

十月ユウ

銀の十字架と

Silver Cross & Draculea

クロス

架と

III

ドラキュリア



ファンタジア文庫

ルシラニダーム
・ドラキュリア

憑いていった人が、吸血鬼の下僕だった。
それだけのことよ。

ふわとうこ
不破透子

すどうめい
巢道芽依



Prologue

"So, just as I suggested previously, in order to prepare for the upcoming summer holidays, I'd like to decide on the club's activities right now. Very well, please offer your suggestions, everyone!"

The club without the school's official recognition—The Supernatural Investigations Club. Today's club activities started officially with the president's declaration.

Gathered in the empty classroom, the club members indulged freely in their own activities as usual.

Example 1—Sudou Mei.

The girl who prioritized beauty was working on her hair, looking for split ends, casually browsing through a fashion magazine.

Example 2—Kariya Eruru.

Typing away on her notebook computer, her characteristic posture remained completely the same as always. The expression hanging on her face seemed especially solemn today.

Then there were examples 3 and 4—Kujou Hisui and the newest club member.

Unlike the other rest, these two were working together with great focus, stapling sheets of printouts together stack after stack.

"With this, we're almost done, right? Senpai."

"Yes. This completes the materials required for the class committee meeting tomorrow."

Tying the stapled materials in a bundle, Seidou High School's student council vice-president—Uno Kirika nodded with satisfaction.

A regular monthly meeting for all class reps and deputy reps was being held tomorrow.

The meeting was chaired by the student council who also prepared the information materials.

This was supposed to be work performed by the student council members under the leadership of the student council president at their base of

operations—the student council office. However, lately the work had been carried out in this empty classroom, with Hisui as an assistant even.

"...Hey, what are you all doing!? Especially you, Hisui! Why are you working for that witch!? When the time comes, be careful or you'll be sent to cook poisonous stews with snakes, lizards in cauldrons!?"

"What? You're talking about that type of sticky job? How could that still exist in this day and age? Am I right, Senpai?"

Hisui found Rushella's words completely ludicrous and sought agreement from Kirika. However, the student council vice-president sighed deeply without returning his gaze.

"That kind of physical labor is rather tiring."

"..."

Apparently, some things never changed even as times progress.

Perhaps one day she might even move a giant cauldron to the club classroom to hold a Black Mass.

"Witches"—inheritors of rituals passed down from ancient times.

Witches were virtually extinct in modern society. However, one of their few descendants resided in this Seidou High School.

More accurately, that particular person was beside Hisui right now.

Having gone through plenty of misunderstandings and suspicions, even becoming enemies with Hisui's group at one point, Kirika finally became a regular visitor to this "club activities classroom" after the incident a few days ago. And for some reason, she decided to make the spot beside Hisui her permanent seat.

"See, you heard it! After all, legends say that witches borrowed the devil's power, right?"

"No matter how I look at it, Senpai doesn't really fit your descriptions. And out of everyone in this group, Senpai is the closest one to me as a living human."

"Shut up, she must be the way I say she is. Surely she prefers the devil!"

"What the heck, you're talking as if she's some kind of devil worshiper? According to you, what do witches do actually?"

"Well... What do they do huh?"

Rushella suddenly tossed the question over to Eruru.

Reluctantly, Eruru looked up from her computer screen and tore her gaze away from it.

"...Why ask me?"

"Because you are very knowledgeable! So what is the relationship between witches and the devil? They have to make some kind of offering, right!?"

"Typically, they offer both their body and soul... Basically something like that..."

After all, since Kirika was present in person, Eruru spoke softly, slightly apprehensive in tone.

But Rushella refused to back down and continued to pursue the matter.

"I see. I can understand offering the soul, but what does it mean to offer her body? I don't see her body being incapacitated in any way, right?"

"No, that is not what I am referring to, umm..."

"What the heck, explain it to me properly!"

"I-It is... Umm... Between male and female... What is known as..."

Eruru's face went red as she spoke. She even glanced furtively at Kirika.

Listening to the conversation, even Kirika herself was getting embarrassed.

"What is that about? What does the devil have to do with anything between male and female!?"

"This... Like I said, umm... That very precious thing, namely... Chastity..."

"Say it louder!!"

...Rushella urged impatiently. At this moment, Kirika stood up, her face all red.

"Stop it, okay! Those are rumors started by certain churches, right!? My chastity is perfectly intact right here, okay!!"

Only realizing the power of her words after she uttered them, Kirika frantically surveyed the surroundings.

Mei nodded nonstop with great interest.

Eruru was so embarrassed her mind was short circuiting.

Rushella's cluelessness continued to display on her face.

Finally... Hisui was staring out the window, pretending not to hear.

Kirika could not help but feel grateful for the silent gentleness and delicacy offered by the young man who was sitting next to her. Frantically, she tried to dispel the misunderstanding caused by her outburst.

"B-Besides, currently in this world, trying to make contact with a high level spiritual existence like the 'devil' is virtually impossible. At most you might encounter supernatural entities with material bodies, such as vampires. A-Although I never expected I would find them in my school..."

Kirika stared at Rushella and Mei as she explained.

She had already known Rushella's vampire secret. After joining the club, she was informed that Mei too was also a nonhuman supernatural creature.

Despite Mei's appearance which was no different from a normal human, the truth was quite unbelievable... Only when witnessing her supernatural brute strength on occasion or whenever she displayed equal combat power in minor conflicts with Rushella did Hisui get a concrete sense of her existence as a nonhuman.

"Hmph, the way I see it, the biggest monster here is Hisui who never turns into a vampire despite accepting my 'kiss' every morning."

"Like I said, it's my constitution. I have no intention of abandoning my human status."

"Every morning huh..."

Kirika's voice carried a meaningful tone as she gazed up at Hisui.

"...Are we having some kind of misunderstanding here?"

"But you and her... On the neck... Isn't that right?"

"Uh..... Yeah, I guess....."

Definitely, a misunderstanding.

Speaking of which, whenever something happened, Hisui could feel Kirika's gaze.

Reluctant to see her slaving away at the student council's workload alone, Hisui occasionally helped her out like he did with preparing the materials just now. But somehow involuntarily, he discovered Kirika was secretly looking at him as she twiddled with her fingers.

"Hey you people over there, stop talking about useless things! Hurry up and offer your wits to solve the mystery of my origins! And make plans for the coming summer holidays! If not, then at least make a 'travel guide' for me!!"

Even though it was clearly Rushella who started the topic of conversation, she was now trying to force the subject back on track.

Two or three days earlier, she had learned about the existence of "summer holidays" mentioned by the homeroom teacher and started to get all excited.

"...What are you talking about here, vampire? If you wanted to, let alone having summer holidays throughout the entire year, you could even hide in darkness every single day. Just make your own plans, okay? I'm totally busy planning my 'memories of the whole summer♥' with Hi-kun."

"Let me state beforehand. I have no intention of participating."

Hisui rejected Mei's troublemaking with a displeased expression.

If he allowed her to have her way, let alone 'memories of the whole summer,' he would most likely be swept into the 'blissful family plan.'

"My club's mission is to act with sincere devotion as my right hand, to unravel the mystery of my origins, and to raise the quality of my blood-drinking life! Have you all forgotten your duties!?"

"As if anyone would do that. Especially the latter half."

"Hear hear. If you want to do anything, do it yourself."

"I'm not idle. I have work from the student council."

Hisui, Mei and Kirika coldly refused.

Staying silent, Eruru displayed a troubled expression. Pausing her hands from typing on the keyboard, she entered deep thought.

"What useless people... Whatever, as a 'True Ancestor' I am more than capable of handling things. I totally don't need any help from a cheap fake or an inauspicious witch."

"Then do your best on your own."

Mei stated simply and began to operate her cellphone, withdrawing her attention from Rushella's declaration.

"Oh, new messages."

She swiftly read through the new messages and indulged herself in playing with her cellphone.

Eruru also resumed her efforts on the computer with renewed vigor.

These two were completely uninterested in Rushella's suggestion from the start.

Mercilessly cast aside, Rushella was just about to seek Hisui's support... But he was currently engrossed in a conversation with Kirika.

"Oh, so in other words, your master was your grandmother, Senpai?"

"Yes, Grandma taught me everything I know. Grimoires, little tools, gardens, she imparted all her knowledge to me. She was very well prepared and equipped for research."

"Based on the way you call her... Could it be that your grandmother was a foreigner?"

"She was true native of England. Apparently a family of witches that passed the tradition down the generations. Also, I am actually a quarter mixed."

"Ah, figures. I always felt you didn't seem very Japanese with your dignified airs."

".....E-Even if you praise me, it's not like you'll get any favors, okay? I baked some cookies... Would you like some?"

"Yes please."

"Here, let me pour you some tea....."

Somehow the two of them ended up having a tea party.

Clearly those two had also cast Rushella completely to the side.

"...Everyone, please don't act like this. Well, it wasn't easy to gather everyone in the same club, so we should... We must have a little bit more 'interaction' right?"

Rushella suggested with a giggle, her tone of voice sounding like she was compromising.

Nevertheless, no one supported her.

All the members ignored her... Or rather, they listened to her suggestion and were focused intently on enjoying their time in the club.

"...This is unacceptable, you people, totally unacceptable!!!"

Tears welling up in her eyes, Rushella yelled angrily, and Hisui was just next to her.

But he did not give much of a reaction, merely waving his hand with annoyance before continuing his engaged conversation with Kirika.

"So how's your grandmother recently?"

"Her health hasn't been good lately. She had to leave home and recuperate at a facility somewhere."

"I see... I'd like to meet her and talk to her."

"You, talk to me first!!!"

Rushella finally exploded.

Bursting into tears, she tugged Hisui's shirt and roared.

Hisui had no choice but to listen to her.

"...So you dragged me out to talk, what's the matter? Can't you give me some peace..."

"But..."

"You totally look like an elementary student who left a note and ran away from home, only to come running back with a hungry stomach before dinner..."

"So annoying, shut up!"

Rushella began to hammer him with her fists.

She was already much stronger than Hisui. Now that sunset was approaching, her strength was even more frightening.

Seeing Hisui suffering again, Eruru could not help but speak up.

"By the way, an acquaintance gave me several of these free vouchers for the cake buffet at Seidou Hotel. Sweets are not my thing, so if you are interested, please take them."

Presented in Eruru's tiny, opened hand were three vouchers for entry.

Rushella stopped the violence and turned her attention over.

"What is that? And what does 'beauvais' mean?"



"Simply stated, you can eat as much cake as you want. Isn't this buffet the one that's quite popular recently? The desserts at that hotel seem quite high-class, I've been wanting to go actually."

Mei explained as she reached out and took a voucher.

"What do you think, Senpai? I'm sure you should be interested, don't you enjoy making snacks quite a bit? I don't want to go alone by myself."

"That's true... Hmm. A while ago, I did consider checking it out. The pastry chef at that hotel is quite famous."

Kirika also seemed interested and took a voucher from Eruru's hand.

One remained.

"I can eat as much cake as I want...? To think such a dream-like place existed.....? Using an analogy, it'd be like Hisui offering me his neck voluntarily, begging me to drink his blood!!"

"What kind of analogy is that... By the way, are you going? The expiry date on there is Saturday, in other words, tomorrow is the only day left."

Seeing Rushella's longing expression, Hisui gave her a friendly reminder.

"B-But... Is it really okay for me to go? Aren't you always stopping me from eating sweets!?"

"Don't describe me like some kind of mom who restricts intake of junk food. Since it's a buffet, of course you can eat to your heart's content."

"But there's only one voucher remaining....."

"Oh, I'm not really interested. Besides, sweets are not my thing either. Also, isn't this restricted to girls only? Even if I'm allowed, I'll pass on this kind of occasion that's packed with girls."

Hisui shrugged and reassured her worries.

Hearing him say that, Rushella finally stopped her tears and smiled.

"Really... Very well, I'll accept it. I'm sure you'll be quite lonely without me by your side during the weekend. Watch the house like a good boy and don't cry, okay?"

"Do you really think you're in any position to say that?"

Hisui was not completely relieved but since Rushella's spirits were lifted, plus the rare arrival of a completely free Saturday... However, things never went as one hoped.

Because a little later on the way home, Hisui discovered he had received a text message from Eruru.

Even though their eyes had not met much today, the contents of the message made his heart race.

"Please accompany me for a while tomorrow."

Chapter 1 - Coffin from the Bottom of the Sea

"...And so, why did you call me out specifically? And of all places, why here?"

Hisui's puzzlement was only natural.

The tall building standing before him was no stranger to any Tokyo local, or even Japanese people in general.

In it resided an organization that no one would want to enter for a cup of tea, yet it was indispensable to society.

And this place was its headquarters.

This landmark frequently appeared in crime dramas, standing tall in the heart of police territory—The Metropolitan Police Department's headquarters.

"To me, this is simply my workplace. Because the Supernatural Investigations Section's headquarters is here as well."

Eruru was speaking in a business-like tone of voice.

Yet she had changed into weekend attire consisting of a frock and frilled skirt.

Naturally, Hisui was dressed in casual clothing as well, consisting of a loose-fitting shirt and casual tie on top with jeans on the bottom. He had picked this choice of attire in consideration of the fact that he was going out with a girl.

Of course, never did he at any point consider today's appointment a date with Eruru—but this sort of rendezvous point had him completely floored with surprise.

"Although I expected it was most likely something to do with your work, I never would have thought it'd be this place. And anyway, why did you ask me to bring this thing?"

Hisui pointed to the load he was carrying on his back. The human-height cross wrapped in white cloth.

People often used "carrying your cross" as a figure of speech but Hisui was currently carrying a real cross weighing close to thirty kilograms.

This was the Tzara Blade usually embedded on the floor of his home's basement.

Hisui had specifically brought this massive anti-vampire weapon with him as part of Eruru's request beforehand.

"Even though you helped arranged a car for me, which helped a lot... This thing is really heavy. Besides, even wrapped in cloth, you wouldn't want to get near it, right? How about you keep a bit more distance from me?"

"It matters not to me, but you will get lost, you know? It is fine, so please follow me."

Although she was afraid of crosses, Eruru lead the way unfazed.

Helpless about the fact that the giant cross was excessively conspicuous, Hisui had no choice but to hurry and follow her.

Despite the challenge of walking under the weight of this thirty kilogram cross, Hisui could not allow himself to hand it over for Eruru to carry.

Even separated by cloth, were she to touch it, surely she would suffer ill effects.

As a half-vampire—the offspring of a human and vampire pairing—she was vulnerable to all vampire "weaknesses," be it crosses, sunlight, garlic or the like.

In spite of all that, she still asked Hisui specifically to bring the Tzara Blade. This implied that the matter must be quite serious indeed.

The path Eruru led him along was apparently reserved for staff with passage restricted to a select few. It led straight to the underground of the Metropolitan Police Department.

There were very few people around and the surroundings had gotten dimly lit before Hisui could notice. In the end, no one else could be seen around.

Advancing along the path in the depths of the Metropolitan Police Department towards who knows where, Hisui inquired Eruru about the matter from yesterday.

"You must have planned the cake buffet thing beforehand, right? Most likely to get Rushella away. If you wanted me to go out on a holiday, you can't have that girl getting in the way. This was the trap you designed to

make her separate from me voluntarily. For the purpose of making that glutton with the sweet tooth fall for the bait, a girls only cake buffet is the best plan."

"....."

"But letting that girl wander the streets alone is very dangerous too. Besides, monitoring her is part of your duties. That's why you sent Sudou and Senpai to accompany her. When Sudou received a text message back then, you were the sender, right? Probably a message like 'I'll give you a buffet voucher later, tempt that girl to go along too.' Going with the flow, Senpai was invited as well, right?"

"You really are smarter than average still. So what if that is the truth? Are you going to reproach me for being a calculating woman?"

"Of course not. This is the best decision. After all, no one is getting the short end of the stick. If anything at all, at most I lost a valuable holiday's worth of time. Anyway... Asking me to bring the Tzara Blade, and requiring both of us to team up here, it must be no simple matter, right?"

Completely sincere, Hisui was not angry.

This was despite the fact that he had basically figured things out when Eruru asked him out.

It was surely related to vampires—And now that they had to run over to the Metropolitan Police Department, things definitely seemed unusual.

Eruru also appeared to have no intention of covering things up. Continuing to walk in the lead, she explained patiently without rushing.

"...A few days ago, offshore of the Seidou harbor, a sunken ship was dredged up. During the course of a resource survey completely unrelated to us, something was discovered... After we investigated, we realized it was a tricky situation."

"What was it? Some sunken ship as famous as the Titanic?"

"The ship is nowhere near that romantic. This ship sank at most ten years or so ago. And most likely it was privately owned. In terms of luxury it is comparable to the Titanic but it does not count as a passenger ship. Also, this ship is apparently illegal and not registered. Despite having sunk so long ago, for this matter to be discovered only recently, something fishy is going on for sure."

"I see. I guess there's no dormant treasure inside either."

"Several human skeletons were found. Their identities are currently under investigation."

"....."

"We have arrived."

Eruru stopped before a secure door.

The door looked like it was made of heavy metal. It was also equipped with a card reader, fingerprint verification and other strict security measures.

Its thickness was probably quite frightening too.

Or perhaps, Hisui was only witnessing the tip of the iceberg as the first of many layers of security.

"Of all the objects dredged up, the most important one was transported here. Today I asked you here in order to perform a test—Or rather, I wanted you to participate in the unsealing operation."

"Unsealing? ...What the heck did you dredge up?"

Eruru opened the door instead of answering.

Accompanied by the sound of activation, the door opened, its left and right halves sliding apart.

Before them was another door, separated by a corridor a few steps long.

Hisui and Eruru followed the corridor, passing through several heavy doors along the way that opened up for them.

After passing through multiple layers of security, they finally reached a large, plain room surrounded by four walls.

The top part of the walls had a portion made of glass, which seemed to count as windows.

It resembled operating theaters where medical interns could observe. Behind the glass, several figures were watching from an elevated position.

Since so many strict layers of security were passed along the way here, the glass up there were most likely reinforced to withstand average impacts.

However—why on earth was such strict security needed?

"I hope it's not for imprisoning some vicious criminal... Come on, what on earth is the thing?"

As if answering Hisui's question, the lights overhead turned on, focusing on an object sitting in the center of the room.

".....!!"

It was a coffin.

Multiple layers of chains were wrapped around it, imprisoning whatever lay sleeping inside.

From gaps between the chains, one could catch a glimpse of the coffin and see that its design was quite intricate.

With a high-class appearance of deep purple, the coffin was ornamented with detailed carvings.

As if highlighting the owner's stature, the outer appearance was exceedingly ornate. This was no simple burial vessel but a worthy work of art.

"This is....."

The outline covered by chains seemed familiar to Hisui.

Approaching it, he examined its appearance in detail.

Whether the skilled carving technique or the overall impression exuded—all of it seemed so similar.

Absolutely too similar.

To that particular coffin he was used to seeing every day.

The coffin Rushella had placed in her own bedroom.

"This was dredged up along with the ship."

Hearing Eruru speak, Hisui slowly turned around and asked:

"Are we going to open this?"

Eruru nodded silently.

Hisui returned to his position just now and stared at the coffin.

On that day, Rushella had woke up from her coffin in the mountains.

That was the beginning of everything for that "True Ancestor" girl.

Then what was going to appear from the coffin before his eyes here?

No one knew the answer, but one could make a basic guess. Hisui tightly gripped the Tzara Blade carried on his back.

"Yes, this is great!"

Enjoying the cake buffet, Rushella was greatly pleased.

Piling her plate with cake, she swept everything clean with ravenous appetite.

Starting from the banquet's opening, she had been eating nonstop, causing Mei and Kirika who were sitting opposite to be at a loss for words.

"How could you eat so much... I never knew vampires had such a sweet tooth?"

"Perhaps your nerves for sensing fullness are damaged? Be careful of getting fat... Though I guess vampires have no worry of that."

Mei and Kirika shrugged in exasperation successively.

The amount of cake on their plates were relatively normal. Cakes were wonderful and all, but for the sake of maintaining their figures, they had no choice but to rein in their appetite.

"I'm not sure why but my body seems to be thirsting for sweet tastes. But ultimately, nothing tastes sweeter than blood. I'm feeling a bit thirsty, it'd be nice if nearby there was..."

Rushella licked the cream near her mouth as she murmured with thirst.

The sight of a vampire like this was enough to send chills down one's spine.

"Hey don't show your true self in a place like this. If you want something to drink, there's as much juice and tea as you want."

"In my view, the taste of blood does not match very well with cake. Or perhaps a vampire's sense of taste is peculiarly different after all?"

Kirika was clearly being sarcastic but Rushella pondered her comment seriously.

"Hmm, that makes sense. Hisui's blood is more tasty when savored by itself. I'll have a good drink when I get back!"

Rushella's eyes glowed as she declared.

Precisely because this statement came sincerely from her heart, pure and innocent, it felt even more terrifying to the viewer.

Hisui very likely felt an inexplicable chill right now.

"I never understood all this time, why are you so obsessed with Hi-kun's blood? Though I suppose he is young and handsome, which should satisfy a vampire's tastes."

"Indeed, I am quite curious too. I heard from grandma that vampires normally prefer the blood of women instead..."

The subject of this conversation between girls might seem a bit too bloody, but precisely because Hisui was not present, it was a perfect opportunity to explore the issue.

But Rushella simply dodged the question.

"...No idea. Do I need a reason to like things? It's just like the cake before my eyes!"

"That sounds like a carefully phrased, shocking confession?"

"So it's that principle after all? The same way that food cooked by the person you love tastes especially good?"

Mei nodded in agreement with the viewpoint put forth by Kirika.

"Are you two misunderstanding something...? Besides, people who possess blood worthy of my attention are exceedingly rare. Simply through unaided vision, I can tell roughly what a person's blood tastes like. For example, you two completely fail to arouse my interest! The same goes for any other male! Make no mistake about this!"

Despite Rushella's domineering tone, she was blushing.

In order to hide her embarrassment, she turned to wolfing down her cake and averting eye contact.

"Oh well whatever. No matter how much affection you show towards Hi-kun, you always turn cold within short time."

"What are you talking about?"

"Senpai, you should understand. After all, one of them is a vampire while the other is human, right? The age difference resulting from the passage of time will become more and more pronounced. Perhaps the blood of the youthful is more tasty and once someone grows up, the attraction will be cut down by half? At least for the blood?"

"Ah, that does make sense....."

Kirika nodded in agreement.

With a human couple, growing old together through life and the passage of time was a worthy experience to savor. But a human and vampire couple would be a different matter. Only the human would age by him or herself.

"Th-This...!"

The flawless viewpoint proposed made Rushella dumbstruck.

Although they appeared to be the same age currently, Hisui was going to age visibly sooner or later.

The taste of his blood would probably decline.

Furthermore, their relative positions... No, only Hisui's position would gradually change.

"Th-That guy should simply become my servant as soon as possible! Then with that...!"

"I will not allow anything like that to happen... That's what I'd like to say, but there's no need apparently. Hi-kun's constitution makes it impossible."

"Apparently so. I was quite shocked earlier... To think he could get his blood drained to such a degree without being turned. Your method surely will not work."

Completely immune to being turned into a vampire, the Anti-Drac.

Despite having his blood sucked by Rushella in full view of these two girls, Hisui's body never underwent any changes.

The fact of the matter stood firmly, better than any argument.

"Hmph... One day I will surely make him my servant. As for now... Well, recovering my memories is more important!!"

"True. Although I hate helping you, it's better to have you recover your memories sooner. Once that happens, you will voluntarily leave Hi-kun alone."

" ".....?" "

Kirika and Rushella displayed puzzlement.

"You don't get it? Because once you recover your memories, of course you'll remember your kin... Or about your family, then you'll return home, right?"

"Ah... That makes sense. Although it is unknown how long you have lived, given you are an undead vampire with perpetual youth, it would not be strange to have a large family."

Kirika was the first to understand, nodding in agreement.

Indeed, vampires who had lived through the ages was very likely to have their own families.

"Let alone a boyfriend, perhaps you might have married, with children even. In the end, you might find out you're the mother of two or something like that? If that's really the case, Hi-kun no longer needs to take care of you, and you'll go home, right?"

Mei smiled malevolently.

Rushella objected with blushing embarrassment.

"W-What are you talking about!? O-Of course there's no... No lover at all! First of all, no other male even registers in my eyes..."

"...Perhaps not in the present, but who is to say it didn't happen centuries ago? It's not like I believe you are a 'True Ancestor,' but given eternal youth, it's probable that you've experienced a few romances more or less, right? In that case, marriage and children is perfectly normal. Besides, without your memories, on what basis are you refuting this?"

Unable to find words to object, Rushella could only turn her head away.

Channeling her displeasure elsewhere, she reached out with her fork to snatch away the last piece of Sachertorte chocolate cake from Mei's plate.

"Hey, what on earth are you doing!? I wanted to save this cake, the one that was limited in quantity, for the very last!!"

"You're being noisy, so shut up!!"

Rushella stood up directly and headed off to find new prey.

"...Jeez, does she really have to get so flustered when she gets poked in a sensitive spot? What a petty 'True Ancestor' she is!!"

"...Indeed, rather than the lord of the night... Describing her as a girl of our age would be a better fit. But why is it like this.....?"

Kirika began to ponder with a bemused expression.

Compared to Mei, she had not spent as much time getting along with Rushella.

Although she had already heard Hisui explain basic facts such as her being a "True Ancestor" and "amnesia"—It was still difficult to accept.

"You look like you have a lot to say... Is there something wrong with that girl?"

"Do you not find it suspicious? Her personality, preferences, tone of voice... None of it resembles a 'True Ancestor' who had experienced a lifetime of eons. She is essentially a spoiled high school girl who throws tantrums all the time."

"Well, apart from drinking blood, that's really true... But isn't it just the result of losing her memories?"

"Wiped of memories, I suppose mental age would be set back more or less... A lack of life experiences would indeed feel more childish. But even so, her personality cannot change entirely, right? It is not like erasing data like a machine results in a pristine child."

"What you say makes sense..."

Memories—in other words, everything one had seen and heard throughout one's life had a great influence on the formation of personality. This was indisputable.

Nevertheless, Rushella was quite strange indeed if considered from this perspective.

"And speaking of losing memories, she should have no memories from before waking up in her coffin, right? But the minimum memories... Or rather, she does have knowledge essential for staying alive. No, based on what I heard from Kujou-kun, she is quite knowledgeable about vampires. In that case, her personality is supposed to resemble more of a vampire who had lived centuries, no, millennia... But in actual fact..."

"It completely doesn't feel that way. You're right, if all her memories were lost completely, then even if her body had matured, her mind would regress back to a child's... But Rushella was not childish to that degree, yet one could not feel traces of age from life's experiences... What is going on?"

"Did she really... Lose her memories?"

Kirika wondered with a solemn tone.

Entering into contact with Rushella as a third party, she seemed to be figuring something out about the matter.

"Hey hey Senpai, are you suggesting that she's pretending? That can't possibly be right no matter how you look at it. At least I don't think she could deceive Hi-kun... Besides, what would she gain by doing so?"

"No, I am not saying she is lying... Rather, I am wondering if her memories ever existed in the first place."

".....!?"

"Looking at her, you really cannot tell she is a 'True Ancestor' having lived for millennia and lording over all vampires from the pinnacle. How should I describe her? ...Perhaps I am not expressing this very clearly, but take for example a girl of our age, suddenly turned into a vampire... That is the kind of feeling I get."

"....."

Mei was unable to refute this hypothesis.

Naturally, there was no definite proof either.

Nevertheless, the 'True Ancestor' vampire before their eyes was currently stacking cake on her plate.

Possessing neither life experiences nor fragments of lost memories, she was simply a girl in the springtime of youth, a smile blooming on her face from the sweetness she tasted in her mouth.

Maintaining her solemn expression, Kirika took a sip of tea.

Amidst the drifting steam, she narrowed her eyes and used a "Witch"'s sharp gaze to scrutinize Rushella.

"Where on earth... did you actually come from?"

"—Next let us begin the unsealing operation."

Eruru announced solemnly at the underground of the Metropolitan Police Department.

In response to her orders, members of a police tactical team put on protective gear, took up their tools and surrounded the coffin.

Due to the special job requirements of the Supernatural Investigations Section as well as precautions against potential threats hidden in the coffin, neck guards were added to their issued gear, protecting their necks securely. Other parts were also carefully reinforced to prevent penetration from vampire fangs.

Just to be on the safe side, they all hung crosses around their necks as well.

A normal person would probably fall over in laughter if they saw such a scene, but everyone present were completely serious in their expression. Furthermore, the Tzara Blade carried on Hisui's back could also be considered a cross they relied on psychologically.

Under Hisui and Eruru's gaze, the team members began the task of cutting the chains.

Due to soaking under seawater for so long, the chains were severely rusted and had lost their former sturdiness.

Very soon, all the chains were severed in turn, revealing the coffin's full appearance to all present.

It looked more and more similar.

At the very least, Hisui was certain it came from the same craftsman who made Rushella's coffin, or a closely related maker.

"Then... Please open it."

Eruru issued orders solemnly.

The team members nodded to each other in acknowledgement and gripped the coffin's lid.

Slowly, slowly—the long sealed lid was gradually opened.

A faint fragrance of the tides wafted out.

The coffin from the bottom of the sea, its content was going to be fully exposed today.

The team members cautiously moved the lid aside—Then retreated together and kept their distance.

Rather than suddenly struck with fear, they were probably following Eruru's strict orders given beforehand.

This was for the sake of handling what was contained in the coffin, in order to keep casualties to a minimum.

However—

"Eh...?"

There was nothing inside.

The coffin was lined with comfortable cushioning as fit for a vampire's sleeping quarters—but the owner was absent.

Completely empty.

Eruru stood expressionlessly in one place while her team looked at one another in puzzlement.

Only Hisui walked up to the coffin to confirm its interior.

No one tried to stop him.

Or rather, there was no need to stop him.

Because no matter how one looked, it was empty.

"....."

Examining the inside in detail... Still no clues could be found.

Because a lot of seawater had seeped in, there was a heavy damp smell and it was quite wet.

But apart from there was nothing special of note. No trace nor possessions left behind by the owner could be found.

Sticking his neck in to investigate deeper, Hisui still found nothing.

Then to understand the coffin's structure and tactile feeling, Hisui reached with his hand towards the coffin surface.

Just as his fingertips were about to make contact with the coffin's edge—

—Don't—

Hisui withdrew his hand in surprise.

But the surrounding people simply reacted with bemused expressions at his behavior.

