



ただ、それだけでよかったんです

松村涼哉



電撃文庫

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Illustration
竹岡美穂



That Alone would have Been Good Enough ただ、それだけでよかったんです

Written by Ryoya Matsumura

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Credits

† The characters appearing in this mystery...



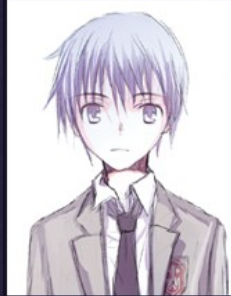
The genius boy who killed himself

Masaya Kishitani



The pretty girl who was hurt

Kotomi Ishikawa



The boy called the devil

Taku Suguwara



Masaya's older sister investigating this mystery

Sanae Kishitani



The mysterious person who knows both Taku and Sanae

Sayo

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松村涼哉

Illustration 竹岡美穂

この狭い教室の片隅。

・危うく保たれた均衡のなか。

すが
わら
たく
菅原拓

いし
かわ
こと
み
石川琴海

笑い合っていた平和な日々。



岸谷昌也

きし 谷 昌也

退屈したり
窒息しそうになりながら



突然、この世界は音を立てて壊れてしまった。

人気者天才少年Kの、謎の自殺によって。

と呼ばれた少年



悪魔を知る秘密兵器

紗世



謎を追う昌也の姉

岸谷香苗

僕だけが知っていることがある。

街外れのプラネタリウムで

泣いていたキミ。

キミがこの世界を地獄と言うのなら、

壊そう。



ありとあらゆる存在から見放され、
世界中の人という人を敵に回しても。

どうか嘲笑して見てほしい。

情けなくてちっぽけな

この僕の物語を——。





革命は
さうらに
進む

Chapter 1 - The Devil's True Form

The fiendish middle school student single-handedly dominated four other classmates, and forced one of them to commit suicide.

Truly, it was ridiculous.

I heard of this news early in December. I, a third year in college, lived alone, so I did not know about the recent happenings back at home. To me, it was too sudden.

I couldn't believe it.

Masaya suddenly died.

†

Masaya was an outstanding middle schooler.

He was someone such that it was more difficult to find out what he was bad at.

After he entered middle school, he, without any prior experience, started playing handball, but in his second year, he had improved to the point where he was the best player in the prefecture tournament. More than his own improvement, the shocking thing was that he was directing his own teammates, and in a year or so, dragged a weak team to the nationals. Through his serious personality of planning even the trainings down to the detail, and his cheerful words that anyone of any age would like, he quickly trained the rookie team until they were able to match the powerhouse schools.

However, Masaya's talent was not limited to just sporting ability and leadership. Particularly impressive, I should say, was his learning ability. He had a mind unmatched by ordinary people, and his academic test results were usually at the top, his grades always at maximum parameters. He even scored full marks in all of the infamously difficult high school entrance exams in the country. Whenever he was free, he even helped the seniors of the club do their assignments, and earned some pocket money for himself. Ahh, he's some superman! He's a prodigy in both smarts and athletics, often hailed by the people around him.

"Taku Sugawara is the devil. Nobody should believe his words."

That was the will Masaya left behind. The 'boy K' reported by the paparazzi, Masaya Kishitani, wrote this on a piece of paper, and left this note in his classroom locker.

On a suddenly frigid morning December, Masaya hanged himself at home.

It had been only two weeks since his fourteenth birthday.

†

Masaya's my little brother, a unique existence for me, who had no older siblings, and he's a family member I doted on.

So when I heard of the details from the school and my mother, I couldn't accept it at all.

The incident was filled with mysteries, probably because everything I heard was hearsay.

It was early in November when I sensed some bullying, it was said the cause was a boy called Taku Sugawara. He bullied a boy called Takayoshi Komuro, and the latter sent a plea on the internet.

"There's a demonic bullying in Kuzegawa Second Middle School. The four of us are being dominated by a devil." The text narrated the horrible bullying they were forced to endure, like eating cicadas carcasses, forced to steal things, and they were all described with much realism.

