't understand.

Even though Yakumo said he understood the method behind the crime, Ishii was sceptical.

He had felt personally when investigating that the case this time would not be solved by ordinary means.

There wouldn't be a breakthrough this easily.

'The method she used was actually very simple.'

Yakumo put his index finger on his brow.

As if that were a switch, Yakumo's gaze grew sharper.

'What method is it?' asked Ishii after a gulp.

'A trap?' interrupted Gotou.

'It wasn't a trap,' declared Yakumo.

'But something like a wire was found at the scene of the crime.'

It wasn't like Ishii himself had been confident about the trap theory, but he wanted to object when it was denied so readily.

'That is probably a fake.'

'Fake...'

'Yes. I discussed this before, but if a trap were used, there is a big problem.'

'Ah!'

Ishii recalled what Yakumo had said earlier.

If a trap were used, it would have been set up before Miyuki was arrested.

Isshin used the temple daily to meditate. It would be difficult to time it so that the trap was triggered after Miyuki declared her killing intent.

But –

'Wouldn't it be possible if she hid the trap somewhere and made it trigger if a special action were taken?' said Ishii, changing his perspective.

'Ishii-san, do you know what the priest at a temple does every morning?'

– Something a priest does every morning?

Meditating, reading scriptures, preparing breakfast – but Ishii could tell that wasn't the reply Yakumo wanted.

– Then what on earth does Yakumo want as a reply?

The answer suddenly came to Ishii's head.

'Oh, cleaning.'

After Ishii said that excitedly, Yakumo nodded, seeming satisfied.

'What're you talking about?'

Gotou looked confused as he stuck his neck in.

'The priest of the temple cleans the temple daily. Very thoroughly at that.'

'It would be unlikely for a trap not to be set off or found when the temple was cleaned every morning.'

Ishii explained further.

'I see.'

Gotou clapped his hands together in understanding.

Just as Yakumo said, this would eliminate the trap theory. Then there was one possibility left.

'So Nanase Miyuki really did escape the detention house and stab Isshin-san.'

Ishii said that with certainty, but Yakumo's response was unexpected.

'That is also wrong.'

Yakumo quietly shook his head.

'Eh?'

Ishii was disappointed.

If it wasn't a trap, there shouldn't have been any method but escape from the detention house.

'Nanase Miyuki did not take even one step out of the detention house.'

'How can you be sure?' said Gotou.

'It would be better to hear it from the person herself rather than from me.'

Yakumo's smile was full of confidence.

It certainly would be better to confirm with the person herself, but Miyuki wasn't the sort of person who would answer questions honestly.

– What on earth is he planning to do?

With uneasy feelings, Ishii continued driving the car.

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4

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Haruka sat on the bench in the waiting room.

She sighed.

Yakumo had made a number of requests earlier.

Because of what happened to Isshin, she didn't object to helping, but it didn't feel great being asked to help without knowing anything – she felt like an accomplice to fraud.

It also made her sad that Yakumo wouldn't tell her anything.

<Saitou-san, Saitou Yakumo-san.>

Finally, there was a call from the reception.

Haruka stood up and headed towards the reception in Yakumo's stead.

'Excuse me... I'm here as Saitou Yakumo's representative...'

After Haruka said that, the woman at the reception handed her a brown envelope.

He'd probably told her in advance that somebody would come pick it up for him. Inside the envelope was a copy of Isshin's clinical records.

In the recent years, there was a movement to implement the browsing of clinical records.

It differed depending on the hospital, but if the person or the person's relatives requested it, they could browse their clinical records.

'Haruka-chan.'

Just as Haruka was walking away with the envelope, somebody called out to her.

She turned around and saw Hijikata Makoto standing there.

She wore a grey pant suit and had a large bag hanging from her shoulder. Her long hair was tied behind her elegant face.

Haruka didn't often speak directly to Makoto, a newspaper reporter, but they had worked together on a number of spirit-related cases.

Makoto had helped out a lot during the last case too.

'Hello, Makoto-san.'

Haruka bowed.

'Hello.'

'Are you here to gather material today?'

'Didn't you hear anything from Yakumo-kun?'

Haruka was surprised by Makoto's unexpected words.

'Not at all...'

'Actually, Yakumo-kun asked me to come here and hand something to you, Haruka-chan...'

Makoto smiled wryly.

– He really doesn't tell me anything at all.

At this point, rather than anger, Haruka felt stunned.

'I see... I'm sorry for the trouble.'

Haruka bowed her head, but Makoto smiled pleasantly.

'It's fine. I know what sort of person Yakumo-kun is too.'

'He really isn't all here.'

Haruka pouted.

'Right, right. Let me hand it to you before I forget.'

Makoto held out a file.

'What is this?'

'You'll find out if you give it to Yakumo-kun.'

'Is that so?'

'Since it's personal information, be careful of how you use it.'

'Yes,' replied Haruka, taking the file.

– I wonder what he's looking into?

She might find out if she looked into the file, but she felt like she shouldn't just look at it so she put it into her bag along with the envelope she had received earlier.

'Well, shall we go?'

After saying that, Makoto started walking towards the exit.

The way she said that made it sound like they were going together, but Haruka didn't understand.

'Where are we going?'

'You've got something to bring to Hata-san's hospital, right?'

'Eh, ah, yes...'

Yakumo had told her to get Isshin's clinical records and bring them to Hata.

– Why does Makoto know that?

'Yakumo-kun told me to bring you to Hata-san's hospital, Haruka-chan,' said Makoto with a smile, like she had sensed Haruka's question.

'I-I see...'

Haruka felt perplexed. A lot of things seemed to be going on without her knowing it.

'Yakumo-kun's unexpectedly nice too.'

'I'm not sure about that...'

Though Haruka didn't understand, she followed Makoto out of the hospital.

They went to the guest parking lot and got into a red family car.

'It's quite a state of affairs,' said Makoto as she started the car.

It really was..

'When I think that Isshin-san might disappear like this, I can't stand it...'

Haruka felt a piercing pain in her chest.

It forced her to think how much having Isshin there up until now had saved her.

'I know...'

'I feel like I have to do something, but I can't do anything...'

Haruka gripped her hands into fists in vexation.

She couldn't help Isshin, comfort Yakumo who was suffering, or make efforts to catch the culprit.

All she could do was watch.

It was frustrating –

'Haruka-chan.'

Makoto put her left hand on Haruka's shoulder.

'Yes.'

'Isn't there something only you can do?'

'Something... only I can do?'

'Yakumo-kun is acting that way, but I think he's actually suffering a lot. I think he wants somebody to save him.'

'Really?'

Haruka couldn't think of Yakumo needing anybody.

No matter how much he suffered, he decided it all himself and just told Haruka after the fact. The words 'painful' and 'sad' had never left Yakumo's lips.

He kept them to himself, as if those feelings were his only.

Yakumo was always alone.

'Really.'

'But Yakumo-kun won't tell me anything.'

'That's because you don't tell him anything either, Haruka-chan.'

Haruka's heart jolted when Makoto said that.

– That might be true.

Strangely, she understood.

Yakumo won't tell me anything – while she grumbled about that, she acted strong herself and restrained her feelings.

Even though she really wanted to leap into Yakumo's arms and sob, she held back those feelings.

'Well, I'm not good at being honest either, so I can't say anything about anybody else.'

Makoto stuck out her tongue and smiled mischievously.

Haruka smiled back with complicated feelings.

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5

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'We've seen through your plan!'

Gotou yelled through the protective glass at Miyuki, who had a faint smile on her face.

However, her expression didn't change, as if she hadn't heard anything at all. Instead, Ishii, beside Gotou, leapt up from his chair.

This was the fourth consecutive day that they had visited her in the detention house.

– I want to make this the last.

Those were Gotou's inner thoughts.

'Seeing you angry makes me very excited.'

Miyuki's eyes narrowed as she let a long breath out of her half-open lips.

– This woman. She's so confident she's trying to provoke us.

Gotou ground his teeth together, making a grating sound.

'Just cough up the code behind your letter already!'

Gotou hit the protective glass.

However, Miyuki still did not stop smiling.

– If this glass weren't here, I could smash her nose in and make her cough up.

'Code? What are you talking about?'

Miyuki shrugged.

'Don't play stupid.'

'I'm not. I don't understand what you're talking about,' said Miyuki with a sneer, eyes still narrowed.

This response. There must be something in the letter – so Gotou felt.

'The letter you sent to Furukawa. I won't let you say you don't know what I'm talking about.'

Gotou took the copy of the letter from his pocket and pressed it against the glass so she could see.

Miyuki's expression still did not change.

'Gotou-san, this won't be a visit if you do that – it'll be an interrogation,' said Ishii quietly.

'Shut up!'

Gotou hit Ishii's head with a fist, emptying all the negative feelings that had built up within him.

Ishii curled up with his head in his arms, as if he were about to collapse.

– Might have hit him too hard in my excitement.

'No matter when I see it, your comedy duo is always funny.'

Miyuki made a Yakumo-like sarcastic comment and laughed.

– What the hell do you mean, comedy duo? Making fun of me.

'Shut up! Tell us already!' Gotou said even more forcefully.

'It seems you are rather cornered. You're so pitiful I don't mind telling you. But I have a condition.'

Miyuki looked up at him with an inviting glance.

– She bit.

The response was just as they had planned. Yakumo had been right.

'Condition...' repeated Gotou, acting troubled.

'If you release me from here, I don't mind telling you,' said Miyuki with a triumphant smile.

'Will you really?' said Gotou, trying not to smile.

'Yes.'

'Got it... I'll negotiate...'

Gotou tried to restrain himself, but he couldn't. He lost control and started laughing aloud.

Miyuki's mouth went wide in surprise at Gotou's response.

Ishii, who had been curled up for a while now, started laughing too.

'W-what...'

Miyuki had thought she was in control, so she had felt superior and decided on a confident attitude.

However, Gotou's and Ishii's responses appeared to be unexpected for Miyuki.

Her eyes were uneasy.

'You're a stupid woman.'

'What did you say?'

'Did you really think I'd accept that condition?' said Gotou, grinning.

'What's so funny?'

Miyuki's eyes narrowed as she stood up.

It was exactly what Yakumo thought she would do. What a guy.

'What's so funny? You don't get it?'

Gotou put his nose up to the glass to provoke her.

'...'

'If you don't get it, I'll tell you. You just asked to be released from here.'

'What about it?'

'That's a funny thing to ask for.'

Miyuki jolted. She had realised the true meaning of Gotou's words.

However, it was too late to realise now.

'You escaped from the detention house to stab Isshin, right? If that were the case, wouldn't it be easy for you to get out?'

There was no response to Gotou's question.

That became evidence for one fact.

Miyuki had not taken one step out of the detention house. To put it correctly, she couldn't. She acknowledged that herself.

Gotou could tell that behind Miyuki's lips, in a thin line, her teeth were grinding together.

She was probably so frustrated she couldn't help it.

'Too bad, isn't it? I said it already – we've seen through your plan,' said Gotou, sticking out his chin.

'It was Yakumo, right? He gave you this hint...'

Miyuki looked bitter.

– It's too late to realise now.

Miyuki had let her guard down since she was talking to Gotou.

However, that had been part of Yakumo's plan. Gotou had just been talking as Yakumo had

directed him to.

Miyuki had gone along and talked too much.

Last time, Yakumo had said nothing and acted quiet as part of his plan to make Miyuki let her guard down.

'Yakumo has a message for you.'

'...'

A shadow came over Miyuki's face.

'His uncle is still alive. You're just a braggart. You can't even kill a bug from inside the detention house – so he said.'

Miyuki's head drooped and she started mumbling something.

At first, Gotou couldn't hear what she was saying.

However, her voice grew firmer and finally the clear words reached Gotou's ears.

'... I'll kill you I'll kill you I'll kill you.'

Though she spoke quietly, the words had more pressure than an angry yell.

It was like there was a black aura behind Miyuki.

However, she couldn't do anything from the other side of the glass.

'It's absolutely impossible for you to kill somebody from inside the detention house.'

In response to Gotou's words, Miyuki lifted her head and her eyes opened wide. Her bloodshot eyes looked like they would fall out.

'I can. This time I'll kill Yakumo-kun.'

After saying that, Miyuki laughed uncannily, showing her canines.

'Really. I look forward to it.'

Gotou said that and then left the room.

Ishii hurriedly followed him.

'You did it, Detective Gotou.'

Ishii's eyes were sparkling like a child's, but there was something Gotou wasn't satisfied with.

He'd provoked Miyuki just as Yakumo had told him to, but was that the right decision – it was like Yakumo was using himself as bait to lure Miyuki.

– He can't be rushing to his own death, right?

Gotou murmured that in his heart.

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Haruka went into the hospital that Makoto had dropped her off at.

It was so different from the hospital Isshin was at that it could be called its complete opposite. With its old white walls, it looked extremely like a hospital.

The truth was that Haruka would have liked Makoto to come with her, but they had split up at the front of the hospital since Makoto had something else to investigate.

Now there was nothing Haruka could do but go, even if she was anxious.

Haruka timidly stepped in from the front entrance, passed the reception and took the emergency stairs by the elevator hall.

A dim corridor went on in front of her.

The walls were stained and cracked, and the air felt unclean. Furthermore, the fluorescent lights were flickering loudly.

It made Haruka think that she had lost herself in a different world.

Haruka was going to meet with Hata, the coroner.

Hata had been involved in many cases with Yakumo and Gotou, so Haruka knew him, but it was the first time she'd gone to meet him on her own.

Though she knew she shouldn't judge people by their appearances, Hata had a somewhat uncanny atmosphere to him – to put it frankly, he was scary.

– Demonic old man.

Gotou often described him that way, but Haruka agreed too.

Haruka took a deep breath to calm herself down and knocked on the door of the room at the very end of the corridor.

'Excuse me, my name is Ozawa. Yakumo asked me to...'

'Door's open.'

A hoarse voice called out from inside the room.

'E-excuse me.'

Haruka obeyed the voice and opened the heavy door to peek inside.

She saw Hata sitting at his desk and leisurely sipping tea.

Though his face was as wrinkled as a dried persimmon, his eyes popped out like a fish's.

'I heard from Yakumo-kun. Well, sit down.'

After Hata said that, he let out a creepy giggle.

It made Haruka think she'd be gobbled up if she let her guard down.

Haruka uncomfortably sat in a chair, as Hata suggested.

'You don't have to be so afraid – I'm not going to eat you,' said Hata, like he had read Haruka's mind. He giggled again.

'No, that isn't...'

'I'm not interested in living humans.'

Though he had probably meant that to be reassuring, it was even scarier.

Hata normally preferred dead people over living people – and burnt corpses were no good. He was an eccentric who boasted about how he liked fresh corpses.

'Hata-san just has a pure interest in the life and death of people as a coroner.' Yakumo had said that, but to Haruka, it didn't seem like that at all.

She brought up the topic at hand before the conversation went off track.

'Er, what did Yakumo-kun say to you?'

Haruka took Isshin's clinical records from her bag and handed them to Hata.

'Oh, that's right. Now, let's see how he was stabbed.'

Hata took the paper and put it close to his face so that his nose was almost touching it as he read it, making hmm noises as he did so.

Could he really see it like that? It felt more like he was sniffing it than looking at it with his eyes.

'I see. This is just as Yakumo-kun said,' said Hata, nodding his head a number of times in admiration.

'Er, what do you mean?' asked Haruka, curious about what Hata saw. Hata turned his cloudy eyes towards Haruka.

It felt like she'd turn into a rock if he continued.

After a while, Hata slowly began to explain.

'When I look at these clinical records, it says Isshin was stabbed diagonally from beneath his ribs upwards, but...'

Hata showed the paper to Haruka and pointed at the picture in the shape of a human body.

The right part of the picture – at the stomach, there was a mark in pen.

That was probably where Isshin had been stabbed.

'Ribs, arteries, other organs – there're no signs of injury. It's like the stab avoided them.'

Haruka cocked her head, not really understanding Hata's words.

'Is that strange?'