They apparently had not heard the voice.

(...Was I hallucinating?)

Just as this notion flashed across his mind, he suddenly felt an intense chill.

Perhaps having been submerged in seawater for so long, the coffin's surroundings were comparatively colder.

Just now when he had heard what sounded like a human voice, Hisui had felt a cold sensation flying past... But that was all.

The empty coffin before him showed no unusual signs.

"...What is going on?"

Hisui turned around and asked. Before Eruru could answer, another person in the corner of the room responded.

"What a complete embarrassment, wouldn't you say, special consultant Kariya?"

"...Who?"

There were several members of the police before Hisui's gaze.

The one who spoke was a woman dressed in a suit and leather shoes who appeared to be their leader.

She had a tall and trim figure with slender arms and legs. Combined with a very short black hair, the description "cross-dressing beauty" seemed a custom fit for her.

Were she to appear on stage with a male role, surely screams of excitement would be elicited from the audience.

Her exquisite face showed no traces of cosmetics. Rather than beautiful, it would be more appropriate to describe her as handsome.

Roughly twenty years of age or so—Quite young for a proper police officer, but given her presence here, she was most likely no ordinary member of the police.

"Oogami Rangetsu—here to make your acquaintance. Unlike the special consultant over there, I am an official police officer of the Supernatural Investigations Section."

As if showing off her identity, Rangetsu displayed her police ID badge.

"Uh... Hi... What did you mean just now when you said embarrassment?"

"Just as you see here. Clearly there is no vampire but to have allocated so much personnel and squandered so much time, what an utter waste of police resources and facilities. All this effort for naught."

Her voice sounded husky like a young man's while her words were completely merciless.

This tone of voice somehow reminded Hisui of his first encounter with Eruru.

"But how could one know without opening it....."

"How utterly foolish. Before it was unsealed, the coffin had already been examined in various ways such as X-ray and ultrasound. All tests reported an empty interior... But this person here stubbornly insisted on carrying out the unsealing operation in this special facility."

"....."

"I am not implying that it should not be opened. Anyone in the Supernatural Investigations Section would recognize it as a vampire's possession. Besides, as an object dredged from sunken wreckage, investigations are definitely in order. However, there is no vampire in it, right? Then it's simply an antique and investigations should be left to forensics upstairs. Does everyone here agree?"

Rangetsu's words were addressed to the people watching above on the other side of the glass.

Although Hisui could not see the expressions on the people above, he could see several of them nodding in agreement.

Rangetsu's words were like a closing statement. Losing interest, the figures turned and left, disappearing from behind the glass.

Then the team in charge of the unsealing operation began to clear up and leave the scene dejectedly.

"Oh what a disaster for you too, getting called out here expressly on a holiday. Oh well, since she exterminated the vampire she raised personally, she has no choice but to turn to civilian collaborators."

Rangetsu sneered.

Her words mocked Eruru mercilessly.

The vampire she raised personally—this was obviously a reference to the man who had concealed his identity and worked by Eruru's side, kidnapped Rushella and finally was exterminated by Hisui.

It was true that he was the subordinate she trained. But had she known he was a vampire? obviously she would not have kept him by her side.

"I can understand how you might be a little zealous in trying to make up for your past blunder, but you should pay a little more attention to others. Otherwise, you'll just end up causing trouble for others—"

"Actually, didn't this turn out great?"

Faced with her endless lecturing, Hisui stretched himself and interrupted.

"Be quiet, child. This is an investigation..."

"Why can't we be happy that things turned out peacefully? No matter how much checking you do, this does concern a vampire, and ultimately the coffin needs to be opened directly for confirmation. Supposing the being inside the coffin actually existed, it should be quite weak after being immersed in the sea for so long, and indeed such strict security might not have been necessary... But isn't this just hindsight? Could you really assert that just because you arranged heavy security and it ended up being bogus, taking precautions was unwarranted? What's the use of criticizing after the fact? Precautions are taken just in case. If nothing happens, it's a happy ending. Isn't that the way it should be?"

Hisui looked greatly unimpressed, his eyes full of derision.

After listening to him, Rangetsu responded aggressively.

"Looks like you have become this half-vampire's dog. Have you been struck by the 'magic eyes'?"

"Eh? Half-vampires can't use the 'magic eyes.' But they do have sharper eyesight than normal humans."

"I was being sarcastic. Are you that dim-witted?"

"Oh my god, there's actually someone who needs to clarify she was being sarcastic? What a total fail."

Hisui covered his mouth and suppressed the urge to laugh.

Rangetsu frowned and summed up with a face of displeasure.

"...In any case, learn from your mistakes. Please think carefully before you act, special consultant Kariya. Although based on my predictions, the higher-ups will be less inclined to listen to your opinion from now on."

Then she led her subordinates and left.

Hisui remained rooted to the spot, watching them with a bored expression.

"...Let us leave. Sorry for troubling you."

Eruru spoke and led Hisui back to ground level.

Along the way back, Hisui carefully selected his words and inquired about what just happened.

"Could it be possible... That you're in a rather complicated position?"

"It has always been this way. The purpose of setting up the Supernatural Investigations Section was to make effective use of cryptids surviving in the modern age. Humans serving under my command are tasked with monitoring me at the same time as assisting me. Oh well, who could blame them for I am the half-vampire inheriting half my ancestry from vampires."

"Don't say that. So who is that Oogami woman supposed to be?"

"Exactly as she introduced herself, an official member of the Supernatural Investigations Section. With several subordinates under her, she can be considered a squad leader. For some reason, she is always trying to compete against me... But she is quite capable in all respects, especially in handling the higher-ups."



"Looks like you're full of sarcasm too. Oh well, I can understand. But I get the impression that back from when I first met you, your authority seems to be higher than that Oogami's. Could it be that... You were disciplined for that particular incident?"

"For my own subordinate to be a vampire, especially one that had sucked human blood? It is only natural that I take responsibility as the leader. By the way, about Kishida's incident, it is very probable that the higher-ups knew he was a vampire and specifically arranged for him to work under me. Were they under the impression that kin could coexist harmoniously?"

Eruru laughed in self-deprecation.

It looked like the incident had hurt her quite a lot.

Despite being the one bearing responsibility, but for the higher-ups to deliberately place a vampire by her side—it would not be strange if she started to hate the world.

"I heard from Sudou already. You put in a great deal of effort to allow Rushella and me to have a normal life. The matter of my constitution... You didn't report it to your superiors, right?"

"Why are you talking about this suddenly? I only do what is within my duty. The current state of affairs is that the higher-ups are taking a policy of leniency towards the amnesiac vampire who has not harmed humans. Besides, the only victim, you, do not actually count as a victim..."

"Granted, but I still haven't expressed my gratitude to you properly. Thank you."

"....."

Walking ahead of him, Eruru began to blush, but Hisui did not notice.

Instead, he changed the subject to something that happened a while ago.

"By the way, about that coffin..... You probably knew there was actually nothing inside, right? But you still called me here just in case?"

"Because I no longer have subordinates working under me... You are the only one I can use. Also....."

"Also?"

Eruru paused halfway through.

She seemed quite hesitant.

"...Because I wanted to hear your opinion. I was certain it was a vampire's coffin, but apart from that, I was wondering if you would discover anything else..."

"Why do you believe in me that much? Isn't this supposed to be your job?"

Saying that, Hisui squeezed ahead to look into Eruru's face—thus causing Eruru to deliver a slap to his face without warning.

Smack, the clear sound of impact echoed through the hallway.

"...Why did you hit me?"

"Shut up. I am sorry for believing in you. How foolish of me."

Without saying anything more, she quickened her pace and walked ahead.

Hisui had no choice but to walk faster to catch up.

"It is indeed a vampire's coffin, I agree. But why was it sunk to the bottom of the sea, heavily wrapped in chains, that I don't get. If it was for sealing a vampire... Wrapping it in chains and throwing it into the sea makes sense. But since it's empty inside, this..."

"...Correct. Regarding the coffin and the sunken ship, investigations will continue. But based on the reactions of the higher-ups just now, progress will be delayed even more. But more importantly....."

"You're trying to say... It's very similar to Rushella's coffin, right? I can't really assert anything right now so I'll wait for the analysis on your side first."

"Please explain to her as quickly as possible. If you were to hide this from her, it will probably result in more trouble. Despite your cleverness, you seem to keep making blunders in this area."

"Yes yes, got it."

Hisui answered in his trademark bored tone of voice. Just as it so happened, they had reached the entrance to the Metropolitan Police Department.

At the same time, his cellphone sounded.

Taking it out for a look, Hisui found a text message from Mei.

...No, judging from the contents... It was quite awkwardly written:

eating kake tuk longr than expected

hurry n pick me up!

"...What's going on? It feels like an elementary schooler sending her first message to her mom....."

"Elementary schoolers these days not only know how to type properly but also use emoticons. If anything, it would be an old lady unused to electronic devices, trying to send a message to her grandson, typing with trembling hands on the new phone she bought... This kind of analogy would be more suitable, right?"

Eruru read the message from beside him and smiled.

Exchanging glances with a smile, they both knew who the sender was.

Although the name said Mei.

In actual fact it was someone else.

Clearly Rushella.

"...She doesn't have a cellphone so she borrowed Sudou's. Should I get her a phone card?"

"I think you ought to give those rare public phone booths a break, for I foresee a terrible fate of destruction for them. By the way, I have no idea if Sudou-san's cellphone survived..."

"Can you write off the replacement costs for me?"

"Keep your fantasies in your dreams, please."

Rejected outright, Hisui resolutely decided his first priority was to pick up the trouble making princess.

"The Tzara Blade is way too heavy... I'm almost out of strength."

"I will send a car. You can use it to pick her up along the way."

"Thanks....."

Just as he thanked Eruru, Hisui felt the onslaught of intense chill.

This bone-chilling, icy cold presence made him brace himself.

"What are you doing so suddenly?"

"Uh, it feels very cold somehow..... Is the air conditioning turned on too strong?"

"This is eco-friendly air conditioning, so the thermostat is set at twenty eight degrees Celsius... Actually, I am feeling slightly hot."

"Really? Why do I feel all cold ever since coming up from underground?"

"Maybe you caught a summer cold? Just as well, tomorrow is Sunday so you should go back and lie down soon."

"Are you my mom? Oh well, whatever, let's hurry and pick her up."

Saying that, Hisui exited the building.

Eruru followed closely behind.

Two people in a series... Or rather, there were three.

One extra.

In this noisy lobby area with so many people coming and going, how many people actually noticed?

Hisui and Eruru were completely unaware, but quite a few people screamed lightly and backed off after looking in their direction.

These people differed in gender, age and appearances. However, they all shared a certain special secret skill that they were not particularly proud of... Rather than skill, it might be more apt to say special ability.

Because they were the only ones able to see.

A girl was following behind Hisui not too far away, dressed in a sailor-style school uniform, her body semi-transparent.

Only people with relatively stronger spiritual senses could perceive—a being that did not exist in the realm of the living.

Chapter 2 - Touko-san

"lyaaaaaaaaah!!"

A super high decibel shriek resounded through the living room as Rushella clutched and wrapped herself around Hisui's arm tightly.

"Ouch, could you stop that!? You're using brute force all over... Especially on spinach night. If you twist my arm off, how are you going to compensate me!?"

"B-But... That..."

Rushella tearfully protested as she pointed to the television in the living room.

Although the scene had already changed, an instant earlier, the screen was showing a woman dressed in white, climbing out of a television. The penetrating sight and closeup of the bloodshot eye filled the entire screen.

"What on earth was that!?"

"Uh... Isn't that Sadako-san? By the way, if you're scared then don't rent it!"^[1]

I can't stand this. Hisui shook his head as looked at the rental DVD box.

On the way home after he picked her up, Rushella became fascinated by a new horror film's poster, so they made a trip to a DVD rental shop in the neighborhood.

Rushella was quite interested in going to a place like that for the first time. Using his own membership card, Hisui rented several DVDs she had picked.

After dinner and a bath, she was dressed as usual in Hisui's uniform shirt. Rushella declared that she wanted to watch a DVD, and so they watched one... This was the result.

"What is with that woman... Whether her eye or her movements, none of them are normal!"

"Uh, that's only natural... Because she's a ghost, you see? By the way, how could a vampire be afraid of horror movies? In addition, I only rented this because you picked it."

"B-But... I never expected something like that to pop out... Oh no, what should I do... I also watched the 'cursed videotape'..... Will be cursed!? Will I also be cursed!? One week from now, will that woman also come knocking on our door!?"

"...As if she's going to come. Even if she did, you can handle it. Yeah, just suck her blood. Drain her dry for sure. Maybe she might even become your servant... But then again, I have no wish to see the birth of vampire Sadako."

"As if I'd bite her!! By the way, how could you be so calm and composed!!?"

Rushella leaned against Hisui and buried her face in his chest to escape her fear.

Her behavior seemed a bit... Or rather, quite adorable. However, Hisui mustered his iron will and turned his head away from her.

"Because I've watched it many times already... Recently, there are a lot of moe-fied versions even."

"Even so.....! Seriously, humans are capable of creating such horrifying things....."

"Praise in this area is rather strange. Anyway, I'm going to bed."

Hisui gently pushed aside Rushella's supple body and made his way towards the staircase.

"W-Wait up! Where are you going!?"

"Like I said, I'm going to bed. Ever since the daytime, my body has had this unpleasant feeling and incessant chills. But I don't have a fever, and in fact, my body temperature is lower than usual... What's going on?"

Hisui puzzled over his inexplicable condition as he walked up the stairs.

Rushella remained clinging tightly to his arm.

"D-Don't be in such a hurry, okay? It'd be nice for a boy and a girl to chat all night long once in a while♥"

"...Are you trying to reenact a touching reunion of old friends in foreign lands? Although I'm not against friendship between genders, I still can't accept girls as close friends or beyond."

"As if anyone is your friend here! I am the master and you are the servant!
Know your proper place!!"

"...Then there's no need to chat all night long. Goodnight~"



Shaking Rushella's arms off him, Hisui returned to his own bedroom.

After repositioning his pillow, he spread out his blanket and got into his steel-frame bed.

Then he laid himself down and switched off the light.

However—

"...By the way, why are you here?"

Hisui grumbled at Rushella.

Because the girl was lying right beside him.

She had burrowed beneath the blanket and was lying face to face with Hisui who was on his side in a fetal position.

"Hmm, after some thought, I realized I was going to suck your blood tomorrow morning anyway."

"Could you stop that!? Stop talking about it as if it were predestined already, okay!? Do you really want me to start Sunday morning all covered in blood!?"

"You're being noisy, so shut up. Since I have to drink your blood anyway, isn't it better to just occupy this spot directly!? Saves me the effort of coming over, killing two birds with one stone!"

Rushella clenched her fist excitedly as if she had suddenly thought of a great idea.

Yeah, it does save a lot of effort.

But there's nothing good about that.

"Say, Rushella-san..... What you said is not wrong..... But you realize... You're going to sleep with me?"

".....Ah."

She finally realized only after Hisui's reminder.

Her face gradually turned red. Then with her long and beautiful leg, she kicked Hisui directly off the bed.

"Y-Y-Y-Y-You lowly bastard, how dare you share a bed with me..... Know your proper place!!"

"You're the one who entered my bed, okay.....!!"

Having landed head first on the floor, Hisui angrily glared at Rushella.

But he had zero hope of victory.

Furthermore, it was currently night time.

After calmly assessing the battle situation, Hisui decided on a tactical retreat and left the room.

"Hey, hold it right there, where are you going!?"

"Going anywhere is my freedom, right? I'm not picky about where I sleep. I'm fine with spending a night on the living room sofa."

"W-W-Wait up, don't be in such a hurry!! Sharing a bed is no good... But umm, I can take the bed while you sleep on the floor!"

"As if anyone wants to sleep on the floor! Go ahead if you want to sleep in this bed. But then again, that bed there... Faces the television."

Only after Hisui pointed with his index finger did Rushella discover the television's existence.

This personal, mini LCD television was positioned at just the right height and distance to be viewed comfortably from the bed.

Obviously, there was nothing on the screen right now, but back in the movie, the television would turn on suddenly all by itself, and from the screen came...

"S-Shut up! Move this thing away from me! Why is it in the room!?"

"Hey, I haven't even questioned your being in the room. Oh well, if that thing really crawls out from the television, do your best to handle it. Don't worry, you can win!"

Hisui cheered enthusiastically for her and prepared to leave the room. But Rushella jumped from the bed and grabbed him.

Then hugging Hisui from behind, she immobilized him.

"What the heck are you doing...? Hurry and let me sleep, okay?"

"Not allowed. As long as a single sliver of crimson light remains in my eyes, I shall never let you have your way!"

"What is this? What the heck do you actually want me to do?"

"Oooh... Umm... Ah yes, we still haven't finished watching all the Dee-Wee-Dee's we rented! Come and watch! Let's try a change of flavor. Come watch, come watch!!"

"The rental period is a week, there's plenty of time left... Or maybe you can watch it alone....."

"What does it matter!? Hurry and accompany me!!"

...In the end, she dragged Hisui to the living room and forced him to watch movies with her.

After they placed another DVD into the player, the screen began to play.

At the end—the living room reverberated with a scream again.

"lyaaaaaaaaah!!"

"...Again, huh."

Rushella wrapped herself tightly around Hisui, causing him to sigh deeply.

"B-Because..... What on earth was that thing? The horrifying woman, all covered in blood, appearing in the big scary house, and then there was even that pale little child, what are they!?"

"Uh..... Isn't that Kayako-san and Toshio-kun? Say, isn't this another horror film!? Didn't you want a change of flavor? Why did you switch to something even more scary!?"^[2]

"B-Because I never expected it to be the same genre....."

"...Come on, you should have looked at the packaging beforehand at least."

"On further thought, isn't that house quite similar to this one... Could there be ghosts here as well!? Does this home have those things too!?"

"Don't say something so rude. Even if my home counts as a western house, it's completely different in style. And it has a vampire instead of

ghosts. Or rather, it has you in it. I really cannot keep you company any further. My head feels really heavy, and I'm getting crazy chills too....."

Hisui took out the DVD from the player and returned it to its box.

Shutting off the television, he thought he could finally head off to bed, only to hear Rushella scream again.

"...What is it this time?"

"I-In the television! There was a figure in the television just now!!"

"Huh?"

With a skeptical expression, Hisui turned to look at the switched-off television.

"...Eh?"

The television gave off a tiny spark for an instant, as if someone had switched it on.

But nothing showed on the screen and it went dark as it was supposed to.

"Is it broken...? This television shouldn't be that much of an antique."

Confirming again, Hisui stared at the television for a long time but there were no changes.

Although the reflection was not as clear as a mirror, Hisui could see his own face on the screen.

"There really was something! A silhouette of a long-haired girl!!"

"Say, did you watch too many movies?"

"Absolutely not!"

Rushella approached the screen as well to examine closely.

Just as in legends, vampires did not have reflections in mirrors. There was no sign of Rushella on the screen.

Water, windows, walls—no reflective surface was capable of producing an image of a vampire.

"If anything, I find your lack of a reflection on this surface even more scary. There's no figure here, right?"

"There really was one just now....."

Rushella pouted, displeased.

Just as Hisui shrugged skeptically, the floorboards creaked.

Creak, creak... They clearly heard sounds of someone walking across the floor.

"W-What is this noise!? Could there be... Someone here!?"

"How could there be anyone? After all, the house is quite old... Probably something's too old and need repairs."

"Really.....?"

Rushella asked half-believingly. A great noise suddenly came from the kitchen.

"W-What now?"

"Probably some plates fell on the floor. Isn't it all because you're making a loud commotion here? Judging from the noise, nothing probably broke. I'll go check it out."

"W-Wait up. Don't leave me!"

Rushella hugged Hisui tightly, pressing him down on the sofa.

Then in order to seal all avenues of escape, she secured his hands firmly behind his back, immobilizing Hisui's body.

"What the heck are you doing? It hurts a lot, I can't move....."

"I have a bad feeling..... Something in this house, there must be something!"

"...Are you a paranormal expert from some sort of occult show? It's just a noise and some plates falling, right? If watching horror movies causes supernatural events, then wouldn't all of Japan be in a total mess?"

"It is completely unrelated. I am simply saying I sensed something bad. I-In any case... Don't even think of leaving me alone tonight....."

Saying that, Rushella curled up and pressed herself even tighter against Hisui.

It looked like she really sensed a presence that Hisui could not feel. But undeniably, it was partially influenced by the movies.

"...I thought you forbade sharing the same bed?"

"I-I can grant special privileges too! So long as you don't get any strange ideas. Just stay there obediently and don't move!"

"What the heck. You're treating me as a body pillow now!?"

Unfortunately, vampires were exceptionally strong at night. Hisui could not escape even if he wanted to.

Just as Hisui pondered on how to handle being pressed beneath her weight... He spontaneously heard steady breathing noises.

"Hey... Rushella-san....."

No answer.

Looking down, he found the vampire using his chest as her pillow, having drifted peacefully off to the land of dreams.

Her powerful grip restraining him had probably relaxed, so breaking free should be rather easy... But Hisui abandoned the notion.

Were he to accidentally wake her up, he would be bringing doom upon himself... More importantly, her sleeping face was far too charming.

There was no longer any trace of her noisy fussing and arrogance. Embracing Hisui, the girl was breathing peacefully.

She seemed to be finding this body pillow very comfortable, for her face was filled with delight and reassurance.

".....This is totally cheating."

Hisui protested lightly. Then he dutifully acted the part of his master's body pillow.

Several hours later—

Or rather, when morning came.

"Ouch—!!"

Hisui felt a sharp pain on his neck as usual, causing him to jump up.

Or rather, before he could actually get up, a supple body weighed him down.

"(Good morning.)"

With the fear from last night having disappeared from her heart, Rushella's face was radiant as she bit his neck, sucking his blood away.

"Damn it, is this how you repay me for letting you rest against me!? My head hurts enough already...!"

"What does it matter anyway!? By the way, drinking blood as soon as I open my eyes in the morning turns out to be really great. How about we sleep together from now on!?"

"Uh, that, let's not..... Hey, hurry up and stop it! Don't drink anymore!!"

"(You're being noisy, so shut up!)"

Hence, Rushella continued to enjoy her blood drinking time.

With the sharp pain on his neck as his daily alarm clock, thus Kujou Hisui's Sunday began.

"...And so, the ghost farce persists to this week?"

"...Yeah. The symptoms aren't really visible during the daytime, but all hell breaks loose at night."

After school on Monday, Hisui was killing time in the "club classroom" again.

Mei was sitting by his side, listening to him recount Rushella's ghost farce that started with the horror movies.

"A vampire being scared of horror movies and fearful of ghosts, come on..... Are you really a 'True Ancestor'?"

"Shut up, it's completely the fault of the humans who make these things! It's even more terrifying than real ghosts and supernatural creatures! And those 'nukular weapon' they talk about on television, why do humans create these terrifying things that could destroy themselves!?"

Occupying Hisui's other side, Rushella cried out angrily.

Eruru and Kirika had not arrived yet so the trio were the only ones in the room.

"I'd never expect you to bring up such a serious topic. I guess I count as a product of humans' endless desire, so I'm not really in a position to comment. But what's up with ghosts?"

"It's not a farce, okay? It really exists! Just look at Hisui's appearance and you'll see!"

Rushella pointed at Hisui.

Indeed, he currently did look a little off.

With dark circles under his eyes, his face was also quite haggard.

"You do look a bit ill... Did you catch a cold or get heat stroke?"

"No, I don't have either... No fever, but just feeling chills. No appetite but I don't feel nauseous either... In any case, I just feel lethargic and cold."

"Isn't this simply because you sucked his blood? You must have accidentally drained too much, causing him anemia, it must be that, right?"

Mei asked in accusatory tones.

She already disapproved of Rushella. Seeing her beloved's health threatened, she put on a very strict expression.

"...I haven't drunk since Sunday morning. And it was the usual amount... Besides, if the reason lies in blood loss, this condition would have happened before, right?"

"...Yeah. I also don't think it's Rushella's fault. But I don't think it's related to ghosts either."

"Like I said, there really is one! When the class rep looked at Hisui, didn't she go pale in the face and started praying with her cross!? It made me so uncomfortable!!"

"Then why don't you simply perform last rites to help the ghost pass on? Or better yet, let's just drive a wooden stake into that damn enormous bosom of yours?"

"You're being noisy, shut up! You count as a supernatural creature, right? Don't tell me you feel nothing at all!?"

"Sigh, haven't we gone over this already? If anything, I'm closer to the scientific side... Supernatural senses or whatever, totally zero. 'A woman's intuition' is hard enough to come by already, I'm not going to be greedy for some so-called sixth sense."

"...So foolish of me, to think I'd place my hopes in you."

"What? Oh, however... I probably do feel something. Hey, Hi-kun, let me have a good look at your face."

"Don't go giving him a surprise kiss, okay?"

"...Of course not. Hurry and let me have a look at your face from the side."

"...Like this?"

Baffled, Hisui turned his head to show Mei his profile.

Mei leaned over and Hisui did not take precautions. After all, with his profile towards her, even if she kissed... It would simply be a kiss on the cheek.

Then Mei came even closer.

Her breath against his ear felt rather ticklish.

And... It really was way too close.

"Umm....."

By the time Hisui realized something was off, it was too late.

Bite.

"...Eh?"

A sweet, wet sensation unexpectedly attacked his earlobe.

Before he could resist, Mei's lips, teeth and tongue had already captured Hisui firmly.

It felt like only an instant—that seemed to persist for several minutes.

As soon as Mei's moistness left Hisui's earlobe, he collapsed silently.

"W-What's with you, Hisui?"

Rushella hastily rushed over.

With Hisui's head in the way just now, she did not see what Mei was doing.

But Hisui's dazed expression alerted her to the truth.

"My earlobe was being sucked..... Then bitten as well..... Also licked..."

"Pull yourself together! What kind of delusional nonsense are you talking about!?"

"I was being teased, toyed with, made wet, then a tongue was inserted there... And..."

"Hurry up and pull yourself together! Stay rational!"

"Don't look at me... Don't look at my filthy self....."

Hisui whispered softly.

Despite his words, his face displayed a hint of delight.

"No one will marry me anymore... My ear, it's reached adulthood... Climbed all the way to the fifth level....."

Hisui muttered nonstop, then fell over on the spot.

A face full of bliss.

"Bitch, what on earth did you do to him!? And he was already so weak to begin with...!!"

"Oh dear, I pitied him for always being a certain someone's drink and chewtoy, so I bit him lightly and gently. Now you see the power of the 'Sweet Bite of Seduction' performed by combining the perfect lovedoll with Sudou Mei-sama's forty eight functions of pleasure? My tongue is even more nimble than the comedian Okada's, you know?"^[3]

"GRRRRRRR.....!"

Rushella could not find any words to retort, especially after seeing Hisui still lost in ecstasy.

He was clearly enjoying it more than having his blood sucked by a vampire.

"If you can't accept this then how about you try biting Hi-kun's earlobe? If you don't even know how to bite lightly, then you're worse than cats and dogs, right!?"

"GRRRRRRR—!"

Taunted by Mei, Rushella approached Hisui's ear.

His dripping wet ear was still red when Rushella's crimson lips made contact.

Then with a flash, pristine white fangs appeared.

Steeling her determination, Rushella opened her mouth.

Bite.

"OWWWWW—!!"

Holding his ear, Hisui jumped straight up.

"What are you doing so suddenly!? Mercilessly biting me in a sensitive spot... I've never had ear piercings before and here you go making a hole in my ear directly!"

"I'm so glad... You're back to your senses, right!?"

"What kind of shock therapy is this!? It's like having one's ear picked and then suddenly splashed with cold water on the face. Totally kills the aftertaste. How terrible can you get!?"

"Arara, was my sweet bite really that pleasurable?"

Mei licked her lips seductively, causing Hisui to shyly scratch his head.

"Why are you making such a shameless expression!? As my servant, show some dignity!!"

Saying that, Rushella prepared to unleash her fists.

As the daily beating performance was just about to begin, the classroom's door opened.

Eruru and Kirika entered.

Seeing the state of the classroom, they both frowned. Eruru was the first to voice her disapproval.

"You people are so noisy. Another argument huh... What is this!?"

"We could hear your voices from the corridor. Don't forget this is an unofficial club, can't you pay more attention...!?"

As soon as they stepped into the classroom, Eruru and Kirika instantly looked nervous.

Then Eruru took out her favorite sacred gun "Argentum" while Kirika brought out a potion bottle with a skull sign from her breast pocket.

"Hey... What are you two doing so suddenly!?"

"Why are Eru-chan and Senpai filled with murderous intent!?"

"What are you two intending to do!?"

Ignoring their doubts, the two girls remained armed.

Eruru and Kirika cautiously approached Hisui's group then pointed their weapons as they spoke.

"Haven't any of you noticed...?"

Eruru asked with her gun barrel directed at Hisui.

Her eyes were not joking.

The way she looked, she really would pull the trigger if necessary.

"Hey, calm down... This is a school, don't do anything crazy!"

Hisui raised his arms to surrender, indicating he had neither weapons nor hostility, but Eruru did not lower her guard.

"...Looks like you people really can't see it. Kariya-san, may I handle this?"

Kirika sighed and stepped forward.

Still holding the gun, Eruru nodded. Her eyes were still locked on Hisui.

"Senpai, why is your expression so scary....."

"It's okay, just wait and stay still."

Kirika took out another bottle and splashed its liquid contents on Hisui, Rushella and Mei's heads.

The transparent liquid turned into mist, spreading into the surroundings, causing their vision to blur.

"You witch, what was that for!?"

Kirika ignored Rushella's protest and began to softly chant some sort of language with a mysterious expression.

Hisui and Rushella could tell that the sentences were composed of Latin and Old English, but the meaning and grammar were completely lost on them.

It was likely a language unique to witches, directed towards otherworldly existences—in other words, a so-called "incantation."

Catalysts, incantations, combined with Kirika's magical powers, it formed a simple "ritual."

Although the act was quick and concise, it produced a pronounced effect on the surroundings.

"Why do I feel a bit cold...?"

Apart from Hisui who had been feeling cold for the past few days, even Mei was hugging herself and shivering.

It felt like a sudden drop in temperature—so sudden that even the air next to their skin felt slightly warm.

"Senpai, what on earth did you do to us....."

—Can you hear me.....?

" " ".....!?" " "

Hisui, Rushella and Mei looked at each other with surprise.

A girl was whispering softly in their ears.

But the voice did not come from anyone present.