Having seen such a terrifying bullying record, many people reported to the police, informed the school, and started a major commotion.

And then, on the second day of the commotion, it was said that Sugawara was agitated by this, and started a violent incident, thus proving that there was bullying. He smacked Masaya in the middle of the classroom with a water bottle.

"Bullying is an invention, a necessary evil to fulfill the soul. You alone won't be enough to stop the revolution."

Sugawara arrogantly sneered when he was brought to the staff room.

Seeing the sear-like red marks on Masaya's beaten face, the righteously furious adults took action.

They forced Taku Sugawara to realize the implications of bullying, and suspended him from school for three days. After that, they isolated him from the victims. The school punished Sugawara harshly, and had Masaya and the others meet the teachers to voice their thoughts.

Mother bought a cellphone for Masaya, and regularly contacted him, checking if Sugawara had been contacting them. Every day, she conversed with her son, trying his best to heal the emotional wounds.

The ones who took action weren't just the adults. The entire student body was furious. It was said that they had bullied Taku Sugawara as revenge. From this point, it was obvious that Masaya was popular.

Taku Sugawara wasn't able to interact with the bullied victims, and ended up being an enemy to the entire student body, and ended up with a bitter fate of a tragic school life. Nobody stood on his side, and he showed no signs of resisting.

But a month later, Masaya killed himself.

Taku Sugawara really was the 'devil'.

After Masaya committed suicide, neither the school nor the police could exert any additional punishment on Taku Sugawara.

The reason was that, during the month after that bullying, while Masaya was in his madness, from what could be seen, Sugawara did nothing to Masaya. There was no evidence, and nobody could reprimand Taku Sugawara. Also, the three other living students indicated 'we don't know anything'.

Thus, once Masaya died, he showed nary an apology. He merely mocked Masaya, "Until the very end, he's a fool."

The devil was never punished, and still lived on leisurely.

†

It's really strange.

I was at the park Masaya loved to play at when he was younger, and shed a tear.

There was a little hill at a corner of the park, and at the center of that hill was a playground. Built with faded colored plastic and appearing like some modern art was a collective piece of the playground children loved to play at.

Over there, I wept silently. My tears continued to flow out, blurring my vision. Having known of the details, I didn't know why I was more crestfallen than I was at the funeral, and I felt my heart about to jump out.

Compared to when I was younger, my point of vision's a lot higher, but I was undoubtedly at a place filled with memories of Masaya. The smell hasn't changed. The dirt and grass, the rubber rubbing against the plastic. It gently engulfed my body, and was the same air as it was more than a decade ago. I once laughed and played around with Masaya here, losing myself.

Thinking back about it, the most memorable moment I had of Masaya was still the moment when he called me 'big sister'. Thinking about this, my body inadvertently shivered.

"There's got to be a mistake!"

After that, I yelled out. I didn't know what went wrong. Maybe it was the school, maybe it was the world, or maybe it was the existence called Taku Sugawara.

"Masaya's more studious than anyone else, has an upright personality, and may be a little arrogant, but he's still my cute little brother. He's not someone who should die. He's not a little

brother who should have killed himself and said goodbye to the world without a whimper. How can I let Taku Sugawara live on while gloating on misery!?"

Something's definitely off.

Even I, a mere college student, realized it.

I vented all my inner emotions, took a deep breath, and absorbed the air in the park.

I then clenched my fists, saying,

"I'm going to investigate this thoroughly."

So, I made up my mind.

"I won't let anything slip by me, and I'll analyze it all. What happened in that school, what happened in that classroom, what did Masaya encounter, what did Taku Sugawara do, I'm going to exact vengeance for Masaya."

I'm going to investigate this thoroughly.

This is definitely the only thing I, as the older sister, can do for my little brother.