'If the culprit stabbed Isshin with the intention of killing him, this would practically be a miracle – the culprit would be an incredible dunce.'

Hata clutched his stomach and started giggling like he thought it funny.

'Does that mean the person who stabbed Isshin-san did not plan on killing him?'

'I don't know. They might not have planned on killing him, or they might have been but missed the vitals by some miracle – both are plausible.'

Hata said that the vitals were missed, but the main problem of Isshin being in a coma continued.

Her head was a bit mixed up.

'Well, tell Yakumo-kun it was just as he thought.'

Hata handed the copy of the medical records back to Haruka.

She took them, still confused.

'Ah, that's right. Yakumo-kun asked for something else too.'

After Hata said that, he took a large paper bag from under his desk and handed it to Haruka.

She took the bag and looked inside.

Inside there was a piece of clothing.

'What is this?'

'You can tell by looking, right? I got somebody I know to bring it,' said Hata with a smirk.

What on earth would it be used for?

The colour was awful – it wasn't fashionable. If Yakumo was going to wear this, Haruka would prefer to refrain from walking beside him.

'He isn't going to wear this, right?'

'I just got what he requested. I don't know what he's going to use it for.'

Hata's body shook as he laughed.

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7

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With a light heart, Ishii followed Gotou.

After reaching the parking lot in the back of the detention house, he saw Yakumo by the car.

He had his hands in his pockets and was looking up at the clouds in the sky in boredom.

– Yakumo’s plan went wonderfully.

They tricked Miyuki so easily. While that brain of his was commendable, at the same time, it was frightening.

The sort of guy you didn’t want as your enemy.

'Hey, we're back.'

Gotou raised his hand and called out to Yakumo.

'You're late. Were you eating grass on the side of the road? You aren't a cow,' said Yakumo with a yawn.

'The thing I hate most is being treated like a brat by a brat!'

'How pitiful; you haven't realised that you're the most brat-like person here.'

Yakumo snorted.

'You bastard! You talking about me?'

'There isn't anybody else I would be talking about, is there?'

'You brat!'

Gotou’s face reddened in a flash and he grabbed Yakumo.

– Again.

He couldn’t beat Yakumo in an argument. Even though he knew that, it appeared that he couldn’t hold himself back.

'Detective Gotou, please stop.'

Ishii hurriedly walked towards them to stop Gotou.

'Let go of me!'

'Please calm down.'

'Shut up! I won't be satisfied until I punch this guy!'

Gotou flailed even more violently.

Ishii felt like he was riding a bucking horse. He gripped on as tightly as he could, but he was flung away; he couldn’t beat Gotou in strength.

Ishii hit the asphalt.

'Don't get in my way!'

At some point, Gotou had turned his anger towards Ishii instead.

'B-but...'

Ishii managed to stand up in his stinging pain.

– Eh?

Yakumo had disappeared in the middle of the fight.

'Please don't dawdle; let's hurry up and go.'

Ishii heard Yakumo's voice.

He turned his gaze and spotted Yakumo in the back seat of the car, yawning. It was like the matter didn't concern him at all.

This made even Gotou lose his spirit. He kicked the car tire and got in.

Ishii felt tired.

'Oi! Ishii! Hurry up and start the car!'

Hurried by Gotou, Ishii sluggishly got into the driver's seat and started the car.

'How was it then?' drawled Yakumo.

It was like he had forgotten the earlier scuffle entirely.

'Just like you said. She didn't say it outright, but that woman admitted herself that she didn't leave the detention house.'

'So that really was the case then.'

Yakumo crossed his arms and looked up at the ceiling.

'Hey, Yakumo. How'd you know Miyuki didn't leave the detention house?'

Ishii thought Gotou's question was very appropriate.

In the end, Miyuki had admitted that herself, but Yakumo had realised before that.

– How?

'It's simple. I knew because it was impossible.'

'That's all?'

It was such a simple answer that Ishii was surprised and had to ask the question again.

'That's all.'

'Is that really all?' Gotou pressed.

'Of course. You should know more about the security at Tokyo Detention House than I do, Gotou-san.'

'Well, that's true, but...'

Gotou nodded, though he didn't look satisfied.

'Then you understand, right? Do you think it is possible to return to the detention house after committing a crime, let alone escaping in the first place?'

'Well...'

'And without being noticed by anyone.'

After thinking about it, Yakumo was right.

It might have been different in the past, but if you thought about it realistically, it was impossible to pass the detention house security, stab somebody and return without anyone noticing.

'It's impossible...'

Gotou scowled.

'In the first place, she declared that she would kill somebody from inside the detention house as an act to direct your attention that way.'

'An act...'

Ishii thought over that word.

Now that Yakumo said that, it made sense. Miyuki's words had been superfluous from the beginning.

'Furthermore, being carried to the infirmary was also a charade. She probably used some sort of drug to make it look like she had a fit. By doing so, it made it seem as if there was a period of time she could escape in...'

It was probably just as Yakumo said.

Ishii and Gotou had been led by the nose.

'But Isshin was stabbed. That's a fact. How'd that happen?' said Gotou carelessly, biting a cigarette that wasn't lit.

That didn't make sense to Ishii either.

He accepted that it wasn't a trap and that it was impossible to escape from the detention house. How did Miyuki commit the crime then?

Yakumo's eyes narrowed as his lips turned up into a smile.

When Ishii saw that expression, a chill ran down his spine and he almost let go of the wheel.

Even though he hadn't done anything, he was sweating.

Yakumo slowly put his left index finger to his brow.

'Isn't it obvious? She didn't stab my uncle. Somebody else did.'

'W-w-w-what!?'

Gotou rose from his seat in surprise.

Yakumo wasn't moved.

'Is there any other method?'

'Well, I get what you're saying, but...'

'No matter how unbelievable the truth, that is the only option.'

Ishii understood what Yakumo was saying.

But –

'How about the fingerprints? Her fingerprints were found on the knife's handle,' Ishii said quickly.

It was because of the fingerprints that they hadn't doubted that it was Miyuki's crime.

Even though they knew there was no other method, if they didn't solve the problem of the fingerprints, they would just have to go back.

'The culprit had her fingerprints and put them on the knife,' said Yakumo matter-of-factly.

Ishii wasn't being stubborn, but he still couldn't understand.

It was true that it would have been possible to use something like gelatine to preserve Miyuki's fingerprints and make fake fingerprints.

You could make it with just a couple hundred yen. Frequently used by those illegally entering the country, it was a big problem.

However, that wouldn't solve everything.

'Where did the culprit get her fingerprints? She was inside the detention house.'

Ishii spoke the question just as it came to his head.

If the culprit did not have the fingerprints in the first place, they could not make a fake.

Yakumo ran a hand through his hair.

It didn't look like he was thinking. Yakumo already had the answer. Ishii felt that directly.

'Your question makes sense, Ishii-san. That was why there was a letter.'

'Ah! I see!' Ishii exclaimed as he unexpectedly arrived at the answer.

'Don't shout all of a sudden!'

Gotou hit Ishii's head.

'I-I apologise.'

'I don't care which one of you does it – just explain it so I can understand.'

Gotou was probably irritated about being the only one who didn't understand. He crossed his arms indignantly.

'Ishii-san, please explain to the bear.'

Yakumo turned his eyes out the window in apparent disinterest.

Ishii fixed the position of his glasses with his finger before beginning to explain.

'The only thing you can send out of the detention house is a letter.'

'What about it?' Gotou said disagreeably.

'She put her fingerprints on that letter and sent it to the culprit on the outside. That's what it means.'

Ishii recalled the contents of the letter.

– The goal of all life is death.

Making it look like a code was just to turn their eyes away from the existence of the fingerprints.

Miyuki's true goal in sending out a letter was to give out her fingerprints.

'I see. So that's how it is...'

Gotou clapped his hands together, but he suddenly coughed, like a small bone had been caught in his throat.

'But wait... Wasn't the letter examined? Other people's fingerprints would be on it too, so the culprit wouldn't be able to say which ones were Miyuki's, right?'

Ishii was startled by what Gotou said so casually.

That was right. It wasn't like there had been names on the fingerprints. If other people touched the letter, it would be difficult to determine which fingerprints were hers.

Ishii looked at Yakumo's face through the rear-view mirror.

However, he didn't seem concerned.

'She didn't leave fingerprints on the letter. She left them on the inside of the envelope,' he said disinterestedly.

– I see.

If she put her fingers on the inside of the envelope, nobody would touch them. The culprit would be able to get Miyuki's fingerprints clearly.

That solved most of the mystery.

'Does that mean the person who got the letter, that nurse Furukawa, was the one who stabbed Isshin?' mumbled Gotou.

Without replying, Yakumo stared out the window.

A question came to Ishii.

'Excuse me, but there's one thing I don't understand.'

'How the plan was drawn up, yes?' said Yakumo, finishing Ishii's question.

'What are you talking about?'

Gotou interrupted immediately.

'Ishii-san, please go ahead.'

Yakumo left the explanation to Ishii again.

'Ah, yes. Even if there is a culprit on the outside, how did they decide on using fingerprints – and also, Miyuki announced the crime ahead of time. The day and time would also become a problem.'

'Well, you know, they used that... Couldn't they have talked on the phone?'

Gotou gave a negligent reply.

'That would be impossible.'

'What?'

'Miyuki was in the detention house. The only people who came were the lawyer and Isshin-san. The only other sign of contact with the outside was that letter,' Ishii said quickly.

'What's going on then?'

Unable to come up with an answer, Gotou turned around and looked to Yakumo.

'Who knows? I don't understand that either.'

Yakumo closed just his left eye and scratched his head.

It was a rather irresponsible answer since he had been the one who brought them to this conclusion.

'Ah! I see!'

A light bulb suddenly flashed over Ishii's head.

How did Miyuki draw up the plan – Ishii had realised.

'What? You're so noisy.'

Gotou frowned.

'Detective Gotou, Yamamura did it.'

'What did that guy do?'

– Why doesn't he understand from what I said?

Though Ishii felt irritated, he started his explanation.

'Yamamura, the guard, met up with Furukawa. He can leave and enter the detention house.'

To be honest, he was confident this time.

With Yamamura's cooperation, it would be possible to discuss the details of the plan. There was no other method.

'Ah, that's very likely... OK, let's go meet Furukawa now. Yakumo, you come too.'

Gotou leant back towards the backseat.

'I refuse. If you know that much, the rest is police business. Please work for your taxpayers' money.'

'W-what did you say!?' yelled Gotou as he tried to fly at Yakumo.

At that moment, Ishii was pushed and the wheel spun to the right. Ishii hurriedly turned the wheel back to the left, but Gotou was still flailing, so it was difficult.

The car veered right and left. Car horns started honking around them.

'Please stop! It's dangerous!' Ishii shouted, his anger apparent.

The car was silent.

Gotou had stopped moving in his surprise. His eyes were as large as plates.

'Er... I mean...'

– I never thought that I would shout at Gotou.

Actually, Ishii was the most surprised.

He might be hit once or twice for this. Ishii raised his shoulders in preparation.

'S-s-sorry.'

For some reason, Gotou bowed his head, looking troubled.

Yakumo clutched his stomach as he laughed in the backseat.

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8

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– I can't cheer myself up for some reason.

With gloomy feelings, Haruka waited in Yakumo's secret hiding place, the <Movie Research Circle> room.

Yakumo wasn't there.

Yakumo was sniffing something out, but Haruka didn't know where he was headed.

Even though Yakumo must have been suffering a great deal what with what happened to Isshin, he wouldn't express his feelings.

It felt like he was bearing with the pain all alone.

– That's because you don't tell him anything either, Haruka-chan.

The words Makoto said to her kept running through her head.

She wanted to deny it, but she couldn't.

Unable to sort her fraying feelings, Haruka put her head against the table.

At almost the exact same time, the door opened and Yakumo came in.

'You're late.'

Haruka wasn't really angry, but she raised her head and complained anyway.

'You'll make a good mother-in-law,' said Yakumo as he sat in the chair opposite her.

Even if he didn't say it, she could tell he was tired from his expression.

His eyes were a little red. Perhaps he hadn't slept much recently.

'Why were you late?' she asked, though she knew there wouldn't be an answer.

'I'm fairly busy too.'

A vague answer, as expected –

Like that, he took everything on himself. Haruka would only find out once the case was over.

'So how was it?'

Yakumo asked for a report of her investigation as he yawned.

Haruka swallowed her swelling dissatisfaction and handed over the file Makoto had given her.

'This is from Makoto-san.'

'I see.'

Yakumo took the file and looked at it with a serious gaze.

Haruka didn't know what was written on it.

I'm always kept out of the loop –

'How about Hata-san?' asked Yakumo after reading the file once.

'Hata-san said that if the culprit had planned on killing Isshin-san, it would be a near miracle since Isshin was stabbed without injuring any of his bones or organs...'

Haruka explained just as Hata had told her.

'So that really is it.'

Yakumo nodded, seeming satisfied.

Haruka didn't know what was 'really' about it.

'What do you mean?'

'Exactly what the words mean. The culprit didn't plan on killing Uncle.'

'Didn't plan on killing him?'

Haruka's brows furrowed as she mulled the words over.

'Correct. It would be troublesome if he died – perhaps that might be easier to understand.'

– I don't understand at all.

Currently, Isshin was wandering the boundary between life and death.

To Haruka, it felt like there was a clear killing intent.

'Why did they stab Isshin-san if they didn't plan on killing him?'

'Who knows? I don't know either.'

Yakumo stood up while running his fingers through his hair. Then, he opened the refrigerator door and took a bottle of tea out.

– He's lying.

Haruka felt that instinctively.

Yakumo's attitude just made it seem like he was avoiding the topic purposefully.

Even though he knew everything, he wouldn't ever talk about it. Yakumo was always like that. That was how he shouldered his harsh fate.

It hurt to watch him.

– Even though I'm prepared to shoulder the pain with him...

'Tell me the truth.'

Haruka spoke, even though she didn't think she would.

Yakumo suddenly stopped.

'I did.'

– Another lie.

'Can't you trust me?'

'I don't think that.'

Yakumo slowly sat in his chair.

– He really is shouldering everything himself.

Haruka suddenly felt frustrated.

Being together wasn't always full of good things. There was pain, frustration, and suffering. However, they could still share the burden.

People lived like that, while supporting each other.

I want to be that existence for Yakumo – she wanted that, but there was a wall she just couldn't cross.

Haruka's existence just circled that wall –

She would cry if she stayed with him any longer.

'I'm heading home. This is from Hata-san.'

Haruka said that quickly and stood up, leaving the paper bag from Hata on the table.

She hadn't planned on saying anything special, but after those words that sounded like a farewell, she felt miserable.

– Yakumo won't be tied down by anything.

Isshin's words came up in her head.

It was just as he said. Yakumo was like a cloud. No matter how you tried to hold on to him, he would slip through, since he had no substance.

– I don't know if I can do this anymore.

'Bye.'

Haruka turned her back to Yakumo and opened the door.

'I'm still thinking about it.'

Yakumo spoke.

'Eh?'

'That's why I can't say anything right now. This is a problem I have to solve.'

Yakumo's words lit Haruka's anger.

It flared up in an instant; she couldn't restrain it.

'If you're thinking about it, why not talk about it!?''

Before Haruka noticed it, she was yelling.

She tried to stop herself, but it was no good. It kept coming out.

'Nobody can understand me – you say things like that! Aren't you just distancing yourself from everyone!? Always acting like you're the only one who understands anything! Even though you don't understand how I feel at all, Yakumo-kun! I'm sick of being pushed around!'

Losing herself to a wave of emotion, the words came out of Haruka all at once.

She hadn't thought about it too deeply before. It was frustrating, it was sad – but this had to be how she truly felt.

Her body was trembling.

The tears that had welled up rolled down her cheeks, dripping one by one from her chin.

Haruka couldn't look at Yakumo to see what sort of expression he was making.

'It's not just me...'

She'd thought that she'd said everything, but words kept bubbling up from inside her chest.

