

Silver Cross & Draculea

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架木と

II

ドラキュリア

十月ユウ



ファンタジア文庫



Silver Cross & Draculas  
銀の十字架と  
ドラキュリア II

# Prologue

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"The club is in danger of being disbanded...!"

Her dignified and beautiful face contorted with sorrow, Rushella Dahm Draculea declared to the members of the club before her.

Currently after school, the location was an empty classroom in a corner of the school building -- in other words, the club activities room.

Standing before the blackboard was the self-styled "club president" Rushella who had founded the club several weeks earlier.

Nevertheless, in all this time since the club was established, neither the club's name nor its activities had yet to be finalized.

"...All this is because you guys are negligent! Especially you!"

"Eh, me!?"

Kujou Hisui had been reading manga with his back to Rushella. Hearing himself singled out, he turned around unwillingly.

"Why are you blaming me... I didn't do anything!"

"That's exactly the problem; you're not doing anything! Furthermore, you even ignored all my suggestions... Such as giving the club a more friendly name of '○○○ Club,' or giving everyone different armbands based on their individual responsibilities, or entering the 'Inter School Writing Competition,' or setting the 'National University' as the goal, or 'welcoming midsummer,' or agreeing to a decisive match with the 'rival' during the finals in the tournament but losing to an underhanded enemy in the semifinals, or having a 'teammate' dying in a traffic accident, or 'unbelievable, for such a handsome character to be killed off'...!?"<sup>[1]</sup>

"Your suggestions are so ridiculous that I give up on retorting! Come on, the items in the second half of your list hardly count as suggestions!?"

"...By the way, isn't she learning about rather obscure things?"

Leaning against Hisui and trying to make conversation was another member of the club -- Sudou Mei.

Like Hisui, she had ignored Rushella's various suggestions and spent her days in the club classroom lazily.

"...It's probably because of her strong curiosity. In order to fill the gaps in her memory, she's been investigating all sorts of things... Unfortunately, she's not good with kanji even though she seems quite fluent with foreign books. Plus the fact she doesn't seem to like serious books, this has resulted in her being brainwashed by anime, manga, variety shows and the like..."

"...Based on the outcome, did she find the club under the influence of those things?"

"Hey, you guys over there, whispering is not allowed! Also, you are not allowed to wrap yourself around my servant's arm without my permission!"

Rushella swiftly pointed over with her finger, but Mei nonchalantly hugged Hisui tighter, bringing her lips near Hisui's little earlobe that was as cute as a girl's.

"Oh my, why does everything need your approval? Besides, when did he become your servant?"

"I bit him, so he's mine! And before coming to school today, we already shared a kiss!"

"Don't forget to add the words "Vampire's" before the word kiss. Please don't say things that could cause misunderstandings, especially in front of classmates."

Recalling the pain from this morning, Hisui instinctively reached out to the left side of his neck -- where traces of the "kiss" remained.

Normally, the only trace a kiss could leave behind... Would be a kiss mark at most.

...However, Rushella's kisses were not the harmless type.

Those were fang marks carved upon the skin by snow-white canines that one could glimpse behind those bright crimson lips of hers.

Not only that... but she also sucked blood.

Correct -- even though it was unbelievable, the girl before his eyes was a true authentic vampire.

No matter how well the high school uniform fitted her, or how well her behavior conformed to modern society -- she was still an inhuman supernatural creature.

She had bitten Hisui while he was on his way home from the high school entrance ceremony, made his home her own, and even followed him to school. And currently -- she was his master and the club president here.

"Sucking recklessly to your heart's content every single day... If it wasn't me, who knows what might happen..."

"...By the way, Hi-kun, you are getting your blood sucked every day, and yet, you're still safe and sound?"

Mei wondered as she stole a glance at Hisui's neck.

His pristine white skin was enough to shame most girls into admitting inferiority. Let alone a bite mark, there was not even a single blemish.

If blood was drawn as claimed, there should be a wound first of all.

More importantly, being bitten by a vampire implied the loss of human identity to become an inhuman supernatural creature.

Just as the ancient legends described, a person who had been bitten by a vampire would turn into a vampire too.

This was an absolute eternal rule and curse that no human could disobey.

But only Hisui was the exception.

"That's the kind of constitution I have. Let me remind you, even though I won't become a vampire and my wounds recover faster, losing blood still hurts a lot! If I suffer an instantly fatal wound, I'll still die. Because of this freeloader invading my home, I'm forced to eat a lot of liver recently for replenishing nutrients..."

"Shouldn't you take iron supplements as well? But suffering that every day is really terrible... Vampires are really troublesome!"

"Who are you calling troublesome!? My race has existed for countless eons, carrying utmost prestige for over a thousand years. You dare say something so rude? You fake human with only mere centuries' worth of history!"

"What did you say.....!?"

Her berserk button having been pushed, Mei stood up.

At the same time, she slammed her hands on the table.

This was merely a natural motion which required no emphasis.

But the instant her hands left the table -- the table was split into two.

This was not because the table was originally old and worn out, or cobbled together -- it was destroyed by pure brute strength.

"...Not this again. Please stop now. Sudou, the more you do this, the further you'll be from human, you know? Could you show some mercy to the public property here please? That strength of yours cannot be compared to normal humans!"

"I didn't choose this body. Besides, isn't this already a lot better than before?"

...Saying that, Mei pulverized the ballpoint pen in her hand.

Had it simply snapped into two, it could still be considered a show of strength.

But for her light grip to turn the pen into fine powder, this had completely surpassed the human realm.

More accurately, she was no longer human. No matter how seductive or tempting her appearance.

In other words, like Rushella, Mei was actually an inhuman supernatural creature.

A perfect creature made in the image of mankind and meant to surpass humanity. But for some reason, be it God's joke or the devil's curse, it was born as an ugly monster. Mei happened to be the descendant of the infamous Frankenstein's monster.

"Hmph, no matter how you disguise yourself, a fake is a fake. Ultimately, you cannot become human!"

"...Shut up, I don't care what you think. My wish is precisely to become human! To become one with a human... Or I should say, have babies with Hi-kun♥"

"Sorry, no can do."

Hisui shook his head expressionlessly.

If she kept hugging tighter, he really would be at risk of injury. That's Sudou Mei for you.

"Why? You're already getting your blood sucked by that vampire every day, right!? Couldn't you inject a little white liquid into me as well!?"

"Umm sorry, could you stop these blatant pornographic descriptions!? And of course the answer is no!"

"I forbid you to ignore me! Also, hugging together is not allowed!"

Rushella squeezed herself into the fray.

Things were always this chaotic around the three of them. Club activities probably failed to make progress thanks to that.

But like always, the situation was brought under control by the monotonous voice of the final member.

"...I have no objections to quarreling, but if you really want to stop the club from being disbanded, you people should think of a plan more seriously, right?"

The speaker was named Kariya Eruru.

Distanced from the noisy ruckus, she had been sitting in a corner of the classroom, staring at a notebook computer without a word, tapping audibly on the keyboard nonstop.

Her face was as cute and adorable as a French doll, but her cold manner of speaking was completely emotionless in tone.

"There's not much time remaining. If you want to continue using this classroom, the club must first be categorized and all sorts of content need to be edited. How about a more serious discussion?"

" " ".....Yes....." " "

Her irrefutable suggestion silenced the other three.

Returning to their own seats, they began to recall the cause of the incident.

Speaking of the club disbandment crisis, one must begin with a particular question someone posed.



# Chapter 1 - Monster Meeting

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"...By the way, I do not recall authorizing this kind of club?"

The quartet was casually doing their own thing in the "club activities room" as usual when a girl suddenly visited and declared.

Viewing the surprised quartet with disdain, she continued even more mercilessly.

"So, please relinquish this place as soon as possible. You do realize you are occupying a classroom illegally, right?"

"Why!? Why was my club not authorized? All we're missing is confirming the name and the activities description, right!?"

"Let me say this, in that case, you guys do not even qualify as a hobby group, let alone a club!"

Before the other three could even retort, the girl already answered Rushella directly on their behalf.

This person exuded an aura of dignity that differed from Rushella. With gently wavy hair coiled behind her head, she was dressed in her uniform in a fashionable yet strictly rule-abiding manner. An existence that no one in the school was unaware of.

Student Council Vice-President, Uno Kirika.

Having joined the student council as a first year, she was now a second year high school student. In the last election, she was able to ascend to the position of vice-president.

From the brief introductory exchange earlier, it was readily apparent that her personality was harsh, uncompromising and dutiful. Consequently, the complete lack of support from the female students resulted in her losing the bid for the president position. At the same time, due to her combination of beauty, talent and upfront ways, her approval rating amongst male students was reportedly the highest in the history of the school.

Amongst the current student council members, due to her being the only one with past experience on the council as well as her business-like personality, rumors speculated that she was the actual boss running the show.

Faced with her merciless announcement, Rushella was the first to object.

"What is going on!? Why can't you approve our club!?"

"What is going on? Because there is no paper trail. Besides, how do you even plan on applying with neither name nor content confirmed? Are these not questions that come before approval? Furthermore, you do realize the challenges of starting a club from scratch like this? Even if you do get approved, more than likely you will end up as a hobby group with neither club classroom nor club budget."

A completely correct explanation.

Even without her dignity as an upperclassman and as the Student Council Vice-President, her reasoning was flawless.

"Mmmmmmm... You dare speak to me in such a manner..."

"Excuse me, but she does bring up good points. By the way, did you even fill out the application? Based on common sense, shouldn't the name and activities be confirmed first before the club is established?"

Hisui's questioning made Rushella display a displeased expression.

"I already told the principal! I ran over to his office and declared 'I shall create a new club!!' Then with a blank stare, he answered 'All shall proceed as you wish...' He approved it!!"

"Clearly you used your 'mystic eyes' to force him to agree!! That's even worse than gaming the system!!"

"Shut up, if the boss already agreed, there's no problem, right!?"

"I say, even if we do it your way... The effect of 'mystic eyes' only lasts for a day, right!? Forcing your way into high school, having to run over to the principal's office to use the 'mystic eyes' every single day would be too much, which was why I asked Kariya to take care of the proper paperwork..."

"Hmm... Well then, can't the club be dealt the same way..."

"You must create the club properly in accordance with school rules. It would be too conspicuous if we meddled in this affair. Even though it would be troublesome for us if your area of movement expands after school, we cannot assist in this matter."

Eruru asserted expressionlessly.

Under normal circumstances, she seldom spoke to the group, but her words were always merciless when she did.

After all, she was only attending this school for the purpose of monitoring Rushella and Hisui.



Belonging to an undisclosed division of the Metropolitan Police Department, as a special consultant to the Supernatural Investigations Section and as an expert in vampire combat -- this was Kariya Eruru's identity.

Hearing Eruru's flat rejection, Hisui ignored Rushella's pouting and had no choice but to attempt negotiations with Kirika.

"So, the matter of the club aside... Why did you come here?"

"Even though our school was affected by the declining birthrate and decreasing trends in student numbers in the past, enrollment has increased in recent years due to the redevelopment of the station area. This in and of itself poses no issue. But at the same time, the problem of clubs operating with a lack of transparency gradually surfaced. My visit here today, could be described as for the purpose of investigations."

"...What do you mean?"

"Sports clubs are basically fine, but we have problems getting a grasp on the number of cultural clubs and hobby groups as well as their membership. Some of them are disbanded in reality and yet they continue to be allocated a budget. There are also chaotic cases of multiple hobby groups carrying out similar activities. Even more outrageously, there are clubs whose activities and existence are unknowns. Given someone malicious, one could easily embezzle the school's club budget under the guise of other clubs."

"...I see. That really is a problem."

"Many teachers who were once club advisors have left the school for various reasons such as retirement or quitting. To be honest, the school administration has no way of finding out the actual situation of all the clubs. Hence, the student council has decided to conduct an investigation. Do you understand now?"

"...I understand."

There was clearly no room for negotiations.

Handled carelessly, this issue could end up making the entire school their enemy.

"Even if classrooms may be currently unused, in consideration of greater student numbers in the future, we must start managing them so that they

can be distributed in a disciplined manner as the need arises. Or perhaps, once the club investigation is complete, the classrooms can be returned to the school administration, to be assigned to officially recognized clubs... In any case, we cannot let you use this classroom for completely unproductive activities of a group that does not even qualify as a club."

"...Lowly human, you dare speak in this manner to an exalted vampire such as me... Well then, by my 'mystic eyes,' thou shalt obey...!"

Faced with Kirika's high tension attack, Rushella who had kept silent all this time suddenly murmured horrifying words.

Alarmed, Hisui frantically pulled her hand and tried to soothe her.

"Idiot, stop it... Even if you drive her away right now, she's going to return, right?"

"It is as Kujou-san stated. Even if you use the 'mystic eyes' to control her alone, there would be too many targets once the entire student council and teaching staff are on the move. Besides, the effect of 'mystic eyes' does not last long enough, resulting in a vicious cycle, would you not agree? Badly handled, you may even expose your identity."

Eruru restrained Rushella's rage with words of reason.

Unable to object, Rushella had no choice but to stand still, clenching her fist.

"...Just as I have said, if you do not have any further matters, please hurry and..."

"Ah, wait a minute, Senpai!"

Just as Kirika was about to end the conversation, Mei joined in.

"We understand the situation now, but isn't it kind of mean to throw us out like this? Even though an unofficial club or hobby group unrecognized by the school is not proper, but honestly, though we appear to be accompanying our club president who's a little unfortunate in the brains department while we pretend to engage in club activities, in reality, all we do is chat around."

"Hey... I don't quite get what you mean by that, but surely you're speaking ill of me, right...?"

Ignoring Rushella's terrifying teeth-gnashing behind her, Mei continued:

"...Conversely, what we're doing does not cause trouble to anybody. There is no school rule forbidding students from chatting in classrooms after school, right?"

Completely unproductive.

Inane to the extreme.

Utterly worthless.

Simply stated, they were killing time.

Precisely because of that, they were not bound by any rules.

Mei was countering using the tragic truth, an act of merciless practicality.

At the very least, until the classroom was assigned an official purpose -- they wished to remain here.

Presumably seeing through Mei's intentions, Kirika relaxed her tone of voice and answered.

"...True. Indeed there is no such rule. However, the rules do advise: students who have nothing to do should leave school promptly, but enforcing that sort of thing is unnecessary. Rather than obeying meaningless rules, there would be more value in improving them."

"You agree, right? So, we can..."

"...The reason I came here today is not only for the purpose of investigating clubs and classroom usage. Recently in the past week, the student council's complaints box was stuffed with anonymous letters concerning this empty classroom after school."

"Anonymous letters... What did they say?"

Hisui was the first to ask as the quartet wondered in puzzlement.

Kirika looked at them as if sizing them up, then continued.

"Let me see... The first letter -- a busty beauty had pushed a slender male student down on the ground, licking his neck with her tongue... That was the eyewitness account. Others have mentioned occurrences of pouncing

to bite and lick the neck, or hardcore situations that rival bedscenes from foreign movies."

"What are you talking about...!?! In this place of learning, such unwholesome and immoral acts!!"

"I'm sorry, but they're talking 100% about you. It must be that time when PE class taught basketball in the gym where you don't have to worry about sunlight. Hence you were in extremely high spirits, saying whatever 'I'm tired and want to suck blood! Hurry and let me suck!!' Then after school you came for a heavy meal of blood, remember?"

Rushella displayed great indignance as Hisui retorted in amazement.

Even though this classroom was relatively remote and unfrequented, due to Hisui's desperate resistance, it was possible that people came to check out the noise.

"There is more. A pony-tailed beauty, far surpassing high school students in sexiness, was guiding a slender male student's hand towards her chest, thighs and even up her skirt. That seductive body was all over him like performing a pole dance or something."

"Wow... For something like that to occur in a school. This person is even worse than a nymphomaniac!"

"I'm sorry, but they're talking 100% about you. It must be that time, when you were saying 'Once a month, there's always this time when I'm consumed with desire' and pounced on me, right? That force and momentum almost crushed me so I couldn't breathe, you were trying to take my virginity that day, weren't you?"

As Mei displayed exasperation, Hisui retorted with a twisted face.

Thanks to Rushella's arrival, his virginity remained untouched. After that, the sparks of war were ignited between the two girls. The scene was like a tournament for the throne of the strongest supernatural creature. It was possible that people came to check out the noise.

"In addition, a slender male student was sighted being beaten up ferociously by a female student even shorter and smaller than him. Despite the male student's apologies and pleas for mercy, the girl continued relentlessly, finally stomping him into the ground."

"How scary. Well, given the victim of assault still counts as male, how utterly useless and incompetent is he?"

"I'm sorry, but they're talking 100% about you. It must be that time, I was trying to stop Rushella and Sudou from arguing and was sent flying when they crashed into me. I ended up touching your chest due to some irresistible force of fate. It was a total accident, but you beat me up mercilessly, remember?"

Hisui retorted, his face completely pale.

He could recall his painful screams, so it was possible that people came to check out the noise.

"Also there are many instances similar to the likes of 'Riajuu Kujou must die.' 'Kujou is an idiot.' 'I'm not jealous of him!!' In addition there were even ones like 'By the way, wouldn't you agree that... Hisui is sort of cute?' 'To be frank, if I were to be alone with that kid... Dangerous.' 'Honestly... Does gender matter actually?' 'Hey... Can you do it... With me?' That sort of stuff."

"Scary!! Hey, what the heck is with the later ones!? What kind of attitude towards me is that!? Of course, I don't want to be the public enemy, but those gazes are even more terrifying! Umm, what the heck are these people complaining about!?"

"In order to safeguard personal privacy, no such details may be disclosed."

"Hey hey hey! My virginity is at stake here! Besides, isn't it a bad thing for your student council as well!?"

"Impure heterosexual relations aside, the school rules say nothing about impure homosexual relations. As for matters of conduct related to 'B' and 'L,' the student council's official position is a policy of noninterference."

Kirika's final blow crushed Hisui's hopes completely.

Collapsing to sit on the ground, powerless, he clutched his head in his arms.

Without even glancing at him, Kirika continued to speak mercilessly to the other three who were rooted to the spot.

"In any case, I forbid you to use this classroom. If you want to engage in club activities, you must abide by the school rules to the letter: gather at

least five members, confirm the club's name and activities, then confirm the teacher advisor and finally apply to the student council through proper procedures. We will go through careful consideration, making sure there is no overlap with other club activities, as well as ensure a positive theme, only then will the formal approval process begin. That is all I have to say, any further questions?"

"...None."

Hisui answered dejectedly on behalf of the whole group.

In actual fact, neither Mei nor Eruru were affected very much.

Only Rushella had her face turned away in disgust.

"Well then, you are dismissed. If you have nothing to do, please leave the school promptly."

Concluding with great solemnity, Student Council Vice-President Uno Kirika left.

And so, before it could even begin officially, the club was facing a disbandment crisis.

The next day, Hisui's group of four gathered once again in the empty classroom to discuss how to handle the crisis.

".....By the way, it's only been a day, and yet we're running over to this classroom again, isn't it kind of bad? That vice-president is famous for doing things strictly. Combined with her academic excellence and integrity of character, she's essentially the representative of the teachers, right? If we oppose her like this, aren't we going to get the short end of the stick?"

"I agree. Besides, why are you so obsessed with the club?"

Hisui and Mei were uninterested in the club in the first place. With zero enthusiasm, they asked Rushella.

"It's all your fault for putting in no effort! Whether assisting me in school life, or seriously investigating clues to my memories, why aren't you people showing me some enthusiasm!?"

"Even if I don't do the club, I've been taking care of your living space and all sorts of daily chores, and we really have been working hard on the matter of your memories, right?"

Living a wonderful life of cohabitation with the beautiful vampire, Hisui sought agreement from Eruru beside him.

Immersed in her notebook computer as always, she nodded lightly after hearing Hisui's question.

"We of the Supernatural Investigations Section are working on it full time. But we are already short on numbers, so our efforts have not bore fruit. Anyway, we did pick up rumors of vampires in this area."

"What, there are others of my kin around here!?"

Hearing Eruru's statement, not only Rushella but also Hisui and Mei leaned closer to listen.

"Yes -- or perhaps 'yes, in the past' would be more accurate. Many eyewitness reports indicate, in the past decade, there was once a woman with extremely pale skin who wore black gloves even in midsummer to prevent exposure to sunlight. Even though most witnesses saw her at night, but summing up the various accounts -- her face was beautiful enough to make one's heart stop momentarily. Despite wearing sunglasses in most situations, her beauty still left a vivid impression on others. Reportedly, some have even witnessed her 'unobscured face' when she took off her shades at night, and they have asserted -- such beauty could only belong to the heavens."

"Mmmmmmm... Based on her beauty, indeed she must be my kin -- or rather, she is more than likely of the same blood. Any other characteristics!?"

"Vivid blood-red lips, eyes that appeared crimson on occasion, as well as dazzling white skin -- basically the appearance of a classic vampire. Reportedly, she always brought a parasol with her, and considering her unusual style of dress, the possibility of being your kin is rather high. Other eyewitnesses have described her appearance as age twenty or so. Over the past decade, all reports of her age have stated the same thing."

"No change in appearance over ten years... In other words, she is an immortal unaging vampire? Really, in this area..."

Mei also exclaimed as she nodded.

Even though Rushella's claims of suddenly waking up in a coffin in the mountains was quite unbelievable, at least it was certain that a member of her race existed in this area.

"Are there any further descriptions of that woman, any other details? If we investigate this thoroughly, perhaps it might be related to my memories!"

"Ultimately these are all eyewitness accounts. Of course, some were summed up after cross examination, but there was nothing in regards to your origins. However, there were several testimonies that stood out."

"What!?"

Rushella leaned forward to ask, but Eruru answered indifferently.

"In most situations, she was not alone... A companion was sighted. According to the earliest accounts, she was leading by the hand a child who appeared five years old or younger."

"...Could that child also be my kin!?"

"No, according to later testimonies, that child showed signs of growing up. Based on appearance and build, it should be the same person accompanying that woman."

"A human who stays by the side of my kin...!? This person is rather concerning... Who on earth could it be!?"

"...I'm sorry, that child is most likely me."

Hisui raised his hand with a pained expression on his face.

Confronted with this suddenly revealed truth, all eyes focused on him.

"It's you...? Then who is that alleged vampire..."

"...Most likely my foster parent. She was aware that her eternal youth would be easily discovered, so she tried as much as possible to avoid being seen... Nevertheless, it looks like her efforts were in vain."

Hisui smiled wryly, his tone of voice helpless.

Subtly hidden was also a sliver of sadness, but the other three noticed.

Hisui was the only pure human present -- however, he was also different from ordinary humans in one special area.

He was raised by a vampire.

When he was young, he was about to be murdered by his parents when that certain vampire killed his parents to rescue him from his unfair fate, thereupon taking up the responsibility of nurturing him.

Savior, parents' murderer, foster parent who raised him -- vampire.

In the end, she met her demise to save Hisui's life.

"I guessed it was something like that. After all, most eyewitness accounts took place around your house. Most likely, it was when you accompanied the vampire late at night for walks?"

"...Don't people inevitably feel like going to the convenience store or visiting a roadside ramen stall on whim at night? Apparently, vampires also have similar habits."

Hisui shifted his gaze away and muttered.

His nostalgic tone of voice was truly filled with the kind of affection one held for a loved one.

"...Hmph, my hopes were raised thinking you had found some kind of clue, but it turns out to be this inane and stupid thing."

Rushella displayed undisguised anger.

Mei frantically tried to smooth things over with an honest question.

"...But the vampire who raised Hi-kun might not necessarily be unrelated to you, right? You both appeared in the same area, and even though you missed each other due to separation of time, you both lived in the same house. Doesn't this imply some sort of blood relation?"

"No no no. They are completely unlike in appearance. If you had to force a comparison, their only commonalities are that massive bust and arrogant attitude. Furthermore, the person in question said she had no blood relatives."

Hisui denied flatly.

Failing in her bid for harmony, Mei could only shrug. On the other hand, Rushella continued to face Hisui with a stiff expression.

"An otherworldly beauty, and yet you say she is completely unlike me in appearance, what do you mean by that? Are you trying to say that I am such a super otherworldly beauty that even that otherworldly beauty does not even come close?"

"I think standards of beauty are very subjective, but in terms of attractiveness and common sense... My foster parent definitely beats you."

Hisui once again asserted directly. Immediately realizing he said something wrong, he entered a defensive pose.

Defense readied... The attack never arrived.

Rushella turned her face just like that and walked back to her original position, not even giving him a glance.

"...What is going on?"

Hisui asked Mei beside him.

"I dunno~"

From her tone of voice, she was clearly pretending.

But Hisui was still clueless, scratching his head, he awkwardly stated their future direction.

"In any case, regarding your memories and past, we will continue investigating as before... But there's no need to do it as a club, right? It's not like the school has any clues."

Hisui's reasonable analysis caused Rushella's gaze to wander.

Her voice much more timid than before, she asked:

"You... Is it because of that? You have something else you want to do... Another club?"

"No, not at all... I did mention I'd hoped to join the 'Go Home' club, right?"

"...But, umm... You could have changed your mind and joined some other club, couldn't you?"

Arrogant and self-centered just earlier, she was now looking up at Hisui with pleading eyes -- as if afraid to anger him.

But Hisui failed to notice the change in Rushella and simply answered indifferently.

"Well..... If I happened to run into friends with similar interests and they invite me..... I would consider it. Ah, but I'm no good with sports clubs. As for cultural ones, I'd simply turn into a member in name only. But if I do that, I suspect that vice-president's gonna drag me off to be disciplined. Honestly, I'd prefer to get a part time job. Or maybe get a driving license to buy a motorcycle or something."

"...W-Well what about, are you going to shack up with that fake or some other woman to get all lovey-dovey whatever..."

"Huh? Something like that..... Well I can't deny that I wouldn't want a girlfriend. But it's not like we have to make out all the time... Simply walking home after school together, that kind of feeling like couples is..."

Just as Hisui imagined all sorts of fulfilling images of school life, Mei and Eruru sighed as they shook their heads.

"I knew it!! That is why you treat me like some low priority, right!?"

"Huh!? I didn't say that....."

"I-In any case, don't forget you are my servant, so you have to follow me properly after school! You hear that!? Participate in the club properly with me!!"

Rushella pressed forward.

Even though she was intimidating, Hisui decided to strike back against this unreasonable master.

"Then what do you want me to do!? And why do you have to keep talking like I have to be alone with you!? You want me to be following behind you, serving you at your beck and call after school!?"

Hearing his words, Rushella instantly blushed.

"U-Umm....."

Her intimidating aura instantly vanished for some unknown reason, Rushella lowered her gaze and began to fidget with her fingers.

"Actually, you must be planning to do something to me, right!? What do you want to do to me after school!?"

Rushella could not help but retreat from Hisui's interrogation.

"I-It's not like I want to do something to you, I mean..."

"You mean?"

"J-Just....."

"Just?"

Hisui took a step forward.

Now their separation was the same as every morning -- in other words, the intimately close distance where his blood could be sucked at any instant.

Even though they were so close they could feel each other's breath, Hisui did not move, in order to look Rushella straight in the face.

".....S-Shut up!! You're not allowed to disobey me! You are my servant, just stay by my side and that's it!!"

"Huh!? What the heck!?"

Just as Hisui inclined his head in puzzlement, Rushella returned to her usual attitude.

Her face blushing, she looked towards Hisui with trepidation -- and then at the two girls beside him.

The other two girls remained silent and simply gazed at Rushella with a certain expression of amazement.

As fellow girls, they understood Rushella's feelings.

There was a sense of resonance and sympathy between them.

Using easily understood terms, it was --

This girl really said it out.

That seemed to be what the two girls' eyes were saying in concert.

"S-Stop it, you're not allowed to look at me with that kind of gaze!"

"...It's fine, I didn't hear anything."

"The room seems a bit hot and stuffy, let us open the window for a bit."

The two girls tried hard to feign ignorance.

But even Hisui could tell they were subtly suppressing laughter.

"Oooh, ooooooooooooh~~!!"

Wailing, her voice failing her, Rushella rushed out the door.

"Ah, where are you going!?"

"S-Shut up, don't you dare follow!? I absolutely forbid you to chase after me!?"

Then she ran at full speed through the corridor, rushing away into the distance.

Presently, still stunned by the aftershock of Rushella's sprinting departure, Hisui sat back down on his seat completely puzzled.

"What the heck is up with her..."

"She's simply... Possessive. Don't people always love to tie up their pets with leashes?"

Mei answered as if she understood.

Her words felt rather stinging to Hisui's ears.

"I still don't get it. What, you're trying to say, that girl not only treats me as food but also a pet to toy with!?"

Hisui asked, his face pallid. Mei simply shrugged and asked Eruru:

"Eruru, did you hear his statement just now?"

"Yes, I heard it of course, Sudou-san. What utterly worthless trash he is."

"Hey, what are you two talking about!? Did I do something to that girl!?"

"...Despite hating vampires with a passion, I still sympathize with her as a fellow member of the fairer sex. You are essentially like a favorite doll that one wishes to hug all day. Her feelings are simply an extension of that."

"Eh, I'm now an inanimate object instead!? What dignity do I have!?"

"That sort of thing never existed anywhere on your person from day one. From the day you were born."

"My entire life from birth has been disregarded completely!?"

"Since she left, I will be going. You two better hurry up and leave as well, or else the vice president will give another lecture."

Eruru shut off her computer and stood up.

Hisui and Mei exchanged glances and got ready to leave school.

With that, no solution was reached for the club disbandment crisis -- before the club ruled by the vampire even began officially, it was already on the verge of natural demise.

"...Why are you following me?"

"No particular reason."

Eruru questioned with displeasure but Hisui continued to follow her with a nonchalant expression.

Rushella had run off while Mei went home as usual.

But Eruru continued staying behind in school.

Hence Hisui started following her.

Their distance was too close to be considered tailing, but neither were they walking together as there was clear separation between them.

"If you have no business then go home? By the way, is it fine for you not to chase after her?"

"She told me not to follow, right? So why should I waste the effort..."

"There is a saying 'Do not push the button, absolutely do not push the button.' Have you heard of it?"

"Huh? I said, even if I caught up to her, she'll definitely show a bad attitude, perhaps even resorting to punching and kicking, in the worst case I'll get my blood sucked..."

"I am not going to refute your speculation, but if you do not chase after her, I fear even greater trouble will come of it."

"I will call you if I run into trouble, I'm relying on you to save me. Remember to bring a gun and silver bullets."

"I will first blacklist your cellphone number."

"...You never told me your number in the first place, right?"

Physically they were within arm's reach, but there was clearly an unbridgeable gulf between them.

On one side was the boy who was raised by a vampire and currently a vampire's servant. On the other was the half-vampire who hated vampires with a passion. Essentially, the two were completely incompatible.

"You should know your boundaries and stop following me, okay? I am about to call the police."