"Someone is... here?"

Hisui voiced the question the trio held as he surveyed the surroundings.

Naturally, there was no one else around.

Only Eruru and Kirika standing on the side mysteriously.

The pair sighed and pointed at Hisui's chest.

"You still haven't noticed?"

?—The trio all turned their gaze at Hisui's chest.

And were shocked.

Because there was another head growing out of his chest.

Striking, long, black hair with the bangs cut uniformly. The hair dangling in front blocked her gaze, shrouding her expression—but this was a girl's head, with extremely pale complexion.

Her skin—really was too white.

It gave a sense of transparency, actually this was not a metaphor—Because she really was half-transparent.

One could see the floorboards through her. The outline of her face also quivered unsteadily.

The head smiled at the trio whose faces had turned pale.

"Finally, you can see me."

" " "Yaaaaaah—!!" " "

The trio screamed loudly all at once, falling from their chairs.

Instead of getting up, they backed off while remaining sitting on the ground.

The head also fell out naturally from Hisui's chest.

Or rather than fall, it passed through.

Passing through Hisui, she remained curled up in the same spot in contrast to Hisui who was retreating as quickly as he could.

"W-What is that thing!?"

Rushella hugged Hisui's arm as she pointed to the object.

Because Hisui had backed off, the full appearance was now visible.

Rather than just a single head... It was clearly a girl's body.

A slender body dressed in a sailor style school uniform that was slightly out of fashion. It looked so intangible because it really was half transparent... Her outline blended with the surrounding environment.

"...Could that really be?"

Hisui asked with a stiff expression and Eruru nodded.

"Indeed, this is what is known as a ghost."

"Really!?"

Hisui exclaimed reflexively, his face all pale. Only then did he notice the girl's movements.

She was coming towards him... Crawling on all fours.

Step by step..... Reaching out with her slender arms, she approached.

"H-Hey Sudou, hurry up and think of something!"

"U-Umm, I am on the side of science, I can't do anything about something immune to physical attacks... You hurry and think of something!"

"I-I'm no good against this sort of thing either! I don't even know if the magic eyes work or not...!!"

The two supernatural entities were completely useless.

As they pushed responsibility onto each other, the girl had already crawled to Hisui's feet as he sat collapsed on the floor.

"H-Hey wait... Don't get worked up, don't bring your curse over here!"

"..."

Instead of answering, the girl slowly pressed her face near.

The trio remained rooted to the spot.

As the girl approached, her face gradually entered their view clearly.

Beneath those bangs, the face—

"...Hmm?"

Hisui was surprised. Rushella and Mei also looked at each other.

He cautiously approached the girl's face, inhaled—and sighed:

"So cute....."

Instantly, the vampire and the artificial human's iron fists pummeled him from left and right in a pincer attack.

"Ouch, what are you two doing!?"

"Shut up, to think you'd lust after a ghost!?"

"That's right, leaving me alone, running off to shack up with a ghost huh!?"

"I'm just expressing my sincere impression! And in actual fact, it is much better than you two deadly hazards!!"

"What did you say!? I simply suck a bit of blood and order you around arbitrarily!!"

"All I want is to have a baby to build a happy family, that's all!!"

"Isn't that enough? You girls are already way worse than typical family violence!!"

The trio instantly began a war of words.

Seeing them about to start a protracted engagement, the girl raised her hand weakly.

"Excuse me..... Are you all ready to listen to me?"

" " "Ah——!?" " " "

Glaring at the interloper, the trio's eyes looked like that of gangsters or ruffians.

"I-I'm sorry....."

The girl shrank back in fright.

Even though she was clearly a ghost.

Fiddling with her fingers, unsure of what to do, she cast a pleading look for help towards the duo behind her.

Eruru and Kirika nodded with an expression of deep understanding. Then Eruru was the first to take action.

"Can you control yourselves? Her situation must be quite difficult."

" " "Ah——!?" " " "

Without saying another word, Eruru stuffed the barrel of the sacred gun "Argentum" into Hisui's mouth.

"(My bad...)"

"Very well. So, Miss Ghost..... Would you like to start?"

"Y-Yes....."

Despite Eruru's assistance, the girl seemed shocked instead.

—Several minutes later, the girl was standing before the blackboard like a transfer student in front of Hisui and the group, her head bowed down lightly.

"Umm... Let's start with a greeting, nice to meet you all for the first time, my name is Fuwa Touko. Uh, my hobby is reading back when I was alive, skills... I guess it'd be literary activities. Recently... I mean after I died..... I've taken an interest in observing humans... Or rather, I can't do anything apart from that... Skills... Hmm... Does causing supernatural phenomenon count? Well, because I can't touch objects directly, I have to move them with my thoughts..."

"Let me interrupt here, why is this self-introduction so dark!? Ah, come to think of it... You possessed me earlier!?"

"Hmm, I didn't plan on possessing you, I just followed you, right? I called you many times but you didn't seem to hear. Then I tried to make you notice, so I made noises and moved objects in your surroundings....."

"So it really was your doing.....! Trying to scare us... But why couldn't we see you until now?"

Rushella began to ponder.

Kirika sighed and explained for her.

"The ability to see ghosts and sense their existence totally varies from person to person. Even people who are described as having strong spiritual senses do not necessarily detect all kinds of souls. This is related to a complicated interplay of wavelength, compatibility and time spent together, hence one cannot assert the same for all cases. Having undergone a certain type of training, Kariya-san and I can see ghosts with a bit of concentration. The way I see it, the fact that you fail to see ghosts despite being a vampire is quite surprising, yes?"

"...So annoying, shut up. I simply failed to see with my eyes, that's all! But I sensed it from the start! And now it's because of your spell that I can see it?"

"Yes. For an analogy, it's like I adjusted the antenna to receive electromagnetic waves? Like a bike without training wheels, once you start seeing her, this Touko-san here will not disappear from your sight anymore. By the way... Why did you choose to possess Kujou-kun?"

Touko herself did not know the answer to this basic question.

"You ask why? ...But actually he's the one who approached me... And he even came to my side."

"...Could you be referring to..... That coffin?"

"That's right....."

"Wait a minute, what coffin is this?"

Rushella interrogated Hisui in surprise.

"You mean on Saturday? The vampire coffin dredged up from the sea?"

Mei carelessly disclosed a secret.

"Ah, it's the one that greatly resembles Draculea-san's coffin. So what happened afterwards?"

Kirika inquired Eruru out of sheer curiosity.

"...What is this about? Great, you're hiding something from me again!?"

Rushella grabbed Hisui and questioned.

"This... Uh, that..."

Hisui looked towards Eruru for help but she did not even glance at him, typing away on her notebook computer, declaring indifferently:

"I reminded you earlier to explain things beforehand. You brought this on yourself."

"...Since she said so already, then give me a proper explanation, okay...?"

".....Yes."

After listening to Hisui's explanation, Rushella looked at Touko again.

"...Then this means you were residing in the coffin all this time?"

She asked the ghost. Also, Hisui's fate of being beaten up after the inquisition needed no mentioning.

"Yes... I've always been... Together with the coffin. Although I can't recall the memories during the time at the bottom of the sea... But I feel..... Like I've always been together with it."

Touko searched her memories as she murmured.

Like her semi-transparent body, her tone of voice was quite vague and intangible.

"...Then you left the coffin and followed Hi-kun. Isn't this the case of... Going to a paranormal site, and getting possessed by a spirit..... So-called compatible wavelengths?"

Mei commented casually.

Touko nodded and recalled her first encounter with Hisui—although Hisui was completely unaware at the time.

"I feel like... That must be the case. I saw him approach the coffin and felt that he might possibly discover me. But he ended up not noticing..."

Touko looked wistfully at Hisui.

Although it was an adorably shy look, her gaze was a bit penetrating.

After all, she was capable of causing paranormal phenomenon, which could very well be a cursed power.

"...So, could you stop staring at me? I feel like, umm, it's a bit scary... In fact, I've been feeling quite unwell, getting chills all over....."

"The key is willpower and getting used to it. It'll get better with time. If she was malevolent, you could be possessed, cursed and killed in a worst case scenario."

"...Senpai, that doesn't count as comforting. Uh, so, Touko-san?"

"Calling me Touko is fine....."

"Umm, Touko-san..... Why were you together with the coffin? That is undoubtedly a vampire's coffin. But you... Resided in it. Why is that? Also, what did you want to tell me?"

Touko did not answer.

Even though she had possessed Hisui for this purpose, she still did not answer.

The ghost lightly lifted the hair on her right side and pushed it behind her ear.

Then leaning over, she displayed her neck to everyone.

".....!?"

Hisui could not help but stand up. The others stared with their eyes wide.

On her semi-transparent, intangible neck—there was a wound.

Pierced by two holes.

Clearly it was a bite mark.

Proof of a vampire's "kiss."

The ugly wound caused Hisui to narrow his eyes and ask softly.

"You... Were bitten by?"

"This is probably... My cause of death. I was bitten by a vampire and died. It must be the coffin's owner, furthermore... He still exists in this world."

"In other words, he has not been destroyed huh....."

"I don't know....."

".....?"

"He was in the coffin back then. Supposed to be... Locked inside. He could not have escaped from the ocean. However, by the time I regained consciousness, the coffin was empty, just as you all saw with your own eyes."

"...Indeed. So what you wanted to tell me... was this matter? You want me to exterminate the vampire who bit you, to avenge you?"

"I already... Don't care anymore. After all, I'm already dead."

"....."

"I do hate that vampire very much, but revenge would be meaningless. On the other hand, if he is left alone, there will be more victims. So please, stop him.....!"

Her voice was filled with sorrow.

Having lost her body, the girl was unable to cause vibrations in the air. Instead, her voice entered the listener's mind directly.

Even having lost her life, in order to prevent new tragedies from happening, she slumbered at the bottom of the sea together with the coffin.

Then what should the living do within their capability?

Hisui spoke and ended the heavy silence.

"Why... choose me? Perhaps if the wavelengths are incompatible, you can't communicate these words, but aren't those people around the coffin from the Supernatural Investigations Section a better choice? Given enough time, people should begin to notice you. Like Kariya here right now."

"Perhaps... You are right. Those people around the coffin, I could sense they are experts from their aura. However, as soon as I saw you... I felt it."

"...Felt what?"

"I would be fine following this person... That's the kind of feeling I got."

"...I'm sorry but that doesn't make me happy at all. By 'following this person,' you actually mean possessing me, right?"

"Don't look at me like that..."

Touko blushed and turned her gaze away.

Seeing her act like that, the girl faction began to cast gazes of derision at Hisui.

"You playboy! Womanizing everywhere, you're planning to cast me aside again!?"

"If you're going to shack up with a ghost, then having a baby with an artificial human is not a problem, right?"

"Going after anything and anyone, driven by your lustful hunger, this is surely a sore sight. What are you planning to do with someone dead?"

"...I didn't know Kujou-kun was this kind of person....."

Despite being separate factions normally, the four girls acted with surprising unity during times like these.

Hisui already had no chance of winning against any single one of them, let alone all four united.

"No no, this is very strange, okay!? I'm the victim here! I was the one being possessed!"

"You don't... want me?"

Touko fiddled with her fingers as she looked up at Hisui.

She really was adorable.

Although semi-transparent.

"Ah, I think with your bangs covering your face, you really capture the Sadako feel! Isn't begging the beginning signs of an evil spirit!?"

"I originally wondered if you would discover me earlier if I used spiritual powers to insert myself into a movie. But you only have DVDs in your

home so I couldn't do anything about that. When I was alive, there were only VHS tapes, I don't understand these DVD things."

"Say, please don't make cursed DVDs appear for real in this world. Otherwise we'd need to have an exorcism. By the way... Is this fine for you? There's a vampire here, a kin of the one who killed you..."

"But this boy here is my servant, you know?"

Rushella pointed proudly at Hisui.

Despite Hisui's displeasure, he knew his objections would be met with retribution ten fold, so he gave up.

Furthermore, the current issue needed to be discussed clearly first.

The girl was killed by a vampire and still searching for that vampire after her death. How would she view other vampires and their servants?

"Oh right... I was quite surprised to begin with, for I never expected the person I possessed to have a vampire in his house."

"Excuse me, could you please stop using the term 'possessed'? It sounds really scary."

"But then... It doesn't matter. The person I possessed is a vampire's servant. That's all."

"Say, could you please stop that? Can you stop talking like this is some kind of pure story of love!? If anything, it's more like a stalker?"

"Also... Despite having his blood sucked over a long period, he shows no signs of turning into a vampire at all. Unlike me, he doesn't have a wound on his neck. During the period of possession, I seemed to have heard a term called 'constitution'....."

"Now you're using the term 'period of possession' directly. Oh well, that is the type of constitution I have. And Rushella... How should I put it? She's a bit different from the vampire you encountered, she doesn't go attacking people randomly."

"...Seems like it. Different from the vampire I am searching for. So... If you can assist me, I would be really grateful. Please help me!"

Hearing the girl's pleas again, Eruru spoke up solemnly while she continued to face the computer screen.

"Fuwa Touko... I have found this name in the school's register ten years ago. Gone missing as a first year student—in light of the incident back then with many girls gone missing, people suspected a criminal was responsible, and the police mobilized a lot of manpower... But to no avail."

"I remember this uniform she is wearing. There are records in the student council office and it looks just like our school's old uniform. Although you were younger than me back then, I think I should call you Senpai now."

Kirika murmured with a complicated expression.

"I have also seen your name before, Senpai. On the back page of that little booklet earlier. The Occult Research Club's booklet—your name was written on the back page."

Hisui and Rushella turned to look at each with surprise.

The unofficial hobby group that once existed in this school—the Occult Research Club.

Back then, the students in the hobby group were fascinated with the study of "witches." Getting caught up in it, Hisui almost died and Rushella suffered much.

After the incident came to a close, there were still many unsolved mysteries regarding the Occult Research Club.

The people involved were no longer at the school, while the lowest ranked member—Hisui's homeroom teacher—did not understand the details of the situation back then.

"Touko-san... Were you really a member of the Occult Research Club?"

"—Yes. Back then, we... Must have gone too far. In the beginning, we were just playing with little spells and fortune telling because it was fun. But then... It became serious after that. There was a child who understood these things very well back then. If only it had stayed that way."

Touko lowered her gaze with a lonely feeling.

The remnants of her youth were, at the same time, tragic memories.

"Before we knew it, we had lost all sense of fear. Forgotten the nature of non-human beings. We did not fear the supernatural. Which was why when he showed up, we approached him unwarily. Then... I became like this."

Touko laughed and pointed at her semi-transparent body.

Naturally, no one else could laugh.

"You really should laugh here... I feel worse if you guys make that kind of face."

"...N-No, I can't laugh. Alone at the bottom of the ocean... Ten years gone by in a flash? And still trying hard for the sake of others? How could I possibly laugh at someone like that?"

Hearing Hisui's serious words, Touko remained smiling.

Everyone present knew that her current smile did not come from the heart.

"Hmm, it seems like the story is pretty much done, so let me, the club president, make a decision."

Rushella crossed her arms and stepped forward magnificently.

Touko seemed to react to her use of the term 'club president.'

"Club president... Eh, everyone is gathered here for club activities? Are you actually making an occult research club as well? I think it's better if you give up... I don't want to see others ending up like me."

"No! This club is for searching for my memories and raising my quality of life. We are called the 'Supernatural Investigations Club!'"

"Anyway, you'd better reconsider the club's name first."

Ignoring Hisui's snide comment, Rushella stared at the horrible wound on Touko's neck.

"What a messy wound. One could tell from its shape how lowly that guy was. Treating prey carefully, to politely add to my race or to bestow eternal slumber of peace—that is the proper etiquette of my race. This guy not only gave up after drinking halfway but even went as far to leave such an ugly wound after death. What a complete disgrace! As a 'True Ancestor,' I must restore the honor of my race!"

"...You mean you're willing to help me?"

"Indeed! For the most part, it'll be Hisui and those other insignificant club members who'll be working their hardest for your sake!"

" " " "You're participating as well!" " " "

Ignoring the retorts of the entire club, Rushella extended her hand towards Touko.

"Humans apparently do this often."

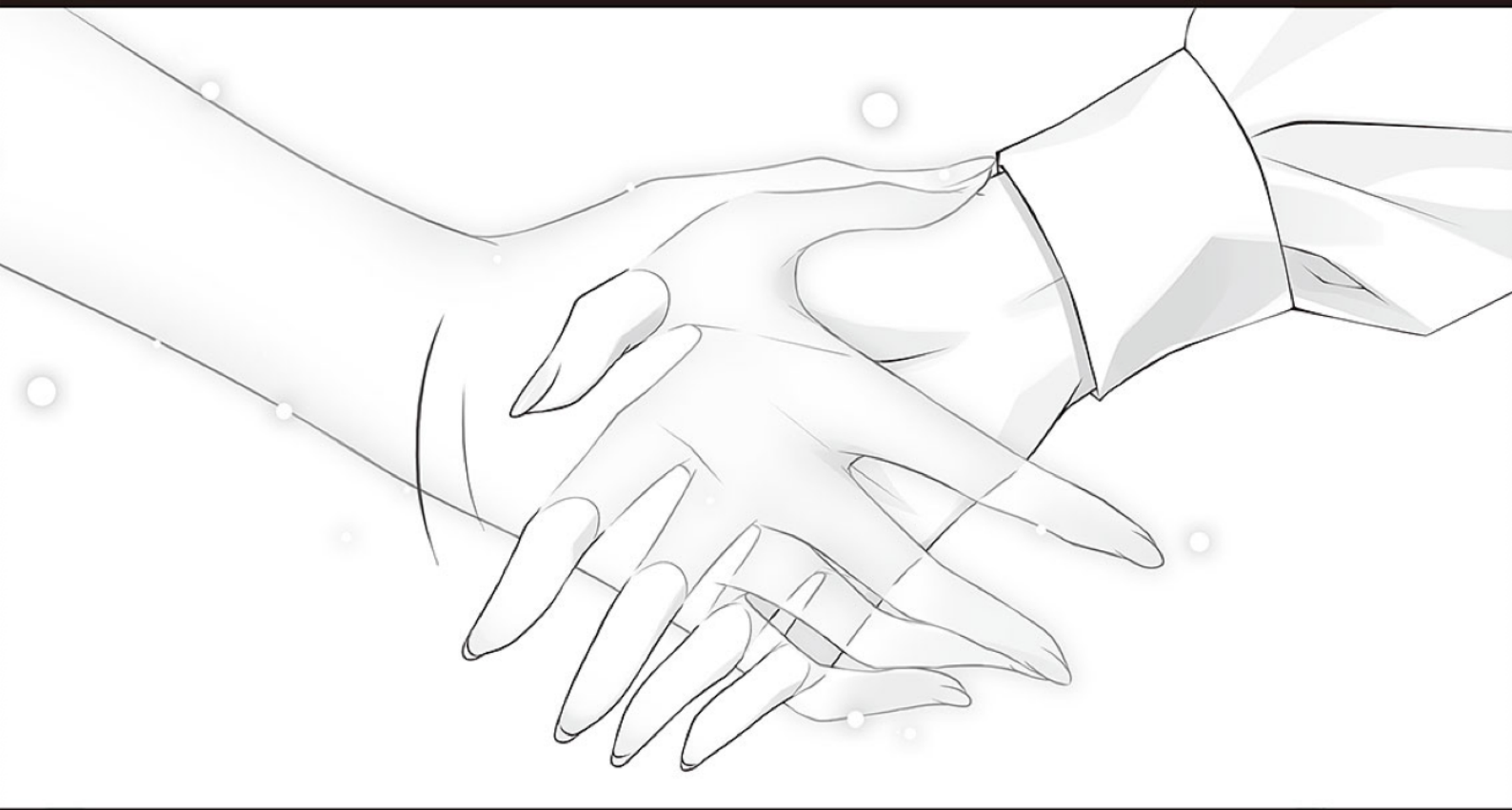
"...That's right. Well then, thank you everyone."

Touko smiled lightly and reached out... But could not grasp Rushella's hand.

Because she passed right through.

Amidst the awkward atmosphere, only Rushella remained smiling cluelessly.

"Leave everything to me! I will surely help you catch that vampire!"



Chapter 3 - Summer Training Camp

A bus was currently driving along a highway along the shore.

This public bus route normally had few passengers and was running on a very infrequent schedule, on the verge of being scrapped. However, the back row of the bus was exceptionally lively today.

An androgynous youth was accompanied by four outstanding beauties—no, more accurately, there were five.

"You sure about the destination? Is your memory accurate?"

"Yes, the place I met him was definitely the beach ahead."

Had there been any other passengers nearby, surely they would have felt surprised by Hisui's conversation—or rather, his apparent mutterings to himself.

Sitting on the end of the back row seats, Hisui was currently speaking to the empty window seat beside him.

The vacant space there was just enough for one person to sit.

The content of the conversation seemed shallow and meaningless, but that was not the case for Hisui and the others.

Naturally, the one sitting in the empty seat was Touko.

Apart from Hisui's entourage, no one could see her. Making use of Hisui and friends' holiday, Touko was leading them to the beach near Seidou City.

According to her, the members of the Occult Research Club she participated in before—those girls—had first met the vampire here.

Why did Hisui's whole group come? Tracing the cause would require an explanation starting with club president Rushella's "interrogation."

The vampire who had appeared ten years ago, Touko's death, the mystery of the coffin—In order to clarify all this, the first thing they did was to question Touko herself in detail.

Hence, Rushella decided to begin an investigation. In her own words, the "interrogation" commenced immediately.

Then for some reason, Hisui was ordered to take notes with his back towards the girls.

"Hey, the composition of this scene is very strange. I'm sure you're being influenced by those police detective movies. Besides, doesn't Kariya have a computer, so what I'm doing is completely unnecessary? Can't I join the observing team?"

"You're being noisy so shut up! This 'interrogation' is absolutely essential! So hurry and call that Touko whatever... For thorough questioning. If there's a need, order some 'takeout food.' This girl here can prepare snacks for tea!"

Rushella pointed to Kirika as she spoke.

As a side note, Kirika and Mei were standing on the sidelines, observing from a safe distance.

"Hey, what kind of rubbish are you talking about? The interrogation you described sounds so Shouwa era from the last century... And even if you order katsu-don takeout, Touko-san can't..."

She can't eat it because she's a ghost... Feeling that such a statement would be inappropriate, Hisui swallowed his words.

But Touko herself smiled with shining eyes.

"Well, even if I can't eat it, but if you bring it up to me, there's a kind of... satisfying feeling. Probably what's called getting full just by watching? Back when I was alive, I never understood how offerings presented to gods at shrines worked, but now that I'm dead, I seem to get it. When the dead receive offerings from loved ones visiting their graves, they must be very happy, I suppose?"

"...I see."

Seeing her bright smile, Hisui gave up on ridiculing Rushella.

His impression of ghosts was also completely overturned.

"Then there's the vampire who bit you. Where did you run into him?"

The way the interrogation was going nowhere was probably making Eruru impatient, so she posed her own question.

Touko became serious and returned to the main topic.

"The first time... It was night time at a beach. We lied to others and called it a group study session... But ran out there for a gathering. Although there was no clear purpose... Because all our parents were quite strict, perhaps we just wanted to rebel and go on an adventure. That probably explains our enthusiasm with the occult. Then... We met him. His appearance... I can't remember clearly anymore. But he should have been quite handsome. Everyone approached him as if mesmerized....."

"Your group was probably under the mystic eyes' control. Since you are a ghost, vagueness in memory cannot be helped. If ghosts kept their sanity and remembered with clarity their memories from when they were alive, things would not be so troublesome. Not to mention, there is the mystic eyes' effect as well. So... What happened next?"

"...He taught us many things, such as about magic, about supernatural creatures, all sorts... Back then, I only thought that he happened to be familiar with this subject, but thinking about it now, it must've been because he's a vampire. Occult phenomena, he could cause them at will... Everyone was enamored with him. Then one by one, they went missing..."

Touko's recollections prompted Hisui to recall something from a few days ago.

The students who used to be core members of the Occult Research Club all had unknown whereabouts. Gone missing, transferred to a different school, dropped out—Although the cases were not all confirmed, if Touko's story was true, very likely, they had all been bitten without exception.

"For a vampire living in the modern world, adhering to ancient rituals is quite hard, which requires feeding on victims one at a time between intervals of several days. The risks of discovery are quite high and if he does not want to keep descendents, killing them off produces corpses. And hiding corpses takes effort. However, the higher ranking a vampire, the more obstinately they adhere to these rituals. He probably relied on the mystic eyes' mental control to make the girls gradually withdraw from society. It must have taken him quite a lot of troublesome arrangements."

Based on her investigation of the club's core members, combined with her own existing knowledge, Eruru offered her deductions regarding the vampire.

Touko nodded in agreement.

"I believe... It should be like that. Before I knew it, among all the people who met him at the beach, I was the only one left. Not that I'm narcissistic... But I think he liked me best. That's why he saved me for last... When he was about to suck my blood, this was what he said."

The classroom was filled with a heavy, somber atmosphere.

Asking a dead person about her experiences during her last moments—Was there anything more insensitive and cruel than that?

Everyone present understood the fear suffered by those who had been bitten by vampires.

Moreover, this was a powerless girl of their own age group.

Even Eruru was at a loss for words.

In order to seek the truth, Hisui spoke up to shoulder the responsibility.

"Then... What was it like when you were bitten? In other words, the circumstances of your death, Touko-san. Could you also tell us about how you sealed the vampire into the coffin?"

Everyone turned to look at Hisui.

They had all been hesitating over whether to speak out, but someone needed to ask the first question. Hisui stepped forward to take on the role.

After a brief moment of silence, Touko continued.

".....He invited me. He asked if I wanted to visit the beach. He had a boat prepared and asked if I wanted to go for a boat ride..."

"A vampire date on a boat huh? Inviting you even though he clearly fears water, he must be either an utterly ignorant fool or quite a high level vampire. Then you accepted, Touko-san?"

"I was not being controlled by him. Of course, I was probably influenced to some extent... My companions were gone, I smelled something fishy going on. Probably out of a sense of self-preservation, I was able to resist. Later on, I found out he was a vampire, so I...!"

"You deliberately accepted the invitation, hoping to avenge your friends... Yes?"

Touko nodded.

In order to seek vengeance for her friends, the brave girl challenged the vampire—However, reality was harsh and unforgiving.

"I made many preparations, such as plain wooden stakes and a cross. However, he snatched them away and threw them into the sea... Then he sucked my blood. My consciousness became hazy, and gradually... could not resist. However, even so... I summoned my last remaining strength and pounced at him! Then he....."

Touko hugged herself tightly.

The image of the vampire, carved into her eyes just before she died.

The mocking laughter, viewing humans with disdain.

His handsome face was filled with derisive mirth as he stared at her.

"He was completely nonchalant. As I crashed towards him, he took the opportunity to hide into his coffin. That coffin was on the boat from the start. He had sipped some wine beforehand, so he may have been a little drunk... But I believe he entered the coffin intentionally. He was mocking me: You wanted this result, so I fulfilled your wish...! But I couldn't care anymore, so I ran over and closed the lid shut. I wrapped chains all over it, then—"

"You pushed it into the sea... Right?"

Hisui described the ending, but Touko shook her head.

"No... Then my memory stops there. My view became completely dark and I can't remember anymore. Probably... I died right then. Before I could push him into the sea, I breathed my last breath... Probably. By the time I came back to my senses, ten years had passed and you appeared right before me."

".....I see."

After a brief sigh, Hisui gathered his thoughts and tried to deduce the truth from Touko's account.

However, there was still too little information in their grasp.

"Touko-san died... But the coffin fell into the sea. Then the vampire was locked inside? No, the coffin was empty... Where did he escape to? As a

vampire, there should be no problem... But the coffin was not damaged... The chains were also intact... What on earth happened?"

Hisui stared into space and spoke slowly.

Eruru also crossed her arms and leaned back to contemplate.

Seeing them both stumped, Mei, who had been observing quietly, raised her hand with a hesitating expression.

"Excuse me... It might be a little rude of me to say this, but can Touko-san's testimony... really be trusted?"

" " "....." " "

Seeing everyone turn their gaze to her, Mei avoided eye contact.

She must have expected this result.

But she felt compelled to bring it up.

She did not take this villainous role willingly, but it was a question that everyone must surely be thinking.

"It's not like I think Touko-san is making everything up. But those affected by the mystic eyes cannot act under their own will, and especially now that she became a ghost, her memories from her days alive are even more uncertain, right? I think we can't take it as truth completely, right?"

"...You have a point. It's true, I don't remember the details, and now that you bring it up, I also....."

Touko lost confidence.

Her intangible, or rather, transparent body became even more transparent, almost as if she were about to disappear outright.

Rushella broke the impasse with a single statement.

"Irrelevant and trivial details. Since I said we are investigating this, I am not going back on my word!"

"Uh, but....."

Hisui want to say something but Rushella held out her index finger to stop him.

"Besides, if we don't believe what this Touko person says, there's nowhere to start. Supposing she is lying completely. The vampire is destroyed or perhaps escaped to a very far place, or there is no vampire to begin with... Let's just assume that for now. But given that's the case, then there's no problem, right?"

Rushella's last question was directed towards Eruru.

Sitting on the side, Eruru was surprised by Rushella's opinion, but she still nodded.

"Indeed. Although it would be regrettable if the search ended up fruitless, it would be best if there is no vampire that is threatening people. If we are the only ones investigating, then there is no issue of wasting taxpayers' money..."

"See, am I right? If it doesn't exist, it doesn't exist. If it exists, then countermeasures must be taken. No matter what, we must find the truth. Then you'll be able to... 'pass on,' right?"

Rushella stared at Touko, who nodded lightly in turn.

Hisui noticed slight tears in the corners of her eyes.

"Well then, the 'interrogation' is over. Let's cut the chitchat, what are we going to do next?"

"Probably... Gather information. We also need to verify how trustworthy her testimony is as well as collect detailed information on the vampire. Furthermore, in order to help her memory return to a more accurate state, we could try visiting scenes with strong connections to her....."

"Very well, first we'll go... to that beach where she first met the vampire! No objections!!"

Normally, this would just end up as one of Rushella's conceited proclamations that no one heeded.

But on that day, everyone smiled and nodded in agreement.

And currently, Hisui and company were at the beach.

Getting off the bus, walking a short distance, they arrived at a vast beach.

This place used to be small-scale seaside resort, but now it was quite deserted without any visitors.

A well-equipped swimming facility was built here simply because transportation was convenient. But even on a hot and sunny day like today, when one would really enjoy a good dip, there were no people here.