"Wait for me, Masaya. This older sister will investigate everything for your sake. I may be useless, and a little bit of an airhead, but to the very end, I'll do my best."

The park at sunset gently echoed at my words

And then, I turned my back on the memory filled place, and walked off.

†

I began my investigations, and moved quickly.

The next day, I visited the principal's office.

And then, I faced the Principal, stating the fact that I was Masaya's older sister, and partially threatened him to meet me. The school had an obligation to explain.

Principal Fujimoto, fifty eight-years-old. Despite being advanced in age, he had a head of black hair, and it was unknown what sports he did, but his muscles were abnormally developed. Through the suit, I could see the lumps of pecs and the thick biceps.

"I'm here to investigate," I slowly spoke, "So, I hope you can go along and answer my questions."

Principal Fujimoto nodded.

"Ask away. I have no intention of hiding anything from you. This is the only thing an educator can do for the victim's family."

Then, he asked with some intrigue,

"What do you want to know next? The bullying, or the incident itself, I shall tell you everything the school knows."

"What I want to know is, the education policy of this school after I graduated."

"Ohh..."

Principal Fujimoto showed a smile. With a serious tone, I asked,

"Please tell me, what exactly is the 'Human Power Test'?"

I had to investigate Masaya's condition.

And so, my investigations began.

The Human Power Test

There was a clear reason as to why I began inquiry with the education policy, and not the incident itself.

Because, amongst the information that was revealed in the turbulence of the incident, that was the one thing that caught my attention most.

It was obvious that this education policy wasn't normal.

I remembered that this policy was hotly debated when it started.

Some critics felt that it was a test that was avant garde, befitting of the times. Some enterprises had openly expressed concern about this school. The media hailed it for being cutting edge, a meaningful system befitting of its time. A famous person commented that it was 'disgusting', but he was immediately lambasted on twitter for being 'a hypocrite', 'just saying nice things'.

There were varying opinions, but it wasn't unreasonable as to why it got most Japanese concerned.

Because the Human Power Test was a scoring system where classmates rated each other's personality.

The Human Power Test was formed by two parts.

"In this era, what do you think is the most important ability for ○○? Please choose from the three options available."

"Amongst the students in the same year, please state the people with XX"

There were two questions.

For ○○, one could write leadership, superior, popular person, and all kinds of words. Like for example, what is the most important ability for a leader? What is the most important ability to be a friend? What people with what kind of ability can help in a culture festival? What kind of ability is needed for someone to be successful in his profession? And things like that.

As for XX, one could write stuff like kindness, seriousness, good looking, and so on.

The students could list their ideal images and the people matching those particular images. For example, 'a leader needs to be hardworking, understand human feelings, has personal charisma'. 'In our year, the most hardworking is Kanako, the second is Taeko', and so on.

Finally, all of these were converted into points. Amongst the abilities the students valued, the ones with more points would have higher scores. The students rankings weren't fully revealed, but the students could see their own rankings.

They could learn of the values of their existences.

They could learn of the appraisal of their personalities

"Of course, starting off, there were a lot of criticisms, 'it's unbelievable to have students rate each other', 'this is inhumane'. Well, those were conservative opinions."

Principal Fujimoto took a sip of coffee, and continued.

"But it is all nonsense. It's impossible to live on in modern society through pretty words. How foolish."

"Foolish... as in?"

"Humph, the prior academic society is currently collapsing, and it's obvious to anyone now, right? It's true that currently, there are unfair job opportunities due to their education prestige. However, thirty years ago, it was impossible to have anyone with high education levels being freelancers. Back in the day, as long as one walked through the gates of a famous school, there would be countless good jobs dropping in from high up. Right now, the college entrance exams are changing. There are also the AO Entrance Exams where academics aren't important; when I first heard of it, I doubted my ears."

"Well, I guess."

"The variations of news, the expansion of the service industry, the advancements of robotics. In any case, current society doesn't need any book smarts. Those who study hard would only give once they're brought into the black hearted enterprises and had labor squeezed out from them. What the modern society needs now is interactive ability. The human power, to put it simply. This is all that's needed. This isn't my own idea, but the ambition of society."