"You are the police, right? Anyway, you were the first to say you're leaving, but why are you still in school?"

"This has nothing to do with you. Is that your reason for following me?"

"You..... Did you really come clean with everything you discovered in your investigations about that girl?"

The mood instantly tensed.

Eruru turned around and coldly glared at Hisui.

"...Are you calling me a liar?"

"Even if you didn't lie, I'm sure you didn't offer the whole truth."

Hisui immediately retorted.

Although he did not believe Eruru was one to deceive casually, expecting her to be honest and upfront with a vampire was an entirely different matter.

"Your small-minded cleverness remains the same as always. Is that what you followed me in order to ask?"

"Another thing... You took part in today's PE class, right?"

"Huh...? What about it?"

She could not tell what Hisui was getting at.

Eruru did indeed participate in the PE class in the afternoon.

The class only consisted of simple outdoor exercises.

Mainly running, which could be rather strenuous, but there was nothing special about it.

"Is it that strange for me to go to PE class? Granted, my duties consist of monitoring you two rather than going to class, but precisely because of that, I must play the role of the student properly. Attending a mere PE class should be perfectly natural, right?"

"...That freeloader who lives with me, watched without participating in PE class today."

"Of course, given the bright and sunny weather, how do you expect a vampire to be active?"

A perfectly logical answer.

Rushella opting out of PE class was only natural.

She hated sunlight because it was her fatal weakness.

Correct -- sunlight was the bane of vampires.

Well then -- what about someone who inherited half the bloodline?

What about a half-vampire, born from the union of a human and a vampire? In other words, Kariya Eruru?

"You haven't been looking well lately. Are you getting enough sleep?"

"Unlike a carefree student like you, I am extremely busy. Do not underestimate civil servants..."

Before she could finish her sentence, Eruru halted in her steps.

Her vision unsteady, her consciousness gradually faded.

That pale complexion of hers, even whiter than Hisui's, proceeded to lose further color of blood.

Seeing Eruru faint and collapse, Hisui caught her tiny body in time before she struck the floor.

"...Like I was saying."

Eruru's last image before she lost consciousness was Hisui's face, full of concern.

".....?"

Upon waking up, Eruru found herself lying on a bench behind the school building.

The bench was located in a shaded spot beneath some trees. Even during the daytime it would be quite dark, and there was virtually no sunlight after school due to the foliage.

"You're awake?"

Hisui's voice instantly brought her back to her senses.

Surveying the surroundings, she could see the sun was still up in the sky despite the change in scenery, hence, not much time should have passed.

Most likely, she had only fainted for a matter of minutes.

Then while she was unconscious... Hisui brought her here.

"What are your intentions!?! To think you would kidnap a girl... Could you be!?"

".....What strange things are you imagining? I only helped you a bit by bringing you somewhere out of direct sunlight. Or perhaps -- you'd prefer if I took you to the infirmary and explained everything to the teacher?"

Hisui's words rendered Eruru silent.

He had made the correct decision.

Bringing her here was indeed the most appropriate measure she approved.

"Looks like you probably know why you fainted. Please take better care of your health."

"....."

Even though she knew Hisui was worrying about her, these words only reminded Eruru of her constitution, causing her to grit her teeth and avoid eye contact.

Half-vampires' characteristic -- like vampires, they were afraid of sunlight.

Their bodies would not turn to ash on contact with sunlight.

Nevertheless, sunlight, and intense sunlight in particular, still eroded their bodies and sapped their strength. Even though they could endure through willpower for a while, fainting was inevitable after a few hours.

By avoiding intense sunlight and taking sufficient rest as well as appropriate nourishment, there were no serious effects -- but Eruru had to cope with work and study, hence a lack of sleep was her everyday life.

Combined with the exertion of PE class -- her accumulated fatigue finally exploded, causing the earlier result.

"I know your constitution is like a vampire's, and nocturnal... But since you still need to go to school during the day, it's better to secure sufficient sleep. Also, when PE class is outdoors, you should rest instead."

"What you want to say is... Because I am a half-vampire? Oh my, I am truly sorry for being nonhuman."



Eruru retorted with agitation.

Rather than saying anything, Hisui tossed to her a sports drink he had bought earlier at a vending machine.

"It's for you. I originally thought it'd be better to get the type for oral rehydration therapy, but it wasn't available."

"....."

Silently, Eruru caught the bottle and began drinking.

Rehydrated, Eruru turned her hostile gaze towards Hisui.

"...How thorough of your preparations. You predicted I would faint?"

"I bought it while you were unconscious. Rather, I should say I know my own body better? Even an ordinary person would collapse if they didn't rest after exhaustion. Especially with the blazing sun right now, that's even more obvious."

"So what? Are you saying that just because I am a half-vampire, I should not mind what happened?"

"Yes yes. Whether human or half-vampire, anyone who busies themselves without knowing their limits is simply a brat who makes trouble for others."

Behind the light-hearted tone of voice was strict admonishing.

Eruru frowned in response but Hisui continued unfazed.

"But I didn't come up with that. This was what my foster parent the vampire who lived a thousand years in human society said."

"...Clearly just a vampire, I have no wish to be lectured on how to live my life by the lessons she gleaned from human society. After all, she must be someone who hides in the dark, the ancestor of shut-ins and social misfits."

"Actually, she has worked virtually every job with night shifts, ranging from convenience store clerks to hostesses at drinking establishments. At one point, she was even the top courtesan at Ginza."

"....."

Eruru remained silent, presumably picturing the sight.

If reports were true, given her beauty, she must have been quite popular indeed.

As for working at a convenience store, she would be most suited to the prevention of theft and robbery. Even if an armed robber came with a gun, she would have handled the situation with ease.

"What kind of vampire was she...!? Could she really be a 'True Ancestor'!? If that girl who lives with you heard this, she would be rendered speechless with amazement!?"

"Apparently she thought that even as a vampire, one must conform to capitalist society in order to survive. Because her life experiences were rather rich, she tends to lecture quite a bit. Such as whether one should compromise work and knowing one's limits were completely separate issues."

"...Coming from your mouth, such advice completely loses all persuasiveness. If your foster parent hears of this from the afterlife, surely she must be sighing."

"Vampires are reduced to nothing when destroyed... Isn't that what happens? Or perhaps they also have souls, allowing them to go to heaven or hell?"

Hisui's casual expression vanished.

When vampires were destroyed, they turned into inorganic dust, leaving no body behind.

No one knew this better than Hisui.

Unable to stare straight into his eyes, Eruru shifted her gaze.

"Overlooking my own health... Is my negligence. I have... troubled you."

"Don't worry about it."

Hisui answered casually and began to drink the mineral water he bought at the vending machine.

Watching him from the side, Eruru spoke after a period of silence.

"You are not... afraid?"

"Huh?"

"Indeed I needed rehydration. But if it were possible, appropriate replenishment of salt was also necessary."

".....? Well, I guess it counts as a heat stroke for you. What's the matter, you're dissatisfied with the sports drink?"

"Ultimately it is something for human consumption. For a half-vampire, there is a more suitable liquid."

Eruru stared at Hisui's neck.

That delicate pale skin which rivaled a woman's.

That certain liquid, coursing through those subtly visible blood vessels, was what Eruru urgently desired at this moment.

Carrying water and salt, as well as life itself, fresh blood.

"Fortunately, my symptoms are not severe... But were I to lose my sanity and bite you, what would you do?"

"That's right... What would happen once you sucked blood and recovered your sanity? I feel like I can imagine your loss of composure."

"...Are you a fool!? Before saving someone, please consider these obvious risks. You should be quite familiar with the characteristics of half-vampires, right?"

"Just go ahead and bite, it's fine. As long as you don't tear out the flesh or suck me dry to death."

Hisui was completely unconcerned.

Due to his special constitution, making this kind of statement was not problematic. In fact, he never feared Eruru in the first place -- he never feared half-vampires.

"You are incurably stupid. I will not be responsible for the consequences, you know? Do you think you can use your ridiculous philanthropism to build a bridge between two different races?"

"I'm not that kind of saint. To be honest, I wouldn't care if a great villain was being sucked to death by a vampire. Neither would I involve myself if I saw a vampire dying of thirst."

"Liar. If you saw an incurable villain being threatened by the fangs of a vampire, you will still save him. If you saw a famished vampire, you will offer your own neck. That is the kind of person you are."

"...Are you praising me?"

"I am criticizing you. Open your eyes to the truth."

Ending the conversation, Eruru stood up from the bench.

She had recovered her strength and was able to move freely. Now that the sun was setting, the most active time of the day for half-vampires had begun.

"Sorry for troubling you. I am fine now."

"Then it's about time you tell me, why did you stay behind in school? If it's for monitoring me and Rushella, there's no point if we already left. You should have left instead and followed us, right? But today... yesterday as well as the day before, you stayed in school. We all left the classroom together when club activities ended, but at the shoe cabinet at the entrance, you parted with us, why?"

Hisui asked with a serious expression.

Eruru finally surrendered and shrugged.

"Your observation skills are sharp as ever. I do have a mission. Even though I have to monitor you two as well, I expressly transferred here, to this school -- or rather, I should say to this area of Seidou city to conduct investigations."

"What investigations... Is there anything in this city worth mobilizing the Metropolitan Police Department? Well, I guess the earlier incident counts..."

"Before that incident, secret investigations were already underway. The reason why we of the Supernatural Investigations Section were stationed at the police station here, was because of this particular matter."

".....!"

That's right -- Eruru and Hisui's first encounter happened at the closest police station, Seidou Police Station.

Originally he had thought they were sent here due to Rushella's appearance... But it looked like he was wrong.

"What is this about?"

"Crime cases in the neighborhood as well as missing persons have been on the rise recently. However, the increase is only slightly above average norms, this in and of itself is not worthy of note. Nevertheless, as the investigation progressed deeper, we discovered that a portion of the cases were greatly related to supernatural beings. Amongst them, there were clear cases where vampires were culprits -- corpses that had been sucked completely dry."

"You are suspecting... Rushella?"

"This was before her awakening. Even though we cannot believe everything she says, given her straightforward personality she does not seem to be lying. These cases are most likely unrelated to her. But this makes things even trickier, after all, there is a vampire working in the dark which the Supernatural Investigations Section cannot track."

"That's true... But then I've been living in this city ever since Miraluka adopted me, and this is the first time for me to hear something like this. When I was young, I never heard stories of strange happening or supernatural phenomena. Why would you people.....?"

As Hisui crossed his arms in thought, Eruru continued.

"That's right... The incident that caught our attention happened only recently. However, you can think of it this way. The foster parent who raised you -- in other words, the existence of the vampire Miraluka, could it have acted as some sort of suppressive power?"

".....!?"

"Consider this carefully, if a 'True Ancestor'-class vampire lived somewhere, then first of all, other vampires will stay away. As long as they are unrelated by sire, they would all keep their distance. This would apply to other supernatural creatures as well -- no one would want to approach the residence of the existence crowned as the king of the night, the highest ranking of the undead race. Even though it is unclear if this was done out of her conscious will, simply by living here, she created a kind of safety zone. Precisely because of that, you received her protection and were naturally unaware of supernatural commotions. What do you think?"

"...What you say makes sense."

In his heart, Hisui basically agreed with Eruru's deductions.

Although he was not too clear on the mindset of supernatural creatures, it was plausible that there would be a lack of troublemakers recklessly approaching a 'True Ancestor'-class vampire. If a supernatural creature were to run over here and do evil, it would definitely be exterminated.

"Also, before you and your foster parent moved here, all sorts of strange rumors already existed in the area."

"Really!? Rumors, you don't say!? Is it those kinds of scary ghost stories that are common amongst folklore!?"

"Completely different from that kind of rumor. Rather than folkloristic strange tales, they are more like urban legends -- and for some unknown reason, they mostly involve western supernatural entities rather than eastern youkai."

"What... I've heard that this place used to interact with foreign countries, with frequent commercial trade, would that be the reason? I don't really know much about local history."

Arms crossed, Hisui recalled his memories of this city from early childhood.

"As expected, you do not know either. Rather, it is very likely that everyone your age have no impression."

"...So something existed in this city before Miraluka arrived. After that, it either left or concealed its tracks... Is that what you mean?"

"Nevertheless, that vampire is no longer. The time of her disappearance -- right, it was after your summer holiday during your third year of middle school."

Hisui instantly paled.

Images surfaced from memories he did not wish to recall.

"I investigated your immigration record. Prior to your summer holiday during the third year of middle school, you really traveled all over the world. Rather than foreign vacations, it would be more appropriate to describe your stays as a series of short term study abroad sessions. However, starting from that particular summer, you never left the country again."

Hisui did not answer.

He already expected his past to be dug up. Naturally, Eruru would not have spared any efforts in this area. This did not really matter.

But she was also digging Hisui's old memories from his mind.

"The last time you returned from overseas, you were under a certain country's embassy's protection, transferring through another country before reaching Japan. This was only natural, seeing as the country you went to had broken out in civil war and fallen into complete chaos. Vampires aside, a human like you must have suffered much hardship."

"....."

"When you returned... You were alone. Records indicate you had also left Japan alone, so it might have been reasonable. However, will a child really head over to that kind of tumultuous country alone? Even if the exit records did not indicate it... Perhaps there was a legal guardian in accompaniment?"

Legal guardian -- that's right, the foster parent who was much older than him.

The one who played the role of mother and elder sister, and closer to him than any other family.

"However -- you returned alone, carrying two objects which you did not have when you left Japan."

"...Stop it."

"The first is a massive cross. Very likely, it is that sword in your basement. The other is --"

"Shut up!!"

The sudden outburst silenced Eruru. Or rather, she swallowed the remainder of her words.

Hisui's emotions surprised her.

"Please stop talking about my past. Do you want to be mistaken for a stalker?"

"...My apologies. I should not have said these unnecessary things. Anyway, something exists in this city. Something that laid low while your vampire foster parent was living here, but is now restless once more."

"After all, we already have a strange vampire as well as a golem of Frankenstein's. But apart from them, what else is out there? Besides, you're investigating within the school?"

Without answering, Eruru walked into the forest behind the bench.

Hisui followed in puzzlement.

Soon enough, Eruru stopped walking and bent down.

"It appeared today as well."

"...What?"

Craning his neck, Hisui looked at what lay before Eruru's eyes.

Then he could not help but frown and avert his gaze.

Calming his heart, he looked at the thing on the ground again.

Lying on the soil -- was the corpse of a black cat.

It looked like it had been rolled over by the tire of a car, with a huge depression on its belly. The sight was most tragic.

Based on its size it should be a kitten, which evoked even more pity.

"You were looking for this...? By the way, how did you know it would be in this kind of place?"

"Because including the one today, this is the third occurrence."

"Huh!?"

"About a week earlier... I was strolling within the school and happened to pass by this area. Smelling the stench of blood, I came over for a look... And found the corpse of a black cat as well. Compared to today's, its appearance was even more pitiful with its entire belly ripped open."

"....."

Eruru spoke indifferently. Very likely she acted in the same manner as today, staring away without reservation.

"Three days after that, I walked here... And found another similar corpse. Although there were no visible external injuries, it was most probably poisoned judging from the strange smell coming from its mouth. After that... It appeared again today."

"What is going on here... Completely mind-boggling... Are you telling me there's a lunatic in the school who cruelly kills kittens and leaves their corpses lying around in the wilderness!? No, wait a minute... since you came to investigate, is the culprit a supernatural creature?"

"Unclear at this moment, but one thing is for certain. This cat is a live sacrifice."

".....!?"

Hearing Eruru's assertion, Hisui looked at the black cat's corpse again.

The kitten's tragic appearance -- on the soil beneath it, strange patterns had been carved.

A circle just large enough to surround the kitten's body, with symbols written within it as well as various shapes with a triangular motif.

Even without expert knowledge, most people would understand the meaning of this circle.

It must be -- a magic circle.

This shape was drawn for the sake of performing magic.

The exquisite detail made it difficult to believe it was merely some sort of prank.

Furthermore, most alarming of all was the way the magic circle was drawn.

The perpetrator did not use some tool like a branch to draw on the soil. Naturally, it was not drawn using chalk like in PE lessons either.

Black with a slight shade of red, along with the smell wafting in the air. Hisui knew what had been used to draw the circle.

It was blood.

Blood which slightly stained the soil red, carving the magic circle in the ground.

"This is completely tasteless... What is it, cat's blood? Or is it..."

"Human blood. Judging from the smell. As much as I hate to admit it, I am actually quite sensitive to anything blood-related, that needs to be clarified. Furthermore, this is..."

Eruru picked up a handful of soil and casually scattered it over the magic circle.

Falling, the soil covered a portion of the circle.

However, -- very quickly, red lines appeared over the obscuring soil.

Clearly when the blood was seeped into the ground, it should have disappeared when covered with fresh soil or if the blood-stained ground was dug up -- but the magic circle did not disappear.

"What is going on here... Not a prank...? Could it really be...!?"

"Looks like... It should be some sort of magic. What is known as black magic. In any case, there is a need to undertake..... Hey, what are you doing?"

Ignoring Eruru's calls, Hisui picked up the dead kitten.

"Please do not touch it recklessly! What are you thinking!?"

"The same as you."

Hisui pointed to the depths of the forest.

"After all, you're going to bury it for sure, like the previous two. If there were flowers, I'd like to offer them as well."

"Umm....."

Eruru blushed and turned her face away.

Hisui smiled and dug up a grave just as she had done before.

At this very moment, the kitten opened its eyes.

Its golden pupils glowed brilliantly.

Narrowing its eyes into a straight line, the cat's gaze pierced Hisui.

"Wha...!?"

"Those who recklessly involve themselves in the way of magic, shall surely be cursed..."

"You....."

The kitten definitely spoke.

When it was clearly dead.

It should not have been able to make any sound at all.

Nevertheless -- it spoke with a hoarse human voice.

Using that tone of voice, a mixture of hate and anger, it continued to speak.

"Shall surely be cursed..... Shall surely be cursed.....!!"

This time, the kitten not only talked but also extended its front claws, making a scratch on Hisui's his right wrist.

"Hmm....."

Hisui could not help but let go, dropping the kitten onto the ground.

At the same time, it closed its eyes.

Then it lay there motionless. The kitten returned to the silent state of death.

".....The previous two, did they talk as well?"

Trembling, Hisui asked Eruru but she shook her head with a grave expression.

"...No. Nothing similar happened previously."

The two fell silent for a moment. Hisui rubbed the wound from the scratch.

It seemed to be fine.

The scratch extended from the wrist all the way to the forearm. Due to his constitution, the bleeding stopped very quickly.

"...Will I be cursed?"

"Who knows..."

Eruru was unsure.

The awkward atmosphere made one at a loss for words. Hisui carefully reached out to pick up the kitten once more.

It seemed like it was not going to move again.

"Are you still doing it... Already cursed?"

"Don't say unlucky things. Well... Looking at things from its perspective, it must really hate us. Humans are all the same in its eyes. Next, I can handle this alone..."

"No, I shall help as well."

After that, Hisui and Eruru made a simple grave for the kitten and returned home.

As they parted, Eruru said to him:

"Please keep today's incident a secret from that girl who lives with you. I have no wish to be hassled by her questioning."

"Got it."

"Sooner or later, Sudou-san will join in to assist... But you should not act alone for now. If anything comes up, report to me immediately. Understood?"

".....I understand."

Then they went off their separate ways.

Along the way home, Hisui suddenly recalled the words of his foster parent.

When he was first adopted by Miraluka, just as they started living in this house, he had asked her -- why live here?

Because he felt that vampires seemed more suited to live in ancient castles deep in the mountains.

After hearing his question, Miraluka thought for a moment before answer in the following manner:

--Well, the reasons are hard to describe... But first of all, it's because this is more interesting.

"Interesting?"

--Yes, a strange fellow lives here.

"What kind?"

--In this very city...

Reaching here, she smiled lightly with profound meaning. Parting her lips to reveal her pristine white fangs which flashed with cold luster, Miraluka leaned over and whispered softly in Hisui's ear.

--A witch lives. Even now, her blood continues to pulsate.

## Chapter 2 - Witch's Recipe

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"Too slow! What on earth were you doing!?"

...Even though he expected this, as soon as Hisui stepped into his home, he was faced with Rushella's lecturing.

Standing at the entrance with her arms crossed, she resembled a stern door god. No answer, no entry -- this was the kind of aura exuded by Rushella.

"Hmm... Just something minor to do."

"Why didn't you chase after me!? Goodness knows how many times I halted or looked back, but I couldn't even catch a glimpse of your shadow!"

"...What. Aren't you the one who ran away? And you end up wanting me to chase after you?"

Hisui's question made Rushella's face turn scarlet.

"S-Shut up, you are obliged to stay by my side at all times! This is obvious!!"

"...So annoying."

Hisui muttered as he took off his shoes and entered the house.

Putting down his bag, he was planning to return to his room directly when Rushella grabbed him by the wrist.

"...What?"

"What happened to your wrist?"

Hisui's right wrist was wrapped in black medical bandages. It would be troublesome if others saw the scratch from the black cat, so he bought them along the way home to cover things up.

He originally intended to use a more fashionable sports-use wrist guard, but the wound was too long to be covered by ordinary wrist guards.

Rushella discovered it as a result.

"Just a minor sprain, nothing much."

"On your body... There's the smell of blood."

Rushella asked solemnly.

Hisui knew very well he could not hide things of this nature from her.

Regarding any issue related to blood, vampires were experts after all.

"A human killed a kitten, so I gave it some last rites in a human manner."

"What is that!? I forbid you to hide anything from me!"

"I'm not hiding anything. This is definitely not human blood, you should be able to tell, right?"

"...Indeed. But there's also the smell of your blood."

"Just a minor scratch when I sprained my right arm. Nothing much."

The dead cat and the magic circle, as well as that instant of revival and the cursed incantation -- simply explaining everything would be troublesome enough. Informing Rushella would be equivalent to bidding farewell to peace and quiet. In the worst case, she might even drag him back to school.

"...Well whatever. I have something else to ask you."

"What?"

"You also have a woman's smell on you... Different from that fake... It's that woman named Eruru."

Rushella drew her face near Hisui's chest, looked up into his eyes and questioned.

"...What is with your special sense of smell? I'm quite familiar with vampires thanks to circumstances beyond my control, but this is the first time I'm hearing about this kind of ability?"

"I know what I know. So you were with that woman?"

".....Yes."

It was not like he had done anything improper.

Besides, he had no obligation to report to this arrogant vampire everyone he had been with.

Nevertheless, for some unknown reason -- Hisui could not bring himself to gaze directly into her crimson eyes that were focused on him.

"Last time, the two of you also went to the hospital together, right!?"

"Only for a simple check up. On the other hand, since you're the one sucking my blood every day, couldn't you show a little more concern for my health instead?"

"What's so good about that kind of woman? So short and diminutive, almost like a little child!"

"...Ever since I met you and Sudou, I've come to realize that a woman's figure only occupies an extremely minor fraction of their charm."

Hisui exclaimed with heartfelt feeling.

This was his personal experience.

"What do you mean by that!? You think I wouldn't realize that woman's true identity!?"

Eruru's true nature -- a half-vampire, was something Hisui had not told Rushella yet.

There was no obligation to reveal it. That counts as one of the reasons. But more importantly, Eruru hated her origins so much, it was not proper to casually disclose her secret.

According to Eruru, the only ones aware of this fact were the top echelons of the Supernatural Investigations Section. Apparently, even Mei was not privy to the fact. However, it was possible that her sharp instincts may have already picked up on it.

As for Rushella... She sounded like she already knew.

Vampires were born with fiery eyes and golden pupils which allowed them to discern humans from nonhuman existences. She must have felt something towards Eruru who inherited half of her blood from the same race.

"If that Sudou woman is called a fake, then this woman should be called..."

"Don't say it. I forbid it. If you say it out, I will hate you for it."

Hisui simply stated indifferently in his characteristic tone.

But the relentless will inherent in his words caused Rushella to stop talking.

She knew that Hisui was one who becomes almost like a different person in critical situations, and should not be underestimated.

"Hmph, there is no issue of liking or hating in our relationship in the first place! Between a master and a servant, those kinds of feelings are unnecessary!"

"Ah, is that so? Well, I guess it's true that there's no lack of servants who dislike their masters."

"...I'm hungry. Prepare dinner."

"Yes yes."

Hisui did not disobey the displeased Rushella and immediately headed to the kitchen.

With virtually no conversation on the dinner table, Hisui did the dishes afterwards while Rushella went to take a bath.

Rushella liked to enjoy her baths nice and slow. While waiting for her to finish, Hisui went out to retrieve the hung laundry that had dried, and began to iron them out.

Halfway through his chores, Hisui undid his bandages to examine the cat scratch.

What was originally a shallow cut was now a subtle pink line. However, due to his pale complexion it was rather conspicuous.

Normally, this level of injury should disappear after a while, but for Hisui, this was already quite an unusual situation.

This sort of minor wound should have healed immediately.

It was Hisui's constitution.

Even cursed kisses that should not disappear until the vampire is destroyed, Hisui's body could heal them instantly. But for some unknown reason, the wound before him was healing rather slowly.

"...Was I really cursed?"

Staring upwards, Hisui sighed, slightly unsettled, and continued ironing.

Holding up an outspread shirt he finished ironing, he nodded with satisfaction. At this moment, someone snatched the shirt away from beside him.

"Yes, well done!"

There was no need to turn to look. Judging from the voice and the sense of heat, he knew it was Rushella.

For her, the shirts Hisui wore beneath his school jacket were her everyday home attire. As soon as he finished ironing, it would be snatched from his hands every time like this.

"Say, why do you have to wear my shirt every time!? At least pick something old with washed out colors, okay!? Why do you have to keep snatching the ones I just ironed!?"

"Ironed clothes feel comfortable! To wear something creased, how unbecoming that would be!?"

"Why do you have to be stubborn in such an area!?"

Hisui turned to her and instantly realized his mistake.

Because Rushella happened to be adjusting her indoor casual wear.

In other words, up until this point, she had been clad in nothing but a bath towel.

Then casting that towel aside, she was in the wonderful moment of getting dressed.

Her voluptuous breasts and the secret region below her narrow waist were bursting out of her yet to be buttoned shirt.

"Looking is forbidden -- !!"

Unreasonable punches pelted Hisui's face like rain, beating him into the ground.

"What are you doing!? It's your own fault, suddenly changing on the spot!"

Hisui raised his objections. He originally intended to stand up and uphold justice -- but could not get up.

Rushella held him to the floor and drew her face near.

Her humongous bosom, squeezed out of shape against Hisui's chest, seemed to be desperately calling for attention to its size and suppleness. Combined with the soapy fragrance of a beauty fresh out of the bath, as well as the scent emanating from her moist hair, Hisui's thoughts were sent into complete disarray.



"Why are you lying on top of me?"

Pushing away Rushella's glamorous body was not particularly difficult.

Even though he was sure to suffer a full-powered counterattack from the vampire after sunset, but apart from that... For some reason he did not understand, Hisui could not resist.

"...If I move my body away, you're going to stare nonstop. You think I wouldn't notice you gazing at me coming out of the bath?"

"You've been wearing nothing but a towel out of the bath, and as for clothes all you have is my shirt draped on you. I'm worried you might catch a cold, that's all. You should hurry up and thank me for my care and concern, even vaster than the ocean."

"Who knows if it's true or not?"

Rushella avoided Hisui's gaze but pressed her body even tighter.

In order to prevent Hisui from escaping, she entangled her lithe and beautiful legs around Hisui's legs.

"Umm..... Isn't it about time to release me?"

"The club... You can't save it?"

"Huh?"

Faced with Rushella's sudden pleading demeanor, Hisui was taken aback for an instant.

Rushella turned her head sideways as she lay on Hisui's chest, avoiding his gaze.

Pouting, she continued.

"Just as that arrogant woman said, all sorts of things needed to be done properly... If we do all of that, then the club can continue?"

"....."

"Why couldn't she turn a blind eye and overlook our case? I hate that woman."

Mumbling repeatedly to herself, Rushella began to trace circles on Hisui's chest with her finger.

Anxiety can be felt from the motions of her fingertips, as her nail lightly scratched him from time to time.

"Why are you so obsessed? Do you want to find out your past that much? I will surely help you, you know? Even though there is strength in numbers, but Sudou has her own affairs, and Kariya... Has to prioritize matters of the Supernatural Investigations Section. Based on the truth of your past... She could end up as your enemy."

"....."

Rushella probably understood deep in her heart.

Eruru had tried to kill her at one point. Even though cleared of suspicions for now, as soon as Rushella sucks the blood of a human apart from Hisui, that core member of the Supernatural Investigations Section would surely aim that gun chambered with silver bullets at her without hesitation.

Looking into Rushella's past was ultimately just a part of her investigation -- only for the purpose of establishing a proper policy towards the threat of the 'True Ancestor'-class vampire, Rushella Dahm Draculea.

"...I don't really care about that. Yes, I do want to retrieve my memories but being impatient won't help. Besides, I never wanted to rely on those people in the first place."

"Then why do you want a club?"

"I haven't decided yet... But I want to do it."

"Do what?"

Rushella fell silent.

Then she buried her face in Hisui's chest.

"Excuse me... Rushella-san?"

"People who join clubs... All look very happy."

"...? Of course, people join clubs because of their interest. Even though sports clubs' practice schedules could be quite harsh... However... that still counted as satisfaction amidst hardship?"

"In other words... They are engaging in 'youth,' right?"

"Huh--!?"

The term uttered by Rushella made Hisui's eyes stare wide in surprise. That term was clearly the furthest thing one would associate with vampires.

"What is with that look, you object!?"

"No no no... I just never expected you to say something like that so openly. What happened, were you influenced by school dramas on television?"

"You're annoying, shut up! I didn't say anything wrong! For people of your age, 'youth' is indispensable!!"

"Yeah, well, so to speak..."

Based on the dictionary definition, it was basically correct. As for whether it applied in actual fact, that was open to question.

"What does it matter anyway... Even someone like me, umm... Would like to enjoy this whatever 'youth' with relish!"

"Say, I'm not even sure how old you are now? No matter how you look, it would not be surprising if you turned out to be over a century old. For you, youth probably flew away like a bird a long time ago, never to return....."

Hisui was trying to show off some poetic imagery, but he discovered Rushella glaring at him as soon as he finished.

"Ah... By the way, you still haven't... experienced youth, right?"

More accurately, she did not have memories of experiencing youth.

Perhaps she was indeed a century old, or even more ancient than that.

For Rushella who had no memories, the present was everything she had.

What she possessed, was the month long period she experienced after encountering Hisui, as well as the mental age which matched her teenage appearance.

Because of that, seeing others in her age group enthusiastically participating in club activities affected her especially.

That past she had once savored -- as if trying to retrieve lost memories, she desired to create her own memories of youth.

Hisui basically understood her intentions, and began scratching his head impatiently.

"Fine fine, I got it. I will try my best, okay?"