They were met with the pleasant surprise of having a beach all to themselves. But naturally, Hisui's group had come here for a different purpose.

Clearly, that was not their purpose.

However, before his eyes—

"Hey, isn't this weird? Why are you all in swimsuits!?"

By Hisui's side, the beauties made a glamorous entrance, standing side by side.

As a side note, Rushella had made a special trip to buy a swimsuit, dragging Hisui off to the mall to accompany her.

"Oh dear, isn't this Hi-kun's fault, come to think of it? He has so many great choices in us already, yet he's still obsessed with gravure idols."

Saying that, Mei leaned over.

Given her voluptuous figure and smooth tender skin, one could not possibly associate her with the original and ugly Frankenstein's monster.

Her black swimsuit was a micro bikini, covering her extremely ample bosom and posterior areas.

The critical points were barely concealed but she showed no intention to hide them, even exuding a "come hither and look" kind of aura.

"No no, like I said, it was Touko-san's misunderstanding! It just happened that the manga I was reading had a gravure idol on the color page, okay? I wasn't looking at the idol, I just wanted to check if there were color pages for manga series when I flipped to that part!"

Hisui fled from the onslaught of Mei's gigantic breasts as he recalled the conversation from the club classroom.

Since the club's members were basically all girls, Touko became great friends with them quite quickly.

This was not the problem.

Their topics of conversation, however—

"Hey, what's Hi-kun like when he's alone at home?"

"I've heard that he cohabits with Draculea-san... Could you let me know the actual details?"

Mei and Kirika probed into Hisui's private life with great curiosity.

Since Touko was in the same age group, she happily engaged in these conversations and made the most of her stalker gifts, providing sensational news to them again and again.

"Let's see... He stays cooped up in his room, reading magazines with gravure idols on the cover! With giant breasts!"

"Oh~~ I knew it, he still... likes those?"

"Anyway, you already belong to that category....."

"Mumumu, he clearly has me already!"

...Somehow, even Rushella joined the fray.

With rather strange motivations.

"I absolutely refuse to lose. I will stand triumphant over those women who only know how to expose their backs and cleavage, so that he lays his eyes on no one but me!"

"...Indeed, now that summer holidays are approaching, I must seduce him with my swimsuit."

"I was thinking of getting a new set. Ah, i-it's not like I'm doing this just to show Kujou-kun....."

Something was rumbling underfoot, unbeknownst to Hisui.

Then this day arrived.

"...Hey, this is really weird. Am I wrong? Why am I forced to dress the same like you girls!?"

Hisui was full of complaints.

He had been forced to change into swimming trunks.

Since he did not have any casual swimwear, he was forced to buy a pair of red swimming trunks during the shopping trip. To be honest, he did not want this color at all, but unfortunately, it was bought at Rushella's strong recommendation.

"Wouldn't it be nice... to spend time like this on occasion? Furthermore, Touko-san isn't going to recall her whole past by staying confined at home."

"Yeah... I guess....."

Kirika leaned over as she spoke, causing Hisui to reflexively enter a state of alert.

She was wearing a monokini style, one-piece swimsuit in violet.

Although it was less revealing than Mei's bikini, Kirika's back was fully exposed. The side cut-outs in the fabric traced out wide curves, further emphasizing the lines of her narrow waist, producing a different sexiness compared to Mei's.

Combined with her attribute of seniority, Kirika's act of leaning over... Felt rather irresistible.

"Why are you escaping?"

"Uh, I'm not escaping..... Eh, Touko-san?"

Hearing Touko's question, Hisui turned around... to find her behind him.

She was apparently able to control her attire mentally. Hence, she had changed into swimwear to suit the background.

Hers was the school mandated type.

A navy blue school swimsuit.

Furthermore, there was strip of white cloth bearing the name "Touko" on her chest.

"Touko-san, umm, even if you don't imitate them with such tricks, you're already very attractive, you know? You're slender and trim, you have a gentle and graceful temperament, your bust is also... on Senpai's level."

Hisui looked out into the distance as he spoke, a hint of loneliness in his voice.

Why would things be like this?

"Hey, wait a minute, stop looking at me with pitying eyes!"

"Uh, but look, this isn't a swimming lesson at school..."

"I can only wear this type of swimsuit! Because my family was too strict, they wouldn't allow any other type..."



Touko explained with resentment, wringing her hands.

Despite being under the scorching sun, Hisui felt the air temperature drop suddenly. Hopefully, it was only his imagination.

There was a terrifying feeling.

"Hey, stop it, Touko-san... Don't use your cursing skills!"

"Very well, if I focus my imagination, I'm sure can put on a swimsuit of my liking... Yes, one like Sudou-san's...!"

"Umm, sorry, we can't have that. You two's attractiveness will cause war to break out, we really can't have that!"

"That's right, if everyone continues to reveal more, Hi-Kun will surely be forced to bend forward to hide his condition♥"

Saying that, Mei grabbed Hisui's arm and pressed his hand against her bosom.

In actual fact, Hisui was already on the verge of bending forwards. However, he ignored his senses through willpower.

"As if anyone would... Hey, could you let go of my arm?"

"Asking me to let go... Why don't I simply hug so tightly your arm breaks off♥"

"Scary! Coming from you, it totally doesn't sound like a joke! You're perfectly capable of that!"

"Oh dear, I've always been serious, haven't I?"

"Come on..."

"If you don't want that to happen, then play with me properly. Okay, here's a ball so let's play beach volleyball? Whoever fails to return the serve has to participate in a punishment game, okay?"

Mei walked over to one side, picked up the ball and got ready to begin.

Without either a net or boundaries, playing with such simple rules turned out to be even more fun.

"...Jeez, don't you go all out with your strength, okay?"

"Got it♥"

Then the two began to play beach volleyball.

Over in a corner, a certain figure was glaring at them with resentment.

Earlier, Hisui had setup a parasol on the beach and laid out a mat for her. After that, all she could do was sit helplessly in the shadow.

This girl would definitely turn into ash if she were struck by the scorching sunlight of this day.

Namely, this vampire.

Or rather... Rushella.

"Sob sob sob~~ To think I bought this to wear for this occasion..."

Rushella had dragged Hisui off on a special shopping trip to buy this bikini.

Having been tipped off beforehand, Rushella had chosen an especially small swimsuit so as to compete with Mei.

In particular, the flimsy fabric of her top was truly incapable of fulfilling the responsibility of hiding the bountiful fruit of her bosom.

Because Hisui mentioned he did not like excessively fancy colors, Rushella had chosen a light colored swimsuit to be on the safe side... However, she forgot she could not stand exposure to sunlight.

Watching her rival seeking ruin on her own, Mei took care to throw bragging glances of victory while playing beach volleyball, causing Rushella even more displeasure.

"Traitor. To think he would play so happily with that fake..."

Rushella pouted and glared at Hisui resentfully.

But Hisui was fully engaged in the beach volleyball game and completely oblivious.

Just as tears came to Rushella's eyes, Kirika came over to the parasol's shade with a shrug.

"Seriously... What are you doing? If you're a vampire, pay more attention to the sunlight, okay?"

"You're being noisy, shut up....."

There was no spirit in her voice.

Dejectedly, Rushella was tracing circles with her finger on the mat.

"...Okay, stay still and don't move."

Kirika sighed and taking out a white ointment, applied to to Rushella's body.

"S-Stop it right now, what are you doing!? What is this!?"

"A light-blocking agent. Vampires should all know it, right? An ointment for blocking sunlight. The modern ones are now made using science, but it originated from witches like me, invented at the request of vampires. If you apply it to your skin, it will block sunlight at least for the duration of this beach visit. Don't worry, it's harmless to the skin."

Kirika explained as she applied the sunscreen thoroughly over Rushella's body.

Rushella remained silent until she finally steeled herself to speak.

"Uh... Umm."

"Yes?"

"Uh, u-umm..... Thank y... Ouch..."

Probably because she never uttered thanks, Rushella bit her own tongue by accident.

Kirika suppressed the urge to laugh and continued with her task.

"If you want to thank someone, thank Kujou-kun. He must have considered your skincare when he asked me to make preparations."

"Eh...?"

Rushella was taken by surprise. Kirika continued and took out an atomizer to spray something in her hair.

"Hey, what are you doing!? Don't go spraying messed up stuff!"

"This is also a type of light-blocking agent. Hair is also considered a part of skin and must be carefully protected. Otherwise, it will turn to dust under sunlight as well."

".....U-Ummmm....."

"Like I said, the one you should thank is Kujou-kun. Your prided hair was also part of his request. I only considered the skin originally but would have forgotten about hair if he had not reminded me."

"....."

Rushella did not know what to say any longer.

Silently, she watched Hisui happily playing beach volleyball.

"Okay, it's done. Why don't you go join in?"

".....Yes."

Rushella stood at the boundary of shadow and sunlight.

She had never walked under sunlight without a parasol.

Fear gripped her heart to some extent.

If Kirika had any malevolent intentions, she would be scorched by the sunlight the moment she took the first step.

However—She did not falter.

"Hmm... Umm."

"Yes?"

".....Thank you."

This time she did not bite her tongue.

Blushing red, Rushella rushed out from the parasol's shade.

Experiencing direct sunlight for the first time, it felt hotter than usual under a parasol.

Nevertheless, it felt quite comfortable.

"Okay, Hisui, hurry and let me join in too!"

She rushed over with great enthusiasm... But the volleyball game had ended already.

Mei was currently lying forwards on a mat over the sand.

With her top untied.

Beside Mei was Hisui, reluctantly applying suntan lotion on her body.

"W-What are you two doing!?"

"Uh, I lost and had to accept the punishment game. She made me put lotion on her."

"Yes yes. This erotic play is totally consensual."

"Don't call it erotic play!"

"The loser has no right to complain. Hurry and apply it properly."

Mei pulled Hisui's hand to her underarm.

This was a bewitching garden revealed by the untied swimsuit.

Namely, the exposed sideboob.

Boing, Hisui's fingertip touched something.

"Ahh mmm, Hi-kun, don't go poking me..."

"Stop making such lewd sounds! I-I didn't touch anything... Nothing at all.....!"

"...I already withdrew my hand, but why is your finger still there?"

".....Grrrrrrr!!!"

Rushella released angry growls from her throat as she took up her fists to pummel Hisui.

"...You traitor!!!"

"Wah, wait, it really hurts! Stop it!"

"Hey hey, what are you doing....."

Saying that, Mei got up.

Naturally, she was topless.

Hisui reflexively averted his gaze... Impossible, he was treated to a full view.



The heavy fruit was topped with tender colors where smaller, exquisite and lovely fruit protruded.

Mei made no effort to hide. Instead, she puffed out her chest and allowed others to admire the sight.

Meanwhile, Rushella was smashing the back of Hisui's head as hard as she could.

This resulted in the seductive images' forced deletion from the hard drive of Hisui's mind, with a bonus special effect of seeing stars.

"You traitor!! Having an affair right here!!"

"N-No... This is an accident... You're the one who.....!!"

Before he could explain himself, Rushella's combo attack landed.

Sitting on Hisui's body, she kept hammering him.

"What are you doing...?"

"Ah, Senpai, you came at the right time! Hurry and stop this girl..."

"Right right... Could you help me put on some sunscreen too?"

Saying that, Kirika turned her exposed back towards Hisui.

This caused the strength of Rushella's blows to rise directly.

"S-Senpai... Please don't add fuel to the fire.....!"

"You're being noisy so shut up! I'm going to beat your body up so much that you won't have affairs ever again!!"

Just as the snow-white sand of the beach and Hisui's pale skin were both dyed scarlet, Eruru distanced herself from the inane disputes and quietly stood by herself by the sea shore.

She was wearing a one-piece swimsuit that had a flounced skirt and decorative patterns. It suited her petite figure very well. However, she had no intention of swimming at all.

She simply gazed quietly at the seawater arriving with the waves as they broke over her feet regularly.

Her body shuddered slightly as if she were enduring something.

Like Rushella, she feared seawater.

As the offspring of a vampire and a human—a dhampir, she had inherited the weaknesses of vampires.

They feared flowing "living water."

This applied to natural sources of water especially, even more so for seawater which contained evil-purifying salt. Entering these bodies of water would mean instant drowning.

Although this weakness was less severe than for full vampires, dhampirs were essentially nonswimmers.

If one had to list exceptions, only a brief swim in a shallow warm water pool for elementary school kids would be possible.

Eruru knew this property of her body better than anyone else.

But currently standing on the water's edge... She did not want to accept her cursed body.

She wanted to overcome the weakness as much as possible.

Starting with confronting seawater.

Adjusting her breathing, she calmed her mind and relaxed her body—

"...How long are you going to stand there for?"

Touko asked by her ear.

Her words were accompanied by light exhalation.

A ghost's breath felt like a gust of cold air, invading Eruru's ear in the middle of her nervous state.

"Eek.....!"

The chill racing down her spine caused Eruru to shudder and she lost balance.

Before she could resolve herself, her petite body had already fallen into the sea.

Then came a sudden wave.

"~~~~...!!!"

Unable to make a sound, Eruru was engulfed by the seawater.

For a normal person, this would be nothing but an exciting experience in the waves. But to her, it was an impact akin to a tsunami.

"W-What should I do... Hey, someone hurry and help!!"

Hisui and company heard Touko's cries for help.

Apart from Rushella who feared seawater, the rest all rushed over.

Fortunately, Eruru was rescued ashore before she could suffer excessive contact with seawater.

Lying on the beach, her lips purple, her body kept shaking.

"...Hey, isn't it bad for her to be like this? It looks like... She stopped breathing!?"

Hearing Mei's comment, Hisui realized what emergency measures needed to be taken immediately.

"In a time like this, shouldn't we start with CPR!? Umm....."

Who was going to do it... Hisui glanced at the people present.

Rushella and Mei—No. Their excessive strength could end up doing more harm than good, perhaps even stopping the heart directly.

Kirika—No. She was calm and composed, but she did not seem to know how to perform CPR.

Touko—Out of the question. Because she cannot make physical contact at all.

"Looks like I'll have to do it..."

Hisui himself only remembered the approximate method. He tried to recall what he had learned from the PE textbook.

Putting one hand over the other, he positioned them on the center of Eruru's chest.

Then without hesitation, he pressed on the sternum—

"Where are you touching!?"

As soon as Hisui's hand made contact with that soft sensation, Eruru woke up.

Immediately, she got up and punched Hisui flying.

"What the heck! This is an emergency... I had no choice....."

Before Hisui could finish, Eruru collapsed again.

This was hardly unexpected. She had suffered shock and flew into a furor as soon as she woke up.

"Why did she stop breathing again! Jeez.....!"

...Hence, Hisui began to perform chest compressions again.

"Hey where are you touching!?"

Eruru sat up and punched him again.

And collapsed again.

This repeated many times until Eruru finally woke up completely.

Adjusting her breathing, she laughed in self-mockery and turned her face away.

"...Go on and laugh at me. You want to laugh, right!? Drowning in such shallow water, go ahead and laugh if you want to, everyone!?"

"...I'm not going to laugh. Hey, you really hurt me with those punches. How many times are you going to punch before you calm down..."

After suffering a beating from Rushella just earlier, Hisui was quite heavily injured currently.

But Eruru's psychological trauma must be much worse.

"Kariya-san... cannot swim? And to a very extreme degree as well... Perhaps better called a phobia?"

Kirika asked with curiosity. Touko also seemed equally puzzled.

Rushella already saw through Eruru's identity long ago, while Mei probably knew even though she never brought it up. The other two had no idea completely.

"Everyone has... something they are not good at. Come, dry yourself first. The sun is setting so put on your clothes."

"No need... to pity me. Just tell everyone about my condition, I do not care....."

Drying her hair, Eruru whispered to Hisui soft enough that only he could hear.

But Hisui dismissed the issue gently.

"If you think you're causing trouble for everyone, tell them yourself. Otherwise, stop making a fuss about your heritage all the time."

"....."

Hisui took his gaze off Eruru who had lowered her head and turned to Touko.

"So... Touko-san, have you remembered anything?"

"No. The location is right for sure, but otherwise..."

"...Then we should try our luck elsewhere. Or how about we ask around in the neighborhood?"

"It is getting late, let me take over from here. I have already booked an inn for myself."

"But you can't investigate if I don't come along, right?"

Hearing Eruru's suggestion, Touko pointed to herself.

Indeed, there was little to investigate if she were not present, however... She was currently haunting Hisui.

"Then Hisui-kun should come along. We'll continue the investigation with the three of us."

Touko suggested innocently.

But this proposal caused the three other girls' beautiful eyebrows to shoot up.

"...I cannot go back while leaving my servant without supervision. Besides, I'm the club president. I will supervise you guys until the investigation is complete!"

"Eruru-chan is going to have a tough time babysitting you guys, let me help?"

"U-Underclassmen wandering about outside at night... Unacceptable! As the one in charge, I must accompany along. Th-This is simply as an upperclassman, and as the student council vice-president, just so you know!?"

The three girls picked their respective reasons for tagging along.

Watching the three of them, Hisui, who originally planned to go home, had no choice but sigh towards the sky.

"...So we're staying here for the night?"

After that, the group decided to check in at the nearby inn.

Thanks to Eruru, the choice of inn was decided immediately. Without mincing words, this inn was more like a guesthouse. Also, due to this sudden influx of guests, all the girls had to stay in the same room.

The only boy—Hisui took the other room. But due to the suddenness of their arrival, the inn had to tidy and prepare the room first. Hisui had no choice but to visit the girls' room first.

After dinner, the members of the group went to take a bath one after another.

As it so happened, Rushella was the last one to take her bath. Finding Hisui and Mei dressed in yukatas as soon as she returned to the room, her face was instantly shrouded with displeasure.

"What are you two doing!?"

"Doing.....?"

Mei was sitting on a cushion while Hisui was sitting behind her.

He was holding a comb and a hairdryer in his hands.

"Doing is 'doing,' eh?"

"Stop it with the dirty jokes! As you can see for yourself, I'm blow drying her hair. Because this hairdryer is kind of weak, it should go faster if I help her do it."

While busy telling Mei off and explaining to Rushella, Hisui's hands continued to be occupied with blow drying Mei's hair.

Watching him use the hairdryer and comb skillfully in tandem, Rushella could not find any signs of indecent intentions.

Although not completely satisfied, Rushella sat down beside them.

"To think you would let a man move his hands through your hair so easily. Didn't you know that a woman's hair is her life? If I were you, I'd never permit it."

"Indeed, touching hair requires overcoming more resistance... I have heard of that saying. However, this implies the intimacy of my relationship with Hi-kun..."

"Go on and delude yourself. I'm just a volunteer here. Could you not move randomly?"

"Fine fine. However, Hi-kun's skills are really good. It dries so quickly and feels so comfortable too....."

Mei did not retort and leaned back towards Hisui, relaxing her body and enjoying the experience.

Indeed, from an observer's point of view, Hisui's slender fingers combed the hair, tugging at it lightly at times, spreading it out on other occasions, quickly drying it. And from time to time, he would also confer head and shoulder massages.

"Wow, this feels really pleasurable....."

"Oh really? I'm just doing it out of habit. I was even worrying what I'd do if you suddenly screamed sexual harassment. It's already a habit of mine."

"Seriously, you could even open up a beauty parlor... By the way, how did you get so good at drying hair? It might be a bit rude of me to say this, but Hi-kun, you're not really that particular about your own hair, right?"

Watching Mei's look of ecstasy, the others heard her question and leaned in to listen in interest.

Hisui simply answered emotionlessly with indifference.

"Because I often did this for my foster parent. She asked me to comb her hair, blow dry it and help her take care of it....."

This answer told Rushella exactly whose hair Hisui used to take care of, or rather, was supposed to be taking care of.

The vampire who raised him—Miraluka.

Mei also seemed to understand Hisui's unexpectedly complicated background. Enjoying the warm wind, she asked a question that sliced straight to the heart of the matter.

"It's that vampire, huh... Although I really shouldn't be saying this, couldn't she do her own hair?"

"I said the same thing to her many times... But she doesn't have a reflection in mirror, after all..."

This prompted everyone present to recall the characteristics of vampires.

Mirrors, glass, water surfaces—Every reflective object failed to produce images of a vampire.

In other words, cosmetics and hair care were quite challenging.

"I see, that really does need other's help... Ah, but she can't go to a beauty parlor, since she won't have a reflection in the mirror."

"Yeah... Although there is mind control using the mystic eyes, it'd still require reserving the entire place. Also, if the amount of hypnosis is not controlled carefully, it could end up disastrous. So she did it herself. And ended up with such long hair. This was probably the reason why she didn't use makeup much. Okay, it's done."

Hisui finished his task and turned off the hairdryer.

Blown dry meticulously, Mei's hair seemed as though it was a professional hairstylist's masterpiece, glistening with gentle luster.

She was apparently no joking when she called it pleasurable. Lying on the floor while the comfort of the bath still lingered on her body, her face seemed as though she was in paradise.

"S-So, Kujou-kun..... Could you help me... do it as well?"

Awkwardly, Kirika raised her hand and asked.

Although her hair was not as long as Mei's, it was still quite wet because she had returned from the bath not too long ago.

"Uh, sure... But Senpai, I get the feeling that you probably won't like having boys do this sort of thing. Are you really okay with it?"

"Hmm, well, umm..... It's not like I'd allow anyone to do it..."

Kirika blushed but Hisui did not discern her intentions.

Touching hair was in a certain sense more challenging than touching skin—Mei had said something like that earlier.

"By the way, I sometimes wonder if you have a maid to do this at home, starting with drying your body."

"What is with that wondering!? Since my parents are often away from home, yes, I do have a servant to help around the house. But I still take care of my personal life myself! I don't allow anyone to enter my room..."

"Oh wow, they really do exist. High-class ladies through and through."

"...This is irrelevant anyway. So... You are unwilling?"

Fidgeting with her fingers, Kirika looked up and pleaded to Hisui.

For someone who did not know the vice-president's true face, seeing her drop her usual stern demeanor must be quite a shocking sight.

"No, I'm fine with it as long as you are, Senpai."

"Well then, thanks....."

Kirika turned around and entrusted her hair to Hisui.

Hisui began to work quietly, causing Rushella, whose mood was poor to begin with, to display further displeasure on her face, grumbling with her pouting lips.

"Hmph, why is everyone so unprincipled? To take a woman's life so lightly..."

She muttered for quite a while but neither Hisui nor Kirika heard her.

Blushing, Kirika chatted with Hisui about her hair.

"...My hair has split ends, right? Would it... be troublesome for you?"

"Oh not at all. I think your hair is very pretty."

"...R-Really? P-Please go harder when massaging me... Please massage longer..."

"Yeah, the student council's work must be quite tiring~~"

Hisui answered as he rubbed Kirika's shoulders with his slender fingers.

Right beside them, Rushella was gnashing her teeth with murderous intent on her face. However, the two did not notice.

"How nice, I'd like one too....."

Let alone a massage, Touko was unable to take a bath in the first place. She murmured in admiration. At this moment, Kirika's hair had also finished drying and another customer laid herself down in ecstatic paradise. Mei was still sleeping where she had lain earlier.

"Okay, done."

"Hmph... Watching your embarrassed expression, you must be doing this just for the chance to feel up girls, right!?"

"I've been desperately suppressing those feelings, okay!"

"...However, your skills seem quite good..... Well, umm... If you really want to, no matter what... I could allow you to do my hair too?"

Rushella asked in a testing manner as she showed off her beautiful hair.

However, Hisui shook his head in annoyance.

"Sigh, forget it. I haven't done this for a long time and even did two in a row. My hands are tired. This takes so much energy. Besides, isn't your hair dry already?"

As soon as he finished, Hisui's face was greeted by Rushella's punch.

"Ouch, what the heck....."

"Jerk....."

Rushella grumbled softly.

Unlike her usual outbursts of emotion, her quiet tone of loneliness made Hisui at a loss.

Without saying a word, Rushella left the room.

She most likely left the inn... But instead of dashing out madly through the door, she simply walked normally.

Inside the quiet room, the sound of Rushella's footfall outside sounded especially loud.

"What's wrong with her brain again..... Don't you all agree?"

Hisui sought agreement from the girls.

But no one looked at him.

"Eh... What's with this atmosphere?"

"It was totally your fault just now, Hi-kun."

"I can't deny Sudou-san and my role in this, but you are the one at fault, Kujou-kun."

"Hisui-kun, you'd better go apologize."

Not only Mei and Kirika, but even Touko were remarking with deep feeling. Despite being a ghost from the same age, perhaps because having spent a decade sleeping under the sea, she sounded especially mature in tone.

"Eh... What's the situation now?"

Besieged from all directions again, Hisui looked over to his last source of hope—Eruru.

Because she was the first to enter the bath, added to the fact of her short hairstyle, Eruru's hair had dried long ago and she simply watched quietly all this time. Now, she scolded as though she were glaring at trash:

"Hurry up and die."

"You can't be serious... Right?"

"Sorry, please do not look at me. Your gaze causes my value to drop as a human."

"What are you treating me as.....?"

Hisui was dealt a heavy blow. He turned and looked at the trio on the side.

Without prior communication, they all pointed at the door simultaneously.

In other words, "Hurry up and go."

"...This is the end result? Honestly, I really want to sleep....."

"Sleep all you want. I'll simply grant you eternal slumber using my strength."

"Be careful that I don't curse you with nightmares."

"...Isn't it said that when traveling, one could encounter sleep paralysis, spellbound by haunted beds?"

Faced with the smiling faces of the artificial human, the witch and the ghost, the helpless boy had no choice but to resign to his fate.

"...I'll be right back."

" " "Take care." " "

Chapter 4 - Nightmare First Thing in the Morning

After Hisui left, he found Rushella much easier than he imagined.

Having left the inn, Rushella was on the main road, walking towards the beach.

However, she was not wearing the yukata she had worn after coming out of the bath. Instead, she had gone somewhere to change into the swimsuit she had worn during the daytime.

By the time Hisui caught up to her, she had already crossed the beach and reached the edge of the waves.

"Dressed like that, are you thinking of swimming? Be careful or you'll just repeat what happened to Kariya. Stop making a fuss."

"...You're so noisy."

"Although it's already night, it's fine if you want to wear your swimsuit... But if you drown, I'm not gonna save you. I'm not a particularly good swimmer either."

"...Shut up."

As the sound of the waves vaguely filled the air, spontaneously... The two of them started taking a stroll.

"Oh... By the way."

"What?"

"Uh... I admit I was wrong."

"What did you do wrong?"

"Well... Umm, I'm not too sure either."

This terrible answer made Rushella even more displeased.

"Does this even count as an apology? Didn't that foster parent of yours teach you properly?"

"That's really harsh, you know....."

Hisui noticed it vaguely.

Every time his foster parent was mentioned, his arrogant master would throw a temper tantrum.

Seeing as they were both vampires, especially 'True Ancestors' as well, clearly conversations related to Miraluka might lead somewhere related to Rushella's lost memories—However, she always sulked.

"About what happened during the day."

"Huh?"

"About that... sunscreen."

"Thank Senpai if you wanna thank someone. She made it specially for you, busy as she is."

".....!"

Instantly, Hisui suffered another beating.

Rushella did not use her full strength, but this lukewarm level of force actually expressed her inner displeasure even more clearly.

"Why are you hitting me?"

"You're being noisy so shut up. Besides, I don't care even if I can't sunbathe during the daytime. The way humans worship sunlight, treating the sun's blessings as a supreme existence, that's such a narrow viewpoint. Vampires are unable to live under sunlight, neither do we appreciate how precious the sun may be, but because of that—"

"They understand the beauty of the night, right?"

Rushella turned around.

A simple and ordinary motion. However, Hisui could not help but stop walking.

That beautiful face, illuminated by the lighting known as moonlight; that gorgeous body, clad in flimsy fabric; that clear, snow-white skin—Everything was so perfect and flawless.

Rather than Rushella serving as a foil to the beauty of the night, it would be better to say that night existed for her sake—That was the kind of illusion he felt.

This was the vampire—no, Rushella—under the night sky.

Whether a vampire under the night sky or an exceptionally beautiful vampire, Hisui should have been used to these sights already despite his relatively young life. However, the sight of Rushella at night, from the very first night they met till now—She has always been so breathtaking.

"I never thought that you'd still be so cute."

"What did you just say?"

Rushella asked suspiciously.

Her crimson gaze was not burning with the light of the mystic eyes. Although the mystic eyes had no effect on Hisui, he could see her eyes glimmering from a magical power different from the mystic eyes.

Speaking of a vampire's charm at night, it was a seductive quality that drew mortals into a demonic realm.

Hence, Hisui did not stare directly.

"You came chasing after me, yet you refuse to look me in the eye. What an incomprehensible guy you are. Who knows how your parents taught you."

"How unfortunate, I was raised by a vampire."

"It's not like I hate her."

".....?"

"I simply hate the fact... that it seems like I'm always one step behind."

"....."

"No matter what's being said, what's being done, that woman's name always comes up."

Rushella spoke with chagrin as she started walking again.

Hisui had no words to answer and could only follow behind her.

'That's normal since I've lived with her for so long.' 'I know very clearly you're not her.'—These kinds of explanations were very legitimate and anyone could easily say them. But for some reason, Hisui could not bring himself to voice them.

Hence he only chose to escape this mood.

"...Why did you believe Touko-san?"

"....."

"She's probably not lying. Perhaps she's a little obsessive. Maybe she died a wrongful death. But still, you decided to help her. She's just a human. And a dead human at that, yet you've gone out of your way to fulfill her long-cherished wish, why is that?"

"You actually know already, right?"

Rushella answered with a question, not even looking back.

Hisui answered affirmatively through silence while deducing her true intentions.

Indeed, in the classroom at the very beginning, when Rushella had proposed helping Touko, he had already sensed it vaguely.

Why would Rushella specifically go out of her way to help a mere human?

Because—

"It's because... I resonated with her. Having no memories is quite painful, yes?"

"I think so too."

Fellow sufferers of the same affliction... Applying such a description would be too simple.

The pain brought about by amnesia that Rushella occasionally expressed was something that Hisui could never comprehend.

On that day, suddenly waking up to a surprise in a strange and unfamiliar world, without any kin by her side, not even knowing her own identity—Touko's situation was actually much better than hers.

"So that's why... You decided to help her?"

"That's not the sole reason, you know? Umm... That vampire who bit her, he offends me."

"....."

"Drinking blood is understandable, yes..... But etiquette cannot be ignored, right? Whether taking victims as servants or simply killing them, umm... But to keep them bound even after death, that's unacceptable..."