'Gotou-san and Ishii-san and Makoto-san and Hata-san. Everyone – everyone's worried about you and trying to understand your heart, Yakumo-kun... But what do you say? It's got nothing to do with me, or it's troublesome – how can you say that!?'

Haruka's breathing was ragged, as if she were nearly drowning.

It felt like she would be crushed and die from the pressure.

She couldn't stand. She sat right there.

– It was quiet.

So quiet you'd think nobody was in this room –

Perhaps there really wasn't anybody there.

Yakumo might have already left the room without listening to Haruka's yells.

Without Isshin, it felt like his bonds to everyone would fall apart at the seams and crumble.

– No, that's wrong.

Haruka might have been the only one who thought there was a bond there, when it had really just been an illusion.

– Which is it?

She didn't know. Haruka didn't care anymore.

She just wanted to run away as quickly as she could.

– Haruka.

She heard somebody call her name close to her ear.

– Who is that? Yakumo? It can't be.

Yakumo had never called her name before.

Haruka slowly stood, dragging up her heavy body.

'I'm sorry. I'll tell you everything.'

This time, she heard it clearly.

There was no doubt about it. It was Yakumo's voice –

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9

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Komatsu relaxed after eating dinner while reading a magazine in the break room.

Then, the internal telephone on the desk rang, breaking that relaxation.

<Doctor! It's an emergency!>

When Komatsu picked up the receiver, he heard a frantic voice on the other side.

'Symptoms?'

<Coughing up blood.>

'I see,' replied Komatsu, writing it down on a piece of paper as he did so.

<Breathing is also weak; it appears there are convulsions as well.>

'Can you carry the patient?'

<We're heading there now.>

'Got it.'

Komatsu hung up and headed right for the infirmary.

From the voice on the telephone just now, it was serious.

Finally, the guards carried the patient in on a stretcher. The patient's arm hung over the side.

'That bed.'

Komatsu instructed the guards.

When Komatsu saw the person on the bed, he was startled.

– This woman again?

She had been carried in because she was coughing up blood just the other day.

The detective who came earlier had suspected it was an act. Komatsu had denied it then, but to be honest, he thought there was a possibility.

– I can't let my guard down around this woman.

It wasn't something specific. If he was forced to say it, it was those eyes. He'd never seen such cold eyes before.

He decided to stop thinking about it for now. He'd determine if it was a faked illness after examination.

Komatsu put his ear close to her mouth to check that she was breathing.

Her breathing was faint.

He checked her pulse using her wrist.

It was so weak with the beats spread out to the point that he wouldn't have noticed unless he was looking for it.

– This isn't an act.

He was sure. People could act like they were suffering or in pain and even consciously make their breath weaker, but they couldn't do the same thing with the pulse.

He suddenly felt impatient.

He took a penlight out of the pocket of his white doctor's gown, opened her eyes and shined the light on them. The pupils remained as they were.

'This is bad...'

He said that without thinking.

'How is she?' asked the guard who had brought her in.

The patient was unconscious.

They wouldn't be able to do anything in the infirmary of the detention house. Komatsu decided that.

'Get permission from head office to transport the prisoner. I'll call an ambulance.'

Once Komatsu said that, one of the guards flew out of the room.

In the case that one of the prisoners held at the detention house suddenly became ill and could not be treated at the infirmary, they would be transported to the nearby hospital with the permission of head office.

Komatsu picked up the phone on his desk and directly called the hospital.

He told the doctor who answered the current situation, received permission to take the patient and hung up.

The woman on the bed groaned, sounding like she was in pain.

'Will she be all right?' asked the guard who had remained.

'I don't know,' said Komatsu.

From the woman's symptoms, it was clear that it wasn't a faked illness, but uneasiness still smouldered in his heart –

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10

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'Before I say anything, there's somewhere I want to go.'

After Yakumo said that, they headed for Gotou's home.

Haruka realised what Yakumo was thinking after coming this far. He had come to check up on Nao.

When Yakumo pressed the intercom button at the entrance, Atsuko welcomed them in pleasantly.

They took the lift up to the fourth floor and were just about to press the intercom button there

when the door opened and Nao showed up.

The moment Nao saw Yakumo, she smiled from cheek to cheek and scratched her face like a cat.

It seemed she'd been lonely.

'It's nice to meet you.'

Atsuko showed up behind Nao and smiled at Yakumo.

'Thank you for all that you've done. My name is Saitou Yakumo.'

Yakumo bowed his head awkwardly.

'You're so stiff. I get enough of that from my husband. Anyway, come in,' said Atsuko mischievously.

In agreement, Nao pulled Yakumo's hand and took him inside.

Haruka followed after them, as if she had been pulled too.

After going into the living, Haruka sat next to Yakumo on the sofa.

'Please don't trouble yourself,' said Yakumo.

'Don't worry about it,' Atsuko replied, and she started making tea.

Nao was sitting opposite Yakumo, but then she stood up and ran to the kitchen to help Atsuko.

There was a very fun atmosphere coming from the kitchen.

At first, Haruka had been worried, but it seemed like Atsuko and Nao had made fast friends.

Yakumo looked at them with a heavy gaze.

'I'm glad Nao-chan seems to be doing well.'

Haruka really felt that way.

Atsuko's presence had probably supported Nao in these harsh circumstances. Atsuko was incredibly tolerant.

That was Gotou's wife for you.

'Nao doesn't remember her mother.'

Yakumo's eyes closed slightly.

Haruka had heard about Nao's mother from Isshin before. She had died when Nao was one.

Just as Yakumo said, Nao probably couldn't remember her mother.

'I see...'

What would happen to Nao if she lost Isshin too?

Haruka didn't want to think about it, but her anxiety showed on her face.

Finally, Nao came back with a tray of tea. Atsuko was right behind her.

'Ah!'

Nao held out the tray as she spoke up.

'Thank you,' said Haruka, taking a teacup.

Yakumo did the same thing, smiling awkwardly.

'Well done.'

Atsuko patted Nao's head.

Nao laughed, like she was ticklish.

'Is she causing you any trouble?' asked Yakumo as he stared at his teacup.

'Trouble?'

Atsuko looked surprised.

'Yes. Suddenly taking Nao in must have been a bother.'

'Why?'

'Er, well...'

Yakumo's brows furrowed at Atsuko's response.

Atsuko smiled pleasantly when she saw him.

'You're a bit different from what I imagined.'

'What you imagined?'

'My husband and Haruka-chan said that you were incredibly contrary...'

Yakumo glanced at Haruka.

Haruka looked down.

'Right, Nao-chan?'

Atsuko looked to Nao for agreement.

Whether she understood what was being said or not, Nao nodded a number of times.

When Haruka looked at Atsuko and Nao communicating like this, somehow –

'It's like they're really mother and daughter.'

It slipped out of Haruka's mouth.

'It really is...' whispered Yakumo.

Haruka thought that it really was a good thing that Atsuko was here this time. Without her, Nao probably couldn't have smiled like this.

'I'm sorry, but please take care of Nao for a little longer,' said Yakumo as he stood.

There was an extraordinary air to him. As if he was preparing for something –

'I don't mind at all, but you have to come back.'

Atsuko turned a sharp gaze towards Yakumo.

Next to her, Nao looked up at Yakumo anxiously.

'I know,' said Yakumo, his head then. Then, he lightly patted Nao on the head and walked to the entrance.

Haruka stood up as well. She tried to follow him, but Nao grabbed her hand.

Nao's eyes were pleading.

Haruka understood even if she didn't say anything. Nao was worried about Yakumo.

'Yakumo-kun's OK,' said Haruka, drawing Nao close.

Finally, Nao nodded and let go of Haruka.

'Haruka-chan, I'll leave the rest to you. At times like this, women have to be firm,' said Atsuko just as Haruka walked to the entrance.

'I will.'

Haruka nodded and then went outside after Yakumo.

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11

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– We've finally come this far.

As Gotou looked up at the apartment that stood out in the dark, he felt relief.

He'd seen Furukawa enter her flat just earlier.

Last time, they hadn't known the point of the letter, so they had been stuck just watching her, unable to go further, but this time was different.

Yakumo had made the point of the letter clear.

Furukawa had taken Miyuki's fingerprints and used them when she stabbed Isshin. That had to be right.

'OK! Let's go!'

Gotou called out to Ishii, who was beside him, and went through the apartment's entrance.

They took the elevator to Furukawa's room on the fourth floor.

She had met with Isshin using a ghost sighting at the hospital before the incident occurred. That couldn't be a coincidence.

She had called Isshin out purposefully – it was natural to think she was wrapped up in the case.

But there was something Gotou just didn't understand.

Motive –

Why did Furukawa have to stab Isshin?

– Well, there's no point thinking about it.

Gotou shook his head and threw aside his thoughts. He'd decided to act rather than think about unnecessary things now.

Gotou stood in front of the door and signalled Ishii with his eyes.

Ishii replied with a nod and timidly pressed the intercom button.

<Hello.>

There was a guarded voice from the intercom.

'Ah, good evening. We're police.'

Ishii spoke in a polite and cheerful voice so as to not disturb Furukawa.

Gotou had thought Ishii was just a fumbling guy, but at some point, he'd learnt a technique like this.

<Police?>

The guarded tone was stronger in Furukawa's voice.

'Oh, it's nothing important, but there's something we'd like to ask you for reference.'

As Ishii spoke, there was the sound of rustling from the room.

She was searching for something. Or hiding something.

After a while, Furukawa opened the door.

It was obvious that she didn't want them to come in.

'Actually, we're investigating an attempted murder case... You know about Saitou Isshin-san's case, yes?' said Ishii, asking for agreement.

'Ah, yes.'

Furukawa's eyes were flicking about.

She was clearly afraid.

'You met the victim, Saitou Isshin, before the incident, yes, Furukawa-san?'

'Eh, well...'

'On what business did you meet him?'

'Er... How should I explain it...'

Ishii and Furukawa continued to talk.

– Ah, get it over with already. Don't make me irritated.

If they kept on asking small things like this, it'd take until morning. Even though they could just get to the point.

Just as Gotou was about to interrupt since he was at the limit of his patience, he saw something move in the back of the room.

A black shadow –

Gotou's body moved before he could think.

He pushed Furukawa aside and walked in in his shoes.

It was a common one-room flat of about eight tatami in size.

After going in, he spotted a man crouching with his hand on the window that connected to the balcony.

– So that really was it.

'Yamamura!' yelled Gotou as he charged.

Yamamura's eyes went wide.

'Wait – what are you doing!?'

Furukawa's expression changed as she clung onto Gotou.

'Let go.'

Gotou shook Furukawa off.

Yamamura used that time to go out the window onto the balcony and jumped right there.

– As if I'd let you get away!

'Ishii! Watch that woman!'

Gotou ran after Yamamura and jumped off the balcony.

– Crap.

When he thought that, it was already too late.

He was on the fourth floor. It was far too high to jump.

After a feeling of floating, his two feet hit something.

However, it wasn't as great a force as he thought it would be.

Gotou had landed on the roof of the entrance rather than the ground.

Luckily, the building's entrance stuck out.

Gotou was relieved, but he didn't have the time to relax. Yamamura had also landed on the roof and had jumped to the ground. He was running away.

'As if I'd let you get away!'

Gotou jumped right after him and ran after Yamamura.

Yamamura ran out from the apartment premises onto the road.

At that moment, a car ran into him and Yamamura's body flew into the air.

It was like a slow-motion movie.

The car veered into the bushes.

Yamamura fell onto the asphalt.

– Is he dead?

He was unexpectedly calm as he worried about that.

'That hurts!'

Yamamura grabbed his leg, writhing like a fly that had been hit with bug spray.

– He's alive then.

'He suddenly ran out.'

The driver got off the car and was lamenting with a pale face.

Gotou ignored the driver, approached Yamamura and grabbed him by the collar.

'Sorry you couldn't get away. This puts you under guard now.'

Yamamura's eyes were filled with tears as he bit his lip.

'Detective Gotou, are you all right?'

Ishii, who had heard the commotion, had rushed out.

'Call an ambulance now!' Gotou ordered.

At the same time, his mobile phone started vibrating inside his jacket.

– Who the hell's calling now?

Gotou quickly cuffed Yamamura and answered the phone.

'Who's it?'

<It's me!>

He heard Miyagawa's voice.

Gotou had been prepared to hear complaints about his phone etiquette, but unexpectedly, they

skpped that.

<Things are a mess.>

Miyagawa sounded tense, which was unusual for him.

That was enough to tell Gotou how serious the situation was.

'What happened?'

<Nanase Miyuki escaped.>

– What kind of joke was that?

Gotou cocked his head.

He'd told Miyagawa that Miyuki couldn't have escaped the detention house to commit the crime.

'What are you saying? It's impossible to escape from the detention house, isn't it?'

<She got out of it.>

'That's impossible.'

While Gotou denied it, his heart was beating loudly.

<About an hour earlier, Nanase Miyuki collapsed in her room and was carried to the infirmary.>

'And then?'

<At the instruction of the medical officer at the detention house, she was transported to the nearby hospital...>

'That's transport, not escape, right?'

<There's more to the story. Listen properly.>

Miyagawa's voice was unsteady, which was unlike him.

Gotou felt anxious too when he heard that voice.

'More... to the story...'

<After arriving at the hospital, they opened the back of the ambulance, but it was empty.>

'Empty?'

– What was going on?

<She disappeared. We're in a state of emergency, but...>

Gotou ignored Miyagawa and hung up before he could finish.

The tips of his fingers were trembling.

'Oi! Yamamura! Why'd you stab Saitou Isshin?'

Yamamura had collapsed, but Gotou grabbed him again by the collar.

Yamamura's lips were shaking in pain and fear.

'I-I-I don't know... Who is that? Hurry and call the ambulance already. It hurts.'

'Don't play dumb. Nanase Miyuki asked you to do it, right!?'

'What are you saying? I just...'

Yamamura looked away in the middle of speaking.

– He's clearly hiding something.

'Just what?'

'N-nothing.'

'Cough it up already! I can just write you off as dead in a traffic accident!' yelled Gotou, slapping Yamamura's left cheek.

'W-what are you doing? Can the police do this?'

'I can.'

'I'll press charges in court.'

'Do whatever you want.'

Gotou glared at Yamamura and raised his right arm.

This time he'd hit him with a fist instead of his palm.

'I-I-I got it. I'll talk, so please stop.'

Yamamura seemed to realise that common sense wouldn't work on Gotou, so he frantically pleaded.

'Hurry it up then! I don't have the time!'

'I just gave that woman the medicine she ordered.'

'Medicine?'

'Painkillers, tranquillisers, stuff like that. That's all.'

Gotou let go of Yamamura and stood up.

His ears were ringing.

On the day of the crime, Miyuki had had spasms and had been carried to the infirmary.

Plus, Miyagawa had said she'd collapsed in her room earlier. The medical officer had decided she'd needed to be transported.

– Is the medical officer in on it too?

'No.'

Gotou rejected that thought aloud.

Miyuki hadn't been faking it. She had definitely had real symptoms.

Furukawa had probably got the medicine from the hospital, handed them to Yamamura who had given them to Miyuki.

Yamamura and Furukawa had had another role.

That was to be Miyuki's speciality – a fake trail.

By leaving evidence well, she made the investigation turn to Yamamura and Furukawa.

And we fell right into that trap –

When Gotou realised that, his body jolted, like electricity had run through it.

Gotou remembered what Miyuki had said.

– This time, I'll kill Yakumo-kun.

When Gotou tricked Miyuki then, he had gone along with the mood.

– Looking forward to it.

He'd said that. There was no way for her to kill him. He'd thought that.

But the situation was different now. Miyuki had escaped from the detention house. She was walking freely. She could kill Yakumo too.

– You kidding me?

'Detective Gotou, I called the ambulance,' said Ishii, out of breath. He didn't know anything.

'Oi, Ishii! I'm leaving the rest to you!'

Gotou ran off before he finished speaking.

'Leaving what to me, Detective Gotou!?'

Ishii wailed from behind him, but Gotou ignored it, getting into the plain car parked on the road.

– Please. Yakumo. Be all right.

Gotou slammed down the pedal as he prayed and started to drive.