"Really!? Yes, how obedient!"

Rushella's eyes instantly glistened with delight.

While she was still in a good mood, Hisui decided to bring up the question he had harbored ever since he entered this position... Or rather, ever since he started living together with her.

"Say....."

"What is it?"

"Up to now, I haven't asked you this question. Actually I don't think it's currently very possible either, but....."

"What on earth are you trying to say!? If you have a question, be out with it, stop stuttering!"

"...Have you been wearing underwear properly?"

Rushella's expression froze.

Hisui tried his best to avoid looking in her face as he recalled everything that had happened so far.

Since the shirts she wore as indoor casual wear were white, it was naturally quite easy to see through them.

Nevertheless, no matter how hard he stared, he could never catch a glimpse of that elusive yet mesmerizing fabric.

The only images reflected into his eyes were the voluptuous curves of her glamorous body.

From the day he started living with her, Hisui had been consumed with doubt in his heart, could it be possible...

More importantly, when she put on the shirt just now, she had exited the bath clad in nothing but a towel.

Based on common sense... Whether on top or below, she should be wearing nothing.

"...Why are you not refuting me? Could you actually be..."

"S-Shut up, what does it matter! Aren't you half naked too after you take a bath? Besides, you can't see anything while I'm wearing a shirt..... Fine, it's all your fault for looking at me that way, you are in the wrong!!"

Rushella argued with her face all red.

Finding her reaction to be exactly as expected, Hisui rolled his eyes and looked up at the ceiling.

"Say, I've heard that women usually don't wear a bra to sleep, so that's no big deal to me... As long as you wear it when you're at school or going out."

Rushella shuddered after hearing his words and stiffly turned her face to avoid Hisui's gaze.

"Come on... it can't be!?"

Without answering, she simply counted on her fingers and then looked towards Hisui once more.

"...It's okay!"

"What do you mean, it's okay!! It happened...? How many times!? How many times did you go to school without wearing underwear!?"

"Let bygones be bygones....."

Uncharacteristically, Rushella did not retort loudly but instead, she stared ahead silently.

".....I'm trying to assist you in school life, but this is one area I can't help out... Please, you have to pay attention yourself."

"So annoying, shut up!!"

Rushella screamed and raised her fist above her head and sat up from Hisui's body, about to beat him up as usual.

But this act became the start of tragedy.

For Hisui, that is.

Rushella's shirt -- was still unbuttoned.

If she had maintained the previous posture where she was tightly pressed against him, it was still possible to conceal the vital areas.

But now... It was just a shirt draped over her shoulders.

Rushella's voluptuous bosom was unsealed before Hisui's eyes, jumping out in full view.

Droplets of bathwater left on her body, flowed across her pristine white skin, streaming along the flower buds of her breasts, descended upon Hisui's forehead.

"U-Ummm....."

"I-Insolent knave -- !!"

Rushella pounded mercilessly with both fists.

Patches of red began to blossom across Hisui's face.

"W-Wait a minute..... Put on your clothes first! Button it up! They're shaking... While you're beating on me, they're shaking nonstop!!"

"So annoying, shut up! Looking is forbidden--!!"

"I'm talking about your.....!!"

As the sounds of Hisui's screams and moans echoed across the living room, Rushella ignored his protests.

After that, needless to say, she drank her fill of Hisui's blood to rehydrate herself after a bath.

".....Based on the above, my life is currently in peril, can't you think of a way to help?"

With a mournful expression, Hisui was pleading with Kirika as she happened to be watering the flowerbeds. He truly looked pitiful.

"What are you talking about suddenly? Did something happen?"

"...Nothing."

Early in the morning, Hisui had gone to visit Kirika. Fatigue and weariness written all over his face, his androgynous visage was also covered with wounds from the beating.

Rushella was really angry yesterday, plus the fact that night was prime for vampire activity, his calamity lasted for quite a while.

Thanks to Hisui's superhuman recovery, most of the internal bleeding healed quickly, but the pain from the bruises still lingered in his body, unable to dissipate.

If he had to let his blood be sucked in the morning in accordance with his everyday mission, it would definitely be too much to bear. Hence, Hisui got up before Rushella woke up -- leaving breakfast and a note behind, he left the house alone.

"Senpai sure comes early. Is the entire student council like this?"

"Of course not, just me, that is all. Even if the others arrive early, it would be due to club activities, probably. Coming to school early because of morning practice, they treat the student council office as their storage area, and disappear... Basically like that?"

Kirika continued to water the flowerbeds without pause as she spoke.

Finishing one patch, she moved onto the next. Whenever she found clear signs of weeds, she also pulled them out seriously.

Although Hisui did not know much about gardening, he could tell from the actions of this vice president that she was not only knowledgeable about plants, she also loved them very much. Unconcerned that her pale white hands were soiled with dirt, Kirika performed gardening work with complete dedication.

"Could it be that, watering all the flowerbeds in school... Is done by Senpai alone?"

"Yes. It is a good thing for the school to have flowers growing all over the place, but the janitors are too busy. Since there is no extra budget to hire more personnel, taking care of the plants has been assigned to the student council."

"...Well, why is it only Senpai alone? Won't it be quite tiring?"

"Because no one else wants to do it."

Kirika exclaimed sulkily as she continued to immerse herself in work.

Watching her like this, Hisui recalled the rumor his neighbor in class, Sera Reina, had told him.

Uno Kirika, who acted even more proper than the proper president -- was being ostracized by the other student council members. They were on quite poor relations.

While Kirika immersed herself in the student council's work with great fervor, the rest of the council members simply fulfilled their duties with minimum effort, resulting in a massive festering conflict.

"It must be tough for you."

"This is all of my own choosing. Besides, I only reached this position through everyone's votes, right? If I really did not want to do it, I would have quit from the start. Besides--"

"Besides?"

"...None of your business."

Although Kirika coldly refused to answer, Hisui could guess roughly what her unvoiced reason was.

This was also a rumor he heard from Reina.

This responsible and talented girl who strictly adhered to school rules and discipline -- she acted this way for a very simple reason.

Because she loved the school.

Hence she performed the student council's duties more seriously than anyone.

But consequently, she was a formidable foe.

"...So? Do you have any other business?"

"Haha, well... About the club, can you show a little leniency....."

"Rather than talking to me, you should find a teacher instead? After all, a club adviser is essential."

".....You're right."

"What kind of club are you running anyway?"

".....The Occult Research Club, I guess?"

This was the result after a night's worth of agonizing contemplation.

After all, given this group of nonhumans, they basically belonged to the occult.

Vampire, artificial human and half-vampire, plus himself with the unusual constitution which prevented him from turning into a vampire.

"What on earth? Do you really think the school will approve of something so unscientific?"

"...That's true~"

He was just chatting casually, but ended up with a flat rejection. Still, he had expected this result.

"Ah... But I think one existed before. Just an unofficial hobby group."

"...Really?"

Hisui's eyes flashed as he was struck with sudden inspiration.

Yesterday he had heard from Eruru about roaming supernatural creatures, and had witnessed the curse ritual.

It was a bit of a stretch, but he felt like there was some sort of connection between them.

"However, I don't really know about the details. Urban legends... Or should I say, more like strange rumors in school. Probably counts as one of our schools Seven Wonders. Solving the mystery of the 'Witch,' the Occult Research Club... Something like that maybe?"

"Witch!?"

Hearing her repeat the term, Hisui unwittingly moved closer to Kirika.

Instantly, their faces almost touching, they could feel each other's breath.

Then an expression of fear flashed momentarily across Kirika's face as she swiftly pushed Hisui away.

"...Don't come close so suddenly!"

"Ah... Sorry."

Seeing her frightened, Hisui silently stepped back. The upperclassman who usually seemed so powerful and intimidating to others, was currently speaking with such docility... So uncharacteristically girlish.

At this time, another rumor he heard from Reina surfaced in his memory.

She hated boys very much, especially weak ones.

"That Occult Research Club... Is just a rumor after all. A rumor dating to before the school was rebuilt."

".....?"

"You didn't know? Our high school, just before I enrolled, had just undergone large scale remodeling and reconstruction. As a result, the current layout of the buildings is very different from before. Thanks to that, what Seven Wonders, what Occult Research Club, these kinds of inane rumors have basically all been wiped out."

"I see... So that's why I never heard of them."

"If you are interested, try asking your homeroom teacher Horie-sensei? She is probably the most senior person in this community."

"Really....."

It looked like the child-faced diminutive homeroom teacher had a little-known side to her.

"Anything more you have to say? I still have further tasks to busy myself with. I would like to finish watering before the morning assembly."

Saying that, Kirika busied herself with the weeding.

Then Hisui joined in.

"...What are you doing? Please do not get so close to me so casually, okay?"

"I'll help you. This will dirty your hands? Look, it's dirty already."

"....."

"You haven't finished watering, right? Why don't you do the other places first?"

Without waiting for Kirika to respond, Hisui knelt down and got to work.

"Even if you do this... Do not be deluded into thinking of currying my favor, okay? There is nothing more to discuss regarding your club."

"I never expected that from the start."

Hisui replied unfazed, focusing on the task at hand.

Kirika stared at him for a while, then pointed to the bandages on his wrist and asked:

"...What happened to you there?"

"A minor injury, nothing much."

"...Beware of infection. You have to wash your hands properly all the time."

"You really sound like a school nurse."

Hisui smiled as he spoke. Hearing that, Kirika blushed.

Just as Hisui was planning to continue working, he heard disastrous footsteps.

"I finally found you! How dare you escape your morning duties, running off to leave me alone!!"

"Crap....."

Turning around, he found Rushella holding a parasol, standing behind him.

Rushing over in a huff, she grabbed Hisui from behind, lifting him by his underarms.

"Yesterday you left me, and again today, why!?"

"It's a long story..."

"So annoying, shut up!"

Rushella ignored Hisui's efforts to explain and directly drew her lips towards his neck.

His morning duties... In other words, blood sucking time, was taking place at school.

"Hey, hold it, consider the situation first!"

Naturally, Rushella could not be stopped, hence her bright red lips pressed upon Hisui's neck.

Then she bared her fangs and prepared to bite. Hisui frantically screamed.

"I said stop!! Senpai is watching!!"

"Mmmm... What are you looking at!?"

"The villain is slinging accusations first!?"

Hisui guiltily looked towards Kirika... As expected, she was gazing at him with derision.

"Morning duties eh? So you do this every single day?"

"Yes! Even though this guy always screams and yells, resisting in the beginning, he always yields obediently in the end!"

"Stop using such an easily misunderstood description... In the end, you always hold me down by force, right!?"

"In that case, why don't you lock the door? In fact, you're looking forward to my arrival, right!?"

"Because if I lock the door, it's the door that will meet a sad fate... There's no escape."

Hisui grumbled in a voice too soft for Rushella to hear, then he looked at Kirika again with trepidation.

The distaste on her face needed no explanation, and her gaze was like she was looking at something dirty.

"...You two are truly infatuated with each other. So, in wanting to create a club, are you saying you want to do this kind of thing in school as well?"

"Yes, that is correct, I always feel the urge to suck from time to time. With the club classroom, I won't need to be concerned with so many things..."

"Idiot.....!!!"

Rushella's statement was revealing her secret identity.

Hisui frantically covered her mouth with his hands, but Kirika had already stopped looking in their direction.

"I am sorry, you entitled to neither budget nor classroom. If you want to make out, please do it outside the school."

Then she left without looking back.

Hisui sighed as he scratched his head.

"You really... Came and killed all hope. Looks like the matter is sealed... I feel like even if we applied it will be rejected directly."

"Stop worrying."

"I'm saying, this is all your fault... Hey, why are you starting to suck! Hey, it hurts, stop it.....!!"

Hisui's screams reverberated until finally, Rushella having had her fill, threw him to the ground.

Unable to move at first, he had to wait a while before returning to the classroom, pressing a hand against his neck. Little did he know, there was a figure watching his every move from the shadows.

"Okay~ students, everyone please pay attention. Try not to get hurt while you're working~"

Homeroom teacher Horie Jyuri was directing the students to work with her leisurely cute voice.

Hisui's class had home economics during periods three and four and they were having a cooking practical.

Jyuri herself was a world history teacher. If one were to ask why she was standing at the lectern, bandanna around her head, dressed in an apron, it was because the home economics teacher had suddenly fallen ill and was home in bed.

In the fully equipped home economics classroom, the students formed themselves into groups of four or five, working on the assigned cooking tasks.

Even though it was considered class time, it always felt as if there was plenty of opportunity for slacking off.

Whenever they had this lesson, the students happily chatted away as they worked on their cooking.

Hisui's class was naturally no exception. However, since the fruits of their labors today will serve as their lunch, everyone was putting in a bit more serious effort in the cooking.

...All except one.

"Yes, everyone is showing enthusiasm, very good!"

"...Hey you, hurry over and help!"

Hearing Rushella standing on the side, sternly acting as a commanding officer, Mei could not help but retort at her.

Knowing that such words were futile, Hisui simply focused on peeling the potatoes without saying a word. The representative of the class' collective conscience, class rep Sera Reina was at a loss what to do, her gaze moving back and forth between the two, very much in a quandary.

"Besides, you're not even in our group, okay!? The groups are mixed in gender and based on student numbers. Why are you even here!?"

"Someone happily agreed to switch with me. Is there any problem?"

"Yes, clearly you used your 'mystic eyes,' right?"

Hisui looked over at a boy whose eyes were still glazed over.

That student was originally in the same group as Hisui but ended up getting caught by Rushella and then swapped to another group directly.

"Seriously, is this okay, letting her do as she pleases?"

Mei moved close to Hisui and spoke soft enough to be unheard by others.

"...Of course not, but letting that girl go with other groups would be even more terrifying. Since Kariya is not in our group, if a situation arises, only you and I can help defuse it. Don't let the class rep find out, I'm relying on you."

"No problem. In that case, this is our shared task, eh?"

"Somehow it feels like I fell into some sort of trap. Oh well whatever. Could you help me cut the vegetables?"

"Sure~"

Hisui finished peeling and the two entered the vegetable cutting stage.

To Hisui who took charge of the kitchen at home, this kind of work was simply a piece of cake. And from the way Mei handled the kitchen knife to slice the vegetables, she was clearly skilled as well.

"Eh... How unexpected."

"Oh my, who do you think I am? As the latest model of artificial human and blowup doll, in order to satisfy male desires, whether secret formulae for awakening your lower half or the naked apron, all are standard issue equipment."

"Uh sorry, I sincerely hope those functions of yours remain sealed forever."

"Hey you two over there, sticking together is forbidden. No idle talk, get to work!"

Rushella squeezed her way in between them.

"Hey, watch it... I'm holding a knife here....."

Even though Hisui was forewarned, he still reacted a moment too slow.

Pushed by Rushella, his index finger was cut by the kitchen knife.

"Ouch....."

"Are you okay, Hi-kun? Hey, you there, pay attention to the situation!"

Reprimanded by Mei, Rushella retreated with an apologetic expression.

"Kujou-kun, are you fine? Should I go tell the teacher and get a band-aid for you?"

Class rep Reina who was in the middle of preparing the stewing pot, hurried over, greatly worried.

Though Hisui's finger was cut, given his constitution, it was no big deal.

"Ah... It's really okay. In a while, it'll automatically..."

Owwwww.

Before he could finish, Hisui felt his fingertip enveloped by moist, soft lips.

As beads of blood escaped his finger, Rushella slowly sucked them into her mouth. While she supported his wrist with her slender hands, it was not even a light bite but gentle sucking.

"Hey....."

Don't suck blood in this kind of place -- was what he wanted to say, but in the end, he let her suck away freely.

Rushella did not embed her fangs as usual, but simply caressed his finger gently with her lips and the inside of her mouth.

Extending her tongue to seek out his wound, she caressed with great lightness of touch.

Then she drew the blood out -- or rather, she was sucking blood at this time only for soothing the pain of the wound.

Even though given Hisui's constitution, this sort of wound would start healing immediately.

As for the pain during the instant of injury and before recovery, he was no different from an ordinary person.

Rushella was sucking away minute amounts of pain and blood between the tip of her tongue and lips.

As if mesmerized by the faint crimson glow from her eyes, everyone in the surroundings stood motionless.

Enshrouded by the quiet atmosphere, only the sound of tongues and lips, licking Hisui's finger with tender affection resounded within the room.

Very soon, the brief but precious tryst came to an end. With a gentle lick, Rushella took her lips away from Hisui's finger.

The wound having vanished, Rushella supplemented with a light kiss on the newly baptized finger.

"It's fine now. I have helped you stop the bleeding. You should feel honored. Also, you're not allowed to bleed recklessly. Your entire body's blood, every single drop belongs to me!"

"T-Thank you....."

Clearly it was all Rushella's fault, but somehow he ended up thanking her, and with his heart racing too.

But in the next instant, he recovered his senses and frantically surveyed the surroundings... The rest of the class turned away in embarrassment one after another.

A few boys were for some reason bent over forwards.

And girls were hiding their blushing cheeks.

Even Eruru... was no exception.

Mei also displayed a face of lament.

".....What a move. Looks like she beats me slightly in tongue skills."

She even murmured that.

And then, Reina, the one who represented the class' collective conscience -- murmured unintelligibly, her face blushing intensely.

"T-That..... It's that thing, right? That... Overseas, very common right, this kind of thing?"

".....I guess."

Hisui was suddenly reminded, in a flash of inspiration, he had introduced Rushella as his distant relative who had returned from overseas.

"That was, simply, wound treatment... That's right. This kind of thing, very common..... Everyone."

Though he knew in his heart this was surely uncommon.

Hisui could only nod and agree.



"Oh, you people know how to do this too? I do it every morning with this guy, so other people have this kind of habit too?"

The atmosphere in the classroom instantly froze.

Especially Reina who entered a rigid mode, her thoughts completely halted.

"Always behaving obediently after sucking, but he's always struggling before the deed. Honestly, it troubles me greatly. Do you guys have any good solutions?"

"W-Who knows.....? I haven't, umm, completely this kind of thing..."

Reina shifted her gaze away from Rushella's innocently pure eyes and ran over to boil the water, adding in the soup base, the vegetables and the sausage.

Today's theme was thick soup -- long stewing times was a major characteristic.

"What, you don't know? But whenever the teacher asks you a question in class, you always answer fluently. Don't be stingy, hurry and tell me."

"B-But, this....."

"What's the matter, are you shy?"

Reina was carefully pouring in the soda water when Rushella went over to hassle her.

Seeing her pitiful pleading gaze, the rest of the students silently stared daggers into Hisui.

"...What a disaster."

"...Yeah."

Mei rested a hand on Hisui's shoulder as he hung in head, losing all strength.

It felt like he had lost something precious on this day.

Luckily the finished soup turned out quite nicely, so there was fortune amidst misfortune.

"Wow, well done! This is quite delicious."

"Hurry and thank the class rep who was in charge of the stewing. Definitely this is wonderful. I really want to find out the detailed recipe."

Hearing Hisui's praise, Reina modestly waved her hands.

"It's nothing special really. I simply added a bit of seasoning to the ready-made soup base sold at the market. It's because the vegetables and the meat were sliced well, right?"

As Reina conversed, she diligently handed everyone a paper cup and poured water from a kettle.

Students were allowed to bring their own drinks but the school had also prepared hot water and kettles beforehand.

"Ah, but really this is great. Did you add some secret seasoning recipe?"

"Well....."

Reina was just about to answer when the sound of a dish crashing to the ground was heard.

"What happened?"

Rushella's dish had fallen. The soup was already finished and luckily the dish did not break, so the floor did not require cleaning.

"No... Thing much. Just my hand slipped."

Rushella patted her face, drank some water and picked up the dish to put back on the table.

Then... She stood up unsteadily.

"I'm full. Already, it's lunch break eh... I need to get a bit, of air....."

Staggering, Rushella left the home economics classroom as she finished speaking.

Hisui and Mei exchanged glances and nodded.

Something was not right.

"I'm sorry, the dishes and the clean up... Can I leave it to you?"

"No problem. But I'm expecting a reward afterwards."

"Got it."

Saying that, Hisui finished the remainder of the thick soup in two mouthfuls and drank the water in his paper cup.

"I've finished. Class rep, we'll talk about the recipe next time."

"Yes, very well....."

Ignoring the hesitating class rep, Hisui hurried out of the classroom to look for Rushella.

It did not take much running along the corridor to find her.

Not far from the home economics classroom, Rushella was just up ahead.

She was leaning against the corridor wall, panting heavily.

"Hey, what is happening!?"

"Hisui, is that you....."

Rushella spoke his name weakly then collapsed in Hisui's chest.

"Hey.....!"

She did not respond. Her pale white skin was drenched with sweat, Rushella had completely lost consciousness.

"What happened?"

Hisui looked back to find Eruru. She probably noticed Rushella's unusual signs and followed.

"She fainted... Not moving at all. What on earth is happening.....? Will she wake up if I feed her my blood.....?"

"Even though blood is the ultimate medicine and nourishment for vampires, save it as the final resort. Let us take her to the infirmary to sleep on a bed first. As for the reason... Saying lack of sleep and anemia should be fine."

"Right."

With Eruru's assistance, Hisui carried Rushella to the infirmary, thereby taking care of the first challenge.

"...Do vampires get sick?"

"Who knows... If even you don't know, neither would I."

Coldly urged by Eruru, Hisui left the infirmary.

It was a strange sort of feeling.

Hazy consciousness. The body was also not listening to orders.

It felt as if the entire body was tied up with chains, but at the same time it felt different from that sacred chain of silver she had experienced before.

Rather than tying up the body externally, the chain felt like it was produced from within.

Using human terms -- this probably felt like an illness like the flu.

But it was completely pointless to consider such a possibility, it was naturally impossible.

Though vampires could get hurt, the concept of disease did not exist for them.

If one really had to force a comparison, only the desire for fresh blood barely counted.

Even though it was a phenomenon resembling instinct, it was not unreasonable to view it as a disease. And if blood was not sucked, the body's sense of fatigue would increase.

Nevertheless, she had already fed her fill this morning. At midday it was a minor amount, but that counted as a second time.

In terms of volume it should be sufficient, but her body felt powerless.

What on earth -- what was going on?

As questions swirled in her mind, a sweet fragrance could be smelled at this time.

It was a bewitching aroma which was so strong it gave headaches.

"What is happening...?"

As if guided by the scent, Rushella sat up on the bed.

She first surveyed her surroundings and found herself in an unfamiliar room.

The room's furnishings were white and clean, with many cabinets filled with medicine. There were curtains separating the beds -- even though she had never been here before, this should be the 'infirmary,' right?

Searching her memories, the last image she had was being held in Hisui's arms.

He was probably nearby -- Rushella looked to the right of the bed with that faint hope.

Entering her view was only the white curtain which marked the boundaries between beds.

Through the curtain, a person's silhouette could be seen.

At the same time, that aroma wafted over. It resembled the burning of incense. Purple smoke could be vaguely seen floating towards here from outside the curtain.

"Who are you.....?"

"Lowly vampire, you are not worthy of knowing my name."

The voice sounded like an old woman's and a young girl's at the same time. Through the curtain, the other person's appearance could not be discerned, not even her figure or the contours of her face.

"How dare you speak to me in such a manner. Hurry and show yourself!"

Rushella roared and reached out to pull the curtain. But even though her words were intimidating, her movements were slow. The aroma was disrupting her thoughts.

".....!"

Pulling the curtain aside -- there was no one there.

Only an old-fashioned candle holder with a burning purple candle, its flame flickering gently.

"How....."

Rushella murmured softly and noticed someone behind her at the same time.



Turning around, she found that "person" standing in the corner of the room.

Based on appearance she should be female, but Rushella could not be completely certain. This was due to her confused thoughts, plus the fact that the person's entire body was clad in a quaint red robe, only exposing the face which was turned towards Rushella. Her head was also covered by a hood that not only obscured her gaze but made her expression impossible to read.

"...Your attire is really quaint. During the times when we vampires dominated the world, there were many fellows who looked like you, displaying wondrous magic. It is recorded in my memory."

"Correct... I am a reviver of lost arts. However, there is no need for your race to revive. Why have you returned? Why... are you in this school?"

"Who knows? I'd like to ask too, who on earth am I?"

"Let's not joke around....."

She extended a hand out from her robe, as white as snow. Even though her age could not be determined from her voice, that skin clearly belonged to a woman in the prime of youth.

She manifested a black sphere the size of a marble in her hand and shot it at Rushella.

".....!"

Instinctively, she realized danger. Rushella slid her hand into the inside of her skirt. When wearing her uniform, that was where she kept her favorite short sword.

Before the sphere arrived, she threw the sword to intercept it.

The instant the blade struck the sphere, tiny sparks scattered as purple flames appeared out of space.

"What.....!?"

The purple flames were not large and quickly vanished in the air. But accompanying the rise in fragrance was a numbing of Rushella's five senses.

"This aroma... Like just now... But stronger... Who on earth are you?"

"For now, just call me -- Witch. Your race is not the only one that lives in modern society."

"I see... A remnant of ancient spellcasters? But why are you treating me as an enemy?"

"It is you who has intruded into my territory. Scram and go back to where you came from. Otherwise -- I shall execute you right here."

Leaving these words behind, the "Witch" twirled her long robe and jumped out the window.

Rushella wanted to chase after, but her sluggish body could not keep up with her will.

The increasingly intense aroma in the room made her eyelids feel heavier and heavier.

Gritting her teeth, Rushella could do nothing as her consciousness sank into darkness.

".....So, the biology room seems to be missing a specimen. I heard it was a precious item sent as a gift from a former teacher. If anyone finds it, please hand it over to a teacher~ What does it look like? ...Seems to be similar to this, kept in a jar, submerged in formaldehyde. The shape looks kind of like ginseng? Everyone please help look for it."

The home economics lesson ended, it was currently a classroom meeting. Jyuri's child-like voice, most unfitting for a teacher's, resounded within the classroom.

Perhaps because no one was interested in the subject, none of the students paid serious attention.

Normally the lessons almost never took place in the "biology room." That place was basically equivalent to a storeroom. Very likely, under the student council, or rather, Kirika's investigation, that room was going to disappear.

"Then the meeting will conclude here~"

With her cute voice, Jyuri declared the conclusion of today's classes. The students began to leave the classroom successively, heading home from

school or hurrying to their clubs. On the other hand, Mei and Eruru remained behind in the classroom.

"...So why did Rushella feel unwell, Eruru-chan?"

"...I am not sure. Also, Sudou-san, could you stop calling me 'Eruru-chan' please? I am in the same grade as you!"

Eruru spoke as she pushed her glasses, while Mei protested stubbornly.

"What does it matter? Don't get me involved into the stratified social class distinctions of the police. By the way, where's Hi-kun?"

"He went over to Rushella. She is a vampire after all, so I do not believe it is anything serious... Why is he so concerned?"

During lessons in the afternoon, Eruru had been thinking about this matter.

If she was simply feeling unwell there was no cause for concern, but for a vampire the chance of this was essentially close to zero.

In other words, she must have eaten something that caused a vampire's body to show abnormal symptoms.

"Before the symptoms appeared, what did she eat... First there was Kujou-san's blood, this should be safe. Considerate of Rushella's blood sucking, he even avoids eating garlic all the time, right?"

"That's right. That guy seems to have engraved his servant identity into his bones. Then it must be the thick soup? But I found it quite tasty, no problem there."

"That is the only thing left to consider. But we brought the ingredients ourselves and the soup base was bought at the market. The seasonings might vary between people but that should not be an issue. Naturally, garlic or the like was not added, right?"

"Of course not. Hi-kun was very attentive, besides, the girl herself would surely have noticed. At such close range, even Eruru-chan's sense of smell can understand, right?"

"...Indeed. Looks like the reason of her feeling unwell surely must lie within that home economics classroom. But what on earth caused her to....."

Eruru began to ponder in earnest as Mei watched her with a meaningful expression.

"...What is it?"

"Nothing much. I'm just surprised you would ponder so seriously about vampires, your greatest hate. If it was a while back, Eruru-chan would surely have said, vampires should die on their own for all I care... Am I right? You've been influenced by Hi-kun?"

"S-Stop making fun of me! It is not what you think, not at all....."

Eruru murmured softly and avoided her gaze as Mei continued to stare at her with amusement.

"I-I am simply worrying about the issue itself!"

"The issue itself?"

"...Humans were fine but only the vampire showed symptoms. If this was deliberate, then that someone must possess specialized knowledge and skills for targeting supernatural creatures."

"....."

"If that person only aimed to destroy a supernatural creature, there is not too much cause for concern. However, this power... is very dangerous, extremely dangerous....."

Seeing Eruru fall silent, Mei also got serious. Switching to a solemn expression, she offered encouragement as an external collaborator of the Supernatural Investigations Section.

"I will assist you, but just not for free."

"No specific clues have been found yet. In any case, we should also go over to Kujou-san. I am also a bit concerned about her condition."

Eruru got up from her seat. At the same time, a strange visitor arrived in the classroom.

Making cute meowing sounds, a black kitten had slipped into the room.

"Oh my, what a cute kitten. Did you get lost?"

Mei reached out to the black kitten as if trying to lead it out of the room.

As she approached the black cat before them.

Eruru was only watching casually to begin with, but recalling yesterday's scene, she immediately called out sharply to stop Mei.

"Stop... Get away from it!"

"Huh?"

As Mei turned her head in surprise, the black cat appeared next to her face.

It had instantly jumped onto her shoulder.

From its movements it seemed completely weightless. Mei and Eruru were taken aback for a moment.

However, the cat's voice clearly reached their ears.

"You two... are also the vampire's companions?"

The two girls looked at each other in shock.

Unmistakably, a human voice was coming from the cat's mouth.

It resembled an elderly woman's and a young girl's, completely indiscernible. The only certain fact was it being female.

"If you are the vampire's companions -- make haste and begone. Or else..."

"Or else?"

Eruru slowly approached to restrain the cat. In the worst case, she would not shy from using the bullets of her beloved sacred gun, "Argentum." This was a weapon chambered with bullets of silver, though specialized for vampires, it was still similarly effective against other supernatural creatures.

"Die."

The cat jeered.

Clearly a cat's body, but the face resembled a human's. It carried what felt like a human's expression.

Facing that smug look, even Eruru and Mei felt a shred of terror despite their unyielding fortitude.

In the next instant, the cat jumped down from Mei's shoulder and spat out something towards the ground. Then it left the classroom with quick and fleeting footsteps.

"What was that... just now?"

"....."

"It spoke, right...? What could it be, a cat demon? Or a cat spirit!?"

"No, probably just an ordinary cat. The only thing special about it is that it is a 'familiar.' Or call it a messenger."

"What... Eh, is that ventriloquism!? Coordinating with the cat's movements, someone else is speaking nearby!? Or someone is performing a magic trick?"

"There is definitely a trick and a punchline, but it is definitely no magic performance."

Eruru fished out a handkerchief and picked up what the cat spat out.