Principal Fujimoto sighed, and at the same time, he smiled.

"Just working hard, just being serious isn't going to be enough in this society. This is a terrifying era. The ones criticizing this test are all fools who don't know anything. 'Opposing the valuation of human personality', 'wanting a more fun school life'. It's true that will be easier. Just let the students take exams, focus on entering the top schools, and watch them be shoved into the ravines in this society where they're unable to rely on their academics alone. After that, see the suicide statistics amongst the graduates and the new meat in the professions, and have a nice tea time? Such a wonderful education system."

Speaking till this point, he cackled, and had a sip of coffee. It was black, no sugar nor milk added.

Seemingly making up this sudden pause, I asked, "So you started this Human Power Test?"

"My student committed suicide," he answered.

This couldn't be deemed as an answer to the question. It seemed he understood this too, and he said,

"Fifteen years ago, when I was still the homeroom teacher, I was very close to a female student. When she graduated, she was often unsuccessful in seeking employment, and due to depression, jumped off a building."

"..."

"My wish... is to create a world where someone like her doesn't have to die. No matter the price."

For the first time, Principal's Fujimoto's stoic face during work collapsed, and his face showed a vague smile of reminiscing the past, and regret.

Like me, it seemed this man bore the death of a certain person. However, the hollow expression in his eyes seemed to have seen something I shouldn't have, and I felt a chill up my spine.

I inadvertently stopped the pen in my hand. Principal Fujimoto let out a long sigh, and when he recovered, he regained his usual face, continuing on,

"But speaking of modern society, even without some Human Power Test or something, middle school students too will segregate amongst themselves. After all, in this modern era, grades aren't absolute. Without an absolute benchmark, the students can only appraise each other. I merely turned them into values."

I was curious as to the female student the Principal had just mentioned, but the conversation was soon redirected to the Test itself.

"So after they're turned into values... you let them compete?"

"It's different from competition. Simply, showing the values would prompt something to change. With this method, I hope students can become more useful to society. This is a real wish of an educator."

Principal Fujimoto stopped talking for a moment. During this time, I immediately recorded the content before into a notebook I had prepared beforehand. While I was furiously writing, he asked me, "Having heard so much, you must be tired, I suppose?"

I could only answer, "To be honest, I am." Having so much information given to me verbally, my brain was simply unable to process it completely.

I finished my coffee.

"Another cup?" the Principal asked.

"Please. More sugar please."

Principal Fujimoto took a second cup of coffee for me, and again, I asked,

"And so? How did the students appraise? Their actual voices."

"Well, there are a lot of appraisals, as expected. Some felt that dealing with human relationships was too easy, and many felt feeble as a result."

"Did the interactive ability improve as you hoped?"

"I couldn't summarize everything. However, a group of enterprises had a high opinion of the tests. They said that if they were to seek a job, they would prefer to take the best in the Human Power Test as compared to the top in academics. Good decisions. This should continue to spread on--"

Pausing at this point, the Principal then said,

"--Well, that should be all. What you want to investigate is your little brother, I suppose? This Test is simply the background to the incident."

"Yes."

"The school can't say anything about your actions. We will respect the rights of the victim's family to know the truth. Even so, I do hope that you avoid touching the wounds of the other students. We do have an obligation to protect the students after all."

"Of course, I will be careful."

"Is there anything else?"

There's one more.

I hesitated slightly. However, I put the ball point pen on the table, and lifted my head.

"Masaya, and that Taku Sugawara, what were their rankings for this Test?" I asked.

Even Principal Fujimoto showed utter disgust at this question. He probably didn't want to reveal a student's secret to the public. After considering, and making me promise not to reveal it to the public, he told me,

"At the end of the semester, amongst the 381 people in the second year, Masaya Kishitani was ranked fourth. His friends, the trio who were bullied, Shunsuke Ninomiya, Kouji Watabe, and Takayoshi Komuro too had high points. They were all very popular amongst their classmates."