Rushella sounded as though she were making excuses.

Hisui could also gather a slight hint that she was trying to test the way he felt.

Rushella herself was probably self-aware of this, hence she did not face Hisui when talking to him.

"About Touko-san, I think she can't let go because of her own obsession. Not passing onto the next life is because of that. The wound on her neck is a reminder to herself not to forget... That's my feeling."

".....Even if that's the case, the cause still lies with that member of my kin, right? Being bitten by a vampire is a serious matter."

"To think you'd say that so shamelessly when you keep drinking my blood all the time."

"Y-You're a separate matter, okay!? Drinking your blood doesn't cause you any problems. More importantly, you belong to me!"

Rushella turned around and snarled.

Coincidentally, a wave crashed down by her feet, causing Rushella to lose balance.

Although it was a calm wave that did not rise above the ankles, "living water" was a major threat to vampires, especially seawater which contained salt with its exorcising and purifying properties. Once splattered, seawater caused local paralysis.

"Ah.....!"

Hisui was unable to catch her in time. Rushella fell and landed on her bottom.

Her body was also splashed with seawater.

"Ooh, ooooooooooh....."

Her delicate body trembling, Rushella could not help but hug herself tightly.

She felt chilled to the bone and a sense of paralysis spreading throughout her entire body.

As a pure vampire, she was even more sensitive to living water than Eruru.

Even if it was not fatal, in the worst case, it could render her in a temporary state of suspended animation.

"This has happened before, right. The second day we met, you were drenched in heavy rain."

"Y-You're being noisy, shut up.....!"

Hisui smiled wryly and covered her with the jacket he had taken when he left the inn.

It should help her stay warm to some extent.

"Here, can you stand up?"

".....Yeah."

Rushella obediently held Hisui's outstretched hand and left the seawater.

"I-I'm not going to thank you, okay!"

"I'm not expecting it in the first place."

"Y-You are in charge of serving me, showing utmost attentive care is only natural!"

"Got it."

"H-How much longer are you going to hold my hand!?"

"....."

Indeed, Hisui had been holding Rushella's hand all this time.

And in a fairly forceful grip.

"Why... are you holding my hand? C-Could it be, that... You want to... hold hands with me?"

Rushella spoke with an expression that was not altogether displeased.

For a vampire, especially at night, shaking Hisui's slender hand off would be a piece of cake.

But she did not do so.

"L-Let me say this to you..... As a reward for your everyday efforts... I'll allow you slightly... Umm... To touch a little. In the future when I attend balls, it's also your responsibility to accompany me as my escort..."

Finding a legitimate reason, Rushella did not release her hand.

Seeing her shy appearance, Hisui spoke up.

But his voice sounded a bit awkward.

"I can touch?"

"S-Sure..."

Immediately, Hisui's empty left hand grabbed Rushella's breast.

"Eh.....?"

Cries of shock were emitted from both Rushella and Hisui's mouths.

"H-How dare you!?"

Before she could stop him... Hisui's left hand was already squeezing Rushella's bulging breast, his five fingers sinking deeply into her supple flesh.

"W-What are you doing!? Th-This behavior.....!"

"Because you said I could touch."

That awkward tone of voice again, but unmistakably, it was Hisui's voice.

However, Rushella did not notice these suspicious signs but simply blushed and twisted her body.

"R-Release me now... This.....!"

"....."

Hisui's left hand moved.

Without causing Rushella any pain, but firm enough to hurt if she tried to escape—Using this amazingly fine-tuned level of force, he held her... Or rather, he was groping her.

"S-Stop it... This kind of thing... Unacceptable..... This....."

The bikini top was already very skimpy. Currently, it could be said that Hisui's hand was touching her skin directly.

Who knew if it was because her unguarded breast was being groped by him, or for some other reason—Rushella was pleading in a sweet tone of voice.



"L-Let go now! This... No....."

Tears appeared in the corners of Rushella's eyes.

But Hisui's attention was directed elsewhere.

He was desperately grabbing his left hand with his right, trying to pull his left hand away from Rushella's breast.

"Y-You... what on earth are you doing? Hurry, let go.....!"

"...I'm trying very hard right now.....! My hand just moved on its own.....!!"

"Huh.....?"

"My mouth didn't listen to me either and said strange things on its own! What the heck is going on...!?"

Indeed... He was not joking. His left hand really did move on its own.

Not some kind of uncontrollable impulse of puberty... But it truly moved on its own.

And his mouth spoke words contrary to his will.

In a state of panic over this body that did not belong to him, Hisui did not have the leisure to enjoy the soft sensations experienced by his left hand.

"Hey hey, this whatever situation is really quite serious!?"

"How would I know!? Hurry and let go! S-Stop it... Don't use your nails to scratch through the fabric!"

Rushella finally reached the limits of her embarrassment and swung her fist at Hisui's face.

Nevertheless, his stubborn left hand continued to grip Rushella's breast firmly, refusing to let go.

"Looks like you're not faking it... What on earth is going on!?"

"As if I would know! Hey, you'd better hurry and help think of a way too! A bit of violence is fine, just get my hand away!"

"Don't give me orders while you're having your way with my breast! But if this continues, it's definitely unforgivable!"

Rushella grabbed Hisui's left hand with both hands.

Given the situation, she intended to use her full strength—Just as she was about to pull, she discovered another hand overlapping Hisui's left hand.

With even whiter skin than Hisui—more accurately, it was translucent, beyond the realm of "white."

The translucent hand and Hisui's hand were overlapping and Rushella recognized it.

Exchanging glances with Hisui, the two figured out the truth.

"What are you doing, Touko-san!?"

Hisui directed his question beside him where Touko was smiling with a mischievous expression.

"Oh dear, I'm caught red-handed now?"

"Did you really think you won't get caught!? What kind of performance are you trying to pull here?"

"This is what's called 'possession.' I tried it and it worked. Although it doesn't work on girls, it seems to be fine with Hisui-kun."

"What... How thoroughly are you going to possess my body!?"

"Hmm... It looks like the limit is controlling the left side of your body and saying a few words. I will practice more and try harder♥"

"Could you not say such dark things with such a cute face!? Why are you doing this!?"

"That's right, I don't care if you control this guy, but why did you make him grope my breast!?"

"Watching you two just makes me so impatient. Two people walking on the beach with no one else... Can't you try harder given this wonderful background? Especially you, Hisui-kun..."

"No no, I only came to bring her back....."

"Look, you're both alive and have bodies, why not have a passionate romance? Once you're dead, it'll be too late, right?"

"Uh, well....."

Her words sounded so convincing no matter what.

As expected of a dead person's speech.

"...Hey, don't change the subject! Could you stop deciding on your own to control someone else's body, okay!?"

"That's right, I'm a vampire, this guy is a human... We are master and servant! Not... Not that kind of... relationship....."

Despite words of refutation, Rushella's voice grew softer and softer, her tone also became hesitant.

Touko crossed her arms and examined the two of them, finally shrugging in exasperation.

"Well, whatever. To be honest, rather than worrying about your relationship, I'd rather taste the bittersweet springtime of youth personally."

"Besides, since I'm haunting Hisui-kun's body anyway, whatever you do, I'll follow you automatically."

"Wah, this is so troublesome!"

"Seriously, not only am I getting stared at all day, even my body gets snatched away....."

Wouldn't it be better to hurry and hold a service to help her pass on—Rushella and Hisui communicated through their eyes. Touko began to smile mischievously again.

"Say... Umm, since I can converse normally with you two, that means that Hisui-kun has regained his freedom, you know? Besides, I can't control him for long periods of time."

"What!?"

Only prompted by her did he realize.

Indeed, since Touko was no longer in Hisui's body, his control should no longer be affected.

Clearly not under influenced by someone else—Yet Hisui's left hand continued to grab Rushella's breast.

"Ah."

Hisui finally regained his senses.

Then preparing himself for the worst, he closed his eyes.

Farewell, cruel world.

"You great big idiot!!"

A completely merciless fist of iron crashed into his face, sending Hisui pitifully falling into the sand.

Although he collapsed, his left hand still maintained its posture in the shape of Rushella's breast.

"How did it feel?"

Touko approached and asked. In a hazy state of mind, Hisui left his last words.

"A perfect combination of volume and softness....."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it♥ Originally, I should use my own body to thank you, but it's a shame that not even my bones remain."

Touko smiled tenderly and made a joke with dark humor. Hisui did not know if he should laugh or cry.

But the next sentence he heard caused all his nerves to tense up.

"Flirting with a vampire, my, what a hobby you have there eh?"

"It's you....."

Hisui stood up.

A tall woman was standing with her back to the moonlight.

Oogami Rangetsu.

"Going out with a vampire at night isn't really commendable. You should be a little more vigilant."

"Who is this?"

Not recognizing her, Rushella asked Hisui.

"Kariya's colleague. She's supposed to be an official detective. So..... What business do you have here?"

"I came to warn you. It seems like you're assisting Kariya Eruru, so I'd like to advise you to mind your own business. There was no vampire in the coffin. That's the entire situation, yes?"

"Even so, isn't assistance voluntary?"

"Let me remind you that it's smarter not to go against the nation's interests, okay? If this sort of unofficial investigation goes wrong, your personal safety is not guaranteed. Besides, you probably have no idea, but she is actually—"

"A dhampir. Is there a problem?"

Hisui cut her off.

Rangetsu showed surprise but immediately regained her composure and mocked sarcastically.

"So you actually knew... Yet you can still hang around her all the time. Plus this vampire as well. Are you really human?"

"Who knows....."

Rangetsu did not know about Hisui's constitution.

Hence, despite mocking him, she was actually worrying for Hisui's safety.

"If you want to investigate me, I welcome you any time. But that will really be a waste of taxpayers' money."

"...What an arrogant brat. Fine, I'll pass. If you were no longer human, Kariya Eruru would surely execute you instantly. However, I never would have expected her to reveal her identity to you... From my observation, she has always hidden it quite well."

"She doesn't trust me that much. I discovered it on my own."

"Oh dear... How unexpected. Looks like you have a few talents of your own. She probably allowed you to accompany her because she appreciates your smarts? And that ghost beside you, you really must have a taste for the supernatural, eh?"

(...She can see her?)

Rangetsu's words clearly indicated that she could see Touko.

After all, as a member of the Supernatural Investigations Section, this level of ability was apparently standard.

"Although I'm not sure why she's possessing you, do you need an exorcism? I have professionals in my team."

"Not necessary. Although the chill troubled me for a while, I'm already used to it now."

"Really..... If you ever part ways with Kariya Eruru, feel free to contact me any time. I wish to talk to you."

Saying that, she threw her name card straight towards Hisui, flying through the dark night.

Her motion was like throwing a poker card, but before it could reach Hisui, Rushella had already thrown her short sword to strike it down onto the sand.

"...What are you doing?"

"If you want to recruit my servant, you'll have to go through me first. How displeasing you are."

Rushella spoke unhappily.

Rangetsu laughed lightly and nimbly leapt off the sand.

Within the blink of an eye, her stern and cold face had already appeared right before Rushella's face.

Despite the unfavorable mobility on a beach's sandy surface, she had closed their distance in by a simple leap.

".....!"

Rushella reacted reflexively.

Because she instinctively judged this woman as a threat.

She reached straight for the target's heart.

Given the length and sharpness of Rushella's fingers, combined with her speed and sturdiness, penetrating a body of flesh would be a piece of cake.

"...Ha?"

After laughing derisively, only then did Rangetsu react.

No, more accurately, she only started moving after confirming Rushella's movements.

Her counterattack was a very simple sweeping kick delivered at mid level.

She first withdrew and folded her long and slender leg, then shot it out like a spring.

The exchange only happened within the blink of an eye, resulting in an instant, decisive victory.

The loser—was Rushella.

Her attack missed and she suffered a kick to her abdomen, sending her flying into the air, finally landing in the shallows.

"You...!!"

"This is nothing to a vampire, right? No actual harm done. Besides, it's even nighttime as well. Oh right, but isn't the seaside rather troublesome? There's the danger of drowning."

Rangetsu simply spoke indifferently, completely unconcerned with Rushella's safety.

"I hate vampires the most. Naturally, dhampirs are not exempted. If the higher-ups make the decision, I will destroy them any time."

".....!"

Hisui glared at Rangetsu without saying a word.

His eyes were burning with distinct hostility, a rare occasion. But Rangetsu turned around, unfazed.

"I would advise you not to get any funny ideas. The only reason why this vampire lives is because there are no concrete records of her attacking any human... That's all. No matter what the reason is, once she makes a move, she'll be added to our extermination list. Please pass that onto her."

Saying that, Rangetsu departed leisurely.

"Hisui-kun....."

"I know."

Hearing Touko's sad voice, Hisui nodded. Instead of chasing after Rangetsu, rescuing Rushella was more important.

Rangetsu was not lying. A simple blunt attack could not kill a vampire at night.

Instead of causing direct damage, her kick was intended to send Rushella falling into the sea.

What was surprising was her speed that surpassed a vampire at night.

"Are you okay.....?"

At Rushella's location, the seawater was at waist-level.

Hisui picked her up in his arms. Rushella was already completely pale, her lips blue, having lost all strength in her body.

After retrieving her short sword that was embedded in the sand, Hisui silently carried Rushella on his back and started returning to the inn.

Touko followed behind him, gazing solemnly at Hisui's back.

For some reason, she did not circle around in front of them.

Touko did not want to see Hisui's face at this time.

"I was thinking of fetching you but this happened? What on earth took place to develop into this situation?"

As soon as Hisui stepped into the inn, Eruru asked him in surprise.

After all, it was only natural to be surprised at the sight of Rushella completely drenched, carried on Hisui's back.

"It's all your colleague's fault. That Rangetsu person."

"Oogami-san...? Why!?"

"I'd like to know too."

After handing Rushella over to Mei and Kirika to take care of her, Hisui told Eruru about everything that happened on the beach just now.

"...I see. Looks like she is tracking down the vampire too."

"Didn't she conclude herself that there was no vampire in the coffin? Why would she come here then?"

"I am guessing it is what the higher-ups wanted. There was definitely no vampire in the coffin but there could be other coffins. Or perhaps there were some other vampire-related clues. Putting aside the truth, someone in the higher-ups with a close relation with her must have decided and sent her here to investigate. Then following the obvious trail, she found us—Probably something like that."

"Competing factions, struggles for power, everyone is secretly vying for domination. When she disparaged you in that underground facility last time, was she taunting the opposing faction?"

"It probably does carry that level of significance. After all, it is true that no vampire was found. There is nothing the opposing faction could say. The ones holding power in the organization basically understand very well."

Looks like that Rangetsu woman's social skills were quite smooth and slick, in a different way from Eruru.

Furthermore, in terms of dealing with vampires, she also possessed the corresponding capability.

Hisui really did not want to make an enemy out of someone like her.

"She looks like she really hates vampires. Are the hardliners intending to catch the vampire first then secretly destroy him?"

"Although it's public knowledge that she hates vampires, her boss is actually a conservative. Perhaps the orders are to prioritize capture over extermination."

"That doesn't sound too conservative actually. Instead of advocating coexistence with vampires... Catching them and conducting research... Is that what it means to be conservative?"

"Indeed. In contrast, the hardliners advocate instant execution of everything harmful to humans, no matter what. As a compromise of these two camps, the current policy prescribes tolerance for vampires that have not attacked humans."

"So... Which side do you belong to?"

Eruru did not answer.

When they first met, surely she would have declared herself in the hardliner camp without hesitation.

Then what about... now?

"Your room is apparently prepared already. I'll take you there, follow me."

"Yes—"

Hisui did not press the issue further. He followed her.

"But I feel kind of bad. A single room for me alone? You girls don't have a huge room but you need to squeeze four people there?"

"Genders need to sleep in separate rooms, right? It's not like we can't split the group in half. Obviously this is the only way."

"That's true."

"We're there."

Eruru stopped and opened the door.

Appearing before their eyes was a dimly lit Japanese style room. The floor was entirely filled with blankets.

"This is... Perhaps?"

"The bedding storage."

Eruru stated simply.

The bedding storage—Just as its name implied, it was the store room for keeping blankets and other bedding supplies.

Despite serving various purposes in different inns, they always had a common function as a storeroom for miscellaneous items, and they were not supposed to be rented out for customers to stay in.

"Eh——What kind of joke is this!? Why would they open this for customers!?"

"Originally, I was the only one planning to stay at this inn. Now that our numbers increased all at once, but their rooms are already fully booked, this cannot be helped... So that is the situation."

"You can't be serious... There's no place to lie down here. The room is completely occupied by blankets."

"This cannot be helped. It is the bedding storage."

"...I see."

"Also, the rent does not come cheap. The part I paid for you already, you need to fully reimburse me later."

"Eh, I need to pay for it out of my own pocket!? And so expensive!? Living in the bedding storage!?"

"After all, we're not on an official investigation. Besides, this is originally unavailable for guests. They only allowed you to live in it after I negotiated with them. Expensive is only normal."

"Uh, this... Fine....."

Although Eruru's explanation made sense, Hisui could not accept it entirely.

Clearly, a room's price should be in direct proportion with its quality.

Although he had many more complaints, Hisui could only swallow them, fearful of the risk that Eruru might simply kick him out. In any case, he decided to first make sure he had a place to sleep. Hisui entered the room.

"This is so dark... Where's the light switch?"

"I think it would be better to keep the lights off, yes? There might be spattered bloodstains... Rather, because this room was not meant for people to live in, there might be many filthy stains. What you do not see will not bother you."

"Hey, did you just say spattered bloodstains? You did say that, right!?"

"I said it."

"Eh, now you admit it directly!? I was thinking you might deny it a bit first!?"

"Hurry up and get rid of those fantasies."

"Why are you counseling me... Speaking of which, this room is that type of room you mentioned, isn't it!?"

"Because it is the bedding storage."

"Bedding storage = a room with an unspeakable past, does such an equation exist!? And so expensive too, what the heck is going on!?"

"It is all because no one normally lives in this room. Besides, the inn consented only because I negotiated. Please be understanding."

Eruru's expression looked as though she was listening to a raving madman.

Her adorable face did not show any emotion while she simply spoke severe words in an indifferent tone of voice.

"B-But, isn't it serious with spattered bloodstains...? Shouldn't there be some exorcism charms?"

"Do not worry, they have been ripped off already."

"That's a great cause for worry! Don't go unsealing the charms!!"

"Having exorcism charms in a room where someone is living in would not be very appropriate, right? Are you trying to express your dissatisfaction with my thoughtful service?"

"What are you getting angry for!? This inn has a problem if it's got a bloodstained room in the first place, doesn't it!?"

"Although the inn was not too willing, they finally agreed. Well, in fact, renting this room out in itself was quite a stretch. In the end, I forced the issue by requesting repeatedly that 'This person insists on living here' so the inn finally relented."

"Now even the inn hates me!! Don't go making use of your negotiation skills in this kind of area!!"

"Do not worry. Even though I tried, the exorcism charms are not entirely ripped out. After all, they are perfectly intact on the underside of the tatami."

"Of course I'm worrying!! Doesn't that make it even more terrifying!!"

It looked like things had gone beyond the issue of whether he could sleep or not.

Whether he could leave this room alive in the morning, that would be a serious question.

"Is it really okay...? I really feel like there's a huge problem, okay?"

"You have been possessed already, right? What difference does it make, one more or one less? Isn't there an old saying, 'being haunted by one ghost is as bad as being haunted by two,' right?"

"The difference is huge..... Jeez, whatever, I'm not gonna turn on the light then. I'll just not think about anything and sleep directly!!"

Hisui sighed with complete self-abandon and entered the dark room.

In order to stay oblivious of his surroundings, he casually covered his head with a blanket.

"Then a goodnight to you. Sweet dreams."

"...I won't forget this."

Grumbling from beneath a blanket, Hisui closed his eyes and headed off to the land of dreams.

Who knew if it were a blessing or a curse, but Hisui rapidly fell asleep.

He was probably exhausted from this and that happening.

There were no nightmares. Neither did he wake up in the middle of the night. He slept through the night and morning arrived directly.

Although he had not set an alarm on his cellphone, he still woke up at the usual time.

And just as usual, a warm and soft sensation was pressing on his chest.

A sweet fragrance.

The feeling of his neck bitten.

As well as—Sharp pain.

Opening his eyes, he found Rushella lying on top of him, slurping as she drank blood from his neck.

".....You're even doing this during a trip!!"

"Stop being so noisy, you're making a ruckus early in the morning!!"

Probably recovered after a night's rest, Rushella's expression revealed nothing about the injuries she suffered the night prior.

Just as usual, she was embracing him tightly, having her daily meal.

"Ouch——!! Damn it, you're sucking too much at once!!"

"You're being noisy so shut up! I got kicked by that woman and fell into the sea, right!? So right now, I need to drink to my fill! Just lie still and don't make a fuss!"

"I don't wanna~!!"

"Watch me put you in your place.....!!"

A boy and a girl, both dressed in yukatas, were wrestling with each other.

This sort of clothing was very susceptible to getting pulled open.

In actual fact, Hisui's collar was already messed up by Rushella's hand, leaving his chest open wide, almost half naked.

And as a result of Hisui's struggles, Rushella's clothing had become a bit... Disheveled.

Also because this was her first time wearing Japanese style clothing, the sash was not tied securely.

Hence, when Hisui struggled with his arms and legs, he reached for the collar and caused the chest portion of Rushella's yukata to slide off.

"Ah..... Sorry."

A bountiful bosom jumped right in front of his eyes.

Perhaps because they were staying outside overnight, or maybe because she was not wearing Hisui's shirt as usual like at home, it was fortunate that Rushella was wearing a bra properly.

Even so—wrapped in a white and lacy bra, her breasts were drawing Hisui's full and complete attention through their sheer overwhelming volume.

"Not allowed to look——!!"

Her left and right hands alternated to deliver a series of slaps, turning Hisui's head into a rattle drum.

Naturally, Rushella's intense exertion also caused her bosom to wobble and shake from side to side, nonstop.

A man's instincts conferred Hisui with astounding vision despite the high-speed motion of his head. Wobbling intensely in all directions, his eyes captured clear images of the dangling fruit.

"I already said, not allowed to look!!"

"Then cover it up yourself!"

"You're noisy so shut up!!"

In an attempt to hide her exposed bosom, Rushella directly pressed her chest against Hisui's chest.

Yes, it was hidden now, but this caused new problems.

"Hey hey, Rushella-san... Could you stop that? Pressed like this together, it's really... Although there was a bath towel separating us last time... I'm half naked with my chest bare today, even with your bra in between, it's really disastrous....."

"What's so disastrous!? Apart from the blood in your entire body rushing down and concentrating in your lower body!?"

Rushella was able to read the bloodflow of a person she was touching. Hence she retorted after analyzing.

Indeed, all the blood in his body was converging there.

Even if that was not his intention, it was also morning.

And there was even someone pressing her breasts against him.

Oh the woes of a man.

"Umm, sorry... Let's talk about blood drinking and apologies another time. Could you stop locking me down with your legs? With your lovely skin, it's very disastrous for me to be caught in between those smooth, beautiful legs....."



"What kind of nonsense are you babbling about!? Blood drinking must come first!! After I'm done with your blood, cover up your eyes, then I'll fix my clothes and leave!!"

"Can we discuss this sequence a little more...?"

"So noisy, shut up!!"

Thinking about nothing but biting his neck and drinking blood, Rushella pressed her weight down harder to prevent Hisui from escaping.

The two were entangled tightly together, with only a soft bosom in between them.

"Hey, seriously... This is very bad....."

Rushella licked her lips and approached.

Hisui closed his eyes, fallen into despair, focusing his thoughts on trying to get his disobedient lower body to calm down at least.

Just at this moment, a savior suddenly descended.

The blanket covering Hisui and Rushella's lower bodies was actually bulging with something the two had not noticed.

" "Eh—!?" "

Under their surprised gaze, the bulge squirmed like a giant caterpillar—Then Mei popped out.

"Eh—!? When did you get here!?"

"I arrived earlier than this girl here! I was actually planning for a nocturnal assault when the time was ripe, but ended up oversleeping. So now it's dawn♥ That would make it a 'morning assault', right?"

"You and your damn assaults! What are you planning now!?"

"Oh dear, isn't it obvious? Let's. Make. Babies."

Mei smiled seductively and joined in intimate state between the two people.

Rather than a yukata, she was wearing a babydoll nightgown. This translucent underwear naturally held true to its excellent tradition of skimpy and erotic design.

"...So, could you move aside?"

"Who are you asking to move aside!? This guy's mine!!!"

On top of Hisui's body, a battle between a vampire and an artificial human was about to start.

But before the battle could officially begin, Mei surprisingly offered a compromise.

"Or how about this, after all, since our goals are different, let's just split things up. You go ahead and suck blood from Hi-kun's neck while I enjoy his lower half properly..."

"I see... That's right, I want to get to fixing up my clothes faster. If we do it together, subduing this guy will be much easier!!!"

"How could you two ally together!? Hey, stop it!!!"

"No problem, just relax....."

Mei readily took off the outer layer of her babydoll and threw it aside.

Her well-developed figure was displayed before Hisui's eyes.

A massive bust on Rushella's level. Voluptuous thighs and buttocks.

Hisui had clearly seen all this before, but the stimulating nature of her attire was too potent.

In addition, hunting his lower body, Mei was crawling around on all fours... Like a female leopard ready to pounce on her prey.

But that was not all there was to it.

If it were just visual stimulation, Hisui could still manage and suppress.

But Mei had brought out an even more devastating weapon.

Hisui did not know if it was by chance or by design.

Perhaps God's gift or the Devil's sacrifice.

Her voluptuous butt was pointed straight at Hisui's face.

Fine, even so, he could still manage to maintain a shred of sanity. Desperately mustering his final strength, he resolved to turn his face away.

However, perhaps because she was spending a night away from home or because she was always thinking about having babies every moment... On her butt was what one would call victory underwear.

It was a pink thong.

The tiny scrap of fabric, buried in the valley of her posterior, completely failed to cover up the overwhelming presence of those childbearing hips.

Storing a thick layer of fat, that luxuriant butt was smooth and glistening.

Seeing the fatal object swaying before his eyes, Hisui's brain short circuited. It was a miracle that blood did not spurt out from his nose.

He could not endure any longer.

Abandoning a human's dignity and chastity, Hisui closed his eyes.

"...You girls should behave yourselves!!"

A cold voice made Hisui open his eyes.

It was... Kirika.

Indeed, he was not fighting a losing battle in isolation.

Isn't the vice-president here as well?

"Senpai, I'm so glad you're here... Hurry and pull these two away....."

As Hisui relayed a message for help, he instantly realized something was amiss.

Kirika's voice came from within the room, not from the door.

"...Where are you?"

"No, umm..... You see, you don't have a window, so I was thinking it must be quite stuffy in here, and wondered if you would feel thirsty, so I made some herbal tea... Cold tea. But I found you still sleeping... So before I knew it, I was waiting in a corner of the room....."

Kirika shyly raised a cup and explained.

She was dressed in a proper yukata with her hair coiled up behind her head, a great match for her Japanese attire and very feminine.

But what she had done was on the same level as Rushella and Mei's actions.

In other words... She had arrived even earlier than those two.

And was admiring the scene of his sleeping face all this time.

Hiding her presence completely.

Despite harboring no malice, she was even worse.

A so-called innocent stalker.

"No no no, that's terrifying! Then couldn't you have just put down the cup and left!? Just leave a note or something!"

"Oh right....."

Only upon hearing Hisui's reminder did she realize. Looks like the prim, proper and smart girl was a little slow in this area.

"...That makes sense too. Hey, look at yourselves, you two, what is with that attire!? A-Anyway, hurry and get away from Kujou-kun.....!"

"Hey... Senpai, wouldn't you like to join us?"

Mei shook her seductive ass as she spoke.

In a situation like this, recruiting Kirika as an ally would be more convenient.

"J-Join you..... It's not like... I also....."

"Rushella wants blood, I want his lower body, and Hi-kun's face... is still free, you know?"

Kirika gulped after hearing her then looked at Hisui's face.

Her eyes looked a bit dangerous.

"Uh, umm... Senpai?"

"Th-That's right... This kind of thing, shouldn't be too direct..... One should follow a natural sequence..."

"You don't need to go mouth-to-mouth directly. How about the cheeks or the forehead? Senpai, you're a quarter British... This would only count as a greeting, right?"

"Th-That's right. It would be just a morning greeting....."

Kirika convinced herself and took up her position next to Hisui's face.

Then lifting his face in her hands, her lips—

"Hey hey Senpai, this is a bit... Clearly you were the only one I could trust!!"

"D-Don't move..... This is just, umm... A British greeting, just a greeting!"

"Does the British Empire really have this kind of tradition...?"

"Becuase you're struggling, you touched my lips accidentally, it's just an accident...!!"

"You did it on purpose!! Arghhh—I've had enough!!"

Hisui mustered all his might, trying to push the three girls away.

But he was powerless.

In particular—His left half.

".....Eh?"

A translucent arm was overlapping his left arm.

More accurately... His entire body was overlapping with a translucent body.

"T-Touko-san!?"

"Yes, good morning."

From inside his body, the ghost smiled innocently.

She was happily engaged in his possessed state.

"W-What are you pulling again?"

"Hisui-kun... I died before I got a chance to savor romance. Before I died, I thought I had met a good man, but ended up getting killed by a vampire."

"Yeah, my condolences... We're all doing our best for your sake."

"So what is love, what does it mean to grow up into an adult...? I'd like to experience that. Using your body."

"That's too weird, this is a male body!? Even if you experienced it, it won't be right!? Besides, what sort of love is this, it's clearly lust! Although Rushella's isn't even lust!!"

"I... want to become an adult!"

"Find someone else!!"

Hisui's pleas fell upon deaf ears. Touko continued to occupy his body.

Since his left side was not listening to him, further struggles were hopeless.

The sharp fangs buried deeply in his neck.

The lustful hand reaching between his legs.

The lips approaching his face.

The ghost sneaking in his body.

Farewell, my various precious things.

Before a drop of tear could slide down Hisui's face, a certain person entered through the door, accompanied by a familiar, cold tone of voice.

"You guys are too noisy. What are you doing early in the morning? Breakfast is ready....."

Seeing the scene inside the room, Eruru's face froze.

A group of girls surrounding a half-naked Hisui.

Rushella was also half-naked while pressing her giant bust against him, sucking on his neck.

Mei, dressed in kinky and depraved underwear, was invading his crotch.