It was an ancient piece of parchment.

Spreading out the parchment which had been folded repeatedly, it revealed the same magic circle she had witnessed with Hisui yesterday, only smaller in size.

From the faint stench, Eruru quickly understood it was made from blood.

There was also a faint aroma of Silver Vine as well as various herbs.

"This is... the punchline? What, making it seem like magic. And using a black cat as a familiar, it's basically like..."

"'Witch'... You are correct."

Eruru's uttering of the word sent a chill down Mei's spine.

"We should hurry and converge with Kujou-san. Investigations must begin as soon as possible."

"Got it...!"

The two hurried out of the classroom and raced towards the infirmary.

## Chapter 3 - Witch Hunt

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"Are you okay?"

Rushella opened her eyes to find Reina sitting in a chair on the bedside, inquiring with great care. She looked like she had been on watch all this time before Rushella woke up.

"...What, it's you. Where did Hisui go, seriously....."

Tactlessly expressing her dissatisfaction, Rushella sat up. The sense of exhaustion had left. Probably because she just woke up, she felt a little dizzy, but other than that she did not feel anything unusual.

"Now... What time is it? What about class...?"

"It's already after school. I think Kujou-kun should be here soon."

"Really... Wait a minute, where did that woman go!?"

"Woman...? Who? If you mean the health teacher, she seems to be away..."

"No...! That aroma... Is no longer here, hmm? Hey, do you see a candle over there? One that gives off a strange smell..."

".....? I don't see one. The candle you mentioned... Do you mean a scented candle? Ah, I've heard that the school nurse loves those things, whenever depressed students come to her to talk about their troubles, she uses those to help them calm down. See, there's an aromatherapy pot here."

Reina pointed to the school nurse's desk and said. Just as she described, that sort of equipment was sitting right there.

"No, not that kind of thing... It must have been put away..."

The room was devoid of all signs of the "witch."

"Spending so much effort to ambush me... How bold for a human."

"Excuse me... Did something happen? Are you really... okay? Umm, could it be because of my cooking..."

Reina asked with an apologetic expression. Very likely, her heart had been burdened with worry throughout her afternoon classes.

"No... It's unrelated to that. Besides, I'm not the only one who tried your cooking, both you and Hisui ate it too. The taste was not bad, you know?"

"...Really? That's good to know....."

"Don't be concerned with these inane things. Wasn't Hisui enjoying the taste too?"

"Yes..."

As soon as Hisui's name was mentioned, Reina seemed happy yet embarrassed.

Something about her smile sent Rushella's heart into turmoil.

"What is with you... Did something happen to Hisui?"

"N-Nothing..... Umm, you two... Live together, right?"

"That's right, that guy is my servant!"

Hearing Rushella's usual catchphrase, Reina's expression became slightly gloomy.

"Right... You two are always together, your relationship must be so close..."

".....? Well, good enough. Although that guy is not too obedient, he is at least willing to take care of my everyday life. That guy, whenever I finish taking a bath, or when I go to his room in the morning, he's always staring at my body nonstop."

"....."

Simply picturing the scene in her mind made Reina's face blush as red as an apple. Steam was almost rising from her head. However, there was a sense of loneliness in her expression.

"That's right too... Rushella-san's... Figure is so outstanding....."

"Well, good enough. One day, I will make sure that guy grovels and worships me completely!"

Rushella proudly expressed her wish while Reina lowered her gaze and stood up.

"...I'm glad you're okay. Then I'll... be taking my leave."

".....? Sure....."

Avoiding Rushella's gaze, Reina hurried out -- but ran into Hisui at the door of the infirmary.

"Eh, Class Rep? What's up, why do you look so sad?"

"Kujou-kun..."

A ray of hope appeared on Reina's depressed face.

But soon, she shyly averted her gaze and quickly moved away.

"Rushella-san seems to be fine now... I'll be leaving first..."

"Ah, sure..."

Hisui watched in puzzlement as her figure receded in the distance.

Then just as he turned around and was about to enter the room.

"Too slow!! Why didn't you arrive earlier!?"

Rushella threw her pillow as hard as she could.

This almost dented his face as a loud roar, most unfitting for the infirmary, accompanied the violent act.

"What are you doing! What would it matter if I arrived earlier or later, aren't you fine already!?"

"I was in trouble! I mean, I was attacked by someone just now!?"

"Huh--!? What, another vampire!?"

"No, it's probably a..."

"A 'witch,' is it?"

"Kariya....."

Turning around, Hisui found Eruru and Mei standing behind him. Based on their argument just now, Eruru seemed to have figured out the situation.

"Looks like we have gotten involved with the same person."

"What? I didn't get involved with anything? If I had to say it, the only ones recently are you three sources of misfortune, vampires and artificial humans."

Ignoring Hisui's retort, Eruru walked over and sat down on the chair in the infirmary. Then she began talking with an inscrutable expression.

"I was hoping my secret investigation would turn up with nothing... But now it looks like I must investigate seriously. Can you tell me in detail what happened earlier here? We will also tell you what we ran into so far."

"This is what's known as 'information exchange,' right? Fine, I'll tell you."

Over the course of a few minutes, Rushella and Eruru exchanged news on the strange occurrences that happened to them after the cooking practical.

Understanding that the threat they encountered was real beyond a doubt, they nodded to each other.

Then Eruru stated her conclusions.

"This school -- harbors a "witch." And this true "witch" is hostile towards vampires."

Hearing Eruru's statement, both Rushella and Mei, both having encountered the "witch," showed tensed expressions... Only Hisui casually raised his hand, completely puzzled.

"Sensei, I have a question."

"...What question?"

"Even though I haven't run into her... Oh, I'm not doubting her existence, but why hasn't she come looking for me?"

"You want to meet her?"

"Not really, I also hope she'd ignore me, but I'm just a bit curious."

"She views vampires as enemies, and that one by your side... Well, anyone slightly knowledgeable would realize her true identity. Given such a peculiar name."

"Your description is truly rude."

"Naturally, the other party will be concerned, whether there are other vampires apart from her. Hence, very unfortunately, Sudou-san and I who are always hanging around her were judged to be companions, and were warned. That is essentially what happened. As for you, there is no point in giving a warning. You look like a servant no matter what. Even within school, your blood has been sucked a good many times, right? Are you confident that you were never seen?"

"Zero confidence."

Recalling various "blood-sucking occasions," Hisui shook his head in anguish.

On the first day of class, a group of girls, headed by Reina, already witnessed the scene of an aborted blood-sucking. Even if no one else saw firsthand, the news would have spread amongst all the other students.

"...What, so you're saying she has already condemned me without a trial!?"

"Were I in her place, I too, would have skipped the Miranda warning of 'You have the right to remain silent' etc and arrested you directly, perhaps even rewarding you with a bullet during the process. Please pay attention."<sup>[2]</sup>

"Uh sorry, have you heard of the term, human rights?"

"...? Ah, excuse me, you are actually human?"

Hisui could only shut up obediently in response to Eruru's serious question.

It looked like he should be more careful from now on, on dark and stormy nights.

"But... 'Witches' or whatever, do they really exist? I think stuff like witchcraft is really superstitious, right?"

"Does an artificial human have the right to say that?"

Hisui retorted against Mei's question. However, she proudly puffed out her spectacular chest instead.

"Hey hey, Hi-kun, surely you must have read about my ancestor in the story of Frankenstein? Artificial humans clearly count as the product of science. There are people who call the book the world's first science fiction novel!"

"But at the same time, there are people who call him a modern homunculus. Besides, from the perspective of science, how is life actually created? And if it really was a product of science, why was that first generation creature so ugly beyond belief? I think it's much closer to magic instead."

"Then it's a union of science and magic. You can call it a hybrid."

"You must be kidding. By the way, what is your body even made of? Ah, I'm simply curious. Even though it feels completely like a normal human's to the touch, but that... Material or the sort, how is it actually made....."

Hearing this question, Mei's expression stiffened.

It was an uncharacteristically serious expression.

"What are your intentions in asking that?"

She replied in a completely emotionless tone.

"Nothing... Forget about it. That's better for everyone."

"Of course, it's better that way. So... In the end, do 'witches' really exist? Even if they existed, what dangers do they pose?"

"Witches do indeed exist. However, white witches who only use herbs and cast spells; black witches who contract with demons and summon disaster -- this sort of categorization is meaningless. True witches are neither white nor black. They are beings who inherited ancient rituals instead of adhering to any religion's ideology -- if one were to define witches, it would be something like that."

Hisui nodded in agreement with Eruru's explanation.

"I also heard from my foster parent who personally witnessed witch hunts in Europe. Those people who were rounded up and persecuted as witches, virtually none of them were actually real witches. But there seems to be an extremely small number of witches amongst them. To the people involved in the hunt, that was sufficient to achieve their goals. Even if it meant sacrificing tens of thousands of innocents, so long as a real witch is not let loose, it was considered worth it. And even if they were not able to exterminate the witches completely, as long as the beings known as 'witches' were banished to the remote corners of history, it was enough to send their power into decline. Like vampires, modern society in this country

no longer has pure witches. Even if there were, they are simply amateurs who learned from some grimoire or through oral tradition."

"...That sounds about right. I do not believe there are real witches who could completely revive the ancient rituals of old. However, someone is at least capable of making a vampire faint... As well as reaching a level of producing illusions we can see. Furthermore... She is in this school. We must find her before the incident escalates. In any case, let us start investigating places where there might be clues. We will split up..."

"Then I'm going to team up with Hi-kun♥"

Mei immediately wrapped herself around Hisui's left arm, pressing her enormous bosom against him.

"Stupid thing, the one who belongs in his team is me! Let's go, Hisui, and catch this insolent culprit who dared to poison me!"

Refusing to be outdone, Rushella embraced Hisui's right arm. For some reason, she also positioned her bosom with the same posture as Mei's.

"...Excuse me, I'm sorry. I'm going to team up with Kariya. You two go with each other."

" "Eh~~!?" "

The beautiful duo exploded with indignant protests as Hisui struggled free with great difficulty to recover his freedom.

"Let's go, Kariya. You two better show up with some respectable results."

Waving his hand, Hisui urged the other two to get to work. Pulling Eruru by the hand, he hurried out of the infirmary.

Making sure the two girls were not following, he breathed a sigh of relief. Eruru shook free from his hand with displeasure.

"Please do not touch me so casually..."

"Ah... Sorry. I wanted to start investigating with you before the situation got even more troublesome."

Hisui's careless remark made Eruru blush instead.

Very quickly, she returned to her usual composure and spoke in calm tones.

"What do you mean by that? If you are worrying about my body's condition, it is unnecessary."

"I don't think you'd make the same mistake twice anyway. But if I want to get things done seriously, I think it's most efficient to team up with you. Even though leaving Rushella alone definitely worries me... There's Sudou accompanying her after all. That girl is pretty smart so even if the sky were to fall down, her brute force should be able to support and hang on."

"Your small-minded cleverness never ceases. I understand, then let us begin."

After assigning roles, Eruru sprang into action with Hisui following close behind her.

With silent understanding they required no talking to know where they ought to search.

This was the scene of the incident, the home economics classroom -- as well as the preparation room next door.

Since they knew that Jyuri was suddenly asked to cover the class, this meant that the original teacher was absent. Even more fortunately, the room was not locked either.

Silently nodding to each other, they slipped into the home economics preparation room.

This was where the home economics teacher usually prepped for class. It was also the room where various teaching resources and cooking ingredients were managed. Naturally, it also contained a fridge.

Rather than the size of a usual fridge for home-use, it was only a mini-sized model usually used by singles. In terms of appearance, it was identical to the fridges in other preparation rooms and the staff room. Nothing suspicious about it.

Hisui opened the door and check the inside of the fridge.

First to enter his view were potatoes and carrots, the same ingredients as those used in the cooking practical today.

"I think no one forgot to bring their own ingredients, so the backup portion in the fridge was unused?"

"Right. Even though she is a witch, knowledgeable in all sorts of magical herbs... It would still pose a tough challenge for her to make a move on the ingredients we brought ourselves."

"Since Rushella did not notice any problems when she was eating, that means it did not contain any garlic or holy water. In other words, the problem did not arise from using foods that target the weaknesses of vampires, and neither were church-related items used... Could it be a magical herb innovated by witches?"

Hisui confirmed the already established facts as he continued to examine the interior of the fridge.

Other than ingredients, the only thing left was backup soup base prepared in case of forgetful students.

No other ingredients related to today's cooking practical were found.

"Nothing useful eh... Well, the things the teacher prepared were not used after all."

"In other words, for someone who did not participate in the cooking practical, making a move on the fridge ingredients beforehand would be meaningless. This means it must be someone at the scene and within your group to have the opportunity."

"...Let's not rush to conclusions. After all, people from other groups were going around observing, right? Even though I didn't notice anyone suspicious, then again, I never expected Rushella to faint so I wasn't paying much attention to begin with."

"...The possibility exists, if that is what you believe."

"You don't sound convinced. Well then, let's think about other suspicious areas. What if instead of the food, it was the utensils that were poisoned?"

"True, the utensils were provided by the school... But there was no way of knowing ahead of time who would use which. Even if poisoned, making sure the poisoned utensil reached the target would require the perpetrator to be one of those present at the scene."

"Sudou and I were the ones who laid out the utensils, then Class Rep portioned out the food. Drinks were poured into freshly unsealed paper cups, so they should be fine."

"In that case, we should investigate the pot..... But that should have been washed already."

It would be rather excessive to call it destruction of evidence -- but all the cooking utensils had already been washed and cleaned. Since no flasks could be found in the fridge, they must be together with the knives, forks and dishes, being washed.

"I suppose if we call in forensics to help out, they should be able to analyze it... Right?"

"Substantial obstacles stand in the way. Sure, there would be no problem for me to take things here to them for analysis. But simply taking one or two articles would be pointless. Furthermore, since this incident has not been made public, confiscating everything as evidence for investigations... Is impossible."

"I guess we need to narrow down the approximate area first, then hand in the suspected evidence... That's the most we could do."

Just as Hisui summed up, the home economics preparation room's door was suddenly opened.

The two intruders jumped in surprise and braced themselves for the visitor.

Under their gaze, Kirika entered.

A paper bag under one arm, she was holding the key to the room in her hand. Most likely a key obtained through proper channels.

"Eh, why is this open..... What are you two doing here?"

"Uh, this is....."

As Hisui stammered, Eruru pushed him aside and replied calmly and fluently.

"Actually, we forgot something in the home economics class room... We were thinking that if the teacher picked it up, it would probably be kept here, so we came over to look for it."

"...I see. But coming here on your own when the teacher is not around is not quite proper, would you not agree?"

"It is our fault for being too impatient... We will be more mindful in the future."

Eruru bowed her head and apologized.

Her perfect acting skills made Hisui feel like applauding in standing ovation.

Kirika appeared to have accepted the explanation and did not lecture any further.

"Be more mindful next time."

"Yes... By the way, why are you here, vice-president?"

"I am delivering something for the teacher. The teacher asked me to prepare scented candles, essential oils, as well as this herbal tea I made."

Kirika pointed to the paper bag in her arms. Setting the bag on the teacher's desk, she left a note.

"Now everything is done..."

"...Vice-president, why does the teacher want these things? You said... She asked you to prepare them?"

"It is the teacher's hobby. It seems like she fell in love with them recently at other teachers' recommendation. Quite a fad has hit the staff room, apparently."

"That teacher's personal hobby... Then why were you sent here, vice-president?"

"Because my father is in the import business of assorted goods, so he has access to rare items. As the middleman, I help the teacher purchase what she wants and delivers them here."

"I see. But you also mentioned that you made herbal tea yourself... What is that about?"

Playing the role of an inquisitive and innocent underclassman... Eruru continued the conversation.

Thanks to Eruru's perfect acting skills, Kirika did not mind answering her questions one after another.

"This is my hobby. When my grandmother used to grow herbs, I often helped her out and naturally learned how to use them through the process. I treated the teacher once and she loved it after one taste. Thereafter, I began to send her some quite regularly. Perhaps she might even treat you some day? I have heard that when she makes snacks during cooking practicals, she treats the students to herbal tea."

"...I see. You must be quite close with the teacher."

"Because the student council's teacher adviser pretty much ignores me... But this teacher often listens to my problems. She is also quite familiar with the maintenance of the flower beds, so we share a common language, so to speak. I simply give her the things I love as a return gift. Furthermore, I help the teacher prepare the water used for cooking, borrow tea ware and stuff like that."

"...I see."

Eruru's eyes flashed with insight behind her glasses. Even though her expression was still that of an innocent junior, there seemed to be a subtle change.

"I am leaving now, so you two better leave soon. Since the teacher is not here, you should not be staying behind. Lost and found articles should all be kept in the cabinet over there."

"Thank you. We will leave as soon as we check it."

Eruru watched with all smiles as Kirika left.

After shutting the door, once Kirika's footsteps faded completely, Eruru instantly undertook a thorough ransacking of the cabinet to investigate.

"...What are you doing?"

"Is it not obvious? Looking for evidence. Hmm... Since there are so many articles, if we take a little of each, no one should notice. We must take them for analysis immediately."

Eruru was holding in her hand what Kirika described as the teacher's hobby -- scented candles, jars filled with essential oils, as well as containers holding herbal tea leaves.

Laying out the three types of objects on the table, she placed them into plastic bags and test tubes, her motions exactly like a police gathering evidence from a crime scene. Apparently for the sake of investigation missions, she always kept these tools by her side.

"Say... Those things you have there, aren't they unrelated to the cooking practical today?"

"Indeed, scented candles and essential oils are unrelated. Even if the scented candles were lit somehow to make us smell the released gas -- we would notice because of the scent. Even if the aroma was extremely faint, it would have been impossible to evade either my or the vampire's sense of smell. Also, today our teacher did not bring out herbal tea during the practical."

"Then why are you doing this?"

"You still do not understand? There is no need to ingest these things directly into the body. Through the assistance of other herbs, it would have been enough to make these substances enter the vampire's body by some other way."

"Wait a minute, how could these three things help achieve that? Hypnotize the vampire and make her drink the drug herself?"

Hisui asked jokingly and Eruru answered softly.

"Not wrong, but not entirely correct either. There is no need to hypnotize the vampire herself. Since the vampire did not ingest it, she would not have been hypnotized. However... The impromptu substitute teacher -- could have been hypnotized."

Hisui stared wide with his eyes.

The ancient legends of witches -- even without being an expert, having received knowledge from his foster parent who had once experienced life in the same era as witches, Hisui understood what Eruru implied.

"Whether essential oils or herbs, both are specialties passed down from ancient witches. Using their effects, enhanced by a little magic, simple suggestions could be made to the teacher, thus achieving the goal of manipulation. That is what you mean, right?"

"Exactly. The teacher could have been moving between groups matter-of-factly, examining the process and results of cooking. If she had any ill intent, she could have done anything she wanted."

"That's possible. But why would she tell us something so crucial to the puzzle? If the vice-president were a witch, she should know that you and I are Rushella's friends, right?"

"Your suggestion is reasonable. However, she could have deliberately said it to dispel suspicion. Regardless, it is possible that what she brought in the paper bag today are simply ordinary items. However, the ones left behind in this room from previous uses might be different. I do not expect scientific analysis to be able to explain the techniques used by witches, but if the analysis identifies components that are either unbelievable scientifically contains unknown matter, then a conclusion can be reached."

".....I see. How thoroughly thought out."

Hisui crossed his arms, nodded and exclaimed. Compared to Eruru whose mind had been in motion all this time, he seemed completely unproductive.

"Go and use your brain a little! Nothing is completely certain at this point. Hurry and help think if there is other evidence we might have overlooked?"

Eruru pointed to a plastic bucket in the corner of the room.

The trash from the cooking practical was emptied every couple days, but today's trash was still in the bucket.

Hisui understood what Eruru meant and twisted his face with disgust.

"You're asking me to trawl through the trash!?"

"In a certain sense, all the evidence could be there? Hurry, since your brain is useless, then contribute a little with your brawn."

Eruru commanded mercilessly, her tone of voice offering no room for compromise.

With great reluctance, Hisui started to go through the trash.

As a minimum safety precaution, he was wearing the rubber gloves from the sink in the home economics classroom as he fished around in the plastic bucket.

"What, isn't this all vegetable leaves? This shouldn't be related, right?"

"Then you go find something else suspicious. Are you saying because it's the same type you can't differentiate at all?"

"What do you mean by that, are you calling me trash!?"

"Ah, excuse me, I went too far."

"...As long as you know it."

"I was apologizing to the trash."

"Eh----!?"

Just as Hisui was shocked to hear he was worse than trash, he found something that felt different from vegetable leaves.

Holding his breath, he fished out the object -- a paper bag small enough to hold in the palm of the hand.

Through the paper bag, one could tell that it contained shredded leaves of some plant.

A Japanese tea bag, or some herbal tea liked by the home economics teacher?

Just as Hisui examined it in his hand, Eruru wrapped it up in tissue paper and snatched it away from the side.

"Say....."

"Anything else suspicious?"

"Nothing else found yet....."

"Then conclude the investigation there for now. I will also take this for analysis. Is there any other location you can think of?"

Hearing Eruru's question, Hisui paused for a moment before he replied.

"There's one more I suppose."

"Where?"

"The library... Or rather, the preparation room in the library."

"Why do I have to team up with you!?"

"I was going to say the exact same thing! This is a rare chance for me to tour the school with Hi-kun, such as the infirmary bed, the sports storeroom, the female changing room, a much anticipated time after school, both dangerous and adult... Or rather, a joyful after school period I'm looking forward to!"

"What are you planning to do to my servant! As long as the crimson light of my eyes continues to shine, you will never realize your ambitions!"

"What, is that some kind of vampire version of some cliched saying!?"

After several exchanges of arguments, Rushella and Mei went "Hmph!" to each other, turning their faces away and stopped talking.

Vampire and artificial human, this dream team of a pair who held exceptional promise as future Hollywood stars, were on exceptionally poor terms.

Left with no choice but to walk together, Mei started leading the way as Rushella followed behind.

"Where are we going? Do you have any idea at all?"

"Of course not. Well, those two should be able to find something. What I can only do, is the basics of the basics of investigating -- examining the scene of the incident."

"The scene?"

Just as Rushella puzzled, Mei halted her steps.

The pair had arrived at the back yard where Hisui and Eruru had discovered the cat's corpse yesterday.

Mei already heard from Eruru what happened, so she decided to investigate this "scene of the incident" once more.

But no clues were yielded at first glance.

There were no new cat victims, nor similar magic circle patterns.

Visiting here for the first time, Rushella casually wandered the little forest. Then she suddenly opened her eyes wide as she pointed at the ground.

"Hey... Is this a grave?"

"Hmm? ...Ah right, Eruru-chan said that she made a grave every time, right? This should be the one she freshly made with Hi-kun. What about it?"

"Someone offered flowers."

"Eh.....?"

With curiosity, Mei looked at the three mounds of soil on the ground. Just as Rushella said, someone had placed several lovely flowers over them.

"Did those two do that...? How thoughtful. By the way, don't they seem to be on quite good terms?"

"...Don't know."

"I never expected them to get along so well? Those two are quite familiar with obscure knowledge, and today they ended up taking action together. Hi-kun is really..."

"I said, I don't know!!"

Rushella roared, causing Mei to stop talking.

Then Rushella left in a huff, a face full of displeasure.

Mei helplessly shrugged and followed instead.

"What, did I push the wrong button?"

"....."

"Even though I don't know what Hi-kun is thinking, we shouldn't underestimate Eruru-chan. In actual fact, she really cares a lot about Hi-kun, you know? Though it's just unclear to what extent."

"So what....."

"Nothing much. Just that compared to a vampire, she is a far better match. I have to pay more attention too."

"What does that... Have to do with me..... After all, that guy serving me is the way it should be....."

This was spoken very softly. It made Rushella's gorgeous figure look even more vulnerable and fragile than usual.

"...Do you really believe that? Then you are really naive and optimistic. Anyway, let's get back on task and help investigate. This started because of you, that's why we're working as a team, you know? What do you know about the 'witch'?"

Mei switched to a serious tone of voice. Perhaps it was pointless to ask Rushella given her lost memories, but she was not a kind-hearted soul who could endure a vampire's willfulness indefinitely.

"...I don't know much. However, my race has had contact with humans apart from feeding on their blood. The humans known as 'witches' were one such group."

"What happened?"

"My race possesses far more resilient bodies than the humans. But regrettably, our 'weaknesses' also make us amazingly fragile. And the techniques for compensating were not entirely created by my race -- rather, it was through human hands."

Rushella raised her favorite parasol and waved it. This was the one she always used outdoors in the daytime.

"This type of sun shading tool was reportedly created by human craftsmen. This possession of mine has gone through special treatment to shade the sun and repel rain. There also exists objects that have been modified as weapons or magical areas, these things often involve the techniques of witches."

"I see....."

In the west, treating witches and vampires the same was deeply ingrained. It was not surprising that humans and vampires would form a kind of symbiotic relationship by harnessing each of their strengths.

"Last time, that Baron guy whom Hisui and I destroyed, I heard that he was applying something to his skin to block sunlight."

"Ah, the sunblock preparation. What about it?"

"Although the modern version is likely different, similar things existed in antiquity. By applying a special ointment to the skin, it allowed temporary freedom of movement under the sun. The manufacturing process was quite unique and extremely important to us, but regrettably our race was

not privy to it and could only request the witches for assistance -- reportedly something like that happened."

"Isn't that the witches' secret medication passed down the ages, the 'witches' ointment' version!?"

"Well... Probably. I never knew my race and the witches had such a deep and intertwined history."

Hearing Rushella talk about the past in a rare moment, Mei nodded emphatically.

To be honest, her opinion of the vampire had improved slightly.

But learning these things brought up new questions.

"But why, I wonder why your race had to rely on witches of the human race? Wouldn't it have been simpler to make them subservient using 'mystic eyes' or blood-sucking? Force them to reveal the method of production, or simply make them into servants."

"I believe many members of my race attempted it, but their efforts basically all failed. Probably due to the effects of the 'witch hunts,' witches act with great caution. Furthermore, they are very knowledgeable in ways to handle my race, such as neutralizing the effect of 'mystic eyes' or using poison to weaken us. Even though we possess undead bodies and won't be killed as a result, it does cause severe suffering. Reportedly, there is even a poison which can send vampires into suspended animation like temporary death."

"I see... By the way, aren't you remembering knowledge from the past? Has your memory recovered?"

"...No. This is simply knowledge. Any pure-blooded vampire will know this through their ancestry, but it is simply knowledge, nothing more than that. Even though I can recall it, there is no sense of concreteness....."

Rushella explained, her expression gloomy. She appeared to be telling the truth, that all she recounted was simply knowledge stored in her mind. Other than that, there were no experiences or sensations, only empty knowledge mechanically composed of terms and sentences.

"However... Doesn't this knowledge come in handy now? Even if those two are very knowledgeable, there are things that only you know as the authentic vampire, right? I suppose... Hi-kun would be happy to know?"

"Is that really so... I hope so..."

A hint of delight returned to Rushella's face.

As Mei secretly reprimanded herself for the naive act of cheering up her rival, she continued to comfort Rushella.

".....!"

"What now, why did you stop?"

Almost colliding into Rushella's back, Mei wondered.

Rushella stood there with a severe expression.

She was staring at a corner of a flower bed that was connected to the school building.

"Just now, I mentioned to you a type of poison that could cause a vampire to enter temporary 'death,' right.....?"

"...Yes. Different from holy water or garlic... You said it was a poison of witches, didn't you?"

"Yes. My race is very wary of this poison and we know its ingredients. Even though the procedure and exact concoction differs from witch to witch, the most important aspect is the raw materials. Without one particular ingredient, the poison cannot be made and there is nothing for my race to fear. I don't know if it is fortune or misfortune, but that ingredient is not only rare, it is also limited to one type."

There was a single flower blooming in the corner of the flower bed.

The flower was conspicuously different from the other plants, isolated in a corner, its purple petals seemingly poisonous.

Greatly alarmed, Rushella was staring at this bell-shaped flower.

"Wait a minute... You don't say... Could it be this very... Thing before our eyes!?"

"Correct... I never expected to find it here."

A flower whose poison posed a threat even towards vampires.

Passed down since ancient times, the poisonous flower of death. Rushella's bright red lips slowly uttered its name.

"The mandrake."

"Pardon our intrusion~"

Even though there were no people present, Hisui still greeted just in case. In an extremely low voice. Even his movements were light and he tried not to make a sound as he walked.

"What are you doing?"

"Ah, just conforming to the atmosphere... Isn't this part of the library?"

"In theory, you are allowed to talk freely in the library preparation room. Of course, it is conditional on the fact that you do not cause any nuisance to the people in the library next door."

Eruru explained. Her voice was also much quieter than usual.

Ending their investigation of the home economics room and its preparation room, the two of them came to the library -- then to the neighboring preparation room.

This was where the librarian did preparatory work and also where students on the library committee who assisted the librarian gathered. In principle, it was closed to outsiders.

Fortunately, Eruru was already appointed to the library committee as soon as she transferred into the school, so they had an excuse if they were caught.

The librarian teacher was not present due to a staff meeting, hence the duo was able to borrow the key from the staff room and slip in here. Luckily, no other students saw them.

"But why come to this place? I have been here a few times due to my duties... But I do not think this place has any clues related to the incident. You cannot possibly believe there might be the likes of grimoires here, right?"

"...That possibility cannot be denied completely, but that's not the reason I felt concerned. This is what I'm talking about."

Hisui pointed at the depths of the room.

A massive bookcase stood before the wall, marking off an empty space that a person could fit through.

The bookcase was virtually packed with books, all of their covers discolored from age, with many of them showing signs of damage.

"This place... Is a restricted area, right? In principle, none of the books in here are in circulation and can only be read within the library with prior authorization..... Indeed there are many ancient or rare books, but is there problem there?"

"No no, what's key is behind the bookcase."

Hisui stepped behind the bookcase. Because the bookcase was not standing against the wall, there was a dim and narrow space behind it.

"Is this your first visit here?"

"Yes... But it is just a store room anyway."

Just as Eruru described, the place was filled with various unsorted articles. Covered with dust, it would take a lot of work to clean up or find something in particular.

"Previously, the teacher needed some sort of ancient information, so the class rep was sent to locate it. I noticed she was having a tough time, so I came over to help. Then I discovered this unusual sight, so I happened to ask about what things were kept here."

"...What things were kept here?"

"All sorts of things, but mainly -- digests."

"Digests!?"

"Yes. I don't know if the current students still do it or not, but it was those guys from cultural clubs like the Literature Club or the Manga Research Society. Whenever clubs in the past accomplished some sort of achievement and recorded it -- it would probably be here. This includes the Occult Research Club."

"The Occult Research Club... Such a thing actually existed once in the school?"

"I only heard the vice-president mention it. Of course, it could be unrelated to the current incident and was simply a research club perhaps. But just in case."