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12

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The surroundings were dark.

In that dark, Haruka walked with Yakumo towards the hospital where Isshin was.

Since it was past the time for the lights to be put out, only a few lights were on.

The cold wind passed between them.

Haruka looked at Yakumo, walking beside her.

His moonlit profile was as expressionless as a wax figure's.

After leaving Atsuko's home, Yakumo told her what had happened so far.

It became a very long conversation.

However, Haruka didn't understand everything.

Just as Yakumo had said, there were only a number of facts for the case, and Haruka couldn't put them together.

However, everything was probably connected in Yakumo's head.

After reaching the night entrance, Yakumo suddenly stopped and took his mobile phone out of his pocket.

'What? It's you, Gotou-san... I'm at the hospital right now... I see... She did...'

Yakumo's voice became quieter and quieter as he spoke.

Haruka couldn't hear what they were talking about, but she could tell it wasn't something good.

'I see. I have something I want to discuss as well. Let's meet at the hospital.'

After saying that, Yakumo hung up.

'Hey, did something happen?'

Haruka spoke to Yakumo's back.

'Nanase Miyuki escaped from the detention house.'

Yakumo said it in a nonchalant manner, but that was truly terrifying.

Her heart was as noisy as a dead branch being blown about by the wind.

Nanase Miyuki had been the start of this case.

No, not just this one. She had been involved in a number of cases in the past. She was the one who abducted Yakumo last time too.

Just as Yakumo had solved the puzzle, she escaped – it was like a bad omen.

'You OK?' said Haruka, hiding her uneasiness.

'I'm fine. I'll protect you, at least.'

Yakumo said just that and started walking again.

– Protect.

It made Haruka happy to hear that, but her anxiety didn't leave her.

Even if she was OK, if something happened to Yakumo, she wouldn't be able to bear it.

Just as she was about to call out to Yakumo, she felt somebody's gaze.

It was a chilling gaze.

Haruka turned around, startled.

However, she didn't see anybody.

There was only a deep darkness.

It felt creepy since she couldn't confirm anything.

'Don't dawdle. Let's go.'

Yakumo urged her on, so Haruka jogged into the hospital.

They passed the reception and went down the corridor, stopping in front of the door to an examination room.

She had been here before.

'Hey, Yakumo-kun. This place...'

'Correct. It's Doctor Mao's examination room. She should know I'm here.'

'Why?'

'It's obviously because I contacted her.'

Yakumo's brows furrowed as he looked at her like she was stupid.

Normally, Haruka would object, but when she thought about what was going to happen next, she just didn't feel like it.

Yakumo opened the door. Just as he'd said, the lights in the room were on and Mao was sitting at her desk.

'Welcome.'

When Mao looked at them, she looked a bit tired.

Her face was haggard; it was like her heart wasn't here.

'Hello,' said Yakumo, stepping inside, but he chose to lean against the wall rather than sit.

Haruka went inside after bowing.

'You're here too? Please sit.'

Mao urged them to sit, but Yakumo refused: 'I'm fine here.'

Haruka couldn't sit either then. She closed the door and stood next to Yakumo.

'So what did you have to talk about?'

Mao crossed her legs and looked at Yakumo.

'It isn't anything important, but there was something I wanted to confirm,' Yakumo said lightly, shrugging as he did so.

'What is it?'

Mao sighed. Her expression was stiff.

It appeared that she knew Yakumo wasn't here just to talk about something unimportant, even though he said that.

'Doctor, won't you tell me the truth already?'

Yakumo's narrowed left eye seemed to have a light within it.

'The truth? I don't know what you're...'

Mao shook her head with a wry smile.

'Will you feign innocence until the end?'

Yakumo's eyes became more forceful.

So Mao really is related to the case –

Mao was Isshin's friend from university and had used to like him.

It might have been naive of Haruka, but she couldn't think – didn't want to think – that such a person would be related to the case.

Haruka looked at Mao with that wish.

'I'm not feigning innocent.'

Mao looked away.

No matter how she denied it aloud, her attitude showed the truth.

'Yes, you are. There's something, isn't there? That you're hiding from me.'

'There isn't!' Mao said loudly, as if trying to drown out Yakumo's words.

She couldn't hide her disturbance.

'Is that so? Then let's say it clearly. The reason that my uncle fell into a brain-dead state is not only because he was stabbed – there is the possibility that it was a medical mistake. Am I wrong?'

Yakumo's words seemed to cut Mao's heart like a sharp knife.

Mao looked anguished; her cheek twitched.

'That can't be. There's no way...'

Those words that sounded like they were strangled out of her were as brittle as glasswork.

No matter how she denied it, it was apparent that Yakumo's words were true.

'That's right. This time, it wasn't a medical mistake.'

'Eh?'

'My uncle was purposefully put into a brain-dead state,' said Yakumo with a sharp glare.

'Wait, Yakumo-kun. That's saying too much,' interrupted Haruka, unable to bear it.

Putting aside whether it was a medical mistake, saying that his uncle was purposefully put into a brain-dead state –

That would be murder.

He couldn't suspect that, even as a joke.

'I'm not saying that lightly. You heard from Hata-san, didn't you? If that were a stab to kill, it was near miraculous that none of the organs was injured. In short, Uncle's injuries were lighter than they looked.'

'That's...'

Haruka swallowed the words she was about to say.

Isshin's medical records and his current status – she had noticed the great contradiction between them.

'That isn't a coincidence. It was fate.'

However, Yakumo's words came into her head, stopping her from trying not to believe it.

'Fate?'

'Correct. In short, the culprit's goal was to put Uncle in a brain-dead state.'

After Yakumo said that, he looked straight at Mao.

Mao's body jolted as Yakumo's gaze went straight through her.

'Why would they have to do that?'

Haruka had the same question as Mao.

Why would somebody go out of their way to make someone brain-dead – if they stabbed Isshin because they hated him, they could have just killed him.

'The reason is simple. The culprit wanted my uncle's organs. Isn't that right? Doctor Mao.'

'Organs...'

Mao repeated what Yakumo said in an incoherent mutter.

'I did a bit of investigation,' said Yakumo. He took a folded piece of paper from his pocket, unfolded it and handed it to Mao.

This was probably what Makoto had given to Haruka to hand to Yakumo.

'Where did you get...'

'That isn't the problem right now. The name on the top of that list. I won't let you say you don't know,' said Yakumo with a hard expression.

Haruka leant forward to look at that list.

It was titled Organ Transplant Registry List and had many people's names on it.

Mao closed her eyes and let out a long sigh.

As if she had let out everything she'd been holding in, her expression seemed a bit softer.

'If you know that much, there's no point hiding it...'

'So you'll talk then. About what you've shouldered,' said Yakumo quietly.

'Yes, I will,' replied Mao listlessly. She looked up at the ceiling.

So Mao really is the culprit – but why?

Feelings of doubt and not wanting to believe it went through Haruka's head, making her confused.

'That day, when I was at home, I was contacted. Isshin was carried in. When I got there, I heard that he might be brain-dead.'

'And then?'

Yakumo urged her to continue without regard for Mao.

'When I looked at the record, I immediately thought it was strange. I'd heard that he had stopped breathing for a while, but it would be strange to think that happened from the injury.'

'Then, you started investigating on your own, thinking it was possible that it was from a medical mistake.'

Mao nodded at what Yakumo added.

After coming this far, a number of things had connected in Haruka's head.

When she came before, Yakumo questioned Mao about Isshin's state when he was carried in. Mao had had an obviously unnatural attitude.

It appeared that it was because she herself had doubts about Isshin's condition.

However, that would mean there was another culprit.

Just as Haruka came to that thought, the internal telephone on the desk rang.

'What? I'm having an important talk right now so if it isn't an emergency, leave it for later...'

Mao spoke brusquely, but as she listened to the response, her face grew rapidly paler.

Haruka knew immediately that something terrible was happening.

'Uncle's disappeared then,' said Yakumo once Mao put down the phone.

'Yes, he has.'

Mao nodded, biting her lip.

– Isshin-san's disappeared?

It was so unexpected that Haruka couldn't hide her confusion.

'Doctor Mao, I understand how you feel, but you can't hide anything anymore.'

'You're right.'

Mao stood, as if dragged up by Yakumo's words.

'Let's go. Before it's too late.'

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13

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Ishii dumbly watched Yamamura being carried away by the ambulance.

Because of the police cars that came later, the front of the apartment was surrounded by curious onlookers in no time, and he also spotted some people from the media.

However, probably none of the people here knew what had happened.

Like moths to a flame, they had just come because there was a commotion.

'Ishii!'

Ishii saw Miyagawa running towards him with a furious expression.

'Yes sir.'

'Where's Gotou?' asked Miyagawa, gasping.

Ishii wanted to respond immediately, but he hadn't asked Gotou where he was going.

'That is... He suddenly ran off...'

'That idiot!' yelled Miyagawa after clicking his tongue.

Ishii felt something was incredible upon seeing that expression.

'Excuse me... Did something happen?'

'Did something happen? Didn't you hear?'

'No, I didn't.'

Miyagawa frowned, as if trying to hold in his anger, and then looked around before walking so close to Ishii that their shoulders were almost touching.

'Nanase Miyuki's gone missing.'

'W-what are you talking about?'

Ishii was so surprised he thought his chin would come off.

Miyuki should have been in the detention house. He'd met with her just a few hours earlier. How could she be missing?

Miyagawa explained the details of how Nanase Miyuki had gone missing to Ishii, who was confused.

'C-could it be that Detective Gotou...'

'He knows.'

– Is that why he ran off so quickly?

Once Ishii understood, he grew pale.

Miyuki had said she would kill Yakumo next. Gotou had probably gone to try to stop that.

However, that would mean flying right into Miyuki's trap.

'I-I'm going to go look for Detective Gotou.'

'I can't leave the scene. I'm counting on you.'

Miyagawa hit Ishii's shoulder hard.

It was a heavy responsibility, but Ishii had to respond to it now.

'Yes sir.'

After responding, Ishii took out his mobile phone and called Gotou.

He might not answer. Ishii thought that, but Gotou answered immediately.

<What do you want?>

'Detective Gotou, are you all right?' Ishii asked frantically.

<Of course I am, you fool!>

Gotou's voice came back, almost too energetically.

Ishii was so relieved he almost sat down.

'I'm glad. Where are you now?'

<The hospital.>

'Please wait until I get there.'

<You're so annoying! As if I could wait for you!>

The call cut off.

From the situation, Gotou was probably at the hospital where Isshin was.

– I'll catch up to him right away.

Ishii started running through the crowd.

As he passed through the people, he suddenly came to his senses.

He'd been running ahead just on his emotions without thinking about what to do at all. Gotou had taken the car. It was five kilometres to the hospital from here.

He didn't have the time to leisurely walk there.

– What should I do?

While he was thinking, he spotted a face he recognised in the throng of people.

'M-Makoto-san,' called Ishii.

Makoto noticed immediately and walked towards him. Since she was a reporter, she had probably heard about the commotion and come for material.

'Ishii-san, did something happen?'

'If I don't get to the hospital soon, Detective Gotou will...'

He couldn't explain properly in his hurry.

Regardless, Makoto seemed to sense the tension and nodded.

'My car is there.'

'Thank you.'

Ishii ran after Makoto.

– He fell.

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14

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Gotou drove, urged on by his impatience.

Even though Yakumo had heard about Miyuki's escape, he didn't seem disturbed at all. It was like he was looking forward to meeting Miyuki again.

– Does Yakumo plan to finish things with Miyuki?

Last time, it just happened to work out well, but confronting Miyuki would be like suicide.

– Yakumo wouldn't do something so rash.

Gotou had meant to deny the possibility with confidence, but there was anxiety in the corner of his heart.

Sometimes, Yakumo did things that would hurt himself terribly.

Like he was looking for a place to die –

'There's no way!' yelled Gotou, clearing away the bad thoughts in his head.

Yakumo might have done it in the past, but he was different now.

– I'm almost at the hospital. Be safe.

Gotou prayed as he stepped on the accelerator.

Finally, the hospital came into view.

He drove onto the hospital premises and parked his car at the front entrance.

He ran at full strength and tried to pass through the automatic doors, but he hit his forehead with a dull thump.

'Not going to open!?'

He'd forgotten that you couldn't go in from the front at this time.

Gotou ran towards the night entrance while holding his head.

Just as he was about to go inside, his mobile phone rang.

It was from Ishii.

'What do you want?'

<Detective Gotou, are you all right?>

When he heard Ishii's hesitant voice, his irritation doubled.

'Of course I am, you fool!'

<I'm glad. Where are you now?>

'The hospital.'

<Please wait until I get there.>

'You're so annoying! As if I could wait for you to get here!'

After spitting that out, Gotou hung up.

Just as Gotou was trying to open the door, his mobile phone rang again.

'What?'

<As usual, that isn't proper phone etiquette.>

Gotou had thought it would be Ishii again, but Yakumo was the one who called.

– So you're still alive.

Gotou heaved a sigh of relief.

'Stop complaining so much!'

<Where are you right now?>

'The exit.'

While talking, Gotou pushed open the door.

He showed the guard his police ID and headed down the corridor.

<I see. Please come right to the surgery room.>

'Surgery room? What for?'

Gotou asked a question, but Yakumo hung up.

'He just does whatever he wants!'

While Gotou's dissatisfaction was at a peak, he checked the hospital's information map and ran at full speed.

He went up the stairs to the fourth floor and headed towards the surgery room at the end of the corridor.

– There he is!

Gotou spotted Yakumo in front of the door to the surgery room.

Haruka and Mao were there too.

'Yakumo! You bastard!'

Gotou ran up to Yakumo and grabbed him by his collar.

'You're so noisy. Please be quieter – this is a hospital.'

Yakumo said that in his usual troubled tone and brushed aside Gotou's arms.

'What'd you say?'

Gotou got closer, but Yakumo put his fingers in his ears with a disagreeable look.

'This isn't the time to have a silly argument. The person who stabbed my uncle looms in this surgery room,' said Yakumo, putting at the door with his chin.

Then, Mao tried the doorknob to force it open.

However, the door didn't budge.

– Looms?

'What do you mean?'

'I don't have the time to explain right now. Anyway, please open this door.'

Yakumo pointed at the door.

– I see. That's why he called me.

Gotou saw the <In Surgery> light on above the door.

'Step away,' Gotou told Mao. Then, he rammed his shoulder into the door.

However, the door just shook slightly without breaking off. There was probably a bolt or something on the other side.

– Don't think that's going to stop me.

Gotou headed down the corridor and started running at about ten metres to ram into the door again.

Crack!

The door opened with the sound of something snapping.

Gotou tumbled forward and hit the wall with his back.

'Please think ahead before acting,' said Yakumo, looking down at Gotou after stepping into the surgery room.

'Shut up! You're the one who said to hurry!'

Gotou stood up with a hand on his back. He looked around.

A surgery room surrounded with white walls –

The culprit was here. Yakumo had said that.

There was one bed in the corner of the room. A girl was sleeping there.

Isshin lay on the surgery table in the middle of the room.

– Why's Isshin here?

Gotou walked towards the surgery table.

However, a man walked in front of him to block his ways.

The man wore a green surgical gown. He had a cap and mask on, so Gotou couldn't see his face clearly.

– Is this guy the perp?

'Who are you?'

Instead of answering the question, the man thrust the scalpel in his hand in front of Gotou's eyes.

– Don't do that all of a sudden.

Gotou glared at the man without flinching.

Gotou wanted to leap at him, but he couldn't.

With the scalpel still out, the man had his left index finger on a switch of a machine by the surgery table.

Gotou couldn't say for certain, but it was probably something that kept Isshin alive. If Gotou moved, Isshin's life would be in danger.

– Now, what to do?

'So this really was the case.'

Yakumo spoke.

The man cautiously stepped back from Yakumo.

Yakumo didn't seem to care as he walked towards Isshin, touched his hands and narrowed his eyes.

He looked down. His profile was so expressionless it was like he was wearing a mask.

However, Gotou could tell that within Yakumo there was anger, resentment and sadness.