Holding his face in her hands, Kirika was bringing her lips closer and closer.

Touko was leaning closely against Hisui's side. The sight was akin to lying in bed with a lover.

This hellish composition of a scene was completely incomprehensible to Eruru, plunging her mind into a crashed state.

However, her mind quickly recovered. Picking up a nearby pillow, she took out her favorite sacred gun "Argentum" from her yukata and aimed the muzzle at Hisui.

"U-Umm... Kariya-san, so you really keep your gun close no matter what you're wearing... That pillow you're holding, is it meant to be a silencer?"

"Farewell."

"Hey, w-wait, I'm the victim.....!"

Before he could explain himself, Eruru had already pulled the trigger.

With the bullet shot through the pillow, the true story was hidden from the other guests at the inn.

Several minutes later, a female server came over to move some bedding and discovered a zombie-like boy, beaten up beyond recognition. Hence, new anecdotes were born regarding this room with its shady past.

This is not right, I didn't do anything wrong, they forced me and pushed me down... The zombie, or rather, the boy kept muttering incomprehensibly, seeking help from others.

Scared out of her mind by his appearance, the female server rushed out of the room. Reportedly, henceforth, the room was used only as bedding storage and no other guest ever stayed there.

"This is great, this food here! Eating this 'Jap food' once in a while is not bad!"

Rushella essentially followed a western diet, especially with eating bread in the mornings. Currently, she was happily taking large bites and enjoying a purely Japanese style breakfast.

"Hmm, although it's very simple, they pay a lot of attention to the details. The miso soup is also tasty."

Mei was tasting the miso soup in small sips.

The breakfast location was in the reception hall. Apart from Touko, everyone was sitting on cushions in seiza posture, savoring the simple but exquisite breakfast.

"I guess I should make miso soup from time to time. It looks like men tend to like that sort of cooking."

Kirika savored the miso soup carefully.

Because her cooking skills were quite advanced, she spoke with a very serious expression.

"Breakfast has always been a casual affair for me. It has been a while since I last ate so sumptuously."

Eruru was enjoying her food with satisfaction.

On first glance, a harmonious atmosphere seemed to be hanging over the breakfast table.

However, a certain boy was far removed from harmonious atmosphere, sitting on the side solitarily, having his breakfast.

".....I'm never going to stay overnight outside with you crazy girls ever again."

Hisui swore with resolution in his heart and silently ate his rice.

Thanks to his constitution, his internal bleeding had stopped and his wounds were healed. However, the injuries from Eruru's brutal beating still lingered in his heart.

With a stiff face, he prepared to go home, walking towards the bus station nearby with everyone.

The bus was roughly half an hour from arriving, so they all sat on the bench and stared at the sky with nothing to do.

"It ended up fruitless..."

Mei broke the silence, sighing and hanging her head dejectedly.

Although Rushella and Kirika's emotions were not shown on their faces, one could still see some sense of disheartening from returning emptyhanded.

"Sorry, it's my fault for not remembering..."

Touko bowed her head and spoke with an apologetic expression.

Because she was already intangible and fleeting, she looked even more transparent when she said those words.

"No, this is not your fault, Touko-san. However... What's the actual situation, Kariya? You must have found out something behind my back, right? You chose this inn because it was already in business since a long time ago, right?"

Hearing Hisui speak, everyone looked to Eruru.

Eruru shrugged and glared at Hisui sharply.

"You are keen as ever. Yes, apart from the cheap price, I did pick the inn because of the reason you outlined."

"If you told us earlier, then we could have helped by asking around? This sort of thing is easier with more people."

"That's right, Eruru-chan, Senpai and Hi-kun aside, I would've helped you if you asked. It definitely would have helped."

Mei tried to help out, but Eruru did not appreciate the gesture.

"This was not an official investigation to begin with, so I shouldn't get others involved. You guys should just treat it as a chance to stay out overnight and take a breather."

"You may think it's appropriate but it's not fair to Touko-san. Fine, what are your results? Did you get anything?"

"...It's regrettable. I asked if there were any strange guests or weird happenings around the time of Touko-san's death... But it seems like they had no idea. Furthermore, there was a sudden bout of heavy rain lasting a few days back then. The sea was very turbulent so the inn did not have much business."

"Heavy rain.....?"

Touko closed her eyes then and frowned.

With a complicated expression, she seemed to be concentrating and searching for some sort of memory.

"What's the matter? Did you recall something?"

"....."

Touko did not answer.

She remained silent, desperately thinking back, thinking back to the instant when she lost her life ten years ago.

No one tried to ask her anything more and simply turned to watch her.

What exactly had she seen or heard?

This was what everyone wanted desperately to know.

Finally, Touko spoke up gravely.

"Heavy rain... That's right, it was raining. That day... The day when I died..... On the boat, facing off against the vampire, it suddenly rained! The sea became turbulent and a storm came, the boat also... Rocked violently. That vampire hid inside the coffin... Probably because of that. Then the boat lost balance and ended up...!"

"Oh I see. A storm huh... An unexpected bout of heavy rain... But to be honest, this point....."

Mei crossed her arms and pondered.

All the others did the same. A moment later, Eruru brought up her viewpoint.

"Indeed, perhaps this point is not a decisive fact, but more or less, it gives us a clear idea of the situation back then. Touko-san herself has no memories of locking the vampire in the coffin and sinking it into the sea. Because she had already died before that. However, the coffin and her remains were found at the bottom of the sea. Most likely after her death, the waves swallowed the boat and swept it down under the sea. With that, even if Touko-san did not do it herself, the boat and the coffin would still sink in the sea."

Hearing her logical analysis, everyone nodded in agreement.

However, these deductions did not clear up the root of the mystery.

"Suddenly swept away by waves... In that case, the vampire should still be in the coffin, but the fact was he was not. Also, the coffin couldn't be

opened from inside. If Touko-san's memories are correct, then the coffin suddenly fell into the sea and he didn't get a chance to escape. What actually happened....."

Hisui pondered the puzzling mystery.

Beside him, Rushella spoke as though she was looking at a fool.

"Speaking of that vampire, what a guy who has no idea how to take precautions. Not only did he have a boat but he also sailed out to sea, but he didn't think of enhancing his coffin?"

"By enhancing... You mean adding waterproof features or making float... Those kinds of enhancements?"

Rushella nodded in response to Kirika's question.

As the only "coffin" user present, Rushella seemed to have her own ideas on coffin construction.

"When we vampires sleep, although futons or beds will suffice, in order to obtain truly restful sleep, a 'coffin' is necessary. Especially when tired. Conversely, lacking a coffin would be quite a troubling problem for us. Combined with the loss of a supply of fresh blood, it greatly diminishes our power."

"After all, to vampires, 'coffins' are a device for recovering spiritual powers. Precisely because of that, they would pour in great amounts of time and money into coffin construction to produce a masterpiece to their liking. In order to handle enemies attacking them in their sleep, some even go as far as to install various traps and mechanisms."

Eruru nonchalantly displayed her great knowledge.

For the purpose of exterminating vampires, she had thoroughly understood these areas.

"Indeed, take my coffin for example. Not only can it float on water, but if you close it shut, it can also stop water from entering. As a vampire, one must insist on such basic requirements in our coffins. But to think that vampire would use something without enhancements and even bring it out to sea, how utterly foolish."

Rushella mocked proudly to display her own superiority.

Probably offended by the expression on her face, Mei shot her down.

"Yeah, perhaps your coffin is fine even if it falls into water... But what's the point if you don't enter it before you go into the sea? Clearly you got kicked into the sea by that Oogami person last night, yet here you go boasting."

"Grrrrr...!"

Struck in a sore spot, Rushella had no choice but to shut up.

"He's vampire at least. Wouldn't he have special powers? Like... In legends, they can turn to mist or a swarm of bats. Even if someone kicks them, they won't fly like a dead fish and end up in such a pitiful state, right?"

"Y-You're really noisy so shut up! What you say, can't be done!"

"Eh~~ Are you really a 'True Ancestor'?"

"Sob, sob sob....."

Defeated in the verbal battle, Rushella began to cry.

Hisui could not bear the sight and extended a helping hand.

"The special powers of vampires are inherited from their parents, or passed down from master to servant. Although there are standard issue abilities like physical strength and the mystic eyes shared by all vampires, other kinds of special powers must come from the 'True Ancestor' at the root of their lineage. Furthermore, each True Ancestor has their own distinct powers. As for Rushella, well, she's just a 'True Ancestor' without the powers you mentioned."

"Th-That's right! We vampires have different strengths and specialties!"

"Fine. Ah, but that means there's more than one 'True Ancestor,' right? I was thinking, wouldn't all vampires descend ultimately from a single vampire?"

"That hypothesis exists. But if that were the case, all vampires would possess the same powers, although differing in strength, so that doesn't fly. The entity known as the 'True Ancestor' is definitely more than one. Of course, you can probably count them on one hand."

"Well, that's true. If she really were the root ancestor of all the vampires, then wouldn't she be a married woman who have sucked the blood of countless humans, with tons of descendants?"

"W-What nonsense are you spouting...!? I-I have never....."

Rushella grumbled softly, sneaking furtive glances at Hisui.

Obviously, her face was all red.

"Didn't I say it was a hypothesis? Servants aside, I never got the impression you were a vampire who had a husband, went through the motions of baby making, or given birth to a 'pure-blooded' child. It's inconceivable."

"Th-That's right, even without memories, that kind of thing... I never did it!!"

"How would you know? Even a lover would be perfectly normal....."

"N-No, no, never!!"

Rushella refuted loudly then fell silent. She sneaked glances at Hisui again but he was just stretching in a bored manner.

"Okay okay, I get it now. So it's like this, apart from standard abilities, whether those various powers of legend are usable depends on a vampire's lineage... Master or parents, ultimately decided by the 'True Ancestor,' is that right?"

"That's correct. So perhaps there are vampires who can turn into mist or bats....."

As soon as he said this, Hisui fell silent.

A thought flashed across his mind.

An empty coffin.

A sudden storm.

Special powers.

A calm and composed vampire.

Also... Also—Hurry and remember.

Think carefully.

Recall everything that had happened till now.

Pick out the unusual.

There must be something, a clue missed.

From the beginning of the incident, search everything—From Touko's encounter, everything that had happened.

"W-What's with you?"

Rushella asked with concern.

At this moment, Hisui met gazes with her.

Then Hisui brought his face close, almost touching each other's lips.

"W-What are you doing!?"

"—I get it now."

Hisui muttered an answer that did not answer her question and stood up.

The bus happened to arrive.

"Let's hurry and get back. Otherwise it might be too late."

"What have you figured out?"

Eruru asked solemnly. Hisui had these special flashes of inspiration from time to time, she knew them better than anyone else.

But Hisui simply shook his head lightly.

"It's all speculation at this stage. I have a theory but no evidence. Perhaps I'm worrying too much, although it'd be best if I'm wrong and there's nothing. But looking at how unlucky I was this morning, I hope the ill fortune doesn't spread over here."

"...What on earth are you trying to say?"

"Let's talk on the bus. Before I explain, hurry and contact the Supernatural Investigations Section, anyone there is fine."

"Contacting them now. But what instructions should I give?"

"Very simple. Quarantine the 'coffin' immediately."

Chapter 5 - Awakened from the Abyss

From her perspective, this job was utterly inane.

The higher-ups had assigned her to supervise the dredging from the bottom of the sea.

Not too long ago, a vampire's coffin was discovered. With one turning up, perhaps there were more.

Furthermore, as soon as a 'threat' was discovered inside, the target must be captured with utmost urgency—That was her mission.

What foolish instructions.

The difficulty of capturing a vampire varied greatly with the target's level. That said, using the Supernatural Investigations Section's equipment, it was not impossible.

For the sake of research, samples were indispensable. Some people insisted on this viewpoint. Naturally, it was understandable.

The problem was that the research in and of itself was a joke.

Human evolution, contributions to medical science, academic pursuit of knowledge—These people's research were not motivated by such noble goals. Rather they simply sought a delusional but as yet unrealized dream sought by people in power across the ages—"immortality and eternal youth."

Of course, even if realized, this result would not benefit mankind but would simply be monopolized by those in power.

Wearing its latest guise as the Supernatural Investigations Section, this organization had survived to this day only because of people in authority who coveted the powers of supernatural creatures, most prominently the vampire.

But in reality, no matter how much research they carried out on vampires, they never obtained the result they hoped for.

"Immortality and eternal youth"—Obtaining it was very simple. Just give up being human.

Living only under the cover of the dark night, burdened by all sorts of weaknesses, feeding on fresh blood.

If one were willing accept these risks, then a human could easily enter the ranks of the immortal and eternally young at any moment.

However, clinging to their secure lives, those in power did not have the courage or determination to give up on being human.

Not needing to worry about an inevitable death, remaining human, staying rational, not requiring a diet of fresh blood, not even weakened by sunlight or crosses, living forever—This was the sort of ridiculous immortality and eternal youth they dreamed about in delusion.

Naturally, none of these experiments succeeded to this date.

One would not expect them to succeed in the future either.

If one wanted eternal life, just give up on being human. There was no other way. However, human existence was limited in the first place.

Although her direct superior never spoke about it, he probably understood all this in his mind.

Clearly he understood, but for the sake of his career, her boss continued to work towards obtaining immortality and eternal youth for those people in power who controlled the world.

And she too, despite understanding the absurdity of such efforts, in order to rise among the ranks together with her boss, she had no choice but to accept this inane job.

But reality was unfavorable and the mission ended up fruitless.

The second dredging did not bring any special results. Not a single decent object could be found.

Let alone a coffin, not even a trace of a vampire was discovered. In consideration of budget issues, the dredging mission was concluded.

Then all that was left was to return to headquarters and submit a report to the leadership, get things done before noon and go home—That was her original plan.

Driving on the way back, she stopped the car for a can of coffee.

As she reached to operate the vending machine, her cellphone rang.

She had recorded this number just in case of emergencies but the unexpected caller ID was completely unbelievable.

"...Hello?"

"Oogami-san? I am Kariya."

"The sun has risen from the west. Did you hear something from the brat?"

"Indeed, he is the one looking for you. Not me. I'll let him speak to you."

After pausing for a few seconds another voice came from the other side.

She recognized this voice. It was the annoying boy who was fooling around with the vampire.

"Umm, Oogami-san? Where are you right now? At the Metropolitan Police Department?"

"How rude. I am currently on the road back."

"Hurry and reclaim that coffin. Then don't take your eyes off it. If any situation occurs, dispose of it immediately."

"Huh? What nonsense are you talking about? Is it possible that the coffin would move by itself!? According to the analysis results..."

"I'm not talking about the coffin."

Hisui's firm tone of voice rendered Rangetsu speechless.

This boy—He must know something.

"The vampire is inside."

"...How could that be? The coffin is empty. You saw it too, I also....."

"Do you really believe that.....?"

"....."

"From the start... You noticed Touko-san already. Before Kariya and I noticed anything, you were already aware. So last time when we met, you were not surprised to see her at all. And you even said that exorcism rubbish. Because you knew from the start that Touko-san was haunting the

coffin. So even though it was empty, you still continued to investigate in secret. I'm guessing this is also part of your orders from the higher-ups, or you applied to your superior, right?"

"What a smart little brat... Even if that's true, so what? I've done nothing wrong. The fact is there is no vampire. A mere ghost, what's the uproar about?"

"You fool! You already made a mistake in not communicating with Touko-san. If you don't want to make further mistakes, hurry over to the coffin."

Saying that, the other side hung up.

What an annoying brat.

But his words could not be ignored.

After some hesitation, Rangetsu still rushed over to the evidence storage where the coffin was kept.

"Looks like the coffin holds some kind of secret. What on earth is going on? It is about time for you to explain, right?"

Hisui ended the call before the bus started. Like the trip coming here, they all sat on the back row.

As soon as they took their seats, Eruru impatiently asked about the truth.

Naturally, everyone else was interested.

"I don't have any concrete evidence. The only reason why I yelled at her just now was just in case, to be on the safe side."

"Then if what you are worried about does not happen, then it just boils down to an ordinary high school boy providing bad information without escalating the situation. Thank you for your consideration, but hurry up and tell me."

"...The first thing I found strange in the beginning was the first time I heard Touko-san's voice. Do you still remember what happened?"

"Yes....."

Touko nodded lightly.

Hisui wanted to touch the coffin—And she called out to stop him.

At the time, he did not know of Touko's existence and thought it was a hallucination. Thinking back, that was probably the first time the two made contact.

"At the time, why did you say 'Don't'?"

"Eh...?"

"It was just an empty coffin. Even if I touched it, it should be fine. But you said that. Why?"

"Why... I just said it randomly? Or perhaps... Umm... Maybe there's some kind of reason I've forgotten....."

"I think so too, you probably forgot or it's some kind of ghost intuition. Because you felt that touching it will be dangerous, you warned me. But why is that? It must be because there's something inside... That's right, because your instincts told you that. After noticing this point, I started thinking there must be something strange about that coffin."

"I understand what you are trying to say now. Since Touko-san and the coffin were together for ten years, her words must reflect something about it. But exactly what?"

"The answer is simple. The vampire is still inside."

"Impossible... You saw it too, right? I confirmed it, there was no vampire in the coffin at all..."

"So basically, he exists inside in an invisible form. At least invisible to the naked eye. No, it's probably impossible to tell through scientific means of observation."

"And why is that?"

"Sudou mentioned it just now."

Shifting the topic, Hisui ignored Eruru's surprise and pointed at Mei.

"Eh, me? What did I say?"

"The special powers of vampires."

"Eh, that...? I mentioned it, yeah... Turning into mist or a swarm of bats, that? But this has nothing to do....."

"Mist...? Hold on, could it be!?"

"Looks like you understand. Most likely, the vampire that killed Touko-san can turn into mist. Although this might seem like a very pedestrian ability for a vampire, it's actually quite tricky to handle in practice. For example, no matter how you imprison him—provided there's any kind of gap, he can easily escape."

"I see, so that's why he didn't care when I shut him inside...!?"

The memories of the moment just before her death flashed clearly in Touko's mind.

Why did he allow her to shut him in the coffin so easily—That was because by turning into mist, he could effortlessly escape through tiny gaps in the coffin's lid.

The coffin was not airtight by intentional design to allow freedom of movement in and out.

"No matter how firmly Touko-san closed the lid, it was unfortunately meaningless. Well, you could have followed the traditional method by inserting Eucharists in the gaps to produce a sealing effect, but he'll surely notice during the insertion process. Besides, you didn't prepare any, right?"

"Yeah... This point never crossed my mind in the first place. I'm so useless... It was all for nothing....."

"Not at all. You achieved your mission splendidly."

Hisui asserted in a rare moment with heartfelt emotion.

Indeed, ten years ago, things ended only thanks to her efforts.

"Touko-san closed the vampire inside. Then you breathed your final breath and that guy could have escaped any time. However, something unexpected happened all of a sudden."

"The sudden storm... Right?"

Hisui nodded at Kirika.

Did the heavens respond to Touko's prayers or was it simply by chance—In any case, the boat was capsized by the waves and sank into the sea.

"I guess the storm arrived quite suddenly. With no one manning the boat, it sank very quickly. The one who really got frightened must be that guy in the coffin. After all, hated seawater began to suddenly seep inside, of course he'll be afraid. Then he would have realized... What a disaster, he had been thrown into the sea and was sinking. If he wanted to escape, even if he turned into mist, he would be dispersed once mixed with the seawater. That might not be a problem with ordinary water, but seawater was dangerous to vampires, only second to holy water. Once his body was mixed with seawater, he would lose consciousness and unable to reform ever again—Pretty much the same as 'destroyed.' As long as the seawater was still present, there would be no hope for revival."

"Whether continuing to hide in the coffin or choosing to escape, either choice meant suffering from seawater..."

Kirika and Mei, who had unwittingly provided the hint, nodded in agreement.

The vampire who had recklessly taken on mist form inside the coffin had no means of escape.

"Reforming from mist would not change the situation either. Since his body was submerged in seawater, it was becoming sluggish and his conscious gradually grew hazy. Very soon, he would enter an immobile state of suspended animation. A high-ranking vampire could probably break out of the coffin by force and desperately swim ashore... That's not impossible. But once sunk into the deep sea, there would be no hope. That guy probably understood his situation. Or perhaps, he didn't even have enough strength remaining to release his mist form. Seawater continued to flow in nonstop, mixing with his body. Hence, all he could do was maintain his sense of self and wait for the day he could resurface. Hence, for this goal..."

"He seeped his body into the coffin... Right?"

Eruru found the answer.

If his body in mist form was mixed completely with seawater, that would be equivalent to destruction.

But under the seawater's effects, his consciousness was already hazy and his body no longer responded obediently to his will.

In order to maintain his sense of self, all he could do was seep his mist-like body into the fabric lining the coffin's interior.

"Correct. But doing that would not prevent the state of suspended animation. Without solid form, without consciousness, that guy stayed sunken at the bottom of the sea for long periods of time. Hiding in the coffin. Then Touko-san must have instinctively realized this so she kept guarding the coffin. Because it did not require concentration, she did not stay conscious. After all, her enemy was no different from being dead. Until later... When the coffin was dredged up. Then Touko-san awakened."

"Right... It must be like that, no mistake. Although I still can't fully remember, I know... 'I can't leave that place'... I did think that at the time.....!"

"After that, when I wanted to touch the coffin—she subconsciously gave a warning. Because the vampire was still inside. That was obviously quite dangerous. Also... it still is."

"After opening the coffin, if we had exposed it to sunlight, then our job would have been easy. But having taken it underground, it will not be moved out for quite a while. For revival, it would be an ideal environment."

Eruru also considered this point and frowned with unease.

Ever since the coffin was dredged up, quite some time had passed.

The seawater's effects were gone. Turned into mist, the vampire could return to tangible form any moment.

"If the vampire simply returned to solid form, that would not count as a threat yet. For example, it would be like a state of hibernation... He will not be active in the short term."

"But give him some slight stimulus, let him drink even just a drop of blood... Then things are over. Instant revival. Then to satisfy the long-suppressed hunger, an immense appetite...!"

Hisui hoped he was simply worrying too much.

There was no concrete evidence at this point.

Perhaps he and Touko were overthinking things.

Or rather, that would be the best result.

Occupied with their own worries, no one said a word.

Hisui's group hurried on their return trip. Regarding this unsubstantiated truth, they all prayed for it to be false, or at least, even if a tragedy was happening, it would not be too late.

Compared to the evidence in ordinary police cases, the Supernatural Investigations Section's evidence was completely different.

Because usually speaking, they were all dangerous items and required corresponding knowledge and skills in usage and handling.

Foci for black magic, vessels with exorcism charms adhered, cursed objects bringing calamity to people—In actual fact, many items would be better destroyed on the spot.

However, the coffin currently kept in a corner of the vault no longer required concern.

Obviously, this was surely something used by a vampire in the past.

But it was empty inside. In people's eyes, it was not a problem anymore.

Moved to this location, it was waiting to be destroyed.

Considering it would be easier to move for future destruction, it was causally dumped on the floor.

In any case, it was just a piece of antique that would not cause any incident. The earlier incident had already ended.

"Uh, the data... The data..... Got it."

The newly recruited male staff member had forgotten something and stepped into the vault.

Although he had gone through an induction course, his days in this job were still young.

His knowledge about supernatural entities still remained at a textbook level.

In fact, he had no experience in facing off against supernatural entities.

Hence, he was only authorized to enter the safest area of the vault.

Everyone had to start as a rookie somewhere. It was not his fault.

Leaving a document file on a desk was a common thing.

And that desk happened to be right next to the coffin that was awaiting destruction... This was pure coincidence.

There were no particularly special factors.

Only the number of small misfortunes stacked together.

That was all.

Ultimately, perhaps all tragedies came about this way in fact.

"Hmm.....?"

The coffin's lid was not shut tight, revealing a bit of a gap.

There was no rule requiring lids to be shut tight. It would have been fine to leave it alone.

Actually, work aside, this staff member was not the type of person who insisted on a meticulousness in his personal life. Normally, he would not care about something so small.

But when he saw what resembled a human face through the gap, the situation became completely different.

".....!?"

He must be seeing things.

After all, he had participated in the opening operation. Not only himself, many people had confirmed with their own eyes at the scene—There was no one inside at all.

Nevertheless...

Someone played a prank—That could also be ruled out.

Even if someone could deliberately lie down inside a vampire's coffin, none of the staff here had that type of depraved sense of humor.

"Impossible, right..."

Perhaps he made a mistake in what he saw.

After looking at it for a while, he reached to touch the lid.

Suddenly he felt a sharp pain across his hand.

"Hmm....."

Looking down, his finger had a cut. On further examination of the lid's edge, he found blades install in several places. Careless touching could easily get hurt.

".....!!"

He spontaneously recalled knowledge about vampire coffins from his training course.

In order to protect their sleeping chambers, from a very long time ago, vampires started installing all sorts of mechanisms.

Of course, installing them on coffins was very common too.

Accomplishing dual goals of comfort during sleep and defensive ability was not easy, but many vampires still install all sorts of traps on their coffins.

As a recent example from a few years back, there was a coffin whose outer layer was electrified.

As for traditional classics, there would be poisonous needles or sharp blades for harming intruders.

Making minor cuts naturally did not deter enemies. It would not even succeed as a threat.

The true purpose of this kind of situation was to draw enemy blood.

No matter how deep in slumber, so long as fresh blood was flowing beside them, vampires would definitely wake up because of their keen sense of smell.

This was the most trusty alarm clock, capable of waking a vampire from deep slumber, allowing them to prepare countermeasures against stakes, crosses, garlic and other adversaries.

"C-Could it be.....!!"

The man covered his wound and kicked the lid in a safe spot to open it completely, peering inside.

Inside.

Inside was a roughly twenty-year-old blond man, lying there completely naked.

A noble face of European descent, easily reminiscent of the homeland of vampires. That handsome face could definitely be described as belonging to a descendant of nobles.

The pale white skin characteristic of vampires was filled with a sense of beauty. The vaguely visible muscles presented a naturally magnificent body.

The most distinct characteristic was that pair of vivid red lips.

So red that his mouth seemed like a red line drawn with fresh blood.

Furthermore, his mouth was already stained with fresh blood.

The blood shed by the wounded staff just now had turned the originally bright red of the lips even more vivid.

"A-Ahhh....."

Shrouded in terror, the staff back away step by step.

He already understood the consequences of his unwitting actions.

The young man stirred slightly.

He slowly got up and licked the blood on his lips.

Despite being a man, the licking motion of his tongue carried a mesmerizing sense of beauty that was difficult to express in words.

Even the staff forgot to run away, watching entranced.

But this caused him to forfeit his life.

"Crap."

As he said that, the staff had already realized his fate.

The feeling of sharp fangs penetrating could be felt from his neck.

Blood was mercilessly sucked away, very soon exceeding the fatal limit. Then his life plunged into a cursed abyss.

"Tell me about the situation in this place. First of all, what is the current time? How long have I slept?"

A seductive and noble voice.

Faced with this terrifying enemy, the staff gazed with hollow eyes, telling everything he knew to the man.

"...Hmm, looks like my sleep was not short. That girl really got me a good one. Fine, you are dismissed."

Obedying his master's orders, the staff retreated.

His eyes shone with red light while fangs protruded from between his lips.

He was no longer a police officer and definitely no human.

"Let's satisfy my hunger first."

Eyes flashing with dangerous red light, the awakened vampire began to hunt.

"...What's going on?"

Returned to the Metropolitan Police Department, Rangetsu hurried to the vault and could not help but frown.

The stench of blood lingered in the air—Although she could tell that the amount of bleeding was quite low, given the special location, Rangetsu began to stay on high alert.

Following Hisui's instructions, she carefully approached the coffin—A sense of nervousness surged.

There was a drop of blood on the edge of the lid.

Then—A woman's scream was heard in the distance.

"Could it be.....!"

Hesitating for only an instant, Rangetsu quickly made her decision.

Swiftly she took out her cellphone and issued orders.

"The MPD is in danger of a vampire intrusion. Evacuate all ordinary staff immediately. Prepare anti-vampire gear and standby at all entrances. Perform this immediately!!"

"We've arrived... After running for so long, I'm so tired..... Has that Oogami lady called back? What's the current situation?"

"Naturally, not too optimistic. Let us hurry."

At the MPD headquarters, Hisui and Eruru were racing through the building with Rushella and the rest of the girls following closely behind.

The destination was the underground elevator reserved for staff that they had visited a few days earlier.

Along the way, they passed by a strange person.

A European young man with a head of beautiful blond hair. More striking was the fact that he was wearing nothing but a blanket casually wrapped around his body.

Furthermore, the instant they brushed past him, there was a distinct smell.

Unmistakably the smell of blood.

".....!"

Hisui turned around forcefully.

But the young man was even faster and bolted out the exit.

"That guy....."

"It's him....."

Touko spoke, trembling.

Her entire body was trembling from fear. She pointed at the back of the guy who had left and said:

"That's him... He killed us.....!"

Hisui's group looked at one another after hearing her.

In the end, their worst fears had come true.

The situation had deteriorated to the worst case scenario. The enemy had awakened.

"I'll go. Since we're both vampires, there's no problem, right?"

Rushella was the first to assign distinct roles.

Mei followed closely behind her.

"I'll go too. That's more reassuring, right?"

"...Me too. Kujou-kun and Kariya-san should go check the situation on the police side."

Kirika added.

Hisui and Eruru looked at each other and nodded, leaving the vampire to those three.

"...Don't do anything rash, okay!?"

"All of us are more resilient than you. You're the one who should be more careful!!"

Rushella smiled fearlessly and chased after the vampire. Mei and Kirika also sprinted out.

"Let's go."

"...Yes."

Hisui and Eruru then went in the opposite direction.

Towards underground—the Supernatural Investigations Section's headquarters.

Eruru avoided the elevator and chose to take the steps.

One that was different from the one they had taken last time.

"What's going on?"

"During emergencies, the Supernatural Investigations Section also acts as a quarantine facility for imprisoning supernatural creatures. After all, the national capital's defense system's central hub is located upstairs so troublesome matters must be resolved underground. In crises, the elevators will shut down and the passages blocked. Under these

circumstances, only a handful of people including me are authorized to enter from outside."

"I see... So emergency measures are already activated?"

"The indoor warning announcement being broadcast can only be understood by related personnel. This is currently a Level 2 alert, implying there are multiple vampires confirmed in the invasion."

"In other words..."

"A number of people have been bitten already."

Eruru bowed her head sorrowfully.

Hisui did not say anything but continued to hurry on their way.