Hisui spoke and turned around towards the pile of assorted items.

But the dismal sight of this junk pile instantly killed his enthusiasm.

"...I guess let's leave instead."

"Have you no backbone?"

"I think my efforts will be futile."

"Even though I had no hopes for you to begin with, you have disappointed me even further."

Eruru sighed as she walked towards the small mountain of records.

Before her was a messy pile of books with countless open scrolls, booklets scattered all over the floor, unidentified carton boxes -- but Eruru stepped forward fearlessly.

"I get it, I get it, I'll help you then. But this is gonna take forever....."

"Not necessarily. Time to call it a day."

Speaking with her usual poker face, Eruru extracted a booklet from the pile and showed it to Hisui.

"Dark Notebook -- The Occult Research Club's Activity Report --"

The cover had those words written in bright red against a pitch black background -- obviously as different from typical cultural clubs as night from day.

There was no other decoration on the cover other than an isolated line of words. One could not even begin to guess what the contents might record. Compared to the digests of ordinary clubs, this booklet was clearly much thicker and was on the level of a relatively thin book.

"How did you find it!? Your luck is too good!"

"This result came not of luck but the inevitable. Compared to the rest, only this booklet's surroundings lack dust. Very likely, it was recently taken out by someone."

"...I see. But wait a minute, if it was taken out already, why would anyone put it back?"

"Because this room also contains a photocopier, hence they simply copied the entire book or just the parts needed. In order not to arouse suspicion, it was placed back where it was found. Since they put this much effort into it, looks like the contents of this booklet should be promising."

Eruru spoke as she flipped it open and began to browse the contents.

Hisui also drew near her face to have a look.

"...Too close."

"Ah, sorry. But your skin sure is super smooth. How do you maintain it so well?"

Eruru blushed as a result of the near collision with Hisui's face. As Hisui caressed her cheek and exclaimed, she slapped him.

".....Why did you hit me?"

"...Who knows."

Eruru desperately tried to pretend to be calm, but her gentle face suddenly displayed surprise.

In the dead center of the booklet's cover -- red flames suddenly began to burn.

"Wha.....!"

"Hey, hurry and get rid of it!!"

Hearing Hisui's yell, Eruru frantically threw away the booklet.

No sooner had the booklet left her hand, flames also shot out from its interior and the entire booklet began to incinerate.

By the time it fell on the floor, most of the pages had burned to ash.

To prevent the fire from spreading, Hisui took off his jacket to cover the booklet and smolder the fire.

Fortunately, the flames only scorched the floorboards slightly without major incident.

"Are you okay!? Did you get burnt..."

"I am fine. But what on earth... This should not be some sort of trap mechanism. This is magic..."

"Could it be the witch's doing as well? Trying to burn to death people who investigate recklessly?"

"This bit of fire would not burn anyone to death. This is simply destruction of evidence, as well as a warning -- it serves the dual purpose of destroying evidence and deliberately letting it be seen, most likely to serve as a warning."

"Looks like we fell for it completely. So what's the result, do the remnants give any clues?"

Before Hisui asked, Eruru was already examining the few pages left behind from the fire.

"Hmm. Based on the binding, the content and structure of the writings, there is no doubt this is a digest written by high school students."

"...Eh."

"However, the content inside is the real deal."

"What!?"

Eruru lifted one of the less heavily damaged pages for Hisui to look at.

Although the page was heavily scarred, the things drawn on it were still discernible -- a magic circle.

It was identical to the one they had found at the scene of the dead cat.

On the bottom of the page, there were even explanations about sorcery and the magic circle.

Just as Eruru described, this was a digest at best. It was far too crude to be called a grimoire.

Nevertheless, its content happened to explain the phenomena observed yesterday.

Eruru read out the words on the page indifferently.

"Place the corpse of a small animal on top of the magic circle drawn using blood and cast a simple revival spell. This imbues the corpse with simulated life, for at most a day, allowing it to be commanded as a simple familiar. However, the familiar's actions are limited to extremely simple behavior. Also the revival itself is particularly difficult and prone to failure. Furthermore, preparing the corpse is no easy task. This is only simple basic magic, to be improved upon... That is what is written there."

"It really turns out to be magic..... And with explanations written by an alumnus.....!"

"Based on the underlying page, this was written ten years ago. Members of the club... Cannot be read, it is burnt. However, this is...!?"

Eruru was greatly surprised.

Hisui shifted his gaze towards the booklet and confirmed the name.

Then the two exchanged glances and in order to prove to each other they were not imagining things, they pointed at the spot to confirm again.

At the location where their fingers indicated, was written a most familiar name.

-- Horie Jyuri --

It was the name of Hisui's homeroom teacher.

It was the only readable name at the bottom of the member list.

"Horie-sensei... Was part of the Occult Research Club!?"

"Also... She used to study real magic. This increases our suspect count by one, and a massive suspect at that."

Eruru murmured lightly. At that moment, the vibrating sound of her muted cellphone could be heard from the pocket from the inside layer of her clothing.

"It is Sudou-san's text. They seemed to have discovered something... Let us go hurry."

"Yes."

Taking the booklet, the two left the preparation room of the library.

Following Mei's text message, they made haste towards a corner of a flowerbed connected to the school building.

As soon as they arrived--

"There's a mandrake growing here!!"

Rushella reported with great pride.

Eruru's poker face was unfazed, but Hisui displayed great disbelief in his gaze.

"I say, Rushella-san, by mandrake you mean that particular plant right? Even people who don't know much about the occult should know, it is a notorious poisonous plant, almost counts as a fantasy creature, in any case it's that super famous thing, right?"

"Correct, indeed it is. Even though I'm not clear on the little tricks of humans, even for vampires, this plant is extremely dangerous!"

"Does infamy = danger? Well, I cannot deny this viewpoint completely... But how could that kind of thing possibly grow in a place like this....."

"Are you doubting my eyes!? Indeed it seems to be a rare and precious thing, but the truth stands before your eyes!"

"Even if you say so... I'm not very sure, but shouldn't the mandrake's growing conditions be particularly stringent? Like growing beside gallows and further conditions."

"Oh, is that so? Then what is the real story?"

".....Why are you asking me?"

Rushella suddenly passed the ball to Eruru who avoided answering. This was not a good sign.

"Because you seem the most knowledgeable! I'm interested too, what are the mandrake's required growing conditions!?"

"...There are differing explanations, basically, this..."

"This?"

"Places where that thing, from males, that..... Secretion, dripped on the ground, that's where it grows, something like that....."

"Secretion... What is that!? Blood, saliva!? If that's the case, it's very normal to grow here!"

"Ah, n-not the ones you listed, this... is....."

Eruru blushed as she spoke. For some reason, she furtively cast glances at Hisui's lower torso.

"What on earth is it!? Don't be stingy, hurry and tell me!!"

"S-Stop it! Do not stare at me with those pure and innocent eyes.....!"

"Then be out with it!"

"I-It is that thing... That..... Male's....."

"Male's what?"

"Sem....."

Halfway through uttering the word, Eruru short-circuited from embarrassment.

Her face was so red it almost seemed like it was about to give off steam. She seemed like she was going to faint.

Fortunately, Hisui stepped forward and caught her.

"...That's enough, stop giving her a hard time."

"Stop interrupting, she was clearly about to say it! People who don't know anything should step aside!"

"...Seeing her reaction, I've pretty much guessed it. Ask Sudou to tell you later."

Hisui spoke as if he figured something out. Eruru finally recovered at this moment and pointed to the flower as she spoke with displeasure.

"Stop that thing from messing around with people's minds. Kujou-san, hurry and uproot it."

"Huh!?"



"Pull it out, then its authenticity can be easily verified by sight. If it is the real thing, it cannot be left alone."

"Ah, that makes sense... So, everyone should know, right? What happens when a mandrake is uprooted?"

The super notorious poisonous plant dating back to antiquity -- and rather than its medicinal properties, it was the plant itself that was most prominent in legends.

Its roots which greatly resembled human form -- in other words, the main body of the mandrake. If pulled out of the soil, the roots emit horrifying shrieks, enough to kill the hearer.

Even someone not particularly knowledgeable about poisonous plants like Hisui knew that.

If it were Mei, even if Eruru and Rushella did not say anything, she would probably know as well.

However--

"What do you mean, uprooted?"

"What does it matter anyway, based on your brilliant insight, it should be a fake anyway, right?"

"Well, that said... You know, just in case..... Right?"

Hisui pitifully sought their consent, but the three girls were completely unmoved by his entreaties, and even retreated backwards.

"Hey hey, that's so unfair! What, this kind of laborious task must be taken up by the guy!?"

"Well this doesn't really count as laborious, but doing your best is right, Hi-kun♥"

Mei sent a sweet and tender smile as encouragement, but she did not want to stay nearby at all.

"Hey, think this over carefully, you three? This is no joking matter, if turns out to be the real deal, isn't it totally unfair to have the weakest one here doing the work!? We have an immortal vampire right here!"

"Don't worry... You are not a man who would die from something so insignificant!"

Rushella cheered Hisui on, clenching her fists, but she did not want to stay nearby at all.

"Why are you showing such trust in this kind of situation!? Hey, you are admitting it's dangerous, right!? Definitely it's dangerous!? Anyway... Did you know, that mandrakes are usually uprooted using dogs.....?"

"You dare sacrifice other small living creatures for the sake of preserving your miserable life? How utterly shameless!"

Eruru criticized severely. Naturally, she did not want to stay nearby either.

"Stop talking about principles when all you're doing is securing your own safety first! I don't want to sacrifice little animals either, but at least have some safety precautions? Otherwise, let's not pull it out... Instead, use something like a spade to dig it out together with the surrounding soil. Let's go borrow a spade!"

Hisui tried to negotiate with full seriousness, but the trio ignored him completely.

Or rather... It seemed like they could not hear a single word.

".....?"

Hisui looked carefully.

So that's why they couldn't hear.

Rushella was blocking her ears with her fingers.

Mei had her earphones on, engaged in a conversation.

Eruru was using a portable player to enjoy music.

"You girls are fully equipped!! Can't you even lend me a set of earphones!!!"

Hisui's pitiful screams naturally received no answer.

To make things worse, he received a text from an unknown address.

"Hurry and pull it out."

It urged with those words. Based on the tone, it was more than likely Eruru.

"Your first ever text message to me and it turns out to be this!! Like I said, give me a set of earphones at least! I listen to music on my cellphone, but I don't have earphones!!"

...Turning his indignant emotions into a reply text message, he soon obtained a response.

"When you pull out the mandrake, just plug your ears before the 'root' screams, okay? All you need to do is act faster than the speed of sound in air and you will be fine."

"Ah, that's right, I see..... Hey, as if that were possible! You're asking me to move at supersonic speed!? Stepping with the left foot before the right foot touches the ground, and then stepping with the right foot before the left foot lands... That kind of ridiculous theory! This is not scientific!! Besides, plugging the ears with supersonic fingers will definitely burst the ear drums and the semicircular canals, okay!!"

...Turning the above scream into words, he replied, this time receiving a return message signed by all three of the girls.

" " "Stop talking nonsense and pull it out!!" " "

"What is with this powerful triple combo strike..... Isn't it just another way of telling me to go and die!?"

Hisui gave up reasoning with them and had no choice but to turn to the mandrake.

No other choice.

Even if he tried to run, he would surely be caught by one of the three and beaten up viciously.

Taking a deep breath, he inched his way to the flower, one step at a time.

Gripping the root end of the stem tightly, he confirmed the touch and surveyed the surroundings.

Other than Rushella and the girls, there were no others nearby.

The soil where the mandrake grew was quite soft, hence he should easily pull out the 'root' without using too much force.

But the problem was... After that.

If it really were the true thing -- it would scream and yell.

And whoever heard the sound -- would be dead.

".....Whatever!"

Hisui pulled out the 'root' in one go, and immediately threw it up into the air as hard as he could.

Then he ran as fast as he could towards Rushella and the girls.

This series of actions were performed for the sake of getting as far away as possible from the "root." Even a centimeter was better than nothing.

In order to reduce the volume of the death cries as much as possible, he desperately distanced himself.

The plan succeeded.

Probably because he plugged his ears with his fingers, Hisui did not hear a sound, and his body remained fine.

I'm saved -- Hisui could not help but think that. Then he suddenly noticed where the "root" had gone and looked into the air.

"...Eh?"

Having peaked, the "root" was beginning its descent. Seeing its appearance, not only Hisui, but also everyone present were stunned.

According to tradition, the mandrake's roots resembled human form -- but this thing did not look human in any way. It was indistinguishable from a common vegetable.

It was what had been used not too long ago in the cooking practical earlier, a completely ordinary carrot one could find on any dinner table.

As the four gazed blankly, the thing finally landed on the ground.

Eruru was the first to rush to the landing spot to pick up the problematic specimen to show Hisui and the rest.

No matter how you looked at it -- it was a carrot.

"Eh-----!?"

Hisui stared so hard his eyes seemed as wide as light bulbs, screaming with surprise. Mei tried hard not to laugh as she patted his shoulder.

"Hey what's with that... carrot!? Hi-kun was so scared he must have crapped in his pants!!"

"Seriously! To have been this scared of a thing like that... Completely unsightly!!"

Rushella joined into reprimand Hisui.

Speaking of which, the whole thing started with her.

"Securing your own safety and now you're lecturing this and that... I was risking my life here!! Anyway, whose low-grade prank is this!? What is this, deliberately disguising a carrot as a mandrake!? Hey Rushella, how did you mistake this for the real thing!?"

Hisui's grumblings came rushing forth like a tide, but Eruru stopped him calmly.

"This is real."

Hisui and the rest were incredulous.

Eruru took the "root"... Or rather, the flower growing out of the carrot to show to them.

"At least the flower is real. Even though I have only seen it in ancient drawings, this is my first time seeing the real thing... If Rushella decided based on this, it should be real beyond a doubt. Of course, the 'root' portion is fake but this is probably not a prank but a type of 'grafting' in gardening. Grafting a mandrake's flower onto a fake, in order to turn the 'root' into the real thing."

"How could something like that succeed....."

Hisui knew nothing about gardening, but his intuition told him it was impossible. If this kind of trick could mass produce the legendary poisonous plant, it would be too easy.

"Just as you say, this is impossible. And in actual fact, it failed. However, the problem is this, indeed there is someone doing this -- namely, the 'witch.' More importantly, since there is a real flower here, then most likely she must possess the real 'root' as well."

Eruru's words made Hisui frown.

The incident just now could be laughed off, but the whereabouts of the all important 'root' that even Rushella was wary off was unknown.

"I have many things I need to verify, but as I thought, there is still not enough information. Furthermore, I am not an expert in magic and have no resources on hand. What sort of place would have this kind of information, and would allow one to sit down and research quietly undisturbed..."

Eruru sighed helplessly. At this moment, Hisui lightly raised his hand.

"What is it?"

"I know a place like that nearby."

"Where?"

All eyes were focused on Hisui. He pointed to himself and said:

"My home."

## Chapter 4 - Spring Training Camp

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One night during a certain holiday in May, Hisui's home welcomed its first guests since Rushella moved in.

"...Thank you for your hospitality."

"Same here, thank you for your hospitality."

In stark contrast, Eruru entered expressionlessly as Mei followed cheerfully.

Their luggage were also completely different. Eruru simply carried a medium size travel bag that probably contained bare essentials while Mei lugged a massive trolley case, looking as if she were going to travel abroad.

"What is wrong with you, why do you have to bring so much luggage!? And why did you come along!?"

Rushella stood at the entryway to welcome the two girls. Greatly displeased, she pointed at Mei's large suitcase.

This was Hisui's earlier suggestion, to come to his house to research and organize their information about the "witch" -- but Rushella seemed dissatisfied for some reason, raging away very early in the morning.

"Oh my, need I remind you I am Eruru-chan's assistant? And letting a young man and woman spending time alone under one roof... What if something were to happen?"

"...In my view, being alone with you is when something might happen, it scares me so much..."

Standing firmly in Rushella's camp, Hisui retorted to express his own anxiety.

Eruru's style was direct and expedient, always relying on biting commentary or violence. On the other hand, Mei was disposed to sexual harassment that was impossible to defend against, which was the most troublesome in a certain sense.

"Don't be like that. After all, this is just one part of work, as well as a chance for me to survey my future living conditions."

"...I already know. Anyway, let's go in first."

Helplessly, Hisui let Mei and Eruru into the house.

Mei looked around the house with great interest, poking and touching things here and there.

"Hmm mmm... I see, the rooms are decorated quite tastefully, and very well cleaned too."

"Of course! This is my house after all!"

"What are you feeling proud of, it's probably all Hi-kun's work, right?"

Mei dismissed Rushella's proud declaration but the arrogant vampire remained unfazed.

"It is only natural for my servant to take care of my everyday life, right? The fruits of his labors are my accomplishments!"

"...Hmph. By the way, since all the housework is undertaken by Hi-kun, then he also does the laundry, right? Including hanging them out to dry and folding them?"

"Of course! These menial tasks are his job, naturally."

"...So you don't mind?"

"Mind what?"

Hearing Mei trying to imply something, Rushella asked with puzzlement.

Mei continued with a poker face and pointed out an outrageous fact.

"What about your underwear and the like -- so he dries and folds them too?"

A moment of silence.

Then -- Rushella's face went completely red as she rushed over and grabbed Hisui by his collar.

"You, y-y-you, to think you went that far.....!!!"

"Eh -- why are you talking about it after all this time!? I thought you didn't care!?"

"So annoying, shut up! You lowly servant, to think you took my u-u-underwear.....!"

"Oh my, who knows what he's been doing with them in secret. Say, have you counted them for any missing ones?"

As Mei sadistically added fuel to the fire, Rushella's face went even redder as she pummeled Hisui with her fists.

"It hurts, hey, stop it! Sudou, you stop saying these unnecessary things!"

"Oh my, it must be so stimulating for boys in puberty, right? So what's the situation actually?"

"...Folding that kind of stuff for her personally would be a bit much, so I simply put them in the box in her room. That's always been the case, right?"

Hisui explained as if trying to appease Rushella, prompting her to recall how things had been done.

"...Right, the underwear were always delivered together. I fold them myself..."

"See? Look how thoughtful I am. When washing them I also put your underwear in a separate washing bag....."

".....!!"

As soon as he spoke, Hisui's chin was struck by another of Rushella's punches.

Dazed by the impact, he protested.

"What the heck!?"

"So annoying, shut up!"

Rushella was on the verge of tears.

Mei nodded in agreement and even Eruru, who had been watching uninvolved, spoke up.

"Hi-kun is in the wrong here."

"You are really too insensitive."

"What kind of responses is this from you two!? My life is not easy, okay?! This is simply Rushella's underwear, this is simply Rushella's underwear, this is simply Rushella's underwear... Do you know how many times I have to silently say that to myself and the effort it took to avoid looking at them in order to stay calm? Think about my plight here!"

Hisui cried out emotionally but Mei continued with her trouble-making.

"Truly, you lead a life of suffering. Since you must have washed your foster parent's underwear as well, you should have gotten used to it to a certain extent?"

"...Well, compared to that person's black or red underwear, rich in vampire style and adult flavor, Rushella's pastel-colored ones are more of the cute variety..."

...Before he could finish, Hisui was struck by Rushella's special attack as she sobbed and wept.

Hisui painfully held his face, while Mei and Eruru sighed in exasperation as they watched from the side.

"...This is completely -- entirely Hi-kun's fault."

"Agreed. I have never seen anyone so insensitive."

".....No one will marry me anymore....."

Rushella wailed in a barely audible voice, covering her face with both hands. Only then did Hisui finally understand.

".....Sorry, it's my bad."

Despite Hisui relenting and apologizing, the girl trio's penetrating gazes remained. In order to avoid their scorching glares, Hisui decided to eliminate the issue at its root.

"...By the way, if you don't want me to see your underwear, then wash it yourself! It's not like you have a lot!"

"...Indeed. It might be more troublesome, but compared to letting this guy wash....."

Rushella brushed away her tears as she started agreeing with Hisui's suggestion. But Mei poured more fuel on the dying fires of rage.

"Isn't this actually quite a dilemma? I think you need to consider carefully first?"

"How so?"

Rushella asked, confused. Mei answered with an impish smile.

"Then it's your turn to wash Hi-kun's underwear."

Mei pointed to Hisui's crotch as she spoke.

Rushella's gaze followed her finger -- her cheeks getting hotter and hotter, she started punching Hisui like a sandbag again.

"You, you, y-y-you lowly servant -- ! What are you asking me to do!?"

"Nothing, I didn't ask you to do anything for me! Besides, this is no big deal!! Stop getting so worked up! How innocent are you, really!?"

"So annoying, shut up!!"

Rushella held Hisui against the floor as she continually pummeled him.

"...I knew it, cohabitation isn't really working out for you two, right? How about I switch with her?"

".....No."

"I'm different from this child, you know? Hi-kun, even if you put any underwear with strange sticky substances on them into the washing machine, I will diligently take them out and personally hand wash them for you."

"Give me a break, okay? Could you stop trampling the most sensitive spot in a boy's psyche!?"

"I haven't finished talking yet! You rude fellow!!"

...Then Hisui suffered yet another beating. Finally released, he was met with Eruru's gaze of derision.

"Stop wasting time with such a farce... Where is your foster parent's collection? I would like to get on with the tour, you know?"

"...What's the rush? Waiting a moment wouldn't hurt, right? It's dinner time anyway, so why don't we eat first?"

"I merely wish to get the task done and over with as quickly as possible."

"I understand how you feel, but if you mess up the meal schedule, Rushella's gonna throw another tantrum. Could you accompany us for dinner first, okay?"

"...Understood."

Eruru compromised reluctantly and took a seat at the dinner table with Mei.

On this rare occasion with so many people for dinner, the meal was Japanese hotpot.

Using chicken broth as the soup base, the hotpot's main course consisted of chicken meatballs. Neatly arranged green vegetables floated amidst the white and tender soup.

"Okay, please enjoy the meal."

Hisui spoke as he brought the pot to the table. For Rushella, this dinner was a first experience since her awakening -- the very first time for her to share a meal at the table as part of this group of four.

"...Somehow I get the feeling that this meal is more sumptuous than usual? Could it be that you're putting in special effort just because these two came?"

"It's not like I put in special effort. Although hotpot gives a suitable sense of luxury and filled stomachs, in actual fact, it's not difficult to prepare at all and quite an efficient way of cooking. It also makes full use of leftover vegetables. By the way, you girls should really eat your vegetables."

Ignoring Rushella's pouting, he began enjoying the meal with everyone else.

Hisui busied himself with replenishing ingredients and soup in the hotpot. In order to maintain the soup's sense of freshness, he used a filter to pick up froth and excess oil in the soup. Diligently, he added new chicken, meatballs as well as various vegetables.

"Hi-kun, you're really pro at this. I'd gladly take you as my bride right now♥"

"That's not something you say to guys."

"Oh my, but I'm really serious, you know? I could eat you up right here♥"

Saying that, Mei licked her luscious moistened lips.

Hisui knew very well she was not joking and silently averted his gaze. Perhaps just as Rushella had said, letting her into the house was not a wise decision.

"Hmm... Well, the taste is not bad. You really did put in extra effort today, right?"

Although Rushella was satisfied with the taste, she was still not in a particularly good mood, with clear displeasure on her face as she spoke.

"I already said I didn't. Like always, I took lazy shortcuts. Besides, hotpot as a choice in and of itself is already laziness in a way."

"Liar! Then how could it be so tasty!?"

"I'm not lying. If you had to say something was different, it's because of the act of having hotpot itself."

".....?"

"Or maybe because we have a whole group here for company."

"What does that have to do with taste?"

"That's what hotpot is like as a type of cooking."

Hisui took the plate Rushella extended and served her various foods in balanced proportions. Naturally, he also placed a fair amount of vegetables that Rushella had been avoiding.

"What are you doing! Don't give me whatever you chose randomly!"

"Like I said, eat more vegetables. And stop breaking up the silken tofu into little pieces. If you're unable to pick it up with your chopsticks, just use a strainer."

Hisui lectured as he added a fair amount of tofu to her plate.

"...Because it's very difficult..... It's all this tool's fault!"

Despite complaining verbally, Rushella continued to shove into her mouth the tofu that Hisui had served her.

Even Eruru, who had not said a single word, was working away at the food with her chopsticks nonstop. Apparently tonight's cooking was rather suited to her tastes.

"But you... Never made hotpot for me before. Why today?"

Rushella's question made Hisui's expression darken.

"...Eating hotpot with just two people, would be a bit much."

"What do you mean by that!? You have something against eating with me!?"

"Hotpot reminds me of memories I don't want to recall..."

Hisui stated indifferently and stood up.

"It's about time to round up the hotpot meal with some porridge."

Saying that, he entered the kitchen to get the ingredients.

Watching his back as he left, Rushella imagined the boy's life at the dinner table before he met her.

Probably -- it was not too different from his life nowadays together with her.

Two people -- having a meal facing each other.

With whom?

With family.

With a vampire.

But later on, he became alone.

And which type of cooking would bring out this heartbreaking sense of loneliness?

Definitely, cooking that required two or more participants to enjoy.

For example... Hotpot.

Even with a new member of the household, even with Rushella joining his dinner table -- was Hisui's loneliness still unable to be dispelled?

".....What a cowardly weakling."

Rushella grumbled with displeasure, sweeping the rest of the food in the hotpot onto her plate.

Then they finished the porridge and Hisui dutifully cleared the table and began washing the dishes and tableware.

Just as he was washing in the kitchen, Eruru suddenly came near him.

"Let me help. Accepting someone's hospitality without doing anything in return does not suit my style."

"Thanks... Although I'd like to thank you sincerely for your offer, what is up with that complaining expression on your face?"

"I have no complaints about your cooking. However, I wish to start on my true purpose for coming to this place."

"I got it. Let me finish the stuff on hand first."

"That is why I am helping. Get it done quickly."

As Eruru hastened verbally, she was also very efficient in action. In short time, all the tableware was washed and she was finally able to cut to the main purpose and begin her work.

"...Then let's go. To the basement."

Hisui led her through the living room.

And ended up being caught by Rushella, observant as ever.

"Where are you two going!?"

"Oh my, it's you two together again. Aren't you teaming up quite frequently lately?"

Mei also joined in, questioning Hisui as she rested her chin on her hands. Hisui could not be bothered to answer her.

"This is work, I repeat, work. I don't know how long she'll take, but I'm coming back immediately. You two should take a bath first."

"Got it. I'll be waiting on your bed, please hurry?"

"...Sleep on the living room sofa tonight, okay?"

Hisui grumbled in response to Mei's tempting seductions, then led Eruru to the basement.

As they descended the staircase, the lighting switched from light bulbs to old fashioned candle stands. With great interest, Eruru surveyed her surroundings.

"This style and atmosphere is pretty effective. I finally get a slight sense that I am visiting a vampire's castle."

"That's all in the past. This is now the home of a human, me."

"Is there not a vampire living here currently? Has she been down here?"

"Are there any vampires in this world who would willingly go to a place where there's a giant cross stuck in the ground? She was curious originally, but once I told her, she avoided this place."

"....."

Hisui's explanation made Eruru's expression awkward. After all, she was afraid of crosses too.

"Don't worry, I moved it somewhere else today."

"...Thank you."

"We're there."

Hisui stopped and pointed somewhere close ahead.

Illuminated by candlelight, one could see a library filled with innumerable bookshelves.

Scattered over the floor were books that could not fit in the filled shelves, clearly displaying their massive numbers and ancient history.

The library's collection of books was quite varied and in depth, with virtually all them in foreign languages, clearly exhibiting the former owner's vast knowledge.

"This is..."

"I guess it counts as the inheritance left behind by my foster parent. She really loved books and would sometimes shut herself down here to read. So, what you're looking for should be over there?"

Hisui walked over to a certain corner in the library and asked Eruru as he pointed to the vast book collection.

"Probably somewhere here... Books about witches."

Eruru carefully browsed the titles on the books' spines, searching for the keyword "witch." Even given her foreign language abilities, she could only read half of them, but she soon found a book related to witches.

"A vampire collecting books on witches...? What purpose did she have?"

"In my view, purely out of interest? Besides, she experienced "witch hunts" personally herself. She mentioned that she was almost mistaken for a witch once."

"I have heard of traditions which regard vampires and witches as the same, could it be possible it stems from your foster parent?"

"This vexes me but I have no way of refuting that possibility... Well, just research as much as you want. If necessary, you can even borrow and take them away."

"Then I shall respectfully accept your offer."

Eruru sat down on the ground and began to browse through a book she casually grabbed.

This was going to be a rather arduous task, but there was no hesitation in her eyes.

"...Don't overwork yourself, okay?"

"I do not need you to worry over me."

Hearing Eruru's cold response, Hisui forced a smile and left the basement.

While Hisui went underground, Rushella went to take a bath -- Mei took this opportunity to go to the second floor.

She had no interest in Eruru's work in the first place.

Of course when her help was needed, she was still going to fulfill her duties in deference to her salary -- but the whole reason she came to Hisui's house today was purely personal business.

That's right -- everything was for her childbearing plan.

"At his house on a holiday -- this inevitable day has finally arrived....."

Mei smiled malevolently and began to explore the second floor.

She had already confirmed this floor was the location of Hisui's bedroom.

As the main battlefield where her ecstatic baby making battle will take place, it was quite necessary to ascertain the physical location beforehand.

"Hmm..... Could it be this one?"

Mei opened the first sliding door. The handle's style was rather luxurious and old fashioned. Entering the room, the sight was even more astonishing.

"Wow....."

It rivaled the palaces where royalty and nobility resided.

An extra large canopy bed. Priceless antiques and art work were everywhere. The bed was covered with a beautiful red velvet blanket which looked extremely soft. From the wallpaper down to the smallest articles, everything was chosen carefully in aesthetics.

The room was large enough to take up most of the second floor, but no matter how you looked at it, it did not seem to be Hisui's room.

Rather, all the designs in view were quite feminine.

However, the place lacked mirrors and a dressing table, essential elements of a girl's room, giving one a very unnatural feeling. But as soon as she saw the jet black coffin placed beside the bed, Mei instantly understood.

"This is..."

Definitely a vampire's room.

Which was why there were no mirrors. Because mirrors would not show the reflection of the master, they were meaningless.

A vampire's characteristic -- no reflection in the mirror. Also, there was the fear of sunlight. Hence the room's curtains were made of thick fabric for blocking light.

"A wrong guess eh?"

Mei prepared to leave in disappointment but unfortunately ran into Rushella just as she was returning to her room after her bath. Naturally, she was wearing just a shirt as per her usual casual attire.

"What are you doing in my room!?"

"Nothing. But your room surely costs a fortune. Could Hi-kun's finances be quite stretched?"

"This room was originally like this! Thanks to that, I am currently very satisfied."

Clearly pleased with the room, Rushella crossed her arms as she nodded.