Gotou was tense.

Finally, Yakumo slowly lifted his face.

'Let's stop this already, Doctor Sakakibara.'

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– Doctor Sakakibara.

Haruka couldn't believe what had come out of Yakumo's mouth.

Sakakibara was the doctor who had first treated Isshin. Why would he?

Contrary to Haruka's emotional state, Sakakibara looked resigned as he took off his cap and mask to reveal his face.

'I am going to operate now. I want you not to interfere. If you do...'

Sakakibara spoke firmly as he turned the tip of the scalpel towards Yakumo.

Yakumo didn't even budge as he looked at Sakakibara with his red left eye.

'Doctor Sakakibara, let's stop this already.'

Mao pushed past Yakumo and pleaded with Sakakibara.

'How could I!?!'

This time, Sakakibara thrust the scalpel in front of Mao's eyes.

'What you are trying to do is a crime,' Mao continued.

'You're wrong! It's an organ transplant surgery!' insisted Sakakibara, his chest puffed out.

Haruka looked at the bed in the corner of the surgery room.

Lying there was Yoshiko, whom Haruka had seen a number of times before at the hospital.

If she remembered correctly, there was something wrong with her heart – which probably meant Sakakibara was trying to transplant Isshin's heart to her.

– But why would he go so far?

'I'm not wrong. Isshin-kun's family did not agree to a transplant, so this is...'

'Shut up! The law doesn't matter! This is a transplant to save my daughter!'

Sakakibara interrupted Mao.

He was terribly agitated. His shoulders shook violently as he breathed.

'Yakumo. Explain. What's going on?' said Gotou disagreeably.

Yakumo sighed, like he thought there was no way out of it, and spoke after running a hand through his hair.

'The girl sleeping there is Kimura Yoshiko-chan. Though her family changed after the divorce, she's Doctor Sakakibara's daughter.'

'W-what?'

'I had Makoto-san investigate for me. The two of them are definitely father and daughter.'

– So that's how it is.

When Haruka heard it like this, she understood what Yakumo had been looking for.

From Furukawa's gossip at the hospital, they'd found out that Sakakibara was divorced and troubled about his daughter. When looking into his background, it was revealed that Sakakibara and Yoshiko were father and daughter – that was probably it.

'That true?' asked Gotou, but Sakakibara didn't respond.

After a breath, Yakumo continued his explanation.

'She has a terrible heart disorder. Without a transplant, she will die. The name of the disorder is dilated cardiomyopathy...'

'How do you know that?' asked Gotou.

'I had Makoto-san look into this as well. Yoshiko's name was at the top of the recipient list for heart transplants. She was probably in considerably serious condition.'

Sakakibara's expression twisted at Yakumo's words.

Even if he didn't say it, it was evidence that what Yakumo said was true.

'Wait a second! How's that girl's condition related to this case?' Gotou said quickly.

Yakumo ran a hand through his hair, looking annoyed, while shaking his head.

'Don't you understand? He was looking for a donor to offer a heart.'

'Donor...' Gotou repeated in a hoarse voice.

'That's right. Then, Doctor Sakakibara participated in the plan.'

'What?'

'He broke the glass of the back window before the event and put Nanase Miyuki's fingerprints there. He sneaked into the temple and waited for my uncle to come.'

There, Yakumo paused and shut his eyes, turning his head towards the ceiling.

Perhaps he was thinking of the scene, because he bit his lip, looking pained.

'This guy did...'

'He did. After Doctor Sakakibara stabbed my uncle, he hurried back to the hospital.'

'Why? He could've just run.'

'It was because he needed to perform the emergency operation on my uncle to purposefully put him in a brain-dead state.'

'This guy... did it then...'

Gotou's expression was filled with anger.

Haruka had never seen Gotou look so frightening before.

'Gotou-san, you and Ishii thought you were guarding Uncle, but actually, you were given the important role of calling the ambulance.'

'What?'

'There could not have been a transplant unless Uncle was brain-dead.'

– So that was how it was.

Haruka could see the whole picture too.

Sakakibara stabbed Isshin, operated on him himself, and purposefully put Isshin in a brain-dead state, though he had been breathing.

What Sakakibara had done was absolutely unforgiveable.

However, his motive had not been hatred or a grudge. He had done it to save his daughter –

Haruka looked at Yoshiko sleeping on the bed.

Her young sleeping face. She had done no wrong. But –

Haruka felt her chest constrict.

'Do you have proof?' Gotou asked Yakumo.

That was a big problem. No matter how much circumstantial evidence they had, without physical

evidence, they couldn't build a case against Sakakibara.

'I have none at this point, but if there is a careful reinvestigation, while fingerprints are probably impossible, there will probably be hair or fabric.'

'Really?'

'Yes. Nanase Miyuki's fingerprints were a red herring to lead the investigation away from Doctor Sakakibara.'

First, Nanase Miyuki announced her intent to murder.

Just as she declared, Isshin was stabbed, and her fingerprints were found. That led the police's investigation in her direction.

'No. Wait. But what about the letter with the fingerprints? Furukawa received that.'

Gotou asked his question in a panic, but Yakumo was calm.

'I had Makoto-san look into this as well, but it seems that Furukawa-san works the day shift every Thursday, while Doctor Sakakibara has the day off.'

'So if she got the letter there on Thursday, he'd be able to get it?'

'Correct.'

Yakumo nodded in response to Gotou.

'Nanase Miyuki planned it and Sakakibara executed it then.'

Gotou's expression was sour.

'No, that's wrong.'

'What?'

'Doctor Sakakibara probably never met with Nanase Miyuki.'

'If not Nanase Miyuki, then who?'

Gotou couldn't hide his confusion.

Haruka felt the same way. From the flow of the conversation, it should have been Nanase Miyuki's plot.

Haruka turned her eyes to Yakumo for an answer.

After a silence, Yakumo slowly moved to stand in front of Sakakibara.

'A man with two red eyes – am I correct, Doctor Sakakibara?'

Yakumo looked at Sakakibara with his red left eye.

He showed no open anger or hatred. Just a straight gaze –

Sakakibara made no response.

The tip of the scalpel he was pointing at Mao just trembled slightly.

'Please stop it already,' pleaded Mao, walking forward.

'Shut up!' yelled Sakakibara, making a slicing motion with the scalpel.

'Aah!' screamed Mao. She crouched while clutching her right arm.

Blood dripped down –

'You bastard!'

While Gotou yelled, he couldn't move.

The tip of the scalpel was still pointed at Mao. Furthermore, Sakakibara still had his hand on the machine Isshin needed for life support.

If Gotou made a move, both their lives would be in danger.

All Haruka could do was ball her sweaty hands into fists.

It was a perfect deadlock.

'Doctor Sakakibara, please let me ask one thing.'

The one who broke the silence was Yakumo.

Sakakibara looked at Yakumo with a expression twisted in pain.

'Do you think feel sorrowful about your daughter's likely death? Or are you sad to think about your daughter disappearing from in front of you?'

As Yakumo spoke, he slowly approached Yoshiko's bed and glanced at Gotou.

For that one moment, it looked to Haruka like the two were talking with their eyes.

It was some sort of sign.

Then, Yakumo put his hand close to Yoshiko, as if to touch her.

'Don't touch her!'

Sakakibara swung the tip of the scalpel to point it at Yakumo.

Gotou took that chance to move.

He charged wildly, elbowing Sakakibara's back with all his strength.

Sakakibara's body curled like a shrimp's. He fell to the floor on his knees.

Then, Gotou kicked Sakakibara's face.

Sakakibara's eyes rolled up as he collapsed backwards, and the scalpel fell from his hands.

Gotou briskly turned Sakakibara around, pulled his hands behind his back and cuffed him.

It all happened in a blink. All Haruka could do was stand there in shock.

'You move agilely for a bear,' said Yakumo, poking fun.

'Shut up!'

Gotou yelled back, but his face looked happy somehow.

– This is the end.

Haruka sighed in relief, but then, something squirmed into her vision from behind Yakumo's back.

Yakumo appeared to notice it too and turned around.

There was a girl in a red dress.

Her face was shadowed, completely black.

'Hey, Yakumo-kun. That...'

Just as Haruka said that, the girl turned around and started running towards the corridor.

Yakumo silently left the surgery room to follow the girl.

Haruka ran out into the corridor too, as if pulled along.

However, the girl had disappeared. She looked at Yakumo beside her.

'That's Yoshiko-chan,' murmured Yakumo.

'Eh? But she's...'

– Alive.

The girl earlier had to have been a ghost. Plus, Yoshiko was still lying in bed.

'A living ghost¹.'

'Living ghost?'

She'd heard the term before.

But if asked what it was exactly – Haruka wouldn't know.

'When a living person has an especially strong feeling, their spirit can leave them.'

'Like an out-of-body experience?'

'Something like that. In her case, it might have been easy for her spirit to leave her body in the first place.'

'Then the ghost that's been spotted in the hospital...'

'Was Yoshiko-chan.'

When Yakumo said that, Haruka understood.

Yoshiko's strong feeling was the desire for an organ.

1 The specific term used is ikiryō (生霊) which has the kanji for life and spirit so I translated it directly, but there is more about it on [wiki](#) if you're curious.

She would be saved if she received a heart transplant from somebody in a brain-dead state. Yoshiko's living ghost knew that, so she asked the patients of the hospital when they were going to die.

She was frantic in her attempts to live, but –

'Yakumo-kun, when did you realise it was Yoshiko-chan?'

'I talked to her in front of the ICU, remember?'

'Ah!'

Haruka recalled Yakumo speaking with the ghost in the hallway.

Yakumo had probably seen through the case's trick then.

'Stay here,' said Yakumo. Then, he started slowly walking down the dim hallway.

Haruka's eyes couldn't see Yoshiko's living ghost any longer, but it was probably not the case for Yakumo.

Haruka swallowed and watched Yakumo's back.

Suddenly –

Somebody jumped out from behind a pillar to block Yakumo's way.

A long-haired woman with a cold smile on her lips –

It was Nanase Miyuki.

Haruka couldn't even shout in her surprise.

Miyuki had a knife which let off a suspicious light in her hand.

'Yakumo! Get away from that woman!'

Gotou's yell echoed through the hallway.

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16

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After detaining Sakakibara, Gotou noticed that Yakumo had disappeared from the surgery room.

No, not just Yakumo. Haruka was gone too.

– Where'd they go?

Gotou went into the corridor to look for them.

Then, he saw something unbelievable.

Yakumo stood down the corridor with his back to Gotou. In front of him stood Nanase Miyuki.

'Yakumo! Get away from that woman!' shouted Gotou.

Yakumo turned around for just a moment in response.

For some reason, it looked like he was smiling.

– Why's he smiling?

'Stay away!'

Yakumo stopped Gotou before he could run over.

Without thinking, Gotou stopped under that pressure.

'W-what the hell are you saying!?'

'Please stay away. I'm going to do what my uncle couldn't.'

'What?'

'I'm going to cut off the chain of hatred.'

Yakumo's back seemed unspeakably tragic.

– He plans on dying.

Gotou could feel it in his skin.

'You want to kill me, right? Do it.'

Yakumo turned to Miyuki again, spreading his arms wide.

'Your determination is admirable.'

Miyuki licked her lips.

– He's kidding, right? As if I could watch this silently.

'Don't take another step towards Yakumo!' yelled Gotou as he started running.

Miyuki waved the knife, as if scorning Gotou.

– Make it in time!

With just one step left, Gotou's feet tangled and he fell forward.

'Nooo!'

Haruka's scream echoed through the corridor.

Gotou stood right up, but the knife was coming down heartlessly towards Yakumo's chest.

Everything seemed to be in slow motion.

'Yakumo!'

Gotou reached out as he shouted.

However, his hand didn't reach its goal.

For a moment, his vision went white.

Yakumo fell backward, clutching his chest –

'You idiot!

– Why!?! Yakumo! Why!?!

Gotou grabbed Yakumo and shook him.

However, Yakumo's eyes were closed. He made no response.

'You son of a bitch! This is exactly the same!'

He hadn't been able to save Takagishi or Isshin. This time, even Yakumo had fallen in front of his eyes.

– I won't let anybody die. I won't let anybody get killed.

He'd said that in such a high and mighty manner, but in the end, he hadn't been able to save anybody.

Frustration and anger welled up within him, threatening to explode.

'Yakumo-kun. Yakumo-kun.'

Haruka had come up too and was calling out to Yakumo frantically.

However, Yakumo was as still as a doll.

'I said it, didn't I? That I'd kill Yakumo next.'

Miyuki covered her mouth as she laughed, shoulders shaking.

– What's so funny? This bitch!

'I won't forgive you!'

Gotou stood up in his anger.

His body was so hot it felt like it would burst into flames.

'It's too bad for you.'

Miyuki smiled triumphantly as she waved about her knife.

'You bastard! You did this to...'

At first, Gotou had just thought Yakumo was a hateful brat.

But still, he couldn't abandon Yakumo, who continued to do his best to live even while shouldering that sadness by himself.

Normally, they just said spiteful things at each other, but after several cases, Yakumo had become somebody irreplaceable to him before he'd noticed.

'I'll kill you.'

For the first time in Gotou's life, he wanted to kill somebody.

He really thought he would kill Miyuki.

Gotou gripped his hands into fists and charged right at Miyuki.

However, Miyuki evaded him, as if she were a matador.

Gotou's body collapsed to the floor.

Miyuki took this chance to pick up the fire extinguisher by the pillar and threw it at Gotou's face.

Thunk!

It made a dull sound. Blood dripped down his forehead.

'You bastard...'

Gotou glared at Miyuki through the pain.

'My, you're unexpectedly sturdy,' said Miyuki as she looked down at Gotou. Then, she ran off while giggling.

– I won't let you get away!

Gotou got up and ran after Miyuki.

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17

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Ishii sat in the passenger seat of the car Makoto was driving.

Though he had been the one to call out to her, when he sat in a car alone with a woman like this, he was strangely nervous.

'Thank you so much, Makoto-san,' said Ishii, wiping the sweat from his forehead.

'It's nearby.'

'Eh?'

'My house.'

'But Makoto-san, don't you...'

Ishii had gone to Makoto's house before.

He recalled her living with her parents in a house on the corner of a quiet residential street.

'I'm living alone now.'

Makoto shrugged with a smile.

Ishii understood when he saw that expression and recalled that case.

Makoto's father had been the chief of the police, but he had lost his position because of that case. Makoto had been the one who wrote the article that prosecuted him then.

It was easy to imagine that would have put a rift in their father-daughter relationship.

'Ishii-san, is it true that Nanase Miyuki has gone missing?' asked Makoto to clear the heavy atmosphere.

'Did the information slip out?'

'Yes. There was a big commotion.'

'I see...'

A prisoner had escaped from the detention house. It was natural that there was a big commotion.

'Was the commotion earlier related to Nanase Miyuki as well?'

'Yes.'

'As I thought...'

Makoto's expression clouded over.

Now that Ishii thought about it, Makoto had experienced something terrible during the last case because of Nanase Miyuki.

'Detective Gotou is probably chasing Nanase Miyuki now.'

'You're heading there too then, Ishii-san.'

To be honest, he didn't want to go.

However, if he hesitated because of fear, he would lose something important like last time.

No matter how scared I am, there are some things I must do – Ishii had realised that.

That said, no matter how he tried to encourage himself, his terror didn't leave him.

After a while, the car arrived at the hospital.

– Detective Gotou. Please wait.

Ishii hit his cheeks with both hands and got off the car.

'Ishii-san.'

Just as Ishii was about to walk away, Makoto called out to stop him.

'W-what?'

'Please run.'

'Yes?'

Makoto said that with a somewhat frightened expression.

– Why is she saying that?

Ishii didn't understand what Makoto meant, but there was incredibly pressure in her words.

'If it's dangerous, please run.'

'Why?'

'I want you to be safe. So please...'

There seemed to be tears in Makoto's eyes.

'I will.'

After replying, Ishii reluctantly ran off, though he was still confused.