"The next level down is the headquarters."

"Okay.....!"

A thick defensive wall appeared before them.

After Eruru used her ID card on the reader beside the door, they would arrive at the headquarters—At this moment, they found several collapsed figures by the wall.

"Hey, are you okay!?"

Hisui rushed over.

She was a young female staff.

Judging from her attire, she seemed to be a clerk and definitely ill-equipped to handle a crisis like this one.

"Pull yourself together... Are you hurt?"

Hisui asked as he examined her neck.

On there were—no teeth marks.

Naturally.

Completely turned into a vampire—The teeth marks would disappear from the victim.

"Get away from her now!"

The female staff had begun to move before Eruru's warning.

On her originally gentle face, the two eyes gave off red light as she bared her fangs to bite Hisui.

".....!"

Bang! A crisp gunshot was heard.

The bullet accurately penetrated the female vampire right in the center of her forehead.

Shooting to kill a vampire required aiming for the brain or the heart, as well as using specially processed silver bullets.

Eruru's shooting was so perfect it could be used as a textbook example of liberating a female vampire from her cursed life with a single bullet.

Her peaceful expression as she leaned against Hisui's body was her only salvation.

However, the vampire's face did not last long and very soon, her entire body turned into ashes, scattering in the air.

At the end of their cursed lives lay complete nothingness—That was a vampire.

Even if they were turned against their will, this iron-clad rule remained unchanged since time immemorial.

"If it's me.. Being bitten doesn't matter."

Hisui said lightly.

Although he knew saying that was useless.

He also knew how Eruru would answer.

"...But if the throat is ripped open by the bite, death might result. Or from excessive blood loss. Let us hurry."

"....."

Actually, Hisui knew very well.

Who the most suffering person was.

Definitely the one who was forced to pull the sacred gun's trigger against her colleague.

A person who had turned completely into a vampire was beyond saving. If Eruru simply treated them as enemies of mankind—Then Hisui would not be assisting her.

The two of them silently reached the headquarters' facilities.

At this time, Eruru's cellphone rang.

"...Hey."

"Kariya-san? Where are you now?"

"In the building. I already have a grasp of the situation somewhat."

Rangetsu finally made a long-awaited call. Eruru answered with a stiff expression.

"The main combat personnel have gathered in the quarantine block. The detailed situation will be briefed there."

"I know."

Hanging up, Eruru told Hisui the destination.

"We are going to the place I took you there before. That can be considered the quarantine facility within this quarantine facility. In a certain sense, it is the safest place."

"Got it."

Hisui answered, then he turned around and looked back.

Rushella and the girls... How were they?

Mei was there.

And Kirika as well.

Yet the unease in his heart could not be dispelled.

"Wait up!!"

Rushella, Mei and Kirika dashed madly and reached the streets.

But the man was even faster.

In terms of a pure contest in running speed, Rushella and Mei definitely would not be at any disadvantage. No, considering it was daytime, Mei should have won instead.

But the man in front was extremely impudent, casually grabbing passersby and throwing them unceremoniously towards the girls. Combined with the power of the mystic eyes, he instantly created a barrier.

"That rascal....."

Rushella originally intended to counter with her own mystic eyes, but abandoned the notion in consideration of the effects on ordinary people.

As a 'True Ancestor,' she could easily use her own power to cancel the effects of a clearly low-ranked vampire's mystic eyes.

However, if she used the mystic eyes to oppose him, the people affected by opposing powers of the mystic eyes would suffer severe mental damage.

"Bastard...!"

Just as she hesitated, they ended up losing the man's trail.

Rushella impatiently kicked the ground but could not change reality.

"Hurry and calm down. Being impatient doesn't help."

"But... We finally found him after so much effort, right? And Touko too... Once we exterminate that bastard...!"

"My, you're really enthusiastic in killing your own kind."

Mei's question was not sarcasm but a simple query.

If she had been harmed, it would be different matter, but the only victim she knew was an insignificant human—and currently dead already.

"Her current state... Cannot 'pass on,' right? That wound... won't disappear."

"That I understand. I sympathize with her too and would like to help her. But... Isn't that guy acting like a typical vampire? If you reject that, it doesn't put you in a great position either."

"....."

Rushella fell silent.

Naturally, she understood very well.

As a vampire, everything she was doing was simply hypocrisy.

"It's not really that bad, right? At least... Since she has not drunk anyone's blood but Kujou-kun's, she probably has not experienced a typical vampire's feelings."

Kirika interjected as though trying to make peace.

But her expression was very serious. She did not look like she was doing this in Rushella's defense.

"But perhaps one day, Kujou-kun's blood will no longer satisfy you. Or consider another possibility, if you recover your memories, you may find that you have once drank other people's blood. In that case, perhaps your current relationship with us might no longer be possible to sustain, right?"

"...Perhaps."

Rushella acknowledged the possibility without any avoidance.

Because she also understood this issue very well.

From the moment it was brought up.

"Then very well. So... How should we chase that guy..... I trust we can leave it to you?"

"Sure."

Rushella drew her short sword and carved a light wound on her wrist.

Crimson blood dripped onto the ground.

Mei and Kirika covered their noses to avoid smelling the blood's fragrance.

It was a sweet, delicious and seductive aroma.

Sufficient to charm all people, no, it should be all creatures.

That included all vampires. This was a power unique to 'True Ancestors.'

Once the inescapably captivating and sweet blood was smelled, not only cats and dogs but also countless small animals, insects and birds gathered in the surroundings.

Kneeling down to worship the girl who gave off crimson light, they listened to her orders.

"There's a bastard in the area who's a vampire like me. Go and find him. Tell me where he is!!"

Using the mystic eyes known as "Dead Aim," Rushella could dominate all creatures to enter her service.

Using her full demonic powers, she commanded her servants from her position at the summit of the food chain.

"Go forth!!"

The swarm of animals dispersed at her command.

Completely unconcerned about startling passersby, they simply began their respective journeys to fulfill the master's orders.

Favorable news was expected to arrive in short time.

Although this was not Mei's first time watching, she still could not help but marvel at the sight.

This power of a vampire to dominate others really was unparalleled, beyond reach.

"This ability of yours is still so amazing."

"Even if it were more amazing, it's still useless on Hisui no matter how much I focus and stare at him. But then again, if I keep staring at him, somehow he blushes and turns his face away, then he seems to agree to my demands!"

"If you look up to him with pleading eyes, try saying "pretty please, I beg you♥". He'll listen obediently to anything you say if you do that."

"Hmph, you're just a fake, how would you know so well?"

"My score as a woman can instantly defeat yours. Since he can't be your servant and the mystic eyes have no effect, then just switch to a different attack strategy, how's that?"

"I see... Fine, I owe you one!"

To think Rushella would express thanks honestly.

Mei scratched her neck in embarrassment.

"Is that really okay? Offering advice to a rival?"

"...I won't lose. Neither will I lose to you, Senpai."

"...Is that so?"

Kirika sighed profoundly.

The battle between the girls was also persisting currently.

"Hmph... This is looking bad. I never expected to run into someone who could use the power of the mystic eyes to this degree."

In a corner of a large department store, the blond, blue-eyed, young man sighed.

This type of department store in a major urban center normally would not have bugs, but currently, the floors were filled with an abundance of animal and bird cries.

They were most likely looking for him.

His position would surely be exposed in short time.

Whatever.

After all, his original intention was to proactively go on the offensive.

"Nice fabric."

The young man was wearing this type of silk shirt for the first time and smiled with satisfaction.

He had come to this shopping mall in order to find clothes and make himself presentable.

Running his hand through his pretty blond hair that was already carefully styled and fixed with hair gel, he left the men's clothing store.

Although he did not pay, there was already no one capable of stopping him.

Because everyone was dead and drained dry.

The dead bodies strewn around, looking like desiccated corpses, were completely drained to the last drop. This showed how insane the young man's "thirst" was.

Discovering an abnormal situation, the security guards came running over.

Naturally, they could not escape the same fate suffered by the people lying on the ground.

Calling the police was likewise useless.

The main anti-vampire forces of the Supernatural Investigations Section were currently in a severe state of chaos, unable to operate normally.

Wherever the vampire had ravaged, only devastation lay in his wake.

"Basically it's all cleaned up. Don't worry."

Rangetsu told them when Hisui and Eruru arrived at last time's isolated block.

An uncountable amount of ash was scattered all around.

This was proof of Rangetsu and her subordinates' extermination of a large number of vampires.

Undoubtedly, her capabilities were in no way inferior to Eruru's.

"Detailed numbers on victims... No, vampires are not yet available. Probably two or three remaining. They surely cannot escape the headquarters facility and the MPD entrances are already sealed off. Looks like we can clean up internally."

"Even if this counts as mission accomplished... Is that really okay?"

Hisui asked expressionlessly.

He had no intention of holding Rangetsu responsible.

In a certain sense, Hisui's responsibility was greater the moment he started getting clues from Touko.

"I believe... This isn't really the police's scandal but just an unfortunate chance event. But the important criminal from the coffin has escaped.

Immediately after waking up, a vampire's thirst is definitely horrifying. He'll definitely drink people's blood without discrimination. Whether announcing the truth to the public or organizing evacuations, shouldn't you guys have other things to do?"

"Not necessary. The Supernatural Investigations Section's work is absolute secret. In a certain sense, it requires even more discretion and secrecy than public safety. Furthermore, how could the nation admit the existence of supernatural entities? We've done everything we are supposed to, don't you worry about that. And that vampire isn't a moron, right? Even if he has a blank period in his knowledge about the world, he should understand how to survive in modern society. He won't be killing indiscriminately."

"Hey hey, is that really what a police should say?"

His tone of voice was casual and laid back as usual.

But Hisui's eyes were filled with rage.

"Indeed, this is the job of the police. Maintaining national security, sustaining the organization itself. Talking about justice at every chance, aren't you annoying? Talking about being an ally of justice or whatever would be even more annoying. Even if hundreds died, as long as thousands are saved, you should count your blessings. Gains do not come without losses."

These were an adult's words.

Personal justice and an organization's justice, this was a principle that adults had to make a decision very early on.

Hence, for Hisui who was not yet an adult, it was completely unacceptable.

"Thank you for your speech. Then I'll be going now?"

"Where are you going? Don't do anything redundant. If you want to do that, at least wait here until everything is resolved."

"I'm just a little brat going outside to play so I won't cause anyone additional trouble. I just hope that my troublesome freeloader doesn't do anything reckless."

"You're troublesome enough. Honestly, letting those two vampires fight would be better. Trash like vampires, the faster they go extinct, the better."

"....."

"Oh my, are you getting mad? You really are that vampire's slave, aren't you? if you choose to hinder us for her sake, that would make you a criminal 100%. An enemy of humans."

"Humans... huh?"

Hisui repeated that word and glared at Rangetsu sarcastically.

For some reason, his gaze greatly displeased Rangetsu, causing her to click her tongue and ask:

"...What now?"

"Did you make a mistake somewhere? Not an enemy of humans... But an enemy of your race."

Rangetsu instantly changed her expression in alarm.

Gnashing her teeth, clenching her fists, her nails were digging into her flesh.

"You didn't think I'd notice? After all, no matter how much training you go through, you can't possibly send a vampire flying with a kick at night through physical strength alone. At least, it's impossible if you're human."

"....."

"Let's look at the current situation. Since we're dealing with vampires, you should be on high alert and arming yourself properly. Naturally, protective gear for the neck cannot be omitted and the mobile squads must dress properly for safety. But look at you here, you're still in casual clothing. Since the alert is still up, you can't possibly have changed already. Besides, you're unarmed as well. Without silver bullets or wooden stakes, how do you exterminate vampires?"

".....Shut up."

"Your fingertips are dyed blood-red. If that's nail polish, the color is too dull. There's also the stench of blood on your hands. You ripped them out with your hands, right... their hearts?"

".....Shut up right now."

"A supernatural creature with physical ability rivaling vampires, ripping out hearts barehanded. And resembling humans. From what I know, there's only one match. Am I right? Miss Werewolf, Oogami-san?"

"I asked you to shut up!!"

Rangetsu kicked the ground hard.

Maximum acceleration. A starting motion that even a world record holder could not possibly manage.

That speed was like a cheetah's, already beyond the realm of humans.

At the same time, Rangetsu's appearance changed.

Fangs protruded from her mouth, similar to vampires yet distinctively different. Her hand also turned into a carnivorous animal's sharp claws.

That was indeed a werewolf's appearance.

Rivaling the vampire and Frankenstein's creature as a representative of supernatural entities, this highest-ranking humanoid beast frequently made appearances in legends and myths all over the world.

The legendary sharp claws of a beast were currently aiming for Hisui's neck.

Before the sharp claws could pierce his neck, Eruru stepped between the two of them.

"Stop it right now!!"

She raised the sacred gun, Argentum.

A gun armed with silver bullets was a sure-kill weapon against werewolves as well.

"Oh dear... You want to protect him? What a rare sight, I was thinking you'd never fall for anyone."

"...Nothing of that sort. Hurry and stop. Perhaps his words are inappropriate, but fighting here will not solve anything. You should know my marksmanship very well, yes? Do you really want to taste the power of a silver bullet personally?"

"That's only if you hit your target, right? I don't think you've ever seen me go all out, have you?"

Although her opponent carried a weapon targeting her weakness, Rangetsu still laughed fearlessly.

Her hostility towards Eruru seemed to be even stronger than against Hisui.

"You've been an eyesore since a long time ago... Dhampir. Neither human nor vampire, yet sucking blood and murdering people. In a certain sense, even lower than a vampire. My race has also been decimated by your kind."

"...Vampires and werewolves are completely incompatible. Whether open war or secret struggles, conflicts vying for supremacy have taken place, too many to count. But unfortunately, I have no interest in that kind of history. Please go ahead if you want to exterminate vampires. However, if you or your race ever harm humans, then I will pull the trigger without hesitation."

Eruru responded coldly.

Just because she did not bother with matters of racial tension, she would not show consideration for Rangetsu simply because they were both non-human. This was Eruru.

"Step aside, Kariya. If she wants a fight, bring it on. I'll take her any time."

Hisui pushed Eruru away and casually stepped forward.

Although his face displayed composure, his physical abilities were naturally below average for a human. There was absolutely no chance of winning.

"You dare look down on me... After all, you just want Kariya-san to help you, right? Despite her cool and merciless exterior, she's actually quite inexperienced. Very inexperienced. So even her subordinates would betray her. In a critical moment, she will surely fire her gun to protect you. You dare speak so arrogantly simply because you know that, right?"

"If that's what you think, why don't you race against a bullet? You should be able to do that as a werewolf, right? Or you can't right now... Obedient dog, fallen so low as to become a police hound?"

".....!"

Rangetsu's eyes instantly changed color and shone with golden light.

At the same time, her clothes burst open.

Completely naked—One could say that but her chest and abdomen were both covered with dense fur, covering her body like clothes.

Most distinctively below the wrists, her hands had become like a wolf's paws with even longer claws than before.

Pointed ears, a long and blood-red tongue, a beast's eyes—A humanoid wolf, or perhaps a human who had turned into a wolf. Before his eyes was the monster told by legends passed down the generations.

"Turned into a beast..... Indeed, the moon's phase is sufficient..... You're seriously going all out!?"

"Roar—!"

Howling briefly, Rangetsu rushed at Hisui.

This was precisely speed that could evade bullets.

"Kujou-san!!"

In the quiet underground space, only Eruru's scream reverberated endlessly.

Chapter 6 - The Strongest Monster

"...Oh no, it's already sunset."

Kirika frowned as she surveyed the surroundings.

The sun had already set and it was dark all around.

A vampire's time of the day was about to start.

"Are you not able to contact Kujou-kun's side...?"

"Looks like I can't... Perhaps there's no signal. Hey, how's your search going?"

"...He's here."

While dialing repeatedly, Mei asked Rushella who answered expressionlessly.

Just now, a dog had come up to report the arrival of the enemy.

Although it could not communicate via words, the message could be guessed from the dog's frightened expression and the way it kept wagging its tail.

"Dismissed."

Rushella dispelled the mystic eyes' effects, causing her servants to scatter and retreat.

Insects, birds and beasts all dispersed into the surroundings.

At this moment, as though cueing a scene change, the man silently descended upon this park at night.

"Meeting you for the first time, 'True Ancestor', the pleasure is all mine. As one of the 'Pure of the Pure' descending from the lineage of 'True Ancestor' Elise Dahm Castile, my name is Fergus von Blitz."

He bowed respectfully, displaying noble bearing without showing any obvious signs of ulterior motives.

The black three-piece suit he was wearing and the cane in his hand were clearly high-class.

If he added a long cape, he would fit the classical image of a traditional vampire perfectly.

"Tidying up my appearance consumed quite a bit of time. After all, I was in no presentable state to have an audience with a 'True Ancestor' just now. That is why I am late."

"Stop talking nonsense! Besides, where did your suit come from? Since you slept in the coffin for ten years, you shouldn't have any clothes with you, right!?"

"Simply by following the rule of 'survival of the fittest', I have taken these from those people."

"I take that as saying you killed and robbed them...?"

"I don't quite understand why your anger is incurred, 'True Ancestor.' This really doesn't sound like words coming from one who rules from the pinnacle of the vampires."

"...How did you know that I'm a 'True Ancestor'? I haven't introduced myself, have I?"

"Because I am privileged to view your face and smell the fragrance of your blood. Although I have no interest in the blood of my kin, the blood of a 'True Ancestor' is as sweet and fragrant as a virgin's blood after all."

Calm and composed, he stepped forward with cordial smile.

Seeing his attitude, Mei elbowed Rushella.

"Hey... You know him?"

"No. I've never seen him before!"

"Maybe... It's from before you lost your memory?"

"Well....."

Rushella wanted to deny it... But could not.

After all, she could not remember.

"Eh... Memory loss huh....."

Fergus muttered with intrigue. He had apparently heard their whispers.

"Wow, a vampire's ears sure are sensitive at night..."

"It's all your fault for bringing this rubbish up. Hurry and shut up!"

"If you have any troubles, perhaps I may be of service?"

Fergus extended his hand elegantly as though treating a noblewoman.

His lack of hostility caused Rushella to feel troubled.

"...What are your intentions?"

"Nothing. Only... Since we have encountered each other here, why not allow me to assist you in your troubles... Although you and I are not of the same blood, devoting ourselves to serve the bidding of the 'True Ancestors' is the etiquette followed by our kind. That is all... Or perhaps, you have forgotten even that as well?"

"Hmm, but..."

"If you have questions, then let us find a different venue for you to ask. However... Those lowly creatures over there need not follow."

Fergus was surrounded by a simmering aura on the verge of eruption.

Perhaps due to the power of the mystic eyes, even the surrounding birds began to clamor.

Also... Without them noticing, numerous servants had gathered behind him.

All were completely turned into vampires—The cursed bite marks were absent from their necks.

They numbered more than twenty.

Apparently, this vampire had sucked this many people's blood after he awakened.

"Bastard...!"

"These two are in cahoots with the little lass who pushed me into the sea. I can't possibly let that slide. Very well, let us not concern ourselves with these lowly creatures and be on our way. I know a nice shop."



The vampire made a violent expression towards Mei and Kirika while smiling towards Rushella.

Rushella had originally decided how to react in a situation like this.

Beat up that contemptible face and team up as a trio to vanquish the vampires.

However—Rushella could not do it.

Despite knowing this was wrong and unacceptable, she could not help but feel enticed by the proposal of this man, Fergus.

"...I....."

"Go if you want to, okay?"

Mei answered readily.

Her nonchalant expression seemed to saying that Rushella's dilemma was totally inexplicable.

"You.....!"

"You're not thinking that the two of us are burdens, right? Go if you want to listen to his story, okay? But once you reach the end of your patience, just give him a good beating, okay?"

"....."

"...You want to retrieve your memories, right? In that case, don't hesitate. Just act according to your own will but you must explain to Kujou-kun properly later. I don't want him to get angry."

Kirika also encouraged Rushella to go with Fergus.

She motioned with her chin for Rushella to hurry.

"Tell Hisui for me, you two... Tell him to pick me up later!"

Saying that, Rushella walked over to Fergus.

"Very well, I shall entertain your offer. But should you dare show any insolence or treachery, I shall instantly rip your heart out and decapitate you."

"As you please. Well then, please walk this way."

Fergus elegantly led Rushella and disappeared with her into the night.

Before that, his lips could be seen moving as he issued orders to his servants on standby.

"Do it."

Red eyes and sharp fangs flashed in the dark night like starlight as the newly born or transforming vampires slowly gathered around.

"To me, this doesn't even count as warm-up exercise... Senpai, would you like to leave first? I'd like to claim all the credit in front of Hi-kun."

"Who do you think you're talking to? Do you really think I would fear this kind of fodder?"

"Oh dear, that's exactly what I love hearing♥"

Saying that, a flash of light erupted from Mei's eyes.

The flash ripped through the darkness, a pulse of light resembling the sun in brightness.

The vampires that were struck by the beam were immediately pierced in the chest and turned into ash.

"...Did you just fire a beam!? Lasers from your eyes!?"

"Eh, I've never mentioned this to you before?"

"Even if you have, I'd still be taken aback! And what is going on here? Aren't normal bullets and lasers ineffective against vampires, but unbelievably, this one strike.....!"

"Oh, I swapped equipment because of Rushella. This is a solar beam. By collecting the sun's rays at noon and firing them in a concentrated form, even a vampire has to surrender with a single hit♥ But there's a weakness, I can't use it if the weather is overcast or if I'm imprisoned underground for long periods."

"No one asked you for the footnote! What on earth is your body!?"

"Never mind that. Putting that aside... They're coming, okay?"

The swarm of vampires was approaching.

The two girls shrugged and began to face off against the vampires.

Vampires versus artificial human and witch, the battle began.

She only wanted to scare him.

From start to finish, she had no intention of taking his life. After all, he was just an ordinary human.

But due to his incessant instigation, going as far as to reveal her secret identity which she did not want to publicize, things escalated to this point. It was not her fault.

She had planned to simply make a light scratch on his neck as a warning and end things at that.

After all, the boy surely would not be able to react in time.

In fact, Hisui did not react at all.

Until her sharp claws touched his neck.

And pierced his skin lightly.

She had thought her goal was fulfilled but in the next instant, the boy stepped forward on his own, burying her claws deeply into his flesh.

"Wha.....!"

Blood spurted out like a geyser.

Without a doubt, the carotid artery was damaged. Unless immediate measures were taken to stop the bleeding, this meant death.

"What on earth are you doing!?"

"Kujou-san!?"

Without heeding Rangetsu or Eruru's cries, Hisui took a few steps backwards, almost as though he were refusing treatment.

"Why did you... Do you want to die!? Hurry and receive first aid treatment.....!"

"No need, I'm fine."

Clearly the pain was making him clench his teeth but he did not even press down on his neck wound to stop the bleeding.

Instead, he tore the wound open with his fingers, causing the blood to gush out nonstop.

"...Are you seeking death!? If the bleeding continues....."

"Not necessarily, you know?"

He resumed his forceful tone of voice.

After the blood finished splattering, Hisui ignored the frowning Eruru and showed the wound on his neck to Rangetsu.

"Eh.....?"

The wound was still present.

However, it had almost completely healed already and was recovering at a rate fast enough to be seen by the naked eye.

Hisui's unique constitution, combined with the power that awakened only on the verge of death from blood loss, had greatly augmented his recovery abilities.

Anti-Drac mode... Activated.

"You're actually... a vampire!?"

"No, but my wounds heal instantly. Also, I become even stronger than you."

Within the blink of an eye, Hisui appeared right in front of Rangetsu.

Then he reached out and touched her delicate neck.

His fingers were long and slender like a girl's... Nevertheless, they would surely break a neck if they gripped forcefully. Rangetsu was certain of this frightening fact.

"Next question. Am I human, or a monster?"

".....?"

"I am human but with powers to rival a vampire. I won't turn into a vampire even if I'm bitten. What should someone like me be considered? The

answer is simple... Whatever. Neither any of them, nor does it matter which side I'm considered as. Whether a vampire or a human, it doesn't matter. Naturally, the same goes for werewolves."

"....."

"Don't go calling others trash. No matter what kind of living creature, whether vampires, humans, werewolves, the only people who can call others trash are the ones who are truly trash themselves."

"You....."

"Continuing, second question... What is truly the most terrifying monster? The one asking this question was not me but the foster parent who raised me, a 'True Ancestor'."

"Huh—!?"

"Despite clearly standing at the top of the food chain, an immortal vampire with eternal youth—and the highest of them all, a 'True Ancestor.' Yet she was always afraid. Afraid of what? The answer is simple—Afraid of humans."

Hisui stared into the distance and lightly spoke this answer.

His eyes were filled with deep sorrow, causing Rangetsu and Eruru to show a layer of sadness on their faces.

"What difference is there between humans and monsters...? They're all monsters."

Saying that, Hisui walked over to the side of the room's entrance.

This was armored and made of heavy alloy as befitting of a quarantine area. Even if a vampire was rampaging, surely it could not be broken.

This was the kind of door next to Hisui.

And precisely because it was this kind of door.

Hisui casually attacked the door with full force.

Accompanied by a heavy crash, the solid door was covered in cracks.

Then Hisui lifted his leg and sent a vicious kick towards the center of the cracked door... Turning the obstacle into shattered fragments completely.

Then he left without looking back at all. Rangetsu stared and spaced out in the direction where he departed.

"...Who on earth is he?"

"Just an ordinary human. Like you... and me. Or perhaps, he is the one who truly understands beings like you or me. The boundary between monsters and humans... and respecting humans because he has seen too much darkness. However, he survived and continued to live. As a human."

"What are you trying to say?"

Rangetsu stared at Eruru and asked coldly.

"...There is no need to be too concerned with one's own past and origins. At least... That is what he believes."

"What pretty words. But in order to survive in this world, one has no choice but to play the part of a human. That is why I joined this organization."

"Indeed, you are completely right. But recently, I have begun to think that my current self is not that bad."

"You've been influenced by him?"

"...Who knows."

Eruru smiled faintly, her gaze following the direction of Hisui who was no longer in sight.

His destination was easily surmised.

Rushella and Fergus arrived at a French restaurant that exuded an air of high-class luxury.

A waiter opened the door and greeted them. Truly dignified.

This was clearly a pretentious act for creating the high-class atmosphere. Seeing the waiter's hollow gaze, Rushella could not help but feel a rising sense of disgust.

The man did not bother to pay attention to the customer's face... No, that sort of emotionless face had already surpassed that level.

Clearly he was being controlled by the mystic eyes... And at quite a powerful level too.

"Please enter and come this way. I have already reserved the entire premises."

Just as Fergus said, there were no other customers within this large shop.

There were probably customers seated or with bookings, but they were already driven away.

No, it would be fine if they were simply driven away.

It would be truly fortunate if they were still living as humans.

"Would you like a drink? I've looked at the menu beforehand and the red wine selection is not bad at all. Or perhaps... Blood would suit your tastes better? Regrettably, the only people in the restaurant are elderly men... I can't make any guarantees about the taste."

"...Not necessary. I'm not here for idle chatting. You bastard... How many people have you sucked blood from today? Controlled using the mystic eyes? It's not like I can't imagine the thirst you feel after being trapped under the sea for a decade, but there's no need for you to drink that much!"

"You are right. But as you know, 'thirst' on a psychological level varies widely from person to person. To me, those ten years were far too long. To compensate for that, I seek fresh blood. If I could take a bath in a large amount of fresh blood from virgins, that would be the best."

"What a revulsive fetish. For the sake of young blood, you attacked Touko and her friends?"

"Touko...? Who may that be?"

"The girl who locked you inside that coffin! After she died, she could not pass on because you still existed!!"

"Oh, that one....."

"What are your intentions? Revenge against Touko? But she's dead already.....!"

"I suppose so. But that doesn't really matter. That kind of little girl, I was just playing with her to begin with."

"...Playing?"

Rushella's face was filled with rage.

Her eyes burned with crimson light.

"Indeed. As you also know, for our kind, sucking human blood is far too easy. Only because of that, various restrictions were imposed to offer all sorts of entertainment. Drinking blood over the course of several nights, invading a human's bedroom despite knowing about the presence of traps and guards, these are actions undertaken to maximize enjoyment of blood drinking. Naturally, you must understand that, 'True Ancestor'?"

"All... entertainment huh..... I see, that's why you didn't even remember her name."

Rushella clenched her fists tight and glared at Fergus.

But he continued unfazed.

"I have a matter to inquire as well. Before I reached an age of understanding, my bloodline's progenitor, the 'True Ancestor' was already destroyed. Rather, during the ten years since I sank into the bottom of the sea, there should only be one remaining 'True Ancestor.' I came to the town of Seidou because I wanted to meet her and seek her help to revive my clan."

"This 'True Ancestor' you speak of... What's her name?"

"From what I heard... She's called Miraluka. But unfortunately, she doesn't seem to be here. I was unable to gain an audience with her."

"....."

Rushella realized that Fergus' past was related to Hisui's past to some extent.

Perhaps Hisui himself had expected this vampire who had killed Touko to seek contact with his foster parent.

After all, it was only natural for a 'True Ancestor'-class vampire to attract the attention of her kind.

Even if they were not hostile, surely there would be plenty of worshipers and vampires with ulterior motives, hoping to use the 'True Ancestor' for their ends.

"Let me ask you... You're saying that apart from Miraluka, there were no other 'True Ancestors' ten years ago?"

"Very unfortunately, yes. If you have news regarding Lady Miraluka, please do tell me....."

"I heard that she died."

Rushella did not use the word "destroyed."

Instead, she used "died" just like the way Hisui usually treated his foster parent.

"...Then you are truly the last 'True Ancestor' remaining in this world. But where have you been previously? Ten years ago, I was not aware of any rumors to your existence. Very likely, all my brethren of our race are the same as me. Where did you come from?"

"No idea... I'd like to find out too."

Rushella feigned calmness but she was actually quite shocked.

Even in the past, ten years ago, there were no clues to her origins.

Fergus was probably not deceiving her. He really looked like he had no information regarding her origins.

"First of all, there were only a handful of people who drank God's blood at Golgotha and became 'True Ancestors.' A new 'True Ancestor' could not possibly be born suddenly. That said, I don't think you're lying... Besides, the fragrance of your blood belongs to a 'True Ancestor' without a doubt."

"Would you like me to show you the emblem displayed by my blood? That's another kind of proof."

"You have that sort of verification method as well huh... Ah, that's really too interesting. Please allow me to assist you in your search for your memories."