On the other hand, Mei looked up at the ceiling with a serious expression.

"What is it, is there a problem?"

"If that is what you say... Then Hi-kun has always kept the room in its original condition? Even after that vampire died."

".....!"

Hearing that, Rushella was shocked and rooted to the spot.

Indeed... That was true.

Thinking back, all the furniture was free of dust and the room was very clean when she moved in here.

All this time, Hisui must have been -- cleaning regularly.

"This looks bad....."

"What do you mean by that.....?"

"Have you heard of Hikaru Genji?"<sup>[3]</sup>

"I learned about him in class. It's that guy who tried to pursue his stepmother in addition to various women at the same time. He even went as far as to kidnap a young girl to raise according to his preferences, that really despicable man, right!?"

"...Well, yes, even though parts of the content is undeniable... Nevertheless it is still a world-famous classic of Japanese literature. Furthermore, doesn't this tale contain a hidden truth that is applicable now?"

"What do you mean?"

"What I mean is, men are unable to free themselves from the shadow of their mother. Shouldn't you understand that better than me?"

Mei stared at Rushella as if she has discerned something.

Rushella simply turned her face away and grumbled impatiently.

"...Don't know."

"...Really? Even if Hisui-kun is uninterested in you as a Lady Fujitsubo, what about the other one? Perhaps he is planning on nurturing his own Murasaki, who knows?"<sup>[4]</sup>

"What on earth are you trying to say...?"

"Would a vampire raise a human child for no reason at all? What would you have done if you were in her place?"

"....."

"Normally, this situation is impossible. However, for an immortal vampire with eternal youth, waiting for a decade or two is nothing, right? Perhaps -- she was simply waiting."

"Waiting for what?"

Rushella asked softly. She did not want to ask, but she had to know -- such were the emotions carried in her voice.

"Waiting for Hi-kun to be raised into a man of her liking. Then suck his blood and easily convert him into a fellow member of her race. Furthermore, Hi-kun most likely cannot be unaware of her intentions... But even after realizing it, he still stayed with her, so that means, Hi-kun also..."

Saying that, Mei glanced sideways suggestively at Rushella.

Rushella simply stood there with her fists clenched tight.

Mei did not provoke her any further and turned back to her original goal.

"Since this is your room... Could Hi-kun's room be over there!?"

"Ah, wait a minute, you...!"

Before Rushella could stop her, Mei intruded into Hisui's room.

This was a very ordinary western style bedroom. Its area was also standard for a high school student, with nothing special about it.

A desk and a steel bookcase. Manga and CDs scattered on the floor along with clothes. No matter how you looked at it, this was a very ordinary high school student's room.

"Hmm... Nothing out of ordinary at a cursory glance."

"I am asking you, what are you thinking!? Why have you come to that guy's room!?"

"Just scouting. In order for baby making to be successful, I need to get a complete grasp of his preferences. Isn't this common sense?"

"I-I don't know!"

The term "baby making" clearly made Rushella's face blush.

Mei went "hmpf," threw Rushella a glance and continued exploring the room.

"I really have to reach a deeper understanding of Hi-kun... I must look here!"

Mei dived beneath the bed as if performing a baserunner's slide.

Rushella followed.

"Hey, why are you following me!?"

"Shut up, this is my freedom! Be quick with it, what have you found here?"

"Oh come on, you didn't know? When it comes to under the bed, this is a man's private space... Sexual dispositions and that sort of stuff will be completely revealed! Well, in short, this is a treasure trove of the worst kind of publications."

"What do you mean by 'wurst kind of publications'!?"

"...You really want me to explain right here?"

"You're talking about that, those whatever 'dourinshi,' very thin booklets, right?"

"You're only half right. After all, they can be targeted towards all age groups, you should stop with that strange sense of prejudice. Anyway, this is off topic, let's hurry and check out Hi-kun's tastes...!"

Mei reached out towards the depths of the dark underbed.

Perhaps driven by a sense of defiant opposition, Rushella joined into the fray.

"What are you doing, searching around as well!?"

"Shut up, understanding the servant is my duty!"

Under the bed, their skirmish reached a stalemate.

These frail-looking girls wrestled together, fighting over the treasure known as the worst kind of publications.

Nevertheless, their efforts ended fruitlessly.

More accurately, nothing was hidden beneath Hisui's bed.

"...Nothing here? Or it's hidden in a more intricate location!?"

"Hmph, that's all a person of your level can do after all! I, on the other hand, was able to find something, see?"

Rushella smiled victoriously and crawled out from under the bed, holding her spoils up in the air.

"What is that?"

Rushella's hand held neither the worst kind of publication nor one of those thin booklets -- instead, it was a bottle that could fit in one's palm. The bottle was sealed with a quaint-looking cork and the contents were rather ordinary looking -- ash.

"So, what could this be?"

"I'm the one who asked first, don't you go asking me back!"

"But even if you say that..."

The two beauties began to ponder together.

At this very moment, the master of the room stood at the door, completely astonished.

Having finished his task as Eruru's guide, he had left the basement to return to his room.

"...What are you two doing in other people's room?"

" " ..... " "

The two girls hung their heads in shame.

What have they done, after all?

The awkward atmosphere hanging over the trio persisted for a moment, until Hisui noticed the bottle in Rushella's hand and broke the silence.

"Give that back..."

Hisui walked over to Rushella, trying to take back the bottle.

In the face of Hisui's forceful demeanor, even Rushella obeyed quietly without resistance.

Hisui ignored the shocked vampire and simply placed the bottle into his pocket.

"Don't hang around in a room that's not yours. If you don't have any other business, then hurry and get out."

Hisui declared gruffly. In response, Rushella resumed her usual airs and objected.

"How dare you speak in such a manner!? Also, what on earth was that!?"

"Ah, perhaps it's sand from a beach they visited together in the past?"

Mei tried to calm the situation and suggested half-jokingly.

However, Hisui refuted with an icy-cold expression.

"...This counts as ashes of the dead, I suppose? Using a human term."

This statement made Rushella and Mei look at each other awkwardly.

They both knew his past. More accurately, they knew roughly what happened, because Hisui himself seldom talked about his experiences.

But they both knew that the vampire who raised Hisui was already destroyed.

As for a vampire's demise, both understood very well.

It was complete and utter destruction.

A body once blessed with eternal vigor, transformed into dust, scattered to oblivion, finally leaving nothing behind.

"I was only able to gather... This much."

Yes.

In the end, all that was left in the palm of his hand, was this much.

In that moment, the merciless wind had robbed him of her remains, taking them to oblivion.

"How utterly inane."

These merciless words made Hisui's entire body shudder. Mei too, turned to face Rushella with a shocked expression.

"For someone already destroyed, what meaning is there in her remains? You... How much longer are you going to let yourself be fettered like this?"

"...Nothing like that. This simply counts as familial attachment or should I say, a ritual... Nothing more."

"My room... You've always kept it in the same condition as when that woman was alive, right? You must have been cleaning it all this time. You're utterly worthless, you know?"

Rushella continued to scold.

Mei motioned with her eyes to tell Rushella to stop, but she was completely oblivious.

"Those furniture and that bed... I'm going to throw them all out and buy new ones. Why do I have to use second hand goods from someone else!?"

Rushella continued with her arrogant rhetoric.

But her gaze towards Hisui carried pity in her eyes.

Having turned around, Hisui did not notice her gaze and simply answered indifferently.

"Do with them as you wish."

".....!?"

"If you want to change them, then go ahead and buy new ones. To be honest, I'm getting tired of them too."

"....."

"But you'll have to pay for them yourself. Also, you have to handle getting rid of the old furniture. Ah, why don't you simply sell them to recover part of the cost, it should save quite a bit."

Then there was heavy silence.

Without saying anything, Mei's gaze began to wander.

Finally, Rushella spoke up.

"Are you joking? If money is squandered recklessly, there's no way to survive in the human world."

"Really....."

Hisui said indifferently and left the room.

The two girls did not follow.

Hisui returned to the empty living room and sat on the sofa, watching television for a while. Then he took out the bottle from his pocket.

Eruru mentioned before that he was carrying two articles when he returned from abroad -- this was the second piece.

Treasuring it by his side at all times, recollecting sad memories from time to time -- was not something that he did.

Hisui simply collected the ash, poured it into a bottle, took it home, and kept it under the bed -- simply that.

Perhaps he would never have looked at it again.

Just as Rushella said, he was utterly worthless.

Clearly this was only ash rather than Miraluka herself.

Hisui dispelled his melancholy and stood up.

Agonizing over the past was not going to change anything. Hence, Hisui decided to take a bath first, wash his hair, and refresh himself. He was also a little concerned about Eruru who was still downstairs.

Hisui walked to the bathroom and took off his clothes in front of the door.

Rushella and Mei were probably still on the second floor. He could not hear anything from them.

Eruru was working hard in the basement.

Encountering someone just as he was taking off his clothes -- should not happen.

The bathroom's sliding door was open and the lights were off. Calling out, he confirmed there was no one inside.

Everything was OK -- in theory.

Up until the point when he sat down on the bathing stool, there were no problems.

But as soon as he sat down, he heard a sound from behind and something jumped down from the ceiling.

"...Huh?"

Hisui was going to turn around to check out what happened, but the soft sensation of something pressing on his back made him froze.

Then a supple arm extended forward from behind, embracing him by the waist.

Additionally -- sweet breath was blowing by his ear.

"Excuse me~~ Sudou-san?"

"Oh my, you realized it was me just from the feeling of my embrace?"

"Only you would do such a thing! Where did you pop out from...!?"

"I was pressed against the corner of the ceiling all along. Using only static friction and muscle power, I kept myself against the wall, so tiring♥"

"What is with that terrifying power and persistence of yours!? Surely you must be using your artificial strength in all the wrong places!?"

In the past, Frankenstein's creature, born in a cold and sterile laboratory, out of hatred, had charged into his creator's life with ferocity that would put modern stalkers to shame -- now in different time and place, the creatures' persistence seemed to have been redirected towards procreation instead.

Here in this bathroom, both of them were completely naked.

"I've been waiting, waiting for this very moment when Hi-kun would take your clothes off yourself...! Finally, accept your fate!!"

"This must have been your goal from the beginning... Could it be possible, the witch was by my side all along!?"

"Hi-kun is so silly... All women are witches, you know?"

Saying that, Mei pressed her body even tighter against him.

Hisui could feel those exceedingly bouncy and heavy fruit against his back.

Mobilizing all the nerves in his body to cut off the sensations from his back, he banished that devilish warmth from his mind.

It is empty.

There is nothing on his back.

Hence, there was nothing pressing against him.

"Ah, stop it, Hi-kun, stop moving..... You're rubbing against the tips, can you feel that....."

"What are you talking about, Sudou-san... I can't feel anything, you know? It must be my imagination, but I seem to be feeling a little bit of softness and warmth on my back, that must be something like meat buns, right? There seems to be something slightly hard on the tips, it must be that, the peas on the top of shumai, right? Definitely, it can't be that thing that babies suck on, right!?"

"...Well aren't you fully aware. Hey, ignoring me like this..... That's so unfair."

Mei's hand of the devil reached between Hisui's legs. With his entire body bare except for the towel covering that location, Hisui barely managed to maintain his last line of defense.

Mei's beautifully slender and pale hand was caressing Hisui's hand which desperately kept the towel in position.

"Seriously... You're desperately holding back. Hi-kun, let your blood fill up this location... And turn into your Anti-Drac mode, how's that.....?"

"Stop using my body's constitution to make dirty jokes..... This little guy here is just as shy as his master, me! Faced with such a sudden situation, he doesn't know how to react!"

With Mei's other arm firmly wrapped around his waist, Hisui could not escape even if he tried. An artificial human's arm strength was completely different from what that devilish supple skin would suggest. Were he to offer the slightest resistance, very likely, he would instantly lose two or three ribs.

"Hey... It's about time you give up on resisting, right?"

"Stop it... Don't blow in my ear! Ah, ahhh, s-stop it..... Don't bite my earlobe..."

Already holding his earlobe in her mouth, she went on to bite lightly.

Mei's lips and tongue deftly played with his earlobe, gradually exiling Hisui's consciousness.

"I've said this before, I am the blowup doll equipped with forty-eight different modes of pleasure..... Faced with my devilish light biting, your consciousness will fly away to the ends of the sky soon."

"I've said this too, that statement you just made is an insult to your artificial human ancestors....."

Hisui's voice of protest was already extremely weak.

Feeling victory was at hand, Mei began to take more intense action.

Slipping the soap through her cleavage, she generated a large amount of soap suds.

Then she used her breasts, covered with soapy bubbles, to rub against Hisui's back.

"As I thought, bathroom play has to be done like this♥ These superb skills of mine, far surpassing those of soapland massage ladies, enjoy them well♥"

".....--!!"

This was probably another one of her forty-eight modes of pleasure. Indeed, it felt extremely nice. Unbearably pleasurable.

While soap suds and breasts were performing a symphony of ecstasy, two protrusions rubbed against him from time to time, playing a low note, feeling like flashes of lightning that streaked across Hisui's back.

No good.

No good, no good, no good, no good, no good, no good, no good, no good, no good, extra super no good!

Using the last of his sanity, Hisui reached out towards the sink. Turning the tap to its fullest, he filled it.

Then he splashed all the water towards Mei's face behind him.

"Ah, so cold!"



Surprised by the sudden attack, Mei finally let go of Hisui.

Taking advantage of the opening, Hisui slid the bathroom door open and attempted to escape.

However, Mei hugged his waist from behind, dragging Hisui along the ground. Only his upper torso made it out the door, but there was no escape.

"Wait up, Hi-kun... Are you trying to disgrace a girl!?"

"Why don't you consider my shame first! Hey, someone, hurry and save me~~!!"

Hisui abandoned his pride and cried for help directly. To his surprise, his reinforcements ended up arriving quite quickly.

Then Hisui immediately regretted his rash decision.

"What!? Did the witch chase us to your home!?"

"What happened!? I was just coming up for a brief break, and now there is a situation!?"

Rushella and Eruru opened the door to the changing area and rushed inside.

The heroic saviors arriving in haste were frozen by the sight of naked Hisui sprawled over the the floor at the bathroom entrance.

Fortunately, his lower torso was still inside the bathroom, so they did not see everything -- but the two girls immediately realized it was Mei inside tugging Hisui.

"Ah, excuse me, my two heroes, allow me to explain....."

"Hi-kun asked me to help wash his back, that is why I....."

Mei suddenly acted rather docile and awkwardly twiddled her fingers.

Hisui instantly went pale as he listened.

"I already said I was embarrassed, but he insisted.....!"

"Eh----!? What a liar! As if anyone would believe you....."

They believed.

Without changing expressions, Rushella took out her favorite short sword and entered a stance. Eruru took out her anti-vampire sacred gun, "Argentum," and undid the safety.

"Hey, wait a sec, isn't this too strange!? It's my virginity that's at risk here! Can't you two understand, this kind of situation!? Hey, why aren't you talking!? Why are you so expressionless!? Calm down, stop, don't, stop now ---- !!"

Before the bathwater had cooled, Mei already left the scene alone.

After that, in the bath tub that was large enough to hold two or three people, floated the body of a boy who resembled a drowned corpse. It was Hisui, completely beaten up with his face entirely bruised.

The blood from his wounds dyed the bathwater red, highlighting the tragic ending.

Kujou Hisui, in accordance to his name, <sup>[5]</sup> was submerged in water dyed scarlet by the bathwater additive known as fresh blood.

Late at night.

Rushella and Mei having gone to bed, Eruru continued to read alone in the basement.

Thanks to her half heritage of vampire blood, there was no exhaustion showing on her face. Using illumination from old fashioned candlelight, she perused ancient books without pause.

Having lost count of the number of books she had already read, Eruru closed another one and placed it on the floor.

Hearing footsteps approaching, clear displeasure appeared on her face.

"What business do you have, Kujou-san who not only tricks girls to enter his house, but even commands them to enter the bathroom?"

"What is with that tone of voice? Perhaps just as Rushella said, I shouldn't have brought you two to my home. I'm still hurting all over from those wounds."

Almost turned unfairly into a drowned ghost, Hisui grumbled as he exercised his shoulder.

He almost expected himself to die.

"It is already late, how about you go to sleep? Go and share Sudou-san's bed."

"Who do you think I am... Are you trying to send little Red Riding Hood to the hungry wolf's nest?"

"Then it would be best if you were eaten by a wolf. Fine, why are you here?"

"Only to see how you're doing here. Also, this is for you."

Hisui put forward a tray with a plate and a coffee cup. The plate was holding a seaweed sandwich while the coffee cup contained hot milk with sugar added.

"This is your midnight snack. Don't stay up too late, okay?"

"Just like the one who lives in your house, I am more energetic at night. But anyway... Thanks."

Eruru took the tray and returned to the books.

But since Hisui had prepared her a snack which could be eaten while she worked, Eruru held the sandwich in one hand in response to his unspoken offer of care.

"So -- any results so far?"

"...Nothing much at this point. Even though the resources here are great, ultimately most accounts of witches are written by third party researchers. Considering Europe's literacy rate at the time these were written, as well as the secretive ways of witches, this cannot be helped..."

"I see....."

His hopes dashed, Hisui slumped his shoulders in disappointment.

As expected, the power of witches were passed from mother to daughter, from master to disciple. Secret rituals which were never divulged to outsiders.

"However, there are many interesting records here. For example, the countering of the "mystic eyes" as part of anti-vampire strategies. Apparently, this simply summarizes the findings through repeated trials

and failures. For example, one could set up a barrier to hide behind and avoid the effects. However, the spellcaster is rendered immobile, hence it lacks practicality. However, even if one wore a talisman, there would not be much use. In order to counter the "mystic eyes," a more direct method of resistance is required -- that is what this says."

"Not yet succeeded? But these records were written centuries ago, perhaps it could have been realized already by now? What about the others?"

"Other information worthy of reference include various records on the drugs and potions concocted by witches. Although the effects of these drugs vary greatly, making them odorless and tasteless seems to be impossible. Even if mixed into food or drink, much work needs to be done in regards to the taste, otherwise the target would notice instantly. If the drug's originates from a herb, then the other ingredients must match. Ideally, those whose taste would not be ruined by the herb's essential oils."

"I see. So if you want someone to eat a witch's poisoned apple, make it into an apple pie... Something like that?"

"Basically. A drug's effectiveness is inversely proportional to its concentration. If it is not a particularly powerful drug, there is no need to spend too much effort on the cooking."

"But if it's added to plain water, then all sorts of covering up must be done. However, how do 'witches' do it....."

Hisui sat on the floor and began to ponder. Eruru took out one of those plastic bags for police evidence and showed it to him.

Hisui could recognize the object inside the bag.

That was the paper bag he had found in the trash at the home economics preparation room.

"Before coming to your house, this was already analyzed."

"Hmm. So what's the result, found anything?"

"...In actual fact, you already understood what this was from the start, right? You knew what it was and what it is used for."

Eruru stared at Hisui as she asked.

Seeing her determined eyes which say "Do not dare fool me," Hisui had no choice but to speak seriously.

"Most likely... Seasoning herbs?"

Seasoning herbs -- in short, a mixture of various herbs for cooking.

Used for eliminating unpleasant odors from fish and meat, to make dishes more savory, they were often used in Europe and could be considered a type of spice.

Combinations of herbs varied from dish to dish. The required herbs were tied up with a string, placed in soup to boil together with the meat.

These were sold at the market, and one could find many simple seasoning herbs at the supermarket sealed in paper bags.

"After all, my foster parent came from Europe, so I've seen her used them in her usual cooking. Last time, the cooking practical was making thick soup, so using seasoning herbs should be perfectly reasonable, right?"

"At least my group did not use them. Probably none of the other groups as well... What about yours? Since you tried it, you should know, right?"

"....."

That's right -- the taste of the thick soup then, was still vivid in his memory.

For the level of a school cooking practical, it was too amazing.

Recalling it now, much effort must have been put into the seasoning. There had seemed to be a faint taste of herbs. In any case, the thing in Eruru's hand was definitely used by Hisui's group.

"Even if it were used... So what? You can buy it at the market, and there's no problem there. Boiling it in the soup, then throwing it out afterwards. Perfectly natural, right?"

"Then who was the one who used it? Excluding the great Rushella Dahm Draculea who did not participate seriously in cooking, was it you? Or Sudou-san?"

Eruru's acute interrogation caused Hisui to start doubting.

Naturally, he knew who used it.

He knew who was responsible for the pot and who's duties included the overall seasoning.

All were performed by Sera Reina.

"...It's the Class Rep who used it. So what? She was only trying to make the cooking tastier, and added an additional step, right?"

"According to the results of the analysis, other than ordinary herbs, mandrake 'leaves' were also detected."

".....!?"

Hisui stared wide in surprise.

Why!?

Why would Reina have that kind of poisonous flower...!?

"What on earth is going on...?"

"I do not know. Only that, according to legend, the mandrake's 'leaves' have no medicinal properties. And in actual fact, neither you nor Sudou-san were affected at all. In the first place, this should not affect vampires--"

Regarding this point, Eruru seemed to lack a hypothesis for now. Puzzled, she shook her head.

However, the confirmed truth lay before their eyes.

"But, how could the mandrake's 'leaves' be obtained... Hey, could it be that thing from yesterday?"

"Apparently. After that, I took the flower you uprooted and found evidence of several leaves having been pulled out. Having no use for the flower, someone grafted it as an experiment in the flowerbed -- probably that was what happened? But then again, if medicinal properties were her goal, she should at least have taken the 'flower' back as well..."

As Eruru made her deductions, Hisui could not dispel the doubt in his mind.

Why would Reina...?

Not too long ago, she had been turned into a vampire's sacrifice. She should be an innocent and pure girl.

Reportedly, both her parents were devout Christians and she herself came from a Catholic school.

The quiet and gentle girl who should be the furthest possible from "witches," why would she?

"I understand your refusal to accept the truth, but this is solid fact. I have tested many things, but at the very least, she was the one who added mandrake leaves into the cooking -- this is unmistakable."

"...And so? Are you saying the class rep is the witch? Anyway, what about the herbal tea and scented candles you collected from the vice-president?"

"Of course they were analyzed. In terms of components, nothing unusual. I also brewed the herbal tea and drank it, the taste is quite good, very normal. I am also testing the scented candles right now -- apparently there is no problem."

Saying that, Eruru pointed to the candle stand on the wall.

Now that she mentioned it, Hisui did notice a faint fragrance in the air.

"...Hey, don't be so reckless. What would you do if there were a problem? Have you heard of that Sherlock Holmes short story called 'The Adventure of the Devil's Foot'? In order to test a poison, Holmes really suffered greatly."

"It was already analyzed beforehand. Besides, there is no problem with me drinking the stuff. Whether poisons targeting humans or vampires -- neither are effective against a halfbreed like me."

"Don't put it that way."

Hisui's words caused a shred of gloom to flash across Eruru's face.

The cursed blood coursing through her veins was what she hated most of all.

"...After all, it is the truth. It cannot be denied."

"....."

"After investigating, apparently the vice-president is essentially the only student who frequents the home economics preparation room. But the stuff she brought was fine. The only one left we should investigate is Horie-sensei who was supervising the cooking."

"Our group included, she was checking up on everyone's cooking process, and tried a little bit from each in the name of taste testing. Perhaps she could have done something then."

More importantly, she used to be a member of that Occult Research Club.

The name written on the back page was deeply engraved in Hisui and Eruru's memories.

"Regarding her case, investigations will take place after the holidays. In any case, checking out these resources is the first priority right now."

"Got it. So... Is there any way I can help?"

Hisui expected her to reply "No" or "Please leave and stop getting in my way" but Eruru did not refuse his assistance. Instead, she handed the emptied coffee cup over.

"...Another cup, please."

"Yes~"

Hisui smiled in return, taking the cup and leaving the basement.

## Chapter 5 - This Blood of Mine

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Early morning.

Just when everyone else was asleep, a certain girl got up by herself.

With light movements, not making a single sound, she went through the corridor and up the stairs -- towards Hisui's room.

She had only one goal -- baby making.

Sudou Mei was back with a vengeance!

Learning from her mistakes in the bathroom, she was determined to have her way with him this time.

"Hmph, this time I will seduce Hi-kun out of his mind with this victory outfit for sure♥"

Dressed in an appealing pastel colored nightgown, Mei smiled seductively.

In addition to an erotic design which made use of minimal fabric, the sheerness of her lingerie offered fleeting glimpses of what lay beneath.

Sleeping under the same roof on this day, it was a perfect opportunity to realize her long-cherished wish.

Quietly, quietly, she approached Hisui's room and gripped the door handle.

The door was not locked.

Naturally, even if it were locked, an artificial human's arm strength could easily destroy it. But since it would be best not to make unnecessary noise, how fortunate.

Mei tiptoed and slowly pushed open the door to enter the bedroom.

In order not to alarm her target, she did not switch on the lights, instead relying on the naked eye to check out the situation in the room. Although not to a vampire's level, her night vision was still far superior to ordinary humans.

Activating her excellent vision, the artificial human swept her gaze towards the bed -- the bulging blanket.

The target was sleeping on the bed.

Mei cautiously approached the bed side -- and flung away the blanket all at once!

"Hi~kun♥"

The ravenous wolf pounced and pressed herself against Hisui.

Perhaps too deep in sleep, the defenseless lamb did not wake up.

In that case, he will be conquered in his sleep!

Extending her left hand towards the chest while her right hand -- gradually slid its way towards the region between the legs.

This was currently the time of the day when young males were unable to control the lower half of their body.

No matter how hard they tried to suppress, surely there will be a reaction!

Surely there will be a reaction! ...But in actual fact, the feeling from Mei's right hand was not a scorching rod towering towards the heavens but a soft patch of grassland.

As for the left hand which was expecting the touch of a spectacularly white chest -- it found a massive bulging mountain instead. This seemingly familiar sensation of softness and elasticity was a far cry from a muscular chest.

"Eh?"

Something was not right.

Mei applied pressure to her left hand to confirm the situation. She also poked with her right hand just for good measure.

"Ah... Nnn..."

A seductive moan -- or rather, breathing noises from sleep would be more accurate.

This too was a familiar voice.

--It can't be.

Mei focused her gaze to confirm the body lying beneath her. The outline of the one lying in the bed gradually entered the artificial human's view.

A slender figure with a massive voluptuous bust.

As well as long slender legs of great beauty.

Together with bright red lips that surpassed the redness of blood and high-class elegant beauty, the sight was impossible to forget.

Finally, the otherworldly body was clad in a thin shirt.

"Why--!?"

The one sleeping in the bed was Rushella.

Molested at Mei's hands just now, the sleeping beauty woke up.

Slowly, she opened her eyes.

Having just woken up, her gaze was wandering unsteadily.

Just as Rushella slowly realized who was lying on top of her and where this person's hands were touching -- She screamed.

"Yah----!!!"

"Hey, keep it down! It's early morning, be quiet!!!"

"Y-You, what on earth are you doing!? Could it be, you want to... me!?"

Rushella pushed Mei away and curled herself into a ball.

This reaction was only natural.



"...Of course not! I came to give Hi-kun a night assault! But why are you sleeping here?!"

"I woke up too early today so I came over intending to get a drink of blood. But that guy isn't in the room! While tossing and turning on the bed, waiting for him to return, I..."

"...You fell asleep yourself. When the lover is absent, you revel in the warmth lingering in his bed... Hey, how much do you really like Hi-kun!?"

"Shut up, that guy is my servant. Liking him is only natural! You are not allowed to prey upon him!"

"Why must I listen to your orders!? Also, where's Hi-kun!?"

"How would I know!?"

The verbal battle between the vampire and Frankenstein's creature began at dawn.

The drums of war were beating in Hisui's room to signal an all-star showdown with great Hollywood potential.

"Besides, what is with the shameless way you are dressed!? Exposing your underwear for others to see, totally shameless!"

"Yeah right, like I'd want to hear that from the girl doing the naked shirt look! You must be doing it on purpose!?"

"I wear this because it's comfortable! You're wearing that because you intend to do something to that guy.....? Or to me as well..."

Halfway through, Rushella finally realized what was being done to her.

First her breasts had been fondled, then her most important private part was--

"Bitch--!!"

Blushing, she picked up Hisui's pillow and smashed it against Mei's face.

Struck squarely, Mei threw it back angrily.

"You really want a fight..... You lustful vampire!"

"Shut up, lecherous Frankenstein!"

As their dispute escalated, killing intent filled the room.

The battle for domination between the strongest supernatural creatures was finally about to erupt.

The aftershock of the impact shook the entire room, or rather, the entire house shook.

".....Hmm?"

The shaking of the ceiling caused Hisui to wake up.

Since the source of the shaking came from above, it was probably not an earthquake, so what the heck was happening upstairs?

Rubbing his sleepy eyes, he noticed several blankets draped over himself.

Hisui had apparently fallen asleep while he was helping Eruru look up information. The blankets covering him must be her doing.

Eruru was also sleeping on the side.

Using the scattered books on the floor as a pillow, she breathed peacefully.

Her pure and innocent appearance did not seem like it belonged to someone of Hisui's age. None of her usual cold attitude could be seen from her face right now.

Lying on the ground, the maiden was neither the important official from the Metropolitan Police Department nor the one shouldering a cursed fate, but an ordinary girl one could find anywhere.

"...Don't force yourself too much."

Hisui gently covered Eruru with a blanket.

Then he started clearing away the surrounding books.

Just at this moment, frantic footsteps could be heard coming down the stairs.

"Ah, you're here!"

Rushella had arrived. Something must have happened for her shirt had been pulled into a mess and she was panting as if exhausted.

"...What happened? By the way, stop making my shirts dirty..."

"Shut up! It's all your fault, because you were not in your room, I.....!!!"

Rushella hugged herself, speaking with tearful eyes.

Hisui had no idea what was going on, but it seemed like something serious happened.

Just as Hisui tried to make sense of the situation, another visitor came down to the basement.

"So that's where you went, vampire!? We haven't decided a victor yet!"

...Her face looking similarly exhausted, Mei made her appearance in a sexy nightgown, all covered in sweat.

"Eh, what the heck is going on?"

Hisui tried his best to avoid gazing at Mei as he asked. Pouting tearfully, Rushella made accusations.

"This woman was making moves on me while I was asleep...!"

"Eh, you're interested in that too!?"

"Of course not! Lesbians belong to the domain of female vampires, okay!? Besides, why aren't you in your own room, Hi-kun!? You made my plans all go to waste!"<sup>[6]</sup>

"That's right, you should be obediently sleeping in your room!!"

"Why are you two in firm agreement over this kind of thing even when you're quarreling?"

Hisui could not help but retort. At his moment, Eruru also woke up, rubbing her eyes.

"...What is going on....."

"Don't bother. Just keep sleeping. Ah, but sleeping here is uncomfortable and you're going to catch a cold. Let's go up."

Hisui suggested helpfully.