He tried to enter from the front automatic doors, but they appeared to be closed at this time, so his head rammed right into them.

He turned to the night entrance while clutching his head and went into the waiting room.

The dim space was empty –

All he could rely on was the green emergency lights.

– I'm scared.

Ishii quickly started to regret coming.

Even though he'd said the hospital, it would be difficult searching such a large building.

Ishii looked around cautiously and chose to go further in.

Thump, thump, thump.

He heard somebody running towards him.

Ishii looked down the corridor, where the sound was coming from.

Then, a woman flew towards him.

'Aaah!' shrieked Ishii in surprise.

The person he wanted to meet least was right in front of his eyes. Nanase Miyuki.

Miyuki panted as she glared at Ishii.

'Ishii-san, could you move out of my way?' Miyuki said slowly.

Gripped by that cold gaze, Ishii couldn't even move his fingers.

'Ishii! Don't let that woman get away!'

Gotou's yell echoed through the waiting room.

With that, Ishii came back to his senses.

Right. Right. He couldn't let Miyuki get away.

Miyuki turned around to see Gotou running after her and then waved the knife in her hand.

'There's no time then,' she said quietly. She swung the knife down.

– Oh no. I'm going to be stabbed.

Ishii promptly crouched and thrust his head towards Miyuki.

With that force, he rolled a number of times, and before he'd noticed, he was lying face up.

– Was I stabbed?

Ishii sprung up and checked his body, but there was no blood or pain.

– Good. I'm alive.

He sighed in relief.

'Ishii, well done.'

Ishii turned to look at the source of the voice.

Gotou was straddling Miyuki, who was lying face up.

Ishii didn't know what happened, but they'd caught Miyuki. Ishii refrained from sitting down in relief.

'You bitch! I'm definitely not going to forgive you!'

Still on top of Miyuki, Gotou gripped her by the collar.

She simply smiled confidently regardless.

How could she be so confident when she was trapped?

'Could you let go of her?'

Ishii heard a voice close to his ear.

A low voice, like a tremor –

Ishii tried to turn around, but he couldn't.

Somebody had reached out from behind Ishii and was holding a knife to his neck. There wasn't even a millimetre between his skin and the knife.

If he moved even slightly, his pulmonary artery would be cut.

A cold sweat ran down his back. His throat dried up.

– Who on earth is it?

-

-

'Damn it!'

Gotou bit his lip.

Right in front of him, there was a knife at Ishii's neck. Gotou recognised the man.

He wore sunglasses and a black suit, and his long hair went down his back. His face was as pale as a dead man's, but his lips alone were strangely red.

An unearthly black energy emanated from his whole body.

Yakumo's father, the man with two red eyes –

He had been involved in several cases up until now. The man never directly interfered, instead manipulating people's hearts and leading them to murder.

'Let me say that again. Could you let go of her?'

The man took his sunglasses off with his left hand.

His two eyes were a deep red.

They were clearly different from Yakumo's. They seemed to let out an ominous light.

The man that Gotou had not been able to catch no matter how he tried was right in front of his eyes, but in this situation, he couldn't even move.

The man with two red eyes would not hesitate. It wasn't a threat. If Gotou moved, he would definitely slit Ishii's throat.

Miyuki started laughing, still lying face up.

'Gotou-san, it's too bad.'

'You...'

'I'm sorry, but could you let go?' said Miyuki triumphantly.

Gotou had never felt more humiliated.

This woman hadn't just involved Isshin in the case – she'd turned that knife towards Yakumo as well. It wouldn't be enough if he beat her to death right here, right now.

But –

'Detective Gotou, you can't!'

When Gotou was about to let go of Miyuki, Ishii yelled.

His eyes were so wide that they could've fallen out, and his head was covered in sweat. Still, he was frantic.

Ishii must have been afraid to die too, but he was battling while knowing that.

'Ishii...'

'If you let go of her, the same thing will happen again, so please...' pleaded Ishii, his face covered in tears.

Gotou had thought Ishii was just a good-for-nothing, but at some point, he'd become competent. Gotou thought it was a good thing. He came to his decision.

It wasn't like his frustration and anger was gone, but –

There was no replacing Ishii's life.

– I won't let anybody die. I won't let anybody get killed.

That was Gotou's belief. He knew this was a trap, but he couldn't have Ishii follow Yakumo in losing his life.

Gotou let go of Miyuki and slowly stood up.

'You aren't honest at all,' said Miyuki mockingly as she stood up.

Then, she turned her back to Gotou and walked away.

'You can't let that woman go.'

Gotou heard a voice. Yakumo's voice –

Gotou thought that his ears were playing tricks on him, but he was wrong. Yakumo appeared from the dark corridor.

– Did he die and become a ghost?

So he thought, but it seemed he was wrong.

Yakumo stood there as a person firmly living in reality.

Haruka was next to him.

'Yakumo... Why?'

'That isn't important. More importantly, hurry!'

Urged on by Yakumo, Gotou turned away his gaze and saw Miyuki reaching for the knife on the ground.

– As if I'd let you do that.

Gotou instinctively twisted Miyuki's arm and stopped her from moving.

The knife fell to the ground again.

Miyuki glared at Gotou while gripping her shoulder.

'Do you plan to watch this young man die?' said the man with red eyes coldly.

Ishii bit his lip and shook his head.

Though Gotou had immediately caught Miyuki at Yakumo's instruction, nothing had changed.

They were at a stalemate for what to do. It hurt to admit it, but if he didn't let go of Miyuki, Ishii would die. This wasn't a guy you could negotiate with.

'I can't abandon Ishii...'

Gotou tried to let go of Miyuki.

'Gotou-san, it's fine. For that man, it is impossible to kill Ishii-san,' Yakumo said firmly.

What do you mean, impossible – the man with red eyes wouldn't hesitate to take somebody's life.

'If you don't hurry, Ishii-san really will die.'

Miyuki's shoulders shook as she laughed.

'Detective Gotou... Forget about me! Please...'

Though Ishii shouted bravely, it felt like he wouldn't be able to stand much longer from fear.

– I can't leave Ishii like this.

'I understand. I'll let go of this woman, so you let go of Ishii.'

Gotou glared at the man with red eyes.

The man with red eyes nodded with a smile.

'Gotou-san, don't let them trick you!'

Yakumo held Gotou with his sharp gaze.

Gotou could understand how Yakumo felt after Isshin was stabbed. He wanted to catch Miyuki and the man with red eyes no matter what. But Gotou couldn't let Ishii die.

'I'll save Ishii,' said Gotou, determined.

'If you won't accept it even after I tell you, let me prove it now.'

Yakumo ran a hand through his hair in exasperation and then looked at the man with red eyes.

Then, he walked right towards him.

'If you walk any closer, he dies,' said the man with red eyes.

However, Yakumo didn't stop walking.

'Yakumo! Back off!' yelled Gotou, but Yakumo ignored him.

He stood right in front of the two of them.

Gotou had thought that the man with red eyes would slit Ishii's throat immediately if they didn't agree to his demands, but he was wrong.

He looked back at Yakumo without budging.

'Now. You're going to kill Ishii-san, right? Do it if you can.'

Yakumo's sharp voice echoed through the waiting room.

– This is strange. What's going on?

Even though Yakumo was being so challenging, the man with red eyes was silent.

Miyuki was grinding her teeth in frustration.

– What the hell's going on?

'Is it truly all right if I kill him?' asked the man after a silence.

However, his words didn't have the pressure they had had before.

Ishii swallowed loudly.

'Please go ahead. That is, if you can –

A smile graced Yakumo's lips.

All Gotou could do was watch.

'Yakumo, it's just as you say. I cannot kill him. I will withdraw for today.'

After saying that quietly, the man with red eyes disappeared into the darkness before Gotou's eyes

–

Yakumo let out a long breath.

Haruka looked shocked. She had her hands on her mouth.

Ishii fell over right there, released from the tension.

'Oi! Yakumo! What the hell was that just now!?'

Gotou came back to his senses and yelled.

The guy hadn't just escaped. Gotou didn't know what method he'd used, but that man had suddenly disappeared in front of his eyes.

'You don't understand? That man is already dead,' Yakumo said quietly, his eyes narrowed.

'Dead?'

– I don't understand.

'Correct. That man is dead. That was why he couldn't kill Ishii-san.'

Yakumo put his left index finger to his brow.

'You saying that guy was a ghost?'

'Exactly. He is a ghost. That was why the plan this time was possible,' said Yakumo, eyes narrowed.

'What do you mean!?'

Gotou's voice was ragged.

His head felt like it would burst from confusion.

– That man's a ghost? As if I'd accept such a stupid story!

And Yakumo said that the plan this time was possible because the man was a ghost. What did he mean?

'The method of passing along the fingerprints. The meeting about the day of the crime. In order to execute the plan, it was essential that they had her cooperation from inside the detention house.'

Yakumo turned the finger at his brow towards Miyuki.

It was true that there was still that question.

Yamamura had got the medicine for Miyuki, but he'd denied stabbing Isshin. That probably wasn't a lie.

Then who had gone between Miyuki in the detention house and Sakakibara?

'You're not saying that that man was their go-between, are you?'

'That is exactly what I'm saying.'

Yakumo concurred with the words Gotou had said in his confusion.

Even if that man had been the go-between –

'How... You can't just go in and out of the detention house!'

Yakumo snorted.

'Gotou-san. Please listen to what I say properly. That man is a ghost. The security is irrelevant.'

It was just as Yakumo said.

If that man was a ghost, it didn't matter how strict the security at the detention house was.

But Gotou still couldn't accept it.

'That man's appeared in front of us a number of times before!'

In his confusion, his tongue wasn't working properly.

'Gotou-san, that's incorrect.'

Yakumo ran a hand through his hair, looking annoyed.

'Even if you say he's appeared in front of you, you've only seen him, correct? Furthermore, he has never appeared in front of me clearly before this,' declared Yakumo.

– That's true.

Gotou felt like an electric jolt had gone through his body.

He'd heard about the man before. He'd seen him in photos and even spotted him, but he'd never actually touched him once.

He suddenly appeared, leaving no trace as he disappeared like smoke. Just like a ghost.

'It isn't just this case. That man has manipulated people's emotions and led them towards crime.'

'Right...'

'That isn't because he dared to do so, but because that was all he could do.'

With that one sentence, something that had always been a mystery made sense.

Gotou only ever saw the man with red eyes. Miyuki had always been the one who took action.

But –

'Why did he hide himself?'

'It's simple. If he appeared in front of me, it would become clear that he was dead.'

– That's right. Yakumo's red left eye can see the spirits of the dead.

If he showed up in front of Yakumo, that would mean revealing his true identity. During the last case, he'd showed up in front of Yakumo, but that was because he knew that Yakumo was psychologically exhausted from imprisonment and torture.

That was why he only showed off without directly doing anything.

– Everything linked.

'If that man is a ghost, then how about you? Your mother...'

Gotou hurriedly swallowed the words he was about to say.

This topic was taboo, but that didn't mean he didn't have that question. Yakumo's mother was imprisoned and violated by that man.

And then Yakumo was born –

Was it possible for a ghost to make a living human pregnant?

'That man was still alive when the incident with my mother occurred. I won't be certain until further investigation, but that man probably died two or three years ago,' said Yakumo with confidence.

'How can you be sure?'

'That man appeared in front of me again, though he had disappeared even since the incident with Takagishi-sensei.'

That one sentence brought up memories in Gotou's head.

Yakumo was right. After that case, he'd completely forgotten about that man, but about a year and a half ago, he'd started hearing rumours about him again.

If he's still loitering around Yakumo after his death –

'What's that man's goal?'

When Gotou asked that, Miyuki's shoulders started to shake as she laughed.

'Gotou-san, you really are slow. Yakumo-kun's realised the reason.'

– Really?

He looked at Yakumo.

'That man wants my body.'

Yakumo said something awful in a calm tone.

'Body... you say...'

Even as Gotou said it, he felt a chill run down his spine.

During the last case and inside the detention house, Miyuki had said the same thing. 'I can't kill Yakumo-kun.'

'Yes. That man lost his own body, so he wants the living body of the only person who has inherited his left eye...'

'You mean taking over your body?'

– What a guy.

'It's a bit different.'

The one who spoke was Miyuki.

Gotou gripped Miyuki by the collar and pushed her with all her strength against the wall.

There was a dull thump.

'What do you mean?'

'Honestly. Don't be so violent.'

Miyuki smiled as she said that.

'Something similar happened before, didn't it? A dead person's spirit cannot fully take over a living person's body.'

Yakumo spoke instead of Miyuki.

Gotou remembered that case. The case when Makoto was possessed by a ghost –

Yakumo had said the same thing then. If there were two spirits in one body, they would reject each other.

'Then what's he planning?'

There was no point doing something he knew he couldn't.

'He's tuning him.'

Miyuki looked at Yakumo like he was prey.

'Tuning?'

'Yes. By making me despair and putting me in a similar psychological state, he is trying to attune me to him.'

Yakumo's expression twisted as he spoke.

If they had the same psychological state, he'd be able to use his body without any resistance –

The bottom of his stomach was hot. Gotou felt his anger flare up like a fire.

That man needed to push Yakumo to the very bottom of despair in order to fulfil his wish of using him as a vessel for his own soul.

That was why he played with Sakakibara's feelings for his daughter and made him stab Isshin.

In this plan, in order to draw Yakumo towards him, he'd attacked Isshin, who had been Yakumo's support, which also made Yakumo taste despair.

– Are you kidding me!?

Even though parents were supposed to protect their children even if it meant their own deaths, he was forcing his own wish on his son –

'What kind of bastard is he!?' spat out Gotou.

Yakumo glared at Miyuki with sharp eyes.

'The two of you let your guard down.'

'What did you say?'

Miyuki's confident expression suddenly changed.

'That man thought that I would easily succumb to despair after losing my uncle and carelessly revealed himself.'

It appeared that Yakumo had met with the man with red eyes without Gotou knowing.

However, that had made Yakumo realise what he was.

'Yakumo-kun, what are you going to do with me? I don't mind if you kill me.'

Miyuki provoked Yakumo as she looked up at him.

'I...'

'If you don't, somebody important to you will die again.'

After declaring that, Miyuki started laughing scornfully.

– There's no saving this woman.

If Yakumo took the knife in his hand and tried to stab her, Gotou wasn't confident that he would stop him.

If he thought about the anger and sadness that Yakumo had experienced, Gotou couldn't think about stopping him.

If Miyuki lived, there would be more victims.

Yakumo slowly walked towards Miyuki.

His expression was as blank as a doll's.

'This is the end of the farce,' Yakumo said quietly, face still blank.

'What are you? Don't you hate me?'

Miyuki looked terribly confused.

She probably couldn't accept how Yakumo was acting with her perspective.

'Gotou-san, please take this woman away immediately.'

Yakumo said just that and turned around.

'Don't act so strong! You want to kill me, right? Just do it!'

Miyuki screamed at Yakumo's back.

However, Yakumo didn't turn around. Together with Haruka, he walked away.

Miyuki had planned on pushing Yakumo to the limits of despair with this case – but what Yakumo had seen there was not anything as small as hatred or anger.

Miyuki had underestimated Yakumo. In a way, Gotou had too –

'Too bad. Didn't go as you planned.'

As Gotou said that, he knocked his head into Miyuki's nose.

Miyuki fell to the ground clutching her nose.

'Yakumo's much stronger than you thought!'

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19

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Ishii was frozen as he sat on the floor.

It felt like his core had been taken out of him.

Other officers had arrived on the scene and taken Miyuki away from Gotou. All Ishii could do was watch.

– I'm saved.

He felt honestly relieved.

'You OK?'

Gotou slowly walked towards Ishii.

'Ah, yes. Somehow...'

Ishii hurriedly stood up.

– I couldn't do anything useful this time either.

That thought suddenly filled Ishii's head.

Though he was glad that the man with two red eyes had been a ghost, if not, they might have lost Nanase Miyuki.

When Ishii thought about that, he felt incredibly sorry.

'I-I apologise.'

Ishii bowed at the waist towards Gotou.