"...Not necessary. That's all regarding my matter, I will settle it myself. Back to the subject, what is your goal? What do you mean by reviving your clan?"

"Exactly what it says. Every generation of the von Blitz family was born from marriage between vampires. Naturally, our clan does not include any vampire who was originally human. All are 'Pure,' natural vampires by birth. We are one of the few clans who adhere to the 'Pure of the Pure' tradition."

"Pure"—namely, a vampire born from vampire parents.

Normally speaking, their overall physical abilities tend to be higher and they were considered more noble in rank than those who became "servants" by having their blood sucked. "Servants" were absolutely unable to surpass their "master." But it was not uncommon for pureblooded vampires to surpass their parents.

But even if a vampire were labeled 'Pure,' one or both of his parents could be vampires who were turned. Rather, that was actually the vast majority of cases.

Those like Fergus, to descend from a 'True Ancestor' with every generation consisting of offspring of pure vampires, this truly "Pure" heritage—"Pure of the Pure"—was rarest of the rare indeed.

For a vampire like Fergus to still exist in the modern age, it could be said to be a miracle.

"Looks like you take great pride in your clan. But in the current world, it's not that easy to meet others of our race, let alone an ideal spouse candidate—Another vampire that is 'Pure of the Pure' like you is probably impossible to find."

"Indeed that is so... Frankly, having failed to find Lady Miraluka, I was beginning to fear that my family's bloodline would end in my generation. However... You've appeared."

Saying that, Fergus' eyes shone with the light of lust.

Before she knew it, he had swept his pale white hand over Rushella's hands.

"...I still have not heard your name, yes?"

"A lowly bastard like you is unworthy of knowing my name!"

Rushella swung his hand away and glared at him with hostility.

She originally accepted his invitation with the intention of breaking things off.

But never did she expect Fergus to be such a repulsive person.

"How unexpected... But as a 'True Ancestor,' you should treat our race's prosperity as your duty. Please fulfill your duty."

"I'd rather our race go extinct than have children with you!"

"Oh dear... I never expected you to reject me outright like that. My original plans... were to start with a platonic relationship!!"

"Shut up!"

Rushella threw her usual shortsword.

She aimed straight for the heart. If a direct penetration did not kill him straight away, then she would rip out his heart by her hand personally without hesitation!

"Laughable."

Just as the shortsword was about to hit, Fergus' outline suddenly dispersed—He transformed his body into mist.

Turned into mist, his body dispersed like steam, vanishing instantly.

"This is your...!"

"This the power I inherited from the 'True Ancestor'. Apparently, you can't do the same."

The voice was near.

Fergus had re-materialized beside her.

"Bastard!!"

Fast as lightning, Rushella aimed her hand straight at her enemy's heart.

Since he was able to escape as mist, I'll hurry before he can turn into mist!

"...Do you really think no one else had tried that idea before? I'm already used to this whole game."

Rushella's graceful hand sliced through air. Fergus's body dispersed as mist again.

Then his gaseous body flew towards Rushella's nostrils—and entered her body!!

"Nnnngggg.....!"

This was the feeling of someone clawing at her internal organs.

Invading her body, the enemy had infiltrated Rushella's various organs and was applying strong pressure from inside.

"How does my secret technique taste?"

"Damn it.....!"

"Originally if my negotiations with Lady Miraluka broke down, I intended to use this method to force her to submit. Even a 'True Ancestor' cannot do anything if she were attacked from the inside of her body. Then after that, I can do as I please—"

A fistful of mist flowed out of Rushella's mouth and turned into Fergus' face.

This was the only part which materialized. The rest of the mist continued to apply pressure from inside Rushella, sealing her movements.

"Stop, this, now....."

"First of all... Let me start with this pair of lovely lips."

With a despicable tone of voice completely unworthy of his title, Fergus slowly approached her crimson lips.

Rushella tried to turn her face away but she could not move at all.

A kiss... This must be her second time.

The first time was with that guy... But actually, she had not initiated it on her own volition.

Besides, she had not treated that act as a kiss at the time because that guy was unconscious.

But there was no feeling of dislike at the time.

Although that guy lacked integrity and even kissed his parent—other women. She had hit him when she heard about it. But apart from that, she had not felt unwilling back then.

Although she was feeding him medicine via mouth-to-mouth, she had not hesitated the slightest bit.

But now... She was absolutely unwilling.

"Hisui...!"

Tearfully, Rushella cried out his name. At this moment, a waiter in the restaurant approached without being called.

"Sorry for the wait, dear customers. The super high temperature pumpkin pie you ordered has arrived. Although it's a shame it's overcooked, throwing it out would be a waste, so please enjoy."

Grinning, the waiter took the plate of steaming hot pumpkin pie and slapped it into the face beside Rushella.

"Argghhh, it burns——!!!"

Fergus screamed awkwardly and left Rushella's body.

Although his materialized face was injured, he recovered immediately. Even so, having suffered a boiling hot pumpkin pie to the face, his cheeks still remained red and swollen.

"Damn it, what are you doing!?"

Fergus re-materialized and returned to the seat opposite to Rushella, glaring angrily at the boy.

Kujou Hisui.

"Hisui!!"

"I can't believe you ran away to enjoy dinner on your own. That's so unfair. Let me join in."

Hisui smiled at Rushella and grabbed a chair, sitting by Rushella's side.

"The situation at the police... Is it okay?"

"Hmm.. Kariya's there, it should be fine. On the other hand, what's with you here?"

"Your face... You turned into that again!?"

"Hmm... Frankly speaking, my neck still hurts. Maybe I tried to look too cool... Had I bled a bit more, it would be bad."

"Seriously, letting me drink is still the best way."

"...As much as I don't want to admit that, letting you handle it is the safest. Say, this guy is Touko-san's enemy, right?"

"Yeah, I permit you to beat him up! But you didn't bring that cross sword, is it really okay? Shouldn't you have brought it along?"

"No problem, I've already borrowed weapons from the Supernatural Investigations Section. Against this kind of bastard, the Tzara Blade would be overkill."

Hisui seemed fully confident.

With victory firmly in his hands. Fergus coldly glared at him and muttered.

"Trash... Disappear from my sight."

His eyes flashed with a crimson glow.

These mystic eyes issued orders for suicide.

However—Hisui laughed leisurely.

"Unbelievable, right? This is useless against me."

"What!?"

Immunity against a vampire's mystic eyes... This in itself was not impossible.

With sufficiently resilient mental strength or preventive measures over the eyes.

But Hisui was not in either category. Simply through the naked eye, he dispelled the effects of the mystic eyes completely.

This kind of constitution was like an unreasonable blow to a vampire.

Completely rejecting their existence.

Hence, he was known as—The Anti-Drac.

"You think you can defeat me like that.....? Give me a break."

Fergus roared arrogantly and turned himself into mist again.

His gaseous body hurried over to a dead angle outside Hisui's view and materialized behind him. But at the same time, Hisui punched backwards, right in Fergus' nose.

"What—!?"

"Your presence is too obvious. A vampire who can turn himself into mist results in overconfidence in his ability. You're not even hiding your presence. Predicting where you'll re-materialize is way too easy. Although I learnt this from my foster parent, I never expected I'd have a use for it one day."

"Don't underestimate me!!"

Fergus held his broken nose and vanished as mist again.

His gaseous body went straight for the inside of Hisui's body.

"No good, you must escape!"

Rushella had suffered the attack once and warned from beside him.

However, Hisui did not heed her warning.

After all, trying to evade was probably useless.

Because Fergus' movements were too swift and hard to guard against.

He entered Hisui's body through his nose and mouth.

His internal organs at Fergus' mercy all at once, Hisui showed pain in his face.

"Are you okay!? Even with your body.....!"

"Hmm... This is a physical attack... Neutralizing it... Probably, not....."

Although there was no tension in his voice, large droplets of sweat were appearing on his face and his mouth began to spit blood.

The pressure from inside was causing even more intense suffering to his body that was already frail from entering Anti-Drac mode.

"This... Might be a bit... bad....."

"You trash! Making me spend all this effort. Watch as I crush your internal organs and eject them. Go and die!"

A terrifying voice was coming out from Hisui's throat.

Occupying Hisui's body by force, the vampire attacked his body and did not neglect to taunt.

"With this, you can't even lift a finger... Taste this pain!!!"

"Not necessarily."

Hisui retorted to the enemy within.

At the same time—His left hand moved.

With the enemy clearly pressing against his central nervous system, he should not be able to move.

"Impossible... What is going on!? Your will should already be.....!"

"This... isn't me..... But a certain troublesome fellow possessing me."

Hisui's left arm moved freely.

His left arm was superimposed with a translucent arm.

This delicate arm belonged to Touko.

"It's you...!"

"Hisui-kun's body... I'm borrowing it for a bit, okay?"

"Please go ahead."

Hisui smiled and replied to this other existence in his body apart from Fergus.

The left arm that was the only part that could move.

Reaching into Hisui's pocket, his hand took out a corked glass jar.

Taking out the cork, his hand then poured the jar's contents into his mouth all at once.

"Poison!? Foolish, this sort of thing does not affect us, vampires....."

"Directly imported from the Vatican... Super high quality holy water personally blessed by the Pope at Rome. When leaving the Supernatural Investigations Section, I got lost and accidentally entered their weapons storage. Wondering if it might come in handy, I discreetly... uh, borrowed it."

Holy water—water that had been ritually blessed by a member of the clergy. Strictly speaking, its composition was no different from ordinary water. It was simply water from a church's font with holy properties.

Although it was a Vampire's fundamental weakness like crosses and garlic, holy water could not cause a fatal injury.

But then, what if a gaseous body were mixed with holy water directly?

What if an enemy lurking inside one's body were forced to drink holy water...?

There was only one answer.

Not to the extent of complete destruction, but the torment of being burned from head to toe by pure holiness.

"GAAA
AAH!!!"

A thunderous scream of pain came out from Hisui's mouth and echoed inside the restaurant.

However, the voice came from someone else, namely, the guy who was rampaging in his body earlier, now suffering a fate worse than death.

Hisui aimed a punch at his own abdomen, causing the "mist" to be vomited out without resistance.

Then the mist rolled under the table legs and materialized... Fergus was rolling on the floor in abject pain.

"Burning, it burns, it really burns——!!!"

For an analogy, it would be like swapping all the blood in one's body with scorching lava.

As a fellow vampire, Rushella fully understood the kind of pain he was suffering.

Hence, she turned her gaze away.

Then Hisui spoke emotionlessly.

"Serves you right. You stayed ten years at the bottom of the sea and you still didn't notice? The greatest weakness of turning into mist is that you absorb moisture from the surroundings in the instant of transformation. Whether seawater... or holy water. Holy water of the highest class mixed into your body, doesn't that feel nice? Combined on a particle level, the pain will probably last a couple centuries. Oh well, I'll be long dead already by then."

"Bas—tard—! How dare you... do this to me...!!"

"This is revenge for Touko-san... Plus revenge for your bloodsucking rampage. At the Supernatural Investigations Section, out on the streets, in the department store... You drank to your heart's content, didn't you?"

A calm tone of voice, but at the same time, a voice of condemnation rejecting all compromise.

Scorched by conflagration all over, Fergus roared with blood and tears.

"(So..... what? You humans have also... To this date...)"

"Eaten innumerable pieces of bread, swallowed countless grains of rice, drank who knows how many bowls of miso soup. No one keeps track, but neither is there any need to keep track. However... As a human, as a higher organism above animals, one must always remember our manners and say 'thanks for the food' before and after a meal. Gratitude cannot be forgotten. That's how I was raised. If you can't even do that, then you're trash even worse than animals. Finally today, I realize that the word was invented just for people like you."

Then Hisui ignored Fergus and urged Rushella and Touko to leave together.

"...Is that really okay? Not terminating this vampire..."

"It's fine, just let him be. I don't know if it's fortunate or not, but all the victims were completely turned into vampires....."

"(You'll... regret this!? Once I survive this, this painful experience, I'll, surely...!!)"

The screams continued behind nonstop.

Hisui ignored Rushella and Touko's worried looks and continued speaking on his own.

"My, you'll miss me that much? But have you given any thought to what's gonna happen to you next?"

".....?"

"Obviously, those Supernatural Investigations Section people are gonna come. Those guys will sever your neck and drive a stake into your heart... Is that what you think?"

".....!?"

"I heard from Sudou and the girls along the way... You called yourself 'Pure of the Pure'? Seeing this kind of rare specimen rolling on the floor completely defenseless, do you think those people will sit by idly?"

Fergus' face instantly went pale.

Just as humans were only food in his eyes, those people did not care about a vampire's dignity either.

Throughout his long life, he had plenty of occasions to observe humans.

Humans were fragile.

Hence, whenever they chanced upon any opportunity to strike back at the strong, their sadism flared up without reservation.

"When the time comes, you'll be locked up somewhere to live out the rest of your life as a poor little lab rat... After all, you're a rare and precious specimen. Actually, it's me who told the Supernatural Investigations Section about this. Isn't that nice? Saves me the trouble. I'll let them interrogate you to get information out of you as much as they want."

"(W-Wait up.....!)"

"Oh well, don't worry. After all, you're immortal with eternal youth. You can endure it, right? Even if it's eternal pain."

"(Wait up.....!)"

"You won't escape a second time."

"(Please.....!)"

"You will pay everything with your blood."

Minutes later, near the restaurant, Rangetsu was making simple records of the situation with Hisui and his group.

But since she already knew everything, the records were finished quite quickly.

Afterwards, Rushella quietly said to Hisui, probably still miffed about Rangetsu kicking her last time.

"I feel something strange about this woman. Her presence feels closer to that Kariya, right?"

"Oh, you can tell? She's a werewolf."

"What!? They still exist!? Eh, but it's not completely the same... The smell is not that intense....."

"...I'm half. Like Kariya-san....."

"You hate Kariya because you're both the same?"

"Don't simplify things that much. Our ways of living are different. Let me tell you this, as a noble wolf, I hold nothing but the highest esteem for my origins!"

"But because you're a half-werewolf, you can't turn into a wolf fully but only end up as a beast-human, right? And that bit of fur covering your chest doesn't look very safe. I wonder if it feels furry to the touch....."

"Wow, this woman here can transform!?"

"Yeah, her palms become paws after transforming. They look very soft."

"Wow, I want to try touching it! Very well, transform for me right now!"

Rushella innocently demanded.

Could it be that she actually liked animals?

"As if anyone would transform for you! Didn't I say that I'm a noble wolf? You can all leave now. Oh, by the way, Kujou-kun?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm seriously... Would you like to come over and help out on my side? If you want, I can even negotiate with the higher-ups for a salary on your behalf."

"Huh....."

"I-It's nothing to do with Kariya-san or anything like that, I simply... find you very capable. And this will give you opportunities to join the Supernatural Investigations Section in the future, you know? A contract for you before you graduate... Mutual benefits?"

The adult policewoman and werewolf was desperately searching for excuses.

Although she was not young, it actually made her seem quite cute.

But Hisui rejected her outright.

"No, that's not necessary."

"Why!? You're more happy... with Kariya-san?"

"No, I've already decided on my career."

"You're just in your first year of high school, right!? You've already decided!?"

"No, rather, I should say I'm already hired."

Hisui smiled wryly and pointed to Rushella.

"I'm my master's servant."

Instantly, everyone fell silent.

A moment later—Rushella blushed and pulled Hisui's arm towards her bosom, wrapping her arms around his arm.

"Y-Yes! You are mine!! Got that, so that's how things are!"

"Got it, yeah, I know. Stop it and don't press so tightly... I'm touching it, your br-breasts, and breasts."

"You're noisy so shut up! Hurry and go home, I'm hungry!"

"Okay okay."

As usual, Hisui led Rushella and started on their way home.

Rangetsu watched with dissatisfaction as Hisui left, disappearing into the distance... Then noticing the presences behind her, she turned around.

Behind her was Eruru... as well as Mei and Kirika.

Through Mei and Kirika's teamwork, virtually all the vampires were wiped out. Despite suffering a few minor injuries, the two girls had completed the task of supporting Hisui splendidly.

"Y-You girls..... What..... Oh, you two were quite amazing... Thank you for your cooperation, the vampire extermination mission was a success....."

Rangetsu wanted to cover up but it was too late.

Eruru sighed and shook her head.

"Yet another troublesome affair..."

"After all, I completely failed to consider her advanced age. What a weird way of courtship..."

Mei also looked exasperated.

"...Since you are a police officer, I am quite sure you already know that shotacon is a crime? Even with mutual consent, statutory rape is still a criminal offense, you know?"

Kirika pointed out calmly.

The three girls stared coldly.

"...No, it's not what you think. Except... Right?"

The three girls laughed at her denial and prepared to leave.

"Oh how the Japanese police have fallen."

"Hi-kun doesn't have a policewoman fetish, so it's fine right? I gained so many points today, I must win him over next time♥"

"Don't forget you had my assistance. But... Aren't there other opportunities?"

As the three girls sighed respectively to sum up, they parted ways and left.

Behind them, Rangetsu kept yelling but none of them listened to a single word she said.

"Like I said, it's not like what you're thinking, okay!? Remember this... Really, I can't get along with you girls! One day, I'll get rid of all of you!!"

"Hey....."

"Hmm?"

On the way home, Rushella kicked a pebble on the road side and asked, hoping Hisui could indulge her.

"Supposing... I'm, umm, a mother with children, what would you do?"

"Huh?"

"What if I had a past lover..... What would you do?"

"Uh....."

"Ummm... Supposing I've sucked many people's blood in the past, killed many people and made many servants, what would you do...?"

"....."

"After talking to that man called Fergus, I've understood a little. At least prior to ten years ago... I did not exist in this world. There was no trace at all. Probably... No one would know about my past."

"That's not for sure. It's just that they did not know you existed."

"But, compared to the 'True Ancestor' you knew... I'm different, right?"

"Well yeah....."

"As I thought... The current me is not my past self. There was once someone else and many other things happened... Then all was forgotten, resulting in the current me. Perhaps even my appearance and body were changed completely. Since there exists vampires who can turn into mist, my hypothesis... Is not entirely impossible, right?"

"Maybe."

Hisui could not refute.

After all, he was not omniscient about 'True Ancestors.'

What Miraluka had brought up in the past—was actually not a lot.

He only knew that the 'True Ancestors' had all lived for over two thousand years.

In a certain place, several 'True Ancestors' had been born at the same time.

The 'True Ancestors' recognized one another and had interacted to a certain extent.

Then Miraluka—She was the last 'True Ancestor' remaining in this world.

"Have... you ever thought about perpetual life and youth?"

"Huh? Why would you suddenly ask that?"

"Well vampires... definitely have many inconveniences. Like sunlight, seawater, blood drinking... But if you're immortal with eternal youth, it can be quite fun!? You should... know, right?"

"Well."

A long life was definitely a good thing.

But what about perpetual life and youth?

Miraluka—What about her?

"Do you know... Actually, it's impossible to prove that perpetual life and youth is actually forever, you know?"

"What?"

"Because, whether you live for ten thousand years or a hundred million, it all ends once you die, and that's not perpetual life and youth. Only by living forever can that be proven. So... Whether vampires actually have perpetual life and youth, no one can actually prove it."

Indeed.

A vampire who lived forever did not exist.

Even the 'True Ancestors' perished one after another.

Hisui's own foster parent had died an unnatural death in the end.

Perpetual life and youth was a vampire's characteristic but also a grand delusion at the same time.

"...That's just playing word games!? Since it's impossible, then why does the word 'forever' exist!?"

"Forever... Perhaps it does exist."

Hisui looked into the distance and recalled the final moments of his only family.

The parent, who died after being scorched and incinerated by sunlight, had said these final words before she passed away.

—The idea of forever... It's all an illusion. But I want to live on and prove it. I don't want to admit that the life of the one who died on the cross was correct. So, I will prove it with my own eternal life.

—Stop saying these weird things..... Don't die!

—I used to be alone. I mistakenly thought that it was the proper path towards eternity. Those who drank his blood together with me on that hill, all of them have perished apart from me. They had died not for themselves but for their descendents and servants. Entering relations with humans, falling in love, raising children, finally welcoming death. No one could prove eternity. So, I did not want to establish connections with anyone. I did not love the world like him. I would not shoulder other people's sins like he did... That was the oath I swore back then.

—Enough... Stop talking!

—But... Now, I understand. Smiling and passing away for the sake of others, he gained eternity for sure... His existence has now spread throughout the entire world. Humans always die eventually... Nothing remains unchanged perpetually. But if one could be recorded in history and remembered for all time... Through the accumulation of every insignificant moment, surely, what I seek must lie somewhere amongst them.

—Miraluka...!

—Through the changing seasons I have spent together with you... I have found 'eternity.' Those instants, filling up my heart quietly... That is the eternity I have sought throughout my life.

"I don't care about this kind of thing."

Hisui tightened his left hand's grip.

In order to stop his tears from bursting out of his eyes, he looked up and continued walking forward.

"Don't go dying so easily, okay."

"What nonsense are you talking about? Also... When did you start holding my hand?"

Only reminded by her did Hisui realize.

His hand had moved involuntarily.

Clearly, that girl was interfering again.

"Touko-san... has finally learned how to become fully invisible... What should I do if my left hand commits crimes without my knowledge....."

"Oh well... Isn't this nice? That girl probably... wants to experience this kind of feeling, right?"

"Maybe..."

"Say... Umm, I..."

"It's fine."

Rushella's deep worries were denied by Hisui flatly.

Hisui ignored her anger and continued walking forward, holding Rushella by the hand.

"I only know the current you. I can't be bothered with the past."

"....."

"If there really were a past, you could consider yourself lucky. With family, a lover, you must have been happy."

"But... Now there's none of that left."

"Getting impatient won't help, right?"

"...Yeah. Umm, a-anyway, I'll start with making you my servant completely!"

"Although I don't think that's really possible, do your best."

"You're noisy so shut up! Since you can't become a vampire... Th-Then using my charms... I-I'll enslave you!!"

"I advise you to save yourself the effort....."

"Shut up!!!"

On one hand, Rushella was getting all fired up. On another, Hisui was completely unenthusiastic.

Neither side willing to back down, they continued holding hands without letting go while Touko watched from behind with a smile.

The terrible wound on her neck was completely gone without a trace.

"Thank you, both... for these memories."

Touko's soft whispers were heard by no one but herself.

Epilogue

"Finally, it's time to say farewell....."

After school, in front of the school gates under the setting sun, Hisui remarked with heartfelt emotion.

Everyone present shared the same feelings.

Ever since the incident was resolved, the wound had vanished from Touko's neck and her lingering regrets were released.

Her time to pass on should have arrived.

Everyone wanted to see her off but were at a loss... After pondering it over half a day, they finally gathered here after school.

"This really feels like a farewell."

"Hmm, the lonely feeling cannot be avoided."

Hisui and Rushella shared their feelings honestly. After all, since they were seeing off the dead, they both carried a solemn expression.

"Perhaps this isn't appropriate to say to a ghost, but take care."

"We will... Take good care of your tomb and offer flowers."

Mei and Kirika offered their well wishes.

Then Eruru summed up.

"You are an amazing person. Despite the great suffering, you still managed to pull through in the end. Please be proud of yourself."

"Yes....."

Touko maintained her smile throughout.

If she did not, she would probably be in tears instead.

"...These past days, I've been very happy. Perhaps even more happy than when I was still alive. It's quite weird, right?"

"I can't really laugh at that joke."

"Fufufu..... Then I should be going. Everyone turn around and I'll take this opportunity to head towards the next life. It's embarrassing to be watched... I might end up crying."

Everyone nodded and turned their backs towards Touko.

Once they all turned around, she was going to vanish.

Their ghost senpai from ten years ago as well as the one who had sought their help.

"Farewell....."

Touko waved and said goodbye.

The five of them also waved... Holding back their tears, they remained silent.

After the long and silent farewell, everyone turned around.

At this moment, the setting sun shone upon their faces.

Touko was no longer present.

Vanished.

Gone to the afterlife.

That was the way things were supposed to go.

After all the preparations.

The mood was also totally brought out.

But in the shadows of the school gates, hiding from everyone, twiddling her fingers at a loss, a translucent and beautiful girl was furtively looking over at them. Was that Hisui's imagination or just someone who looked similar?

"Uh....."

Amidst the awkward atmosphere, Hisui went over and brought Touko out from her hiding place and led her before everyone.

"Excuse me... Touko-san?"

"S-Sorry....."

She seemed to realize she had committed a serious crime.

Touko's eyes were tearful but those tears were clearly not because she was touched.

"It's a bit hard to bring this up... But how does one pass on.....?"

"Uh, well... It should come naturally... Rising up towards heaven, slowly disappearing into the air....."

"I'm afraid of heights..."

Saying that, Touko was about to cry.

Indeed, rising up into heaven might be a bit difficult for someone with a fear of heights... However.

"Say, Touko-san, you should not have any lingering regrets, right? The incident is all resolved... Could there be more regrets you have remaining from your life?"

The expert, Eruru, asked.

Indeed, the problem probably lay in eliminating those lingering attachments.

"Lemme see... I've always wanted to eat all the crepes in one go at the crepe shop near the station without worrying about my weight... Also ice cream at the cafe! Also there's that, the dozen or so little charms I've always wanted to try out, such as having a happy marriage in the future... Oh, I still want a boyfriend! I've never met one during my life... After I get a boyfriend, I'd like to prepare handmade lunchboxes for him, go out on dates, etc....."

.....If they continued to listen, she would probably talk all the way till the next morning. Exasperated, Hisui asked Eruru:

"So... What should we do now?"

"...In any case, I think we should just observe for now. Since she has done good deeds, we cannot just exorcise her."

"In the end, this development occurred?"

"In the end, this development occurred."

"Then I'll continue living at Hisui-kun's house!? Oh yeah, I've also looked forward to cohabitation....."

Touko was ecstatic.

At least, none of the items on her wish list included passing on.

Hisui and Rushella silently exchanged glances and nodded together.

Standing in front of Kirika at the same time, they bowed their heads in unison.

" "Senpai, we're relying on you." "

The next day.

An intricate magic circle was carved on a certain desk in an empty classroom.

Although it pained one to damage school property, for the sake of a certain student, there was no choice.

After all, that student had already died ten years ago.

"Hey hey, this is so mean! You're going to force me to live in this room!? Drawing this kind of magic circle to affix me to this desk!!"

"Don't worry, this desk is simply one of many foci in the entire school for anchoring your existence. Similar foci are located in other places in school so you can move around freely within the grounds."

At Hisui and Rushella's request, Kirika had separated Touko from Hisui's body.

Hence, she had now legitimately anchored the existence of this earth-bound spirit to the school, allowing her to begin a new life.

Even though she was already dead.

"So mean... Then I can't experience romance like this!? Hisui-kun, I guess I'm not attractive enough!?"

"Hmm, you're already dead so that's out of the question. Better luck in your next life."

"Sob sob~~"

Ignoring the sorrowful Touko, the aimless club activities started up as usual today, centered on the club president.

"Don't worry, Touko. One day, I will help you to pass on properly! Okay, we have a new member. From now on, you too shall devote your utmost efforts to recovering my memory and improving the quality of my bloodsucking life!"

"I really hate nodding and agreeing every time I hear that sentence....."

Hisui retorted against Rushella's declaration as he welcomed the newest club member.

"So, I'll be in your care, Hisui-kun. Until I pass on."

"...Yeah."

However, shaking hands was still not possible.

Because his hand passed through.

Hence there was no way to hold firmly.

Literally a ghost member of the club, Fuwa Touko.

With a list of worldly attachments so numerous that she could chatter about endlessly, the day of her passing on seemed forever distant.



Afterword

Hello everyone, I am Totsuki.

Coming up next is a spoiler about this volume's story, so please be careful.

The newest character in this volume is the most devilish in everyday life in a certain sense and might even be something that dear readers have encountered.

As a side note, I have no paranormal senses at all so I've never had any experiences in this area.

Neither have I visited places rumored to have paranormal phenomena.

Perhaps it serves me right, after all, I seldom pay respects at my ancestors' tombs either, so I've never had a chance to encounter them. Naturally, I have no wish of encountering them either.

In fact, more fundamentally, I'm afraid of horrifying things.

Although I'm very scared, the main characters I write about are completely opposite. Instead, they are characters who either possess the same superpowers or can defeat monsters directly.

When going to video rentals, I don't really like going near the special shelves for that genre.

But when I pass by, I check out the box out of curiosity.

Yes, it happens almost exactly the same as with Rushella.

As soon as I look at the box I begin to regret it.

Occasionally, I would pop it into the player and feel like dying when it finishes with a bad ending.

So, as a child, I basically watched horror films while hiding behind my father's back.

Yeah, it's quite similar to Rushella in the story, although my appearance is worlds apart from hers.

Oh right, my father was totally unafraid of ghosts and monsters.

In his words, that's because he knew what was truly the most terrifying.

My father always spoke in a very direct and upfront manner and never said anything resembling famous quotes. But for some reason, these words of his left a deep impression on me, and I used it as this story's theme.

What is the scariest monster?

Hisui did not fear Rushella and the other girls and even treated them as ordinary people and got along, perhaps because he knew the answer to that question.

Oh well, for a scaredy-cat like me, whether the most scary or the second scary, or even not scary, in any case, horrifying things, please stay away from me.

Because it's very scary, after all.

Also, currently, the most scary things are deadlines and failure to get reader support.

In that case, fictional monsters created by humans are not worth fearing at all.

Even with that notion, I still ignore the horror section when walking past it in the rental shop. Seeing psychic shows on television, I silently switch off the TV.

A man with a clear conscience has nothing to fear.

In order to dispel the lingering fear in my heart, I will have Hisui try his very best.

If it's him, he should be able to face any situation calmly.

What sort of suffering will he face next time? Please look forward to it, everyone.

Totsuki Yuu

Illustrator's Afterword

こんにちは、ハ坂です。

今作では様々なサイズのおっのいを
描かせていただいたのですが…
…やっぱり難しいです! (>ロ<)

M
シニア



Hello everyone, I am Yasaka.

For this volume, I had to draw bosoms of various sizes... It's actually quite tough!

References

1. ↑ Sadako-san: the ghost antagonist featured in the Ring horror franchise.https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadako_Yamamura
2. ↑ Kayako-san and Toshio-kun: a pair of vengeful ghosts (mother and child respectively back when they were alive), from the Ju-on(呪怨) horror franchise.[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ju-on_\(franchise\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ju-on_(franchise))
3. ↑ Comedian Okada(岡田): a Japanese comedic celebrity.http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masumi_Okada

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