Still in a sleepy daze, Eruru nodded and agreed.

"Hmph, you're sure being treated well here."

Rushella mocked unhappily and started looking around the basement.

"Hey... Isn't this a wine cellar!? You never allowed me to come here before, could that be the reason?"

"To be frank, yes, that was a contributing factor. Ah, hey, stop messing with things carelessly!"

Rushella ignored him and invaded the wine cellar in the corner of the basement.

"Hmph... What a classy collection. Primarily red wine, excellent taste, I say!"

Alcoholic drinks had to be red wine -- perhaps stemming from a vampire's instincts, even without her past memories, Rushella still insisted on red wine.

Although the wine cellar was quite small, the temperature and humidity were definitely controlled meticulously. With no lack of well-aged highly prized vintages, this was a very well-stocked private collection indeed.

"Yes, this bottle looks great!"

Seeing one particular bottle of wine that stood out and seemed to be particularly treasured and safeguarded, Rushella plucked it out and left the wine cellar.

"What the heck are you doing?! Ah, that one is.....!"

As Rushella exited the wine cellar, Hisui noticed the bottle of red wine in her hand.

"Give it back."

A stern expression on his face, Hisui reached out and grabbed the bottle.

"What's the matter? There's so many there, I'm just taking one!"

"This is no drink for a child."

"I am a vampire, you know? How old do you think I am!?"

"No idea, but your mental age is just a brat's. Even if you won't die from acute alcohol poisoning, you will get drunk. Hurry and give it back."

"Shut up!"

Both refusing to back down, they began a battle for the bottle.

Before a victor could be decided, the struggle ended unexpectedly. Slipping out of Rushella's hand, the bottle flew through the air.

"Ah.....!"

Before she could catch it, the bottle struck the floor with crisp sound and shattered.

The dark violet liquid splashed across the floorboards, releasing a rich aroma.

Someone with poor alcohol tolerance would probably get tipsy from the mere smell. That was how concentrated and fantastic the wine's fragrance.

A connoisseur of red wine would be able to tell this was definitely a priceless vintage simply from the smell.

Hisui stood rooted to the spot in shock, staring at the wine's demise.

The gloom on his face made Rushella and all the girls fall silent.

Finally, Rushella averted her gaze and broke the silence.

"I-It's your own fault, okay.....! Don't blame me, you were the one trying to take it by force..."

Her quiet denial carried an apologetic tone.

"Fine, whatever."

Hisui approached the bottle's remains and dipped a finger into the residual wine at the bottom of the bottle. Then he tasted it lightly.

"...So that's what it tastes like?"

Exclaiming, Hisui began to clear the fragments from the floor.

Watching him from behind, Mei stepped forward apologetically. Definitely, she felt partly responsible for the accident.

"...Let me help you?"

"It's fine. No need."

Hisui was not angry. Rather, he was completely emotionless.

No good.

This was the worst.

"This bottle of wine... Is it something really precious...?"

Mei asked with trepidation as Hisui continued clearing up and replied.

"This vintage is from the year of my birth. The original plan was for us to open and drink it on my twentieth birthday."

" ".....!!" "

Rushella and Mei looked at each other.

Who bought the wine and who planned it for commemorating Hisui's twentieth birthday -- the answer was obvious.

The foster parent who raised Hisui and former master of the wine cellar -- that vampire.

"She told me on my tenth birthday that she was really impatient. A vampire's concept of time sure is really different. In the end, she died first instead."

Continuing with his task, Hisui spoke indifferently.

The mood of the three girls standing behind him grew increasingly somber.

Mei and Eruru glared at Rushella with reproach, causing her to feel awkwardly at wit's end.

"...I'll have to get a cloth to wipe this up later. Ah, are there any glass fragments over there? Did you get hurt?"

Hisui finished picking up the glass and asked Eruru.

It was only natural for him to worry about her because she just woke up. But Rushella responded with displeasure.

"...You don't need to worry about her. Even though inferior to me, her wounds heal quite quickly."

"...Don't say stuff like that. Everyone feels pain all the same."

"Why weren't you in your room? Instead, you ran over to this kind of place to spend time with this woman! If it weren't for you, I wouldn't have suffered what happened in the bedroom, and the wine wouldn't have.....!"

Rushella glared hatefully at Hisui and continued.

"So you have a preference for this kind of half-breed? Neither human nor vampire, a half-breed species!?"

As soon as she finished speaking, Hisui expressionlessly poked Rushella in the head.

A light poke, nothing out of the ordinary -- but Hisui's face was full of cold and merciless anger.

"What are you doing!?"

"Apologize now."

Hisui pointed at Eruru as he commanded Rushella.

"Shut up!"

Rushella punched Hisui in the chest.

Completely not holding back -- she had used her full strength.

Struck by the impact, Hisui's slender body instantly flew away and smashed into the wall.

Unfortunately, he hit his head.

"Hey what are you doing!?"

"Aren't you going too far!?"

Mei and Eruru's words caused Rushella to return to her senses. Realizing what she had done, she stared at her own fist.

"I-It's all because.....!"

Rushella had barely begun to justify herself when Hisui stood up. Apparently his forehead was wounded for blood seeped from a cut, dyeing his pale face red.

His tragic appearance shocked everyone present.

Unsteadily, Hisui walked before Rushella and repeated the same line.

"Apologize now."

Saying that, he fainted and collapsed on the ground.

Mei and Eruru hurried over to his side.

Rushella, on the other hand, trembled all over as she ran out from the basement.

"Are you okay, Hi-kun!?"

"In any case, the bleeding must be stopped first. Help me."

Carrying Hisui to the ground floor, Eruru performed first aid treatment.

Luckily, the wound was not very deep, and combined with his constitution, the bleeding stopped quickly.

"I'm okay now. Just that I'm seeing double when looking at things."

"This cannot be a concussion, could it!? Please remain still."

Eruru's every sentence expressed concern as she moved Hisui to lie down on the living room sofa.

"...Where's that Rushella? She seems to have ran out directly."

"Really?"

"Why did you have to force her to apologize? I know very well how pure-blooded vampires, let alone true ancestors, view half-vampires. It does not bother me either. After all, I think of her as a contemptible abomination too. But you--"

"I didn't do it for you."

Hisui screeched and stopped her.

That's right.

He did not do it for Eruru.

"I was simply angry, that's all."

"....."

"I was angry at her for saying something like that. Whether human or half-vampire does not matter. But for her to thoughtlessly insult others like this makes me angry."

Hisui's face showed faint sadness.

As one of the people responsible, Mei spoke up to break the somber tone.

"Anyway... I have to apologize to you first. I played a part in causing the wine incident. Sorry."

"That really doesn't matter. I already decided a long time ago if I ever needed money, I'd sell off that collection."

Hisui's words did not carry sarcasm or self-mockery.

But Mei sighed deeply upon hearing them.

"...As I thought. I think I can understand how Rushella feels more or less."

"What? I am completely the victim here."

"I know. Everything is her fault. However, it's not like I can't understand how she feels. When a guy talks to his current girlfriend about his ex, it's only natural for her to be displeased."

"What are you talking about? Very regrettably, I have neither a current girlfriend nor an ex."

Hisui displayed a puzzled expression as Eruru calmly pointed things out.

"In other words -- what was important to you was not the bottle of wine but the promise. The promise you made with the vampire who bought the bottle -- Am I right? So the wine is inconsequential. Even breaking the bottle is fine. The reason lies in the fact that the beautiful woman to share the great wine no longer exists. So the most important thing is--"

"Don't talk like you understand everything. Stop analyzing on your own. Besides, I have no interest in wine."

"Even if that is true, Rushella understands things differently."

"When a current girlfriend finds out you still cherish mementos from the ex, surely pandemonium would result?"

"Like I said, I don't know what you two are getting at!? Don't turn every interpersonal relationship into some sort of equivalent exchange of love!?"

Hisui snapped with great annoyance but Mei and Eruru stared at him with a knowing expression.

"What kind of gaze is that? What do you want me to do?"

"You're not going to do anything? I am simply wondering if you're going to leave her alone like that."

"I too, feel that you cannot leave her alone. In a certain sense, keeping her by your side is the condition for maintaining her freedom."

"...How did it come to this?"

"No no, you're not being forced to do anything, okay? Just think of it this way, if the current girlfriend runs away from home after an argument, the boyfriend is responsible for chasing her and bringing her home. This has nothing to do with who's right or who's wrong."

"Are you really the type who can resist when you hear someone say 'Do not press the button under any circumstances'?"

Act quickly -- that was what Mei and Eruru's gazes urged.

Unable to withstand their wordless pressure, Hisui had no choice but to sigh towards the heavens.

".....I'm going out to buy some juice."

" "Take care." "

It's all that guy's fault.

The girl repeated the same line over and over again in her heart, murmuring out loud at times.

But the agitation in her heart only increased instead.

After leaving home, she kept looking back for some reason.

No one came from behind.

This was only natural.

But once again she looked back.

"It's all... That guy's fault..."

She said it out again.

That's right, it's all that guy's fault.

Not only was he bound to the vampire destroyed a long time ago, he was also acting intimate with other women.

But still, what happened just now was also--

"Eh, Rushella-san?"

Reina called out to her.

Even on a holiday she was still wearing the school uniform. In stark contrast, Rushella was wearing a low-cut formal dress.

"You..... What is with this presence?"

Rushella could feel a terrifying presence from the classmate standing beside her and instinctively retreated to keep a distance.

Looking carefully, she found Reina holding a cross in her hand.

A vampire's greatest weakness.

A fashionable ornament would be harmless but the one held in Reina's hand was different.

This one had been blessed and sanctified, infused with her faith and extremely threatening to a vampire.

"Oh you mean this? Because I just came back from church....."

Reina pointed towards a certain direction.

Feeling the same indescribable presence from that direction, Rushella's expression became serious.

"Shut up, hearing that word makes me uncomfortable! I deliberately changed my route because I wanted to avoid that side..."

"Huh, you're not feeling well somewhere? There's a park over there, let's go over and rest for a bit."

Expressing care and concern, Reina approached.

Cross in hand.

"D-Don't come over! Put that thing away!"

"Eh, what's going on? Is there something wrong with this?"

"Don't come over, put that down!! Don't let me see it!!"

...Faced with this incomprehensible dispute, Reina finally put the cross to settle the affair even though her face showed complete puzzlement.

Drained by this dispute, Rushella's appearance convinced Reina she was unwell so she led Rushella to sit down on a bench in a nearby park.

"Are you okay? I can see you're holding a parasol. Did you get a heat stroke? I bought you a sports drink....."

"Like I said, I'd be fine if you put that thing away faster....."

Despite complaining verbally, Rushella took the sports drink and drank it.

Then she realized this was her first time drinking something like that.

"So humans drink something of this sort? Still, I think it'd be better if tasted sweeter."

"Ah, I guess people want to drink something sweet when they're tired."

"Yes, especially sweet blood."

Reina clearly did not understand.

Vampire and pious virgin, surely this impossible combination could not communicate on the same wavelength.

"Today... Why isn't Kujou-kun together with you? You two... Are living together, right?"

"...Who knows. After all, he's probably making out with that fake or the half-breed."

".....? Speaking of which, he does seem to be on quite good terms with Sudou-san and Kariya-san. They're always chatting together....."

Reina lowered her gaze as she spoke.

Unable to understand what Reina implied, Rushella tactlessly spoke out about a question that had been weighing on her mind for a long time.

"By the way, you seem to be staring at Hisui all the time. What's the matter, you're concerned about him?"

"N-Not really, it's not like I'm concerned... Umm..... You see, last time when I was kidnapped, he was the one who saved me, right? Though I don't remember much of it..."

"Ah, right..... Something like that."

Actually, Reina was bitten by a vampire instead.

Because her memories after being bitten became unclear, Reina herself had virtually forgotten all of what happened.

Hence, Hisui and his companions took advantage of her amnesia to fabricate a story about how she was kidnapped but fortunately, Hisui discovered it by chance and prevented a tragedy -- That was the plausible story they told Reina without mentioning the word "vampire" at all.

Kidnapped and then drugged unconscious, thus explaining the fuzzy memories -- this explanation seemed to have been accepted, so Reina was still none the wiser.

Hisui had also told Rushella about it, hoping she would not reveal the truth recklessly.

"But then... Umm..... I vaguely remember Kujou-kun... Umm..... It's him who saved me, right...? But when I asked him, he refused to tell me anything....."

"He not only saved you but also me as well. But he is supposed to..."

"Eh, were you involved in that incident as well, Rushella-san!?"

"No, umm..... Anyway, that guy belongs to me!!"

Rushella hastily brought out her trump card to dodge Reina's question.

Somehow she felt uncomfortable being in Reina's presence.

"Really... You two's relationship must be so close..."

"Hmph, but lately he's always taking me lightly!"

"Really? I think he's always cared for you deeply....."

"That's hard to say. By the way, when you're staring at that guy, why do you always avert your gaze as soon as he turns around?"

"N-Nothing, this is... Umm....."

"Just gaze if you want to gaze. Say whatever you want to say. What's wrong with that?"

Unprepared to find her maidenly secret exposed, Reina displayed a worried expression.

Oblivious to tact and worldly matters, the vampire fired off direct attacks one after another.

"...I don't really understand either. I've never experienced this before..... I was raised to ignore these kinds of matters to consider later in life....."

"What is that about? Is it the teachings of that particular deity?"

"Yes, my family... Our faith runs deep. When going to church on Sunday, they tell me I must wear my uniform..... There are also various rules on all sorts of things. Even simple fortune telling is forbidden. It's a bit annoying....."

The sheltered young lady had her own troubles.

But it was impossible for Rushella to understand.

"Mere fortune telling doesn't change anything. Only humans would rely on something like that. Are you one of them?"

"Really...? I think it works to a certain extent..."

"If you have something to say, say it; something you want to do, do it. Don't beat around the bush. Whoever I stare at, the target will always do my bidding obediently!"

That's clearly using your "Mystic Eyes," right? ...This was supposed to be Hisui's customary retort.

But the past familiar dialogue did not appear, causing Rushella to look around her, thinking of Hisui.

At this moment, her own words stabbed herself in the heart.

If you have something to say, say it.

Should she say it to him?

".....Things are not always that simple."

"That's true....."

Although the two girl's faces did not match, they were in clear agreement on a rather crucial point.

Rushella stood up and said to Reina with an inscrutable expression.

"I'd like to make a request."

"As long as I'm able to help....."

I'm going out to buy some juice -- leaving those words behind, Hisui left the house.

But he did not return for a very long time.

Because -- he still had not found Rushella.

He tried attaching a tracking device to her before, but she threw a tantrum after she found out so he stopped doing that.

And she still did not have a cellphone.

Hisui had no choice but to follow the footsteps of ancient vampire hunters and search for Rushella based on a vampire's tendencies and characteristics.

Rushella had left after changing her clothes, taking no luggage with her. She was virtually penniless.

In most likelihood, she would probably return home by herself eventually. In that event, Mei and Eruru stationed at the house would inform Hisui.

In any case, Hisui decided to check the places where Rushella might have visited.

".....What sort of places are those?"

He had no idea at all.

After all, they always went out together. Now that he had to imagine where she might wander off alone, he had not a single clue.

Her greatest desire -- blood was supplied by his person. Other than that, Hisui could not think of another activity for her to while her time away.

Checking out all the places she had been to -- the way to school, the shopping district -- all of them, Hisui could find no signs of her.

Mei and Eruru's side offered no news either.

"What should I do now....."

The sun was about to set, signaling the arrival of a vampire's time of the day.

Once Rushella became fully active, her area of activity was going to be much wider.

I'd better go home first to plan -- Hisui made his decision and turned around to head home.

Walking along, as he turned a corner, he ran into the person he missed.

" "Ah." "

The two of them exclaimed as they pointed at each other.

Then a moment of silence.

Hisui was the first to speak up.

"...Where did you go?"

"None of your business."

Rushella's words stung.

She looked no different from when she went out, except she was now holding a brown paper bag conspicuously in her arms.

"What is that?"

"I-It's... I'm back from 'shopping'!"

"So you even learned a new word like that....."

"Then what business do you have!? Why are you here!?"

"That's my question instead."

Beneath the streetlamp they stared at each other.

Just as they were both about to speak up simultaneously--

A rich thick sweet aroma filled their surroundings.

So thick that the air was dyed a pink color, this gas seemed to carry poison.

Hisui instinctively sensed danger and frantically surveyed his surroundings.

The street at night was devoid of others.

Except for an outline of a figure in an old fashioned red robe, standing quietly.

In her right hand she held a small knife, shining sharply. On her left hand was a small bottle, the apparent source of the aroma.

"Could it be... You're the 'Witch'?"

"Be careful..... That outfit and fragrance, I remember them!!"

The figure approached the pair slowly.

Hisui and Rushella raised their alert.

Then the "Witch" acted unexpectedly.

Though slower than a vampire, she was still much more agile than Hisui.

".....!"

As the two watched in alarm, she reached into her robe with her left hand and took out a new bottle.

This bottle was slightly bigger than the previous and just large enough to rest on her palm. It contained a liquid as red as fresh blood.

The "Witch" tossed the bottle towards their feet.

Dodging in time, they were not struck. The bottle simply shattered against the ground.

By the time they noticed the resulting smell, only then did Hisui and Rushella realize the "Witch" intended to produce this smell rather than strike them directly.

Fairy tales told of sun-dried lizards and frogs being cooked in cauldrons to concoct witches' potions -- currently, the poisonous gas before them was recreating a secret potion from witches of legend.

Hisui frowned and frantically covered his mouth and nose.

Despite the overwhelming stench -- there was no greatly debilitating effect.

He should be able to endure it.

But Rushella seemed quite unwell on the other hand.

Pressing her hand against her chest, she sank down on one knee.

"What, this is..... So unpleasant....."

"Hey, are you okay!? Pull yourself together."

"How does it taste..... This magical potion I cooked using blood and a secret recipe? Blame nothing but your keen sense of smell which has intensified the unpleasant stench. Particularly, your reaction towards the blood should be greater."

"This is... A poison targeting vampires?"

"That's right -- Even your race will be rendered immobile for a while after inhalation. This is -- enough!!"

The "Witch" sprang into action.

In order to protect Rushella who was incapacitated, Hisui stepped in front of her.

"Wait, stop.....!"

Rushella's cries were futile.

The "Witch" had her face obscured by the hood, revealing only the tempting smile hanging over the corner of her lips.

She swung the sharp blade.

The blade slashed at Hisui's arm which guarded Rushella's vulnerable state.

"...Mmm!"

Hisui felt sharp pain.

However, the wound was not very deep.

He originally intended to launch a counterattack with his other hand but the person grabbed his fist. Without a doubt, the sensation on his fist felt like that of a female, but there was some kind of ointment giving a slippery feeling.

"You wish to protect her... In that case, you shall be 'cursed' first instead!"

Twisting the blade, she scraped across Hisui's arm, leaving a cruel trail of bloody script.

Hisui could not decipher it at all, but he was sure those were "words" of some language.

"This... What the heck.....?"

The wound was shallow -- but Hisui immediately collapsed.

"Bitch--!!!"

Rushella finally broke free from the potion's restraints and wielded her favorite short sword.

Then she activated her "mystic eyes."

Crimson light penetrated the "Witch," placing her under absolute command.

"Stand there obediently... Watch me take care of you personally!"

But completely unfazed, the "Witch" simply smacked her lips.

"Tsk..... Your servant saved you."

Realizing the situation was not in her favor, the "Witch" melted into the darkness and retreated.

Another reason she retreated was probably because she sensed someone approach.

But this was simply the conclusion of this particular hunt.

"Surely I will destroy you next time. Scram -- Vampires!!"

".....!!"

Completely unwilling to accept the outcome, but Rushella had no choice but to watch the "Witch" escape before her eyes.

Frantically, she hurried over to Hisui's side and picked him up in her arms.

"Pull yourself together. Given your constitution, this minor injury shouldn't be any problem, right!?"

"It's not supposed to... But..... The bleeding is not stopping..... What is going on....."

"Be strong! Your blood belongs completely to me... Don't waste it bleeding like this!!"

Rushella's words were arrogant as ever, but her tone of voice was already sobbing.

"Why, why did you have to protect me!? I'm a vampire, you know!? I am immortal! And it's currently at night even... You great big idiot!"

"Shut up..... Whether vampires or humans, it's irrelevant. This is something... I have to do....."

Hisui was still awake but he was finding it extremely hard to speak.

Something invisible, more terrifying than the wound, was eroding his body.

"Also, shouldn't you... Have something to say instead.....? Say it... properly... for me..... You only have to... Do that first....."

Finishing his sentence with great difficulty, Hisui fainted.

"Hey... What is going on? Pull yourself together!!"

Rushella cried hysterically as she shook Hisui's body in her embrace.

But he did not wake up.

The next day -- in a sickroom at Seidou Hospital.

Hisui was transported to this comprehensive hospital closest to the scene. This place was also closely affiliated with the "Supernatural Investigations Section" that Eruru belonged to.

After carrying Hisui home in her arms, Rushella told Eruru and Mei what happened and they immediately called an ambulance for him.

In order to guarantee absolute peace, Hisui was being quarantined in the same room where Reina was once confined.

This implied that he was suffering from no ordinary illness.

In actual fact, Hisui's body only had a shallow scratch -- normally he should heal instantly and be out of the hospital.

However, he still remained unconscious.



Under Eruru's supervision, Hisui had undergone all sorts of tests. On the other hand, Rushella and Mei obtained leave from school and waited quietly beside him for results.

Sitting on the bench outside his room, the two girls' faces were filled with grief.

"The test results came out. The wound is not serious. Given his constitution, it should have healed a long time ago. However, it continues to bleed nonstop. As for the reason -- most likely the knife was poisoned."

Eruru held the patient's chart in one hand as she reported to the two girls. Her face was equally solemn.

"Poison...? What on earth....."

"Based on the analysis of the poison, its primary ingredient is the mandrake. Naturally, it is the most medicinally potent part -- the 'root.' Most likely the missing root from the flower we found at the flowerbed."

Eruru replied to Mei's question in somber tones as she flipped through the charts.

"The mandrake's poison is most effective when ingested orally. Provided the poison was properly prepared, the target, even a vampire, would be immobilized for a period of time. But due to the taste, it is extremely difficult to have a vampire drink it without noticing. Hence it was coated on the knife. Furthermore, this is not purely a 'poison' but should be regarded as a 'curse' medium."

"'Curse'... What does it do?"

Rushella asked quietly.

She was the original intended target of the curse. But Hisui suffered as a result of protecting her.

"Nonstop bleeding. No matter how we try to staunch the wound, the blood continues to flow. This is most likely a curse meant for taking care of vampires. A mere poison cannot defeat a vampire but by making wounds bleed nonstop, a vampire can be weakened continuously. For a vampire, blood is the source of life and the root of one's power. Even though large scale blood loss will not lead to death, a vampire will still be immobilized. Then seizing the opportunity, a death blow can be applied -- this is probably the witch's plan?"

"Since it targets a vampire... What happens when it's used on a human?"

"The result is the same. However, the damage is naturally much higher against a human. More accurately, a human would rapidly bleed to death. The only reason Kujou-san is still alive is thanks to his constitution conferring superior regeneration and blood-making, thereby offering some resistance to the curse."

Because it was Hisui, he could still endure.

But death was simply a matter of time.

"Of course we tried a transfusion, but for some reason, his blood type keeps shifting, making all blood types incompatible. This is likely a kind of curse produced by the poison. In other words, once he bleeds dry there is no hope for recovery. Even right now, the blood loss is slowly draining his life drop by drop. If this continues -- he probably only has one day left to live."

Eruru's words were completely emotionless.

But her face was filled with suffering.

Mei was the same.

Only Rushella turned away expressionlessly and walked towards the elevator.

"What a stupid guy. No self-awareness as a servant."

"Hey, you're really going too far!"

Mei rushed over and held her by the shoulder.

But Rushella did not look back.

Only her shoulders trembled nonstop.

"For him to die and cast aside his duties of taking care of me, it's completely unforgivable! Staying alive to serve me is the greatest prerogative of a servant!"

"....."

Sensing Rushella's true feelings, Mei remained silent.

This time, Eruru spoke up and made a suggestion.

"Based on all sorts of information I gathered at Kujou-san's home, there was one point -- the witch who creates a poison definitely possesses the corresponding antidote. The one who curses others always knows how to lift the curse. Finding the witch and bringing her to justice -- is the only way to save Kujou-san now."

"....."

"Also -- When using the 'mystic eyes,' you must disrupt the target's concentration first. No matter how much mental strength she had, so long as you take her by surprise, even your power can render her powerless."

"...I know."

Rushella ran into the elevator.

As Mei watched Rushella leave, Eruru cautioned her.

"I hope you can stay by her side to assist her. The enemy must be caught alive, otherwise there would be no point. Now that Kujou-san is unavailable, someone has to act in support for her."

"No problem. I'll rely on you to update me on the situation, Eruru-chan."

"Very well... I will continue researching and see if there are other solutions."

As the three girls pursued their respective goals, they prayed in their hearts for Hisui's safety.

His life at crossroads, Hisui's survival was still currently uncertain.

## Chapter 6 - Draculea Versus Witch

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By the time Rushella and Mei arrived at school, classes had already ended.

Having packed her belongings, Reina was leaving the empty classroom.

Seizing this opportunity, Rushella spoke to her from behind.

"You there. Girl."

"Hmm?"

The instant Reina turned around, she was pierced by Rushella's crimson gaze.

The "mystic eyes."

The mystical eyes possessed by all vampires, capable of hypnotizing humans.

As a prestigious "True Ancestor," Rushella possessed eyes carrying absolute magical power, allowing her to easily obtain information from the target's answers.

Eruru only allowed Rushella to come here because she was aware of this fact.

In principle, Eruru was reluctant to make use of the "mystic eyes" for investigations, but for the sake of Hisui, she had no choice but to allow it.

"Answer me... Are you the 'Witch'?"

Reina shook her head in denial.

"Well then, why did you mix mandrake leaves into the cooking last time...? Why on earth did you do it.....?"

Rushella had already heard from Mei the results of Eruru's investigations.

Hence she rushed ahead to find out the truth.

"That was merely..... A little spell."

".....!?"

Reina murmured with a hollow stare.

Even when a person was controlled by the "mystic eyes," it did not result in a total loss of emotions.

Reina's expression displayed sadness.

"Although that picture book was confiscated, I... still remember..... That is, the recipe for the magical drug..... So, provided I used that, Kujou-kun will surely... even more....."

Even more -- she took forever but still did not finish her sentence.

Perhaps even she herself had yet to fully realize.

Only that her heart had been stolen on that night, by the knight who brought his sword and saved her from the vampire.

Admiration, or was it infatuation -- Perhaps in order to verify her own feelings, she decided to use the magical spell involving herbs.

A secret little spell -- one that all love-stricken teenage girls would harbor at some point or other.

"This is enough..."

Rushella walked away from Reina.

As Reina collapsed and sat down on the floor, Rushella threw a glance of pity at her before continuing on her way.

"...That was enough? Perhaps more questioning might reveal something..."

"Enough. If she wanted to harm me, she should have done it during 'daytime' instead. But on that day, this girl accompanied me all the way until sunset. Without doing anything. That is enough to prove her innocence."

"I see....."

Mei smiled as she followed Rushella running through the hallways.

Their next destination -- the staff room.

Homeroom teacher Horie Jyuri was in a corner of the room, facing a computer.

Presumably tired from work, she had taken off her glasses and was rubbing her eyes.

Rushella patted her shoulder from behind.

Jyuri turned around reflexively.

In the next instant, she was pierced by the light of the mystic eyes.

"Answer me... Are you a witch?"

".....Maybe... so."

Rushella and Mei exchanged glances with surprise.

Maintaining the crimson mystic eyes, Rushella continued the questioning.

"What do you mean by that... Explain clearly! Why was your name on that digest!? Who are you!? What was the Occult Research Club about!?"

"We investigated..... The Seven Mysteries... And legends..... Then, made contact with the witch... However, we were getting too deeply involved..... I withdrew... Halfway..... But the other students....."

"Say, why is the teacher's speech in fragments? Are you sure your power is working?"

"My mystic eyes are not omnipotent. If the person does not know or already forgot, then no answer can be obtained. Deeply buried memories could take a long time to retrieve. Hurry and continue explaining!"

"The other students..... I'm not sure either..... After transferring schools... We lost contact..... There were also kids who went missing..... Witch? Became witches.....? The real witch..... Or perhaps, killed by the witch....."

"Who is the witch!? ...Isn't it you!?"

Completely unconcerned with the gaze of others, Rushella grabbed Jyuri's collar and demanded.

Anxious for an answer as well, Mei did not stop her.

Another student in the staff room stepped forward to intervene.

"Hey, what are you two doing to the teacher!?"

Kirika had gotten involved.

As the student council vice president, she frequented the staff room for official business.

Setting down on a table the stack of books she was carrying in her arms against her chest, the vice president glared at Rushella and asked.

Naturally, she became the next victim of the mystic eyes.

"...You might be involved in the incident of the cooking practical. Answer me, are you a witch?"

"No... What is that....."

Kirika instantly lost her usual prideful demeanor, answering as she shook her head blankly.

Rushella clicked her tongue and motioned with her chin for Kirika to leave.

"Then step aside. You're not needed here anymore."

Unsteadily, Kirika left the staff room.

Having confirmed the vice president had left, Rushella turned to interrogating Jyuri again -- but the gathering crowd was increasing.

"Hey... Can we go out for a bit? After all, using mystic eyes to control everyone would be too difficult. Besides, the teacher doesn't seem to be a witch either....."

"....."

Rushella looked greatly displeased but she had no choice but to leave Jyuri behind and swiftly depart from the staff room.

Then she ran full speed through the hallways and out into the school yard.

Mei chased after her and asked as she panted.

"What do we do now? We don't have any other suspects. It's not practical to use the mystic eyes to interrogate everyone involved in the school, right?"

"I have a plan."

Rushella unsheathed her favorite short sword and held the edge against her wrist.

"Hey, what are you intending?"

Rushella did not answer but scratched her wrist with the short sword, producing a red line.

Droplets of blood seeped out from the wound and dripped onto the ground.

Ignoring the laws of physics, the bloodstains on the ground gathered to form an emblem of a rose.

This was proof of her identity as a "True Ancestor."

A sweet fragrance emanated from the fresh blood, causing Mei to cover her own mouth.

I feel compelled to drink it.

If she did not restrain herself, very likely she would already have done so.

Were she to continue smelling the blood's scent, she would very likely lose all reason.

"As a 'True Ancestor' -- My blood is very sweet. So sweet that anyone would thirst for it, wanting to drink, no exceptions."

Rushella smiled fearlessly.

As if to prove what she just stated, they began to gather in the school yard.

In this almost emptied school -- there existed beings with a keener sense of smell towards blood compared to humans, and now they gathered around.