Then, something hit his head. Gotou's fist had come down.

It made sense for Gotou to be angry.

'Because of me...'

Ishii raised his head which stung from pain.

Just as he expected, Gotou looked frightful.

'You fool.'

'I am truly sorry. Because of my negligence...'

'That isn't it!'

Gotou gave Ishii's chest a push.

Ishii stumbled backwards, unable to brace himself when it was so sudden. However, Gotou quickly closed that distance.

'Eek.'

Ishii unconsciously let out a squeak under Gotou's pressure.

'Got this? Don't ever waste your life again.'

'Eh?'

Ishii cocked his head at Gotou's unexpected words.

'I'm saying that I'd rather let Nanase Miyuki go than let you die!'

Gotou's yell shook Ishii's heart and body.

It was like he'd been hit by lightning.

– Detective Gotou! You can't!

Ishii had yelled that when the man with red eyes held a knife to his neck. Those words had surprised Ishii more than anyone else.

In the past, he would have definitely wanted to be saved.

However, at that moment, those words had undoubtedly been his true feelings.

'I was just trying...'

'I'd be troubled if you died,' Gotou said awkwardly, looking away from Ishii.

Ishii hadn't thought that Gotou felt that way about him. For the first time Ishii's left, he felt like somebody had acknowledged his existence.

'Don't cry. It makes me feel sick.'

When Gotou said that, Ishii realised that he was crying.

'I-I apologise.'

'Don't apologise. Fool.'

Gotou hit Ishii's head with his fist again before walking away briskly.

The pain in his head felt different from usual.

– No matter what happens, I'll follow this person.

As Ishii watched Gotou's back, he came to that decision again.

'Ishii-san.'

Ishii saw Makoto running at him.

'Makoto-san...'

Makoto was panting when she reached Ishii. She raised her head and smiled.

Normally, she looked very mature, but she looked like an innocent child now.

'I'm so glad you're OK.'

Makoto put a hand to her chest.

'Yes. Somehow...'

'I'm really glad.'

Ishii felt embarrassed and replied with a wry smile, but then he realised that he wasn't nervous even though Makoto was in front of him.

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Haruka sat on the bench in the hospital's waiting room.

There were a number of police cars parked outside. Their red lights were blinking.

Though it had been dim earlier, the lights were on now and officers were running about. Everything felt disorganised.

Yakumo was just idly watching from beside her.

– You can kill me.

Did Yakumo want to kill Miyuki when she said that – Haruka wanted to ask, but she didn't dare.

In the end, Yakumo didn't kill Miyuki. That was enough.

'Oi, Yakumo! I forgot something important!'

Gotou shouted as he approached them.

'You're noisy, as usual.'

Yakumo ran a hand through his hair, seeming extremely annoyed.

'You were stabbed by that woman.'

'Ah, that's what you're talking about...'

'What do you mean, that's what you're talking about? How can you be OK?'

'Do you know what a stab-proof vest is?'

As Yakumo said that, he stood up and undid the buttons of his shirt, showing what was inside.

It was what Haruka had received from Hata to give to Yakumo.

At first, she hadn't known what it was, but Yakumo had explained while they came to the hospital.

It was called a stab-proof vest, and per its name, it was an article of clothing that protected its wearers from stab attacks.

Made of nylon, if something was worn on top of it, it couldn't be told apart from a regular piece of clothing.

Yakumo had known that Nanase Miyuki would come to stab him. Furthermore, she would do it in a way that wouldn't kill him –

There was a reason she couldn't kill Yakumo.

'Where'd you get that?' said Gotou, eyes wide as saucers.

'I borrowed it from Hata-san,' replied Yakumo matter-of-factly.

'Borrowed, you say... Then you should've told me in the first place!'

'You didn't ask me, did you?'

Yakumo lightly let Gotou's anger pass.

It finally felt like things were back to normal. Haruka ended up laughing too.

Then, Gotou's sharp gaze turned to her.

'Did you know, Haruka-chan?'

'Ah, yes. I was the one who went to borrow it from Hata-san.'

'Then what was the scream?'

It hurt to have him point it out.

'Even if I did know, I was surprised...'

Feeling apologetic, Haruka bowed her head and said, 'Sorry.'

The way Yakumo collapsed had been so realistic that she had been upset even though she knew it was an act.

'You two really are the worst couple,' said Gotou, sounding disappointed. He sat himself next to Yakumo.

Then, he mumbled, 'Well, long as you're all right.'

Gotou also was the type who couldn't be honest.

No matter how they quarrelled, the two of them had a relationship of trust.

'But that man was a ghost, eh...' grumbled Gotou, an unlit cigarette in his mouth.

'That's right,' agreed Haruka, recalling the time she had met the man with red eyes at the mountain cottage in Nagano.

At the time, the man had kept threatening Haruka, thrusting a knife at her.

However, he had disappeared without doing anything in the end.

Now that she thought about it, it was incredibly unnatural.

'Well, the mystery's solved, so that wraps one thing up. There's no point chasing that man any longer,' said Gotou emotionally.

Yakumo looked at Gotou grimly.

'What are you saying? Nothing has changed.'

'What do you mean?'

Gotou cocked his head.

'Remember that man's modus operandi. He never does anything directly. He leads the darkness in people's hearts to commit crime.'

'So he's going to keep doing the same thing...'

Gotou stood up.

'Correct. As long as there is darkness in people's hearts, that man will continue to commit crime, while we cannot arrest him or kill him...'

Yakumo's voice rang darker than Haruka had ever heard it do before.

There was a dilemma. Yakumo had the unique ability to see the spirits of the dead, but all he could do was see them – he couldn't exorcise spirits.

In short, he couldn't stop the man with red eyes, who was a ghost.

– The same thing will keep on happening.

When Haruka thought that, it made her shiver.

'What do you plan to do?' asked Gotou as he bit the cigarette filter.

'Unfortunately, I'm out of options right now,' Yakumo replied listlessly. Then, he suddenly stood up, as if he had seen something.

– What did he see?

Haruka stood up and looked in the same direction.

At the end of the corridor, she saw a man slowly walking towards them. It was Sakakibara.

He was handcuffed and was surrounded by police.

Because of the commotion earlier, his face was swollen and there was blood above his eye and below his nose.

This person had fallen to hell to save his daughter. Strong feelings for somebody could turn good or bad.

When Haruka thought about that, it was too much for her.

Yakumo silently walked up to Sakakibara.

Haruka thought about following him, but the sparks between their eyes had so much pressure that her feet couldn't move.

The police officers by Sakakibara tried to move Yakumo away.

'Oi, Wait. Let him talk.'

Gotou stopped them.

Yakumo had always been a bystander in the cases he had been involved with before.

But this time, it was different.

With the victim being a relative, he had been put in the most painful position.

After the incident, Yakumo hadn't put his feelings into words, but he had felt a deep sadness and a boiling anger.

And then he had disappeared for a day –

Yakumo had decided something then. That was why he still had his red left eye out in the open, with no contact lens.

'Because of you... My daughter – my daughter... Why did you get in my way!?'

Sakakibara yelled from the bottom of his stomach.

The police held onto him to stop his shaking.

His eyes were bloodshot. No, not just his eyes. His whole body was red, the embodiment of fiery anger.

Yakumo didn't appear disturbed at all by Sakakibara.

He just looked at Sakakibara's face emotionlessly.

'Because of you, my uncle is in the state that he is.'

'I love my daughter.'

'You aren't the only one who has somebody he loves. My uncle is as important to me as your daughter is to you.'

Yakumo seemed to be testing each word.

'My daughter is my only treasure. I can't lose her.'

Sakakibara didn't back down, gritting his teeth.

The last resistance of a captured carnivore –

'Do you still not understand? My uncle has a daughter. Just one daughter. She is only seven, and she is deaf. Can you still say the same thing? That it's fine as long as you can save your daughter...'

Yakumo paused. He took in a deep breath and continued.

'Every person has somebody they love.'

Sakakibara's chin was shaking.

He must have realised what he had done – but he was still trying to justify himself.

People were terribly prideful creatures.

'Shut up! Shut up! That man had a brain tumour! He would've died anyway! What's wrong with making his life useful!?'

Sakakibara's words sounded like the screams of a dying man.

'That doesn't make it acceptable to take a life!'

Yakumo's shout stopped time.

That one sentence had been filled with many feelings. The strong beliefs that had piled up from

everything that Yakumo had experienced up until now –

His words after having his one and only parent taking away from him –

They were heavier than anything someone else could say.

Sakakibara's face went pale as his mouth flapped like that of a fish asking for bait.

He might have been looking for words to object with.

However, no words could argue with Yakumo now.

'I can kill you. It would be easy to throw your daughter aside.'

'Agh...'

Sakakibara groaned and shut his eyes tightly.

He doesn't want to accept his daughter's death –

After a silence, Yakumo took another deep breath.

'Please open your eyes.'

Sakakibara did as Yakumo told him and opened his eyes.

Yakumo did not glare at him. He just looked straight at Sakakibara's eyes.

'I have no intention of continuing this chain of hatred.'

This was the conclusion Yakumo had chosen –

Yakumo had stayed with his beliefs even after losing Isshin.

He was incredibly awkward. It hurt to watch him. But that was why he was Yakumo.

'I give my consent for the transplant,' said Yakumo in a whisper.

Sakakibara's body shook. He held his handcuffed hands out towards Yakumo.

He looked like a figure from a religious painting. A peasant begging for mercy from their god.

'... Will you save her? My daughter...'

'That is what my uncle would want.'

When Yakumo said that, tears started falling from Sakakibara's eyes.

His tears, dyed red with blood, fell one by one to the floor.

'However, please do not forget. A life was lost in order to save your daughter. That death brought about the same anger and sadness that you were feeling just earlier... You must not forget...'

'Ur... gh... I...'

Something fell from Sakakibara's shoulder.

His body shook as he fell to his knees.

Yakumo walked up to him and said this close to his ear.

'It has nothing to do with your daughter. This is a burden for you to bear alone.'

When Yakumo said that, Sakakibara collapsed to the floor and started sobbing like a child.

His cries echoed through the hospital.

Yakumo turned his back to Sakakibara.

'Let's go back.'

Haruka nodded silently and left the hospital with Yakumo.

The night wind was cold.

'The goal of all life is death.'

Looking up at the sky full of stars, Yakumo said just that.

終章

その後

EPILOGUE

epilogue

-

Haruka looked outside from the bench in the hospital waiting room.

The cherry blossoms in the courtyard were starting to bloom.

Spring was the season which breathed life, but right now, someone irreplaceable was disappearing before her eyes.

'How long are you going to sit there for?'

Haruka turned around at the voice.

Yakumo looked at her with his eyes, which were sleepy as usual.

'Is it done?'

'Yeah. I just had to sign a document,' Yakumo replied brusquely.

Isshin's medical examination had determined that he was brain-dead.

Just as Yakumo had declared to Sakakibara, he gave his consent to transfer Isshin's organs.

Haruka knew that nothing could be done now, but she still wanted to hear how Yakumo really felt.

'Yakumo-kun, are you really OK with this?'

He didn't reply immediately.

Yakumo's eyes were narrow as he looked at the cherry blossom tree in the courtyard.

Haruka couldn't tell how he truly felt from looking at his profile.

– You always hide your heart like this.

'... It's what Uncle would want,' Yakumo murmured.

'Right.'

That was all Haruka could say.

The truth was that she wanted to scream.

– It's a lie! Isshin-san is still alive!

However, Yakumo must have had the same feelings, and much more strongly at that.

'I think Uncle probably knew this was going to happen to him,' said Yakumo, his hands in his jeans pockets as he looked at his feet.

His words made sense.

The day Isshin was stabbed, Mao had told him he had a brain tumour.

He had been prepared.

– From now on, I'll leave Yakumo to you.

Isshin's words had had a heavy meaning to them, but Haruka hadn't realised then.

'Right...'

'When Uncle heard from Gotou-san that his life was in danger, he still went to do his daily meditation.'

'He did.'

'He was probably trying to cut off the continuing chain of hatred with his own hand.'

Yakumo's words echoed heavily in Haruka's heart.

Isshin had probably thought that the man with two red eyes, Yakumo's father, would come to kill him himself.

Then, he had tried to end things, in exchange for his own life.

That was how Isshin used his life.

Isshin had probably believed that even if he was gone, Yakumo wouldn't lose his way –

But the person who actually came to him was Sakakibara –

'Let's go. Uncle's waiting.'

Yakumo smiled bitterly.

– That's right. Isshin-san's waiting.

'OK,' replied Haruka, and then she started walking.

They walked silently to the ICU where Isshin was.

A nurse showed them inside.

Isshin looked so healthy on the bed that it made Haruka think he might wake up at any moment.

Even though he was using an artificial respirator, his chest was moving up and down slightly. When Haruka saw him breathing, she felt another bout of disbelief.

Haruka stood next to the bed and held Isshin's hand.

– It's still warm.

She couldn't believe that he would die in just a few hours.

– Are you really going to go, Isshin-san? Are you going to disappear without saying goodbye?

Haruka called out in her heart, even though she knew her words wouldn't reach him.

Yakumo looked down at Isshin silently.

What could he be seeing with his red left eye?

He must have been recalling the many memories he had had with Isshin.

Isshin had been closer to Yakumo than anybody, so they must have had countless memories together.

Tears welled up in Haruka's eyes just from thinking about it.

'... You're not here anymore then,' Yakumo said quietly.

– Not here anymore?

Haruka didn't understand what Yakumo meant.

All she could do was grip Isshin's hand again with both of her own to express feelings that wouldn't reach him.

Isshin had saved her countless times. He had given her courage. He had shown the path that everyone should take. He had been like a light in the dark.

I had so much I wanted to talk to him about –

People always had regrets.

– But please don't worry. I'll continue to watch over Yakumo.

So please rest well –

Haruka touched Isshin's cheek.

* * *

Gotou took Atsuko and Nao to the ICU just as Yakumo and Haruka were stepping out.

'Hey,' he said, raising his hand.

Haruka was sobbing and couldn't speak.

Yakumo was as expressionless as usual and just sent a glance Gotou's way.

This is nothing. It was like he was saying that.

Nao walked up to Yakumo.

Yakumo crouched and hugged Nao, patting her head.

Nao started sobbing into Yakumo's chest.

– This girl's been holding it in too. These siblings really tough it out.

However, no matter how much they tried to put up a brave front, both of them were still children.

Gotou looked at Atsuko's face.

Her lips were in a thin line. She nodded.

He understood even if she didn't say anything aloud.

When Atsuko looked like this, she was prepared. She had looked the same way when she decided to marry Gotou.

'Oi. Yakumo. There's something I want to talk with you alone.'

When Gotou called out to Yakumo, he replied with a silent nod, perhaps sensing Gotou's intention.

-

Gotou sat next to Yakumo on the bench in the hospital courtyard.

Come to think of it, this might've been the first time he'd talked to Yakumo about something that wasn't for a case. When he thought about it, he felt a bit awkward.

However, it seemed that Gotou was the only one who felt that way, because Yakumo let out a bored yawn.

'Hey, what happened to your contact lens?'

Ever since Isshin was stabbed, Yakumo hadn't worn the black contact lens that hid his red left eye.

At first, Gotou had thought he just didn't have a replacement for the one that broke, but it had been a number of days already.

'I don't need it anymore,' Yakumo said firmly.

Gotou was surprised, but then his expression softened.

Yakumo had detested that red left eye in the past. He had even tried to cut it out with a utility knife. For Yakumo to say he didn't need to hide it any more – it was incredible progress.

– Old man, you watching this?

Gotou looked up at the sky and called out.

'So what did you have to discuss?' said Yakumo, like he wanted Gotou to hurry up.

'Actually, I have a request,' Gotou said formally, an unlit cigarette in his mouth.

'I won't lend you money.'

Yakumo yawned.

– Really, what a hateful brat.

'Don't look down on the police.'

'Gotou-san, you're a part of the police?'

'What did you think I was?'

'A NEET¹.'

'You an idiot? I don't have the free time to talk to you about stupid things.'