Dogs.

Cats.

Insects.

Innumerable animals were closing in here in swarms.

Gathering out of desire for the blood, they knelt down before her.

The unusual sight rendered Mei speechless while Rushella bore a smile.

Using her crimson eyes, she announced to her loyal subjects who had rushed forth.

"Listen well, you all--"

A dream.

In actual fact, I had dreams every night, although whether I remembered or not was another question. But recently, I suddenly realized that the dreams I remembered were for the most part unpleasant ones.

The reason, obviously, was because -- I had dreamt of my foster parent.

In today's dream, it was that particular scene during dinner.

She asked me to pour some of her favorite wine. She enjoyed the fragrance released from the rich violet liquid as she elegantly drank from the glass.

--You really seem to love wine. Is it because you're a vampire, and wine looks like blood?

--Possibly. But perhaps the main reason is because it reminds me of that man who called wine "this blood of mine."

This foster parent would say strange things from time to time.

As expected of one wise in the ways of the world, she was well versed in the art of implicit communication.

--What are you talking about?

--Old memories, two thousand years in the past. He was a good man. Perhaps that was why I could not defeat him, even as a vampire.

--I'm completely lost here. What about him, was he some handsome dude?

--His long hair and beard suited him very well. But more praiseworthy -- was his noble spirit. Hisui, how much do you think this man would be worth if one had to set a price for him?

--How can people be measured with price?

--Thirty pieces of silver, that was his price. In light of his influence on the future world, that price was truly a bargain. Far too cheap. But the problem lies not in money but this man's philosophy of life. Very likely, I submitted to him because I respected his high-minded soul.

--.....

--Hence, Hisui, you too must become a good man. Even if you were to be sold for thirty pieces of silver, you must save those who are suffering around you.

".....What the heck were you trying to say....."

Hisui woke up in the pristine sickroom.

He ripped off the tubes connected to his body and stood up unsteadily.

"Seriously, you're already dead, and yet you still lecture me in my dreams..... Am I really that unreliable?"

Changing into his own casual clothing that lay folded on the table, Hisui quietly walked towards the door.

Blood seeped out continuously from his bandaged right wrist.

He was on the very verge.

On the verge of death by blood loss.

Blood pressure, pulse, all were at their limits.

Precisely because of that -- he awakened at this very moment.

Awakened to obtain a body that could still be active even when under the effects of a curse.

Awakened a resilient body that could rival vampires -- the Anti-Drac mode.

"I know, okay..... This kind of matter... If I were to rely on girls..... Definitely... You'd scold me to no end."

Dragging his body that lay at death's door, Hisui left the sickroom.

Leaving the building, he crawled his way into a taxi... And got a ride home.

During this time, he contacted Mei by cellphone.

Although his hand no longer seemed to be following orders, he still managed to dial the number. Luckily, Mei also picked up very quickly.

"Hi-kun!? Hey, are you alright!?"

"Let's talk about that later... Where's Rushella?"

"Ah, she's currently... This is serious! All these animals have gathered... Ah, but now at least we know the witch's identity..."

"The mystic eyes were used, right?"

"Eh.....?"

"She must have used her mystic eyes to investigate. Hurry and tell me the result and the situation over there. Don't leave out any detail no matter how small."

"....."

"Please..."

"I understand."

After obtaining the necessary facts, Hisui hung up.

The pieces of the puzzle were now all gathered. The only remaining step was to piece them together.

Not long after, Eruru received news that Hisui had gone missing.

Then immediately she deduced he must have gone home based on the reports of eyewitnesses, so she jumped onto a police car to rush to Hisui's home.

"Kujou-san!?"

The entrance was not locked and Eruru instantly rushed inside.

No one answered, so she decided to search the basement first.

As expected, Hisui was right there.

Before the cross-shaped holy sword, he looked like he was confessing his sins.

Kneeling on the cross embedded in the floor, Hisui was leaning his forehead against a vivid red gemstone.

"What are you doing...?"

Unable to view the cross directly, Eruru had no choice but to ask with her face turned away.

"I suppose... I'm making deductions. This is the place where I can concentrate best."

Hisui turned his head to answer. Currently, a crest floated above his head, its shape resembling thorns.

Eruru had seen this sight before.

"Are you actually...? Stop it immediately, your current state is akin to a candle's final brightness just before it burns out. Even if you awaken, you are only delaying your death by mere moments!"

"That's enough... Totally enough. I need to concentrate the remaining blood at my disposal, right here."

Hisui lightly tapped his temple.

The amount of blood circulating through the brain took up fifteen percent of the entire body's volume of blood.

Using the Anti-Drac mode to control bloodflow, he was able to raise the proportion and rate of circulation.

Using all the power from his remaining blood, he offered it all to his brain.

"If I use this opportunity to think, I should be able to obtain a satisfactory answer. Let me find the witch."

"What nonsense are you saying.....There is no time left. Are you trying to render the girls' efforts in vain?"

"If that's what you think, then hurry back to the hospital. I forgot to get something."

"Huh?"

"Help me retrieve it. I'll probably need it next."

Eruru realized Hisui's intentions at this time.

Nodding lightly, she turned and went towards the stairs.

"...Please do not do anything reckless."

"I'm already being reckless."

After Eruru left, Hisui focused his mind once more.

He mobilized all the nerves in his body.

Confirming all information at his disposal.

Exploring all possibilities.

Ignoring all consequences -- he concentrated his blood in his brain as much as possible.

Blood rushed through his blood vessels.

His heart was beating at its very limit, following a rapid rhythm.

Moments later -- in actual fact it was just an instant of extremely brief thinking, a flash of lightning streaked across his mind.

"--So that's what's going on."

Returning blood flow to normal, he allowed his blood to return to his torso.

Hisui pushed and supported his unsteady body, pulled out the Tzara Blade from the floor and carried it on his shoulders.

Then step by painful step, he walked out of the house.

Walking out the entryway, just as he was crossing the front yard -- Eruru returned in haste.

Behind her was an escort vehicle used for transporting prisoners.

"What a burly looking taxi....."

"If you want to transport that sword, this type of vehicle would be the most convenient. But do not let that sword get too close to me."

Hisui nodded and took his seat in the car.

I was still in school.

Who knew if this was good or bad.

In any case, it was very likely that I would be located soon.

In the beginning, only a lost dog walked into the classroom and started barking madly at me.

Those howls sounded almost like it was summoning its companions.

Then as if passing the orders along, the cries of cats and dogs could be heard all around.

Swarms of insects could be seen flying outside the window, blotting the sky.

I did not comprehend the situation straight away.

What had happened in the surroundings, I did not have a single clue.

But as soon as I heard footsteps -- a vampire's unique, almost inaudible footsteps -- I understood the reasons behind all this.

Regardless, I could tell through my hearing.

I had been found.

By commanding these little animals, she managed to locate me.

Now that I thought about it, witches really are linked to animals in myriad ways.

The familiar I sent to Sudou Mei and Kariya Eruru, as well as the cat I used to warn Kujou Hisui.

For matters regarding animals, asking animals directly was the most effective.

Using the mystic eyes to dominate the animals that were on intimate terms with the "Witch," the animals who had seen the witch would then obediently expose the identity of the "Witch."

My current location was definitely being broadcasted by the barking of dogs.

That said, I had no intention of hiding in the first place.

This location was once their club activities room but I have taken it now. The vampire -- Rushella Dahm Draculea opened the door and rushed inside.

Followed by her companion, Sudou Mei.

"You are -- the witch?"

Hearing Mei's question, I smiled and answered.

"Indeed, while you people are the vampire and her companions."

"How dare you harm my servant? I will surely make you regret this! Uno Kirika."

"That is correct... Let us settle this, vampire."

Indeed, I smiled towards my enemies.

"The vice president is the witch!?"

Hisui's conclusion caused Eruru great surprise.

"That's right, though I have no evidence."

"But I heard from Sudou-san's report that under the influence of the mystic eyes, she said she was not a witch, so..."

"The mystic eyes are ineffective against her. In the manner we discovered in your research, she is prepared. But Rushella probably didn't notice."

"...I see. You mean that she pretended she was under the mystic eyes' influence, and lied?"

"Exactly. Although the mystic eyes are quite convenient, if someone pretends to be under their effect, it is actually quite hard to tell. But the mystic eyes should have worked on the class rep and the teacher."

"How can you be so sure?"

"For the class rep, it's just as Rushella said. If she were the culprit, then all those things she did was futile and too unnatural. However, I still have doubts regarding the mandrake incident."

"Sudou-san didn't mention the incident either... Why did she add that to the cooking?"

It looked like even during such a state of emergency, Mei was still quite considerate of Reina.

Naturally, she understood the heart of a maiden in love.

"What is this? She was secretly doing something without my knowledge?"

"...It's nothing of significance. Please carry on. What about the teacher?"

"Rushella and Mei took your useful advice and took her by surprise. Furthermore, it happened while she had her glasses off. Although it's possible for people to escape the mystic eyes through mental resilience, that requires a major precondition -- being prepared beforehand. 'I will be facing the mystic eyes, very well, I will concentrate in preparation' -- that kind of mental preparation is needed. Rushella took her by surprise from behind at the time. No matter how strong her mental will, she would have succumbed."

"I see -- what was that about glasses? Disregarding sunglasses, ordinary spectacles and contact lenses should not hinder the power of the mystic eyes -- Are you actually implying that the enemy's glasses have undergone special treatment?"

Eruru tapped her glasses and asked.

"That's my guess. Talismans are useless, barriers are impractical. To evade the mystic eyes, applying special treatment to glasses which stand in between eye contact would be the best strategy. If that was done, even unexpected encounters of the mystic eyes could be defended against. But the teacher had taken her glasses off at the time. That said, it's possible those spectacles were simply decoys and she actually wore contact lenses -- but I think that's over thinking things."

"Agreed. By the process of elimination that leaves only the vice president. This means she is wearing contacts, though it is only speculation. What about other clues? And how did she actually poison Rushella?"

"The vice president frequently visits the home economics preparation room. She must have done something in advance to the food or drink we were having."

"We already investigated this. The results showed that nothing was poisoned, right?"

The two of them had already verified this -- but Hisui disagreed.

"We missed one thing. Didn't she say something like 'I help the teacher prepare the water used for cooking'?"

Eruru suddenly remembered their conversation at the time.

Indeed, she had mentioned that last time.

"The cooking practical requires water taken from the jug. Normally, preparation is as simple as adding ice cubes to mineral water, so why would she need to prepare expressly beforehand? It could be done simply before the practical. Based on what was said back then, the home economics teacher asked the vice president for help to prepare beforehand and put the water into the fridge because the vice president was knowledgeable in herbs and greatly familiar with preparing water."

"What about the water... Are you saying that substances extracted from herbs were added? That the water your group used for cooking had the witch's drug mixed in?"

"If that's the case, it would have been instantly noticed from the taste -- which was what we learned from your research. But consider those western cake houses or restaurants with better service, you must have seen those jars of water with lemons or herbs floating in them."

"Ah yes, quite a few times..."

"That's the so-called herbal water, right? Like the herbs using in cooking, they can be added to the water beforehand to add a faint distinctive flavor. Nowhere near the level of fruit juice, it's still basically water more or less. Most people would simply think this tastes good when they drink it. In order to avoid rousing suspicions when people drank the water, the vice president must have spent quite a lot of effort. Even I failed to notice anything. However, due to the herbs in the water, it caused an adverse reaction in a vampire's body... Should be something like this."

"I see..."

Understanding how the whole incident occurred, Eruru nodded emphatically.

"Also, back when the vice prez saw my arm that had been scratched by the cat, she advised me: 'Beware of infection.' But I was using bandages to hide the wound so most people would expect a sprain or a bruise instead, right? But because she already knew... She knew how I was hurt."

"As much as I am unwilling to admit it, these are quite brilliant deductions. We have no physical evidence but given all these facts we only need to

investigate her surrounding environment. Or ask her directly in person. However, why are you in such a rush? Why not just leave it to us?"

Throughout the conversation, Hisui's face became more and more haggard.

Something was worrying him even more than his own life.

"If we don't hurry... Something serious will happen. Rushella will surely do something rash."

"You are the witch...? Then how can Hisui be healed?"

"You really think I will tell you? Vampire and your ilk, scam and begone from this school. You too."

"I understand now... Then I won't be holding back."

The clash between the two was imminent.

Kirika was dressed in that red robe from earlier.

Having realized she was being tracked, she had already made preparations.

Rather than being backed into a corner with no place to flee, this was her hunting grounds for slaying vampires.

"What, this smell is..."

Mei noticed the poisonous fragrance filling up the classroom.

The smell that immobilized Rushella last time was being released from the burning scented candles in the four corners of the room.

"That's right... This is a smell that vampires fear. What will you do?"

Kirika smiled fearlessly.

But Rushella began to move, completely unfazed.

Seeing her mobility unaffected, only then did Kirika realize.

This girl -- she was holding her breath.

With a flash of the short sword, the blade came slicing head on.

Instantly, a long incision had been made on the robe.

Kirika's exposed body was clad in a black outfit.

The representative color of witches' evil. All the vital areas of her body were wrapped in black leather that resembled bandages carved with spell incantations. The rest of her skin was normal in color and exposed for all to see.

On her skin was a shiny and slippery looking oily sheen.

Something was smeared all over her.

Completely unconcerned, Rushella charged at Kirika without delay.

As if toying with her, Kirika ran freely and unhindered in the classroom.

That sort of speed was so fast -- Even Mei could not catch up.

"Do you know of the witch's ointment? A secret medication applied to the body for the purpose of flying. But in actual fact, it has no such miraculous effect. But it is more than sufficient for staying ahead of you--!?"

Kirika could not believe her eyes.

Rushella was already closing in before her.

Eyes blazing with crimson light.

The mystic eyes.

Although Kirika's contact lenses blocked the effects of the mystic eyes...

Apparently due to the eyes' excessive power, the lenses began to crack, causing Kirika to find her field of view fragmented and broken.



Since there was no room for negotiations and the mystic eyes were not working -- Rushella decided to resort to blood sucking.

"You can't!"

Mei's words of warning were ignored by Rushella.

She was like an unbridled horse.

"No....."

Fear spread throughout Kirika's face.

No longer emanating a witch's presence, she was merely an ordinary girl now.

Despite the tears welling up in Kirika's eyes, Rushella mercilessly bared her fangs and extended them towards Kirika's neck.

".....!!"

An unexpected visitor burst in through the door.

Rushella reflexively closed her eyes and released Kirika.

A cross.

Someone had thrown a massive cross.

And allowed the crucial prey to escape.

Rushella felt Kirika's touch disappear from her clutches.

"Don't interfere! If we don't hurry, Hisui will.....!!"

To eliminate the enemy, Rushella swung her sword and stabbed the interloper.

Next came the sensation of the blade entering flesh and a faint groan.

"Idiot~"

Even after hearing the voice, Rushella remained in a state of disorientation and did not come to her senses.

Her mind was consumed by Hisui.

These thoughts and feelings combined with her vampire instincts, turning her into a savage beast that knew only to annihilate enemies before her.

In the next instant, her lips were sealed.

As soon as Rushella realized her lips were pressed against another's lips, she felt a familiar taste spreading in her mouth.

The taste of blood.

This was the taste of blood she had grown accustomed to, the first blood she tasted after waking up in modern times.

The bonds of rich thick blood caused Rushella to recover her sanity.

"Ah.....!"

Secretly feeling fearful inside, Rushella opened her eyes.

The one locking lips with her was Hisui.

Standing in front of Kirika, protecting her, was also Hisui.

As for Rushella's short sword, it was stabbed into his chest.

"You... Why?"

Hisui did not answer, or rather, he could not answer. For he collapsed on the spot.

"Why?"

Tearfully, Rushella embraced Hisui's head, caressing lightly.

"This... Worked just as I thought. A blood transfusion pack made from my own blood... Kariya brought it here for me, that was really a good decision."

".....!?"

"She said that because my blood type is so rare, I should stock up some just in case of unexpected injuries in times of need. Oh well... I guess it also works as storing food for you."

"You.....!"

Rushella's face was covered with tears.

Hisui painstakingly squeezed out his words.

"It's okay..... Because as you can see, I had this in my chest pocket."

Hisui held up the little jar containing the ashes of Miraluka's remains. Rushella's short sword had pierced the jar, causing the ashes to scatter in the air.

"This is your precious..."

"It's fine. I originally planned on using it as a lucky charm... But then, I already have this."

Hisui took out a gold coin.

A memento of extraordinary significance.

It was the gold coin he had received from Rushella on the first day that she moved into his home.

"How could this happen, this kind of thing.....!"

"...By the way, there's something important you shouldn't forget..... Why were you going to suck the blood of anyone apart from me.....? I will hate you if you do that."

"But, but, you were already.....!"

"Oh well, I'm barely still alive. You should have something you need to say, right?"

Hisui stared straight at Rushella.

Using his final embers of life, he asked her.

Rushella nodded repeatedly, tears flowing from her eyes.

".....rry."

"I can't... Hear you....."

"Sorry....."

Tears surged forth like the rupturing of a dam. As Rushella kept repeating this word, she buried her face in Hisui's chest.

Hisui forced out a fragmented sentence as he spoke to Kirika who was staring blankly at the two of them.

"So that's that... Oh well, you can forgive her... Right... She has apologized... now....."

"You... What are you actually..."

"I am just a human. Not a vampire, okay. You were the one who made a mistake. Oh well... Being seen with a vampire biting my neck... A misunderstanding is only natural. I guess for a witch's ointment producer like you... My lack of fear for sunlight wasn't going to convince you of my innocence."

Indeed.

Everything was a misunderstanding.

Anyone observant enough would naturally realize Rushella's identity.

It went without saying that given Hisui and Rushella's inseparable relationship, combined with the fact that she sucked his blood in front of Kirika, it was only natural for her to conclude Hisui was a monster baptized by cursed blood.

"Based on Senpai's personality, if you found out there were vampires in school... Surely you'd take action to exterminate them. Especially since you are a witch possessing these powers. But still, it's quite strange. Why did you kill cats? Why did you incinerate the digest? And the mandrake... Why plant it in the flowerbed?"

"This--"

"Unrelated... to Rushella. I'm guessing it was a warning to some half-baked amateur magic users. Senpai has been devoting her heart and soul to the school starting from a long time ago. I never realized the truth all this time. Never did I think that Senpai would be an evil witch. That is why only now did I finally decided..."

Hisui understood.

Based on Kirika's manner of thinking, as well as the various fragments of evidence, he knew that she was not a vampire hunter but some other sort of existence.

"The whole incident's cause -- is probably the digest from the Occult Research Club. Although that doesn't count as a grimoire, it did record a little amount of magic. That book ended up being read by someone and

the fool tried to apply the knowledge written in the book. This resulted in the first two cats' bodies in the beginning. The dead cats were found by not only Kariya but also you, Senpai. You wanted to stop that person. You wanted to give out a warning. Which is why you cast that magic for others to witness. Since you are an authentic witch, naturally the spell succeeded. Then you expected the person to be scared away after approaching the cat and not touch magic anymore. Oh well, but it turned out to be me who stepped into your trap....."

"...Right. Seeing someone do something so terrible, I could not stand aside without doing anything.....! That is why..."

"...Coincidentally, you ran across a cat that had been crushed by a moving vehicle, so you cast magic on it. When I heard the story from Rushella, I found it quite strange. Someone who did something so cruel would not have the heart to offer flowers. Actually, it was you, Senpai, who offered flowers to the kittens, right.....?"

"....."

"You also did something to the digest so that the next time the person looked at it they would be scared off... A bit of magic cast upon it. But sorry, I became the lucky winner this time as well....."

"You.....!"

"As for the mandrake... It was probably an accident. Horie-sensei said something like... A specimen had gone missing. That was the... mandrake? A witch's inheritance, probably left behind by those people from the Occult Research Club... Senpai, you must have stolen it and recycled it so that it would not be seen by others, right?"

".....Right. But I simply threw the 'flower' away. How careless of me....."

"...Then some fool picked it up and planted it in the flowerbed as an experiment. In the end, I was the one who pulled it out, however. That type of childish trick could not have been done by a true witch. After that, the class rep saw it by chance and for some reason placed the leaves into the cooking as herbs..."

Hisui's voice grew fainter and fainter.

He really was at his limits. The candlelight of life was flickering and about to extinguish.

"You... Who on earth are you...? Clearly you're just an ordinary human, but why.....!"

"Who knows. I understand you want to protect the school from vampires... But that's not necessary against Rushella. Also..... Can you allow us to use this room? I'm placing my life on the line here in exchange."

Everyone present remained silent.

And signs of life were rapidly disappearing from Hisui's face.

"Although I want to voice my grievances properly... But now... I have no more strength..... I really can't go on..... If I said something hateful before I died... That's a bit..... So please. Don't... mind me."

Saying that, Hisui collapsed.

Leaving unremarkable last words, his last thoughts were still considerate of others.

Rushella's mind was totally empty as she stared blankly at her servant.

On the other hand, Mei sprang into action.

"Hurry... Hurry and take out the antidote! You must have it, right!?"

She rushed towards Kirika who was finally brought back to her senses from her dazed state.

"Hurry and take it out... Quickly!"

Eruru pressed the barrel of her gun against Kirika's temple. Even though she knew that this gun was not authorized to shoot humans.

But for the sake of Hisui, this was the only thing she could do.

"Ah yes, I-I know!"

Kirika finally regained composure and handed over a small jar containing a transparent liquid.

Rushella instantly snatched it away, opened the lid and poured the liquid into her own mouth without hesitation. Then she fed it to Hisui via mouth to mouth.

Hurry and wake up.

During this long lasting deep kiss, she prayed from the depths of her soul.

## Epilogue

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"Oh my, I really thought I was a goner for sure."

Several days later, in a sickroom -- Hisui remarked nonchalantly.

He barely pulled through and survived.

After that, Kirika had apparently performed some sort of ritual for him, but he could not recall what took place.

Oh well, in any case, it's a happy ending -- This type of thinking of his made Rushella mad.

In addition, earlier--

"You insolent fellow... To think you dare steal my... My..... First kiss was....."

"But who knows if it's your first or not. You've lost your earlier memories."

--Thanks to this most foolish retort, Hisui was treated to a sound beating.

Furthermore, Mei and Eruru added fuel to the fire.

"This is all Hi-kun's fault, okay."

"Agreed. As a fellow female, I express my sympathies."

...In the end, the assault continued overwhelmingly.

"I couldn't help it because of the emergency situation, okay!? Besides, isn't it the same for me... Ah, but in my case..."

Hisui's gaze wavered and turned towards Mei, seeking her opinion.

"Sudou-san, kissing family doesn't count, right?"

"Of course it doesn't count. If it did, things would truly be a mess." Hearing Mei's reply, Hisui nodded hard and announced to Rushella.

"Then it's my first kiss too!"

"Jerk!!"

Pummeled by a series of punches, Hisui survived to this day but in a foul mood.

Although they were finally authorized to use the classroom, the club still had yet to make an official application. Neither did it have a name decided.

Hisui was sitting down staring at empty space when Kirika opened the door and walked in.

Eruru had interrogated her extensively, but in order to respect the wishes of the main victim, Hisui, Kirika was released without charges in the end.

Naturally, Rushella and the girls were not going to let her off so easily.

"What business do you have coming here?"

"If you dare harm Hi-kun again, I will be really mad, okay?"

Ignoring the two girls, Kirika handed a paper box over to Hisui.

"This is... Umm..... To express my apologies to you."

"What?"

Opening it, he found a freshly baked apple pie. It was clearly hand made.

"Oh, thank you. I was starting to feel a bit hungry actually."

Hisui stuffed a piece into his mouth without any wariness.

Naturally, the onslaught of criticisms began.

"Hey, show me some alertness, okay!?"

"What if it were poisoned again!?"

"What would be the point of poisoning me again? It's quite delicious, actually. Or are you girls talking about a witch's poison apple? It's not like I'm Princess Snow White."

After Hisui started eating, Kirika refused to leave and took a seat by his side.

Then opening her books and documents, she started working on her own tasks in a most natural manner.

"Umm..."

"What is it? Choosing my work location to complete tasks for the student council is my freedom, is it not? The desk in the student council office is not very convenient and the chair is not comfortable either..."

"But why do you have to sit beside me?"

"W-What does it matter!? And don't you go leaning against her so casually, okay!?"

Seeing Kirika's face turn red, Rushella and Mei had a bad premonition.

Could it be that this girl...

Speaking of which, Hisui did indeed risk his own life to save her.

"You are all allowed to use this room. I will explain to the teachers."

"Ah, thanks. By the way, did you find out who the person playing around with magic was?"

"...I am not too sure. Besides, it is not even clear if it is one person or many... And who knows how many people have read the digest already... Perhaps there might be more than one remaining in the school. M-Maybe... You can come and help? Although it might be a bit dangerous..... From the student council's standpoint... Umm....."

Although her tone of voice was a bit haughty, Hisui did not mind and replied.

"Oh sure, it's not like I'm busy after all."

"This does overlap with the activities of the Supernatural Investigations Section. This school apparently still has many secrets. The club should be run unofficially, or simply under the name of the 'Supernatural Investigations Section,' and unravel the remaining mysteries as quickly as possible."

Eruru calmly decided their direction.

Stomping her feet in fury, Rushella pointed at Hisui and yelled:

"Don't get taken in so easily! Don't tell me that there's some kind of love potion mixed in that apple pie!?"

"What would be the point of using that kind of potion!? Right, Senpai?"

Hisui remained relaxed but Kirika clicked her tongue.

"Oh yeah, there is also such a method...!"

Then Rushella and Mei exchanged glances once more.

Just as they thought, this girl was...

"Give that to me!"

"Hey, what are you doing? It's my apple pie!"

"Shut up! Just in case, I will eat this together with her. This drink is good enough for you!"

Saying that, Rushella shoved a paper bag towards Hisui.

"What's this? By the way, you were holding this that night... What did you end up buying?"

"Grape juice."

"Huh?"

"I asked the class representative to find your... That bottle of wine. But we couldn't find it. When we asked the salesperson, about vintage whatever....."

"That's only to be expected. That bottle was from a year of poor harvest so production should be quite limited. But the few bottles on the market are quite high in quality and their prices keep surging up. If there's no supply, then you can't buy it no matter how much money you have."

"That's why, that's why... This is what I bought. The class rep also said, drinking is not good, that's why, I bought the most expensive juice I could find! Hurry up and... Thank me....."

Saying that, Rushella turned her head away and refused to look at Hisui.

Hisui shrugged and opened the lid of the grape juice.

As the saying goes, there's no point in crying over spilt milk. Likewise with that bottle of wine.

Even if things of the past could not come back, there were new memories waiting to be made.

"Why don't you have some too? It comes with cups."

"...Yes."

"Cheers."

Although the promise with his foster parent for his twentieth birthday could no longer be fulfilled, the bonds of master and servant were engraved thus.

Reaching out and bumping cups lightly with Rushella, Hisui raised his cup and savored the excellent violet-colored wine.

## Afterword

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Greetings, I am Totsuki.

Just as I mentioned on the fold of the cover, the abbreviation for this series' title has not been decided yet. If everyone could think about it a little when you're free and pitch in some ideas, I'd really appreciate it.

Deciding on an official short form has its advantages. For example, there are conveniences for the editorial department, when specials are published, or in all sorts of situations. After all, the title isn't short at all so using the full name is quite troublesome sometimes.

Looking back throughout history, both local and foreign, most famous works have abbreviated names given by the readers who love them. These short forms contribute immensely to a work's development.

Indeed, a mere abbreviated name possesses such great power!

...I'm sorry, I'm just pulling things out of thin air.

Disregarding grandiose claims about short forms, at least it stands as proof of the readership's support. Of course, I believe that the convenience of referral is also an important point.

It seems a bit much for me to be worrying over such an issue before I even know how readers are referring to this book, so let's talk seriously about the work itself.

The first volume already established Hisui as the weakest protagonist and this volume continues the tradition. Essentially, he's physically weaker than all the girls in the story.

Take sprinting for example, Reina beats him.

Take long distance running for example, Reina would probably lap him once at least.

After that, he would inevitably be confronted by Rushella, but he would surely defend himself thus:

"No no, I really didn't go all out. It's just lessons in school so I'm gonna do things casually without exerting too much."

Then show your true abilities and get fired up! A certain former professional tennis player would probably say that. But Hisui is one of those types who believes "You lose if you get serious." Basically, he doesn't go all out in battle.

The only times he puts everything on the line is when someone else's life is in a desperate crisis, rather than for himself.

In those cases, he will persevere come hell or high water.

Of course, if that weren't the case, the story could never reach a climax.

Due to his constitution, he does not mind getting hurt too much. And it is the people around him who worries over him... Although many of them are not human, in any case, that's the job of females.

Clearly the weakest, but always injured the most each time. That's our protagonist, Kujou Hisui.

On further thought, that makes him quite pitiful.

Let me think for a bit about the future plot, is there some remedy for this?

...Apparently, it's hopeless.

Moving forward, he will continue to be drained, bitten, eaten, licked, beaten and pummeled.

Readers, may you all continue to support our Kujou Hisui and the powerful females.

It's about time to wrap up. Due to my working too slowly on Volume 2, I caused a lot of trouble for the supervising editor and various colleagues at the editorial department.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my apologies to them.

Since this is a creative product, the author should take responsibility. If the readers have any opinions regarding this book, please do not hesitate to offer criticism for it is within my duty to consider them. Various care provided by the dear supervising editor has also spurred me onwards greatly.

Powered by my regrets, I will strive to write faster, so please continue to support me.

Totsuki Yuu

## References

1. ↑ The latter portion of Rushella's list is a reference to the baseball manga Touch.[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Touch\\_\(manga\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Touch_(manga))
2. ↑ Miranda Warning: a warning given by police in the United States to criminal suspects in police custody before they are interrogated to preserve the admissibility of their statements against them in criminal proceedings.[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miranda\\_warning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miranda_warning)
3. ↑ Hikaru Genji(光源氏): the protagonist of the classic Japanese novel The Tale of Genji. Losing his mother in early childhood, he went on to develop romantic relations with numerous women, one of them being his stepmother, Lady Fujitsubo, who greatly resembled his mother and became his womanly ideal. Later on, Hikaru would encounter his stepmother's niece, Murasaki, whom he brought home to raise and educate to become the ideal woman of his dreams.[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hikaru\\_Genji](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hikaru_Genji)
4. ↑ As described in the previous note, Lady Fujitsubo is the stepmother while Murasaki is the stepmother's niece in the Tale of Genji.
5. ↑ Kujou Hisui(紅城緋水): for the kanji in his name, both ku(紅) and hi(緋) mean the color red/scarlet, while 水 means water.
6. ↑ Lesbians... female vampires: a reference to the famous gothic novella Carmilla which features the eponymous female vampire who preys on young women. Predates Bram Stoker's Dracula.<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carmilla>

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