1 NEET stands for Not in Education, Employment, or Training. This generally derogatory term was originally used in the UK but Japan and some other countries took it up.

'I feel the same way. Please get to the point already.'

Yakumo ran his fingers through his hair.

Gotou cleared his throat and tried to speak, but he didn't know how to start.

He knew Yakumo would complain, but Gotou couldn't stop himself. He lit his cigarette and let the nicotine flow through his body.

Yakumo looked displeased, but Gotou was able to relax a bit.

'My request is, er.... about Nao.'

After Gotou said that, Yakumo's brows furrowed as he cocked his head.

Even Yakumo, who was so intelligent, probably couldn't read into what Gotou was going to say next. It was a funny thought.

'I discussed with my wife. We want to take Nao into our home.'

'Did you hit your head?'

Yakumo looked at Gotou as if he were something filthy.

He probably couldn't understand why Gotou had made such a suggestion.

'I'm serious. I can't let that girl be picked up by some foster parents from who knows where.'

'Isn't that just your ego?' Yakumo said coldly.

Gotou understood that even without Yakumo's telling him.

'We still need Nao.'

Gotou took Nao in for this case and had planned on protecting her.

However, that wasn't what happened.

Nao had saved Gotou. By trying to protect Nao, Gotou could face his wife Atsuko for the first time.

– That's ego too.

But he still couldn't leave Nao alone.

Nao had suffered so much up until now.

Her actual mother had been killed, and now this had happened to Isshin, the person who'd raised her. He didn't want to let Nao feel sad again.

No matter what happened, no matter what he had to do, he was prepared to protect Nao.

'That isn't something for you to decide on your own, is it, Gotou-san?'

'I said I talked to my wife, didn't I? It's the first time we've agreed on something.'

'What do you gain out of this?'

'Are you an idiot? It's not a matter of profit or loss. We want to be her parents. That's all.'

Gotou was so forceful that the words sounded like a threat.

Yakumo had lived his life doubting people. He had protected his heart that way.

That was why he thought that every person acted for their own gains. But that wasn't everything in the world.

It seemed Gotou had put Yakumo in a bad mood, because he suddenly stood up.

'If you do that, wouldn't that make us family, Gotou-san?'

– This guy. Why'd he have to put it like that?

'I don't care what you think, but me and you were like family in the first place! What's the point of talking about that now!?' yelled Gotou angrily, standing up as well.

'I don't think you're fit to be a parent, Gotou-san.'

'Nobody's born a parent! They have children and become one!'

'Who'd you hear that from?'

Yakumo snorted.

– This brat! When I was being so nice about it!

Contrary to Gotou's agitated state, Yakumo had his usual sleepy eyes as he plucked the cigarette out of Gotou's mouth.

'I wouldn't mind thinking about it if you stop your bad smoking habit.'

– And he's complaining like a sister-in-law!

If it was for Nao, quitting smoking was nothing.

Gotou put the cigarette in the case and threw the whole thing into the rubbish bin.

* * *

Haruka was in the living room of the priests' quarters.

Isshin's funeral had ended and many people had gathered.

Gotou, Atsuko and Nao were sitting together, like a real family.

Opposite them, Ishii and Makoto sat respectfully.

Hata was by himself, sipping tea leisurely.

Next to Haruka was her mother, Keiko. When she heard about Isshin's death, she rushed over from Nagano.

It was only a blink of an eye since Yakumo consented to the organ transplant.

The heart Isshin donated was probably with Yoshiko now. According to the list Makoto got, her

name had been at the top of the recipient list.

Haruka wanted to check, but there was no way to confirm it legally.

Isshin hadn't just donated his heart. Liver, kidneys, pancreas, corneas, lungs, small intestine – he had donated every organ he could.

After the surgery, Isshin's body had been empty – so light that a single person could pick it up.

Isshin was still living in other people's bodies – Haruka wanted to think that.

Reminiscing about him was gentle and warm, like his character. He had been like the spring summer.

Now that Haruka thought about it, she had always felt like there was something gloomy in Isshin's smile.

He had never lived for himself.

He had been incredibly self-sacrificing.

Haruka looked up and noticed that Yakumo alone wasn't participating in the reminiscing, just looking out the window.

His left eye flickered about, like it was looking for something.

Even after the funeral, Yakumo had not let anybody see him cry even once.

Even though he must have been sad, because of his obstinate nature, he kept that sadness within himself.

Finally, Yakumo stood up and went out of the room, as if to escape the gazes of everyone around him.

However, Yakumo was the only one who thought he wouldn't be noticed. When he left, everyone went quiet.

Haruka felt everyone's gazes turn to her.

– A silent pressure.

'Excuse me. Should I go check up on him?'

Ishii stood up.

'Are you an idiot!? Read the atmosphere!'

Shut down by Gotou, who had an artificial cigarette in his mouth, Ishii's shoulders slumped and he sat back down.

Makoto comforted him.

Hata started giggling like he thought the scene amusing.

On top of Atsuko's lap, Nao let out an 'Ah!' and then grabbed Haruka's shirt.

Everyone understands you better than you think they do. You need to understand that better.

Right –

'Haruka, if you don't go, I will.'

Keiko poked Haruka's arm.

'Why would you go, Mum?'

'If you're going to complain, go yourself.'

Keiko pushed Haruka's back.

– From now on, I'll leave Yakumo to you.

She might have just imagined it, but she felt like she had heard Isshin's voice.

Haruka stood up from her seat and left the room to find Yakumo.

Though she didn't see him, she had an inkling of where he went.

Haruka went out the entrance and walked through the gravel garden.

The cherry blossom tree on the grounds was in full bloom.

Haruka took off her shoes and went up the wooden stairs to the temple.

Careful not to make any noise, she opened the sliding door.

She spotted Yakumo sitting in the lotus position in the centre of the dim temple.

'... You're still here?' said Yakumo, looking up at the ceiling.

Haruka was about to respond but she realised immediately that the words weren't directed at her.

Though Haruka couldn't see anything, Yakumo probably saw Isshin's spirit.

Yakumo was talking with him.

'You worry too much, Uncle. I don't need to hide my red eye anymore.'

With this case, Yakumo had taken another step forward.

He didn't need to worry about other people's gazes and hide his left eye anymore.

'Nao and I are fine. We're not alone. We have a family. Even though we're not connected by blood...'

He was right. It was just as Yakumo said.

Without Isshin, Yakumo had lost the last person in his family that he was related to by blood.

However, he had people with whom he had bonds which were stronger and firmer than that.

They compensated for each other's shortcomings. Stubborn, selfish and straightforward people –

'That's why... you should go already,' said Yakumo.

– An awkward farewell.

Even though he really wanted to tell Isshin not to go, he acted brave until the very end.

– Are you going to continue to live while keeping everything to yourself?

Haruka just heard the sound of the wind.

While listening to it, she watched Yakumo's rounded shoulders.

'You really left...'

Yakumo said that to himself.

Haruka looked up at the ceiling.

However, all she saw was stained beams – she couldn't spot Isshin.

'Did Isshin-san say something?'

She had never been so envious of Yakumo before.

Of course Haruka and the others couldn't even say goodbye to Isshin at the end.

He had suddenly disappeared, like he'd never even been there in the first place –

However, Yakumo had been able to say what he had to at the end.

'He said he was happy... He was smiling,' Yakumo said quietly.

– I see.

Even though so many things had happened to him, Isshin was still worried about others at the very end and donated his own organs. Isshin still thought that his life had been happy.

– That's just like Isshin-san.

That at least made Haruka feel better.

'And he said... thank you...'

Yakumo's voice was hoarse. His shoulders were slumped and his back was shaking. He was still holding himself back.

– Really, how obstinate.

Haruka walked up to Yakumo and hugged him from behind with both arms.

'Yakumo-kun, you're not alone,' she murmured.

Yakumo's hands gripped Haruka's hands tightly.

– Don't take everything on by yourself. You're not alone.

Yakumo started weeping.

His body shook violently as his tears dripped one by one to the floor.

Haruka felt like the sadness that filled his heart had come into her.

Isshin was gone. But his death left a mark in many hearts.

That became a strong, firm bond, tying us together.

So please don't worry, Isshin-san.

We're fine.

And also –

-

Thank you –

-

One month later – Hokutou Newspaper Excerpt

-

Patrol Wagon Overturned, Catches Fire!

Prisoner Dead?

-

At about 8 PM last night, on the city highway near Kosuke ICU, a patrol wagon carrying a prisoner overturned and caught fire after hitting the middle divider. The four guards were able to safely escape, but the prisoner Nanase Miyuki (26) has not been confirmed. It is believed that she died within the car.

The cause of the accident is not yet clear. Though the police had not made an official announcement, eyewitness testimonies state that the investigation is looking at it as an accident caused by a driver who dozed off.

On the day of the incident, prisoner Nanase was in the middle of being transported back to Tokyo Detention House after escaping and being rearrested.

添付ファイル

夜桜

E X T R A ^{FILE}

extra file: evening cherry blossoms

-

It was a week after Isshin's funeral –

-

Ozawa Haruka stopped in the courtyard.

A pleasant warm wind brushed her cheek. The green of the lawn was dazzling.

With the new school year, circles had started to recruit new students at the school gates, so the place was teeming with people.

– It's spring.

It was normally an exciting season, but Haruka's heart still had a hole in it.

Though she knew it in her head, her heart still hadn't accepted it – the reality of Isshin's death.

Haruka let out her breath and started walking again.

– I wonder how Yakumo's doing.

While thinking about that, she spotted the person himself just as she arrived at the front of the school gates

'Yakumo-kun.'

When she called out to him, Yakumo, who had had his back against the gates, slowly lifted his head.

His expression was as grim as if he had seen the end of the world.

'What are you doing here?' asked Haruka.

Yakumo just let out a deep sigh.

'I'm waiting... for somebody.'

It was unusual for Yakumo to have such bad enunciation.

'Who?'

'You really are slow.'

Yakumo ran a hand through his hair, his irritation evident.

It was like he was trying to deceive her. Perhaps he didn't want her to know who he was waiting for.

However, that just made her more curious.

'Why not just tell me?'

'That's why I said you're slow.'

'What? You don't want me to know?'

'That's not it. Just...'

When Haruka peered at Yakumo's face, he turned it away to avoid her gaze.

Haruka didn't understand why, but Yakumo looked cute when he was troubled. This just made her want to find out no matter what.

'Just what? Ah, could it be Gotou-san?'

'No.'

'Then Ishii-san?'

'No. Gotou-san and Ishii-san went ahead.'

– Went ahead?

The conversation made no sense to Haruka.

'Where to?'

She cocked her head.

'To the flower viewing.'

'Eh?'

'I somehow ended up with a promise to go flower viewing.'

'Oh?'

So even the always quibbling Yakumo could get into the spirit and go flower viewing – Haruka's expression softened at discovering this unexpected side of him.

– But.

'Isn't this the wrong season?'

Haruka looked at the cherry blossom tree in the courtyard again.

The cherry blossom tree, past its season, had already lost most of its petals and only had withered flowers left.

'We would have gone earlier, but with the commotion...'

Haruka understood even without his saying the rest.

'Right,' murmured Haruka, closing her eyes tightly.

If she relaxed even a bit, she would start crying.

'But it's fine.'

After a silence, Yakumo said that with a little laugh.

'Eh?'

Haruka opened her eyes and looked at Yakumo.

As his eyes looked somewhere far away, the side of his face was so beautiful it was startling.

'Since I made a promise.'

'A promise?'

'A promise with Uncle.'

'Isshin-san...'

'A few days before he died, he called me. Since it would be the cherry blossom season soon, he said that we should all go flower viewing together...'

After Yakumo murmured that, he turned his gaze up towards the sky.

Haruka looked up at the sky as well.

She saw the clouds slowly blowing by. The shape of them reminded her of Isshin's face.

'I see.'

'He'd never said something like that before. Uncle might've known he didn't have much longer to live.'

Haruka looked down silently, neither agreeing or disagreeing with Yakumo's words.

It made sense.

When Isshin came to Yakumo's secret hideaway, he had been different than he usually was. Haruka wouldn't have been able to explain if asked what was different, but he had looked like he was prepared for something.

'Hey, can I join you for the flower viewing?' Haruka asked Yakumo.

If it was a flower viewing in Isshin's memory, she wanted to participate no matter what.

'That's why I said you were slow,' said Yakumo, exasperated, running a hand through his hair again.

'What?'

'I'm waiting for you,' said Yakumo, scowling as he cast his gaze downward.

'Eh, really?'

– Yakumo waited for me.

He had never done that before.

Haruka's eyes were wide in surprise as another feeling started welling up within her.

– We're going to have a flower viewing. Do you want to come?

Even though it would have been OK to just ask honestly, that wasn't possible for Yakumo. He

probably wasn't used to inviting people.

He was a contrary person, but Haruka thought it was cute.

'So what are you going to do?' asked Yakumo, eyes still downcast.

He didn't even have to ask. Of course –

'I'll go!' Haruka replied cheerfully.

Yakumo shrugged and started walking silently.

– He could've at least said something.

Instead of complaining, Haruka poked Yakumo's side.

Yakumo's whole body jolted up. He glared at Haruka, but then he continued walking without saying anything.

Haruka also walked silently after Yakumo.

When they reached the temple gates, it was already dark.

Gotou, Atsuko, Nao, Ishii and Makoto were in the gravel garden and talking cheerfully.

'I have something for you.'

Haruka was about to join everybody when Yakumo called out to stop her.

'For me?'

'Yeah,' Yakumo replied brusquely, taking something out of his jeans pocket.

'What is it?'

Haruka took it, though she felt puzzled.

It was a case with two contact lenses, one red, one black.

The black contact lens was the one Yakumo used. The red contact lens was the one Isshin used –

Once Haruka realised that, the small case suddenly felt heavier.

'You're giving this to me?'

With her mouth wide open, Haruka looked at Yakumo.

'I'm distributing mementos.'

'Isn't this important to you?'

These contact lenses were proof of the bond between Yakumo and Isshin.

'That's why I want you to have them,' Yakumo said in a murmur.

Haruka didn't know what emotions were behind Yakumo's pale face, lit up by the moonlight.

The wind brushed her cheek.

Though she might have been mistaken, Haruka felt Isshin's presence in that wind.

'Thank you.'

Haruka's fingers closed over the contact case.

Tears naturally spilled out of her eyes.

They weren't from frustration or sadness. The tears were very, very warm.

'What are you two doing!? Hurry over here!'

She heard somebody calling them from far away.

Haruka looked over to see Gotou standing up and waving.

'Let's go.'

'OK.'

Together with Yakumo, Haruka started walking –

*本作はフィクションであり、実在の人物、団体等とは一切関係ありません。

afterword

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Thank you for reading *Psychic Detective Yakumo 6 – To the Limits of Despair*.

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This work was a strongly meditative piece for me.

Saitou Isshin actually has a model. He is based on the priest who was at the temple by my childhood home.

When I was young, I was a timid crybaby who didn't talk much.

Even when something painful or unpleasant happened, I couldn't talk to my parents or friends about it, so I would always end up crying in front of my grandfather's grave.

I felt like my dead grandfather was listening to the feelings in my heart that I couldn't tell anybody.

When I did so, that priest always showed up.

The priest didn't ask me what happened. He would just smile and say things like 'It's hot today' and 'The wind is strong'.

All I could do was nod.

However, when I looked at the priest smile like Maitreya, the things I found painful would be mysteriously washed away.

I grew accustomed to waiting for the priest to call out to me.

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Ten years after that, I, who had used to be a crybaby, started writing novels.

Though that priest already passed away, I had the chance to talk to his family upon my return.

'He was really worried about you.'

When I heard that, I started crying.

The priest had known everything and watched over me.

-

With this story, Isshin has left this world.

However, he has left unforgettable memories in the hearts of Yakumo and the other characters and will probably continue to have a great influence on their lives.

Just like it had been with me –

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Heisei 22¹, heat wave – Kaminaga Manabu

1 Heisei 22 is 2010 in the Gregorian calendar.