"..."

"However, Sugawara was ranked 369th. He was someone nobody liked, yet he bullied four popular people."

Finally, Principal Fujimoto said a cryptic line to me.

"Sugawara once said, 'This is a revolution. The revolution has yet to end'."

Has yet to end?

I inquired as to the meaning of those words, but the Principal merely shook his head.

†

"This is really suspicious! Principal Fujimoto reeked of suspicion, so much that all the perfume shops in the world could close down!"

Once I got home, the first thing I did was yell. I threw my bag aside, spun around, and removed the winter cloak while making weird sounds like 'ahh', 'oohhh', then ran up and down the second and first floor. Then, I ran to Masaya's room that had yet to be cleaned up, and fell onto the floor. I flailed my legs on the floor for two minutes, as though I was swimming, and finally managed to calm down.

For a long time, I wasn't good at doing such things, and no matter how many years it was, it hadn't changed. I definitely couldn't remain seated in front of that terrifying Principal Fujimoto.

"But I know now that the school isn't ordinary."

I lifted my face from the pillow, and repeated what I heard from the Principal.

"Let's put aside the issue of whether that Test is good or bad. I can't understand this. But! What I can understand is, that school has a unique environment."

"That is, in that kind of an educational environment, in Masaya's classroom, what happened..."

Of course, the obvious thing would be to ask the people directly.

However, I failed to get an interview with the friends bullied along with Masaya. I was rejected by their parents, and in their youths, when their emotions were delicate, with the paparazzi around, if I were to involve them anymore, they probably would break down

"But this won't do. If I leave it be, I won't be able to solve anything."

I recalled Masaya's human relationships.

"Masaya's girlfriend... it's impossible. Given her current situation, I can't ask her..."

I once met her, she was a girl so cute even I would be jealous of her.

But at this point, it would be impossible for her to listen to me.

"Then, who shall I ask?"

I rolled around on the bed, and scanned Masaya's room. Then, a notebook computer entered my sights. Mother bought it for him. He got so arrogant even though he was in Middle School. I only got mine when I entered college.

"...I guess all his browsing history was investigated?"

All the SNS, emails, and the document folders should have been investigated. Even the deleted software data that could be recovered were investigated. But, there was nothing involving Taku Sugawara, according to the police.

Nevertheless, there might be some minor details that were carelessly leaked out.

I got up from the bed, and immediately switched on the computer. I then opened his web browser, and checked his internet history. However, there were some adult sites involved, all things an ordinary Middle School boy would look at.

"So they really went to investigate these..."

Masaya had probably never thought that his internet history would be completely recovered, or that his sex life would be revealed to the public. I'm really sorry. Your older sister will pretend to not have seen anything.

While enduring this guilt, I continued to search backwards, and then,

"Preventing eavesdropping."

I saw those words

My body froze. Masaya's scared of eavesdropping? I checked the date. It was exactly six months ago. In other words, that was the time Sugawara was thought to have started bullying Masaya. Of course, it's impossible to prevent eavesdropping.

"Masaya..."

The Human Power Test.

What was born out of this school with such a strange ranking system?

Why did Masaya kill himself? Why was Masaya scared of eavesdropping?

Who exactly was Taku Sugawara?

I had to find all the answers.

To approach the truth of this matter, I decided to enlist the help of the 'secret weapon'.

Chapter 2 - Nobody Else Knows

There are few ways for me to become one with you.

Not because my life's really special, not because I have strange thoughts. It's just that I'm way too stupid. Of course, I'm not talking about you. I'm talking about myself.

In a corner of a certain classroom, I was spacing out nonchalantly, and so the day ended. Nobody spoke to me, and it seemed as though I was the only one abandoned in my own world. The bell chimed on its own. In the morning, everyone was chatting about the TV show the previous night; at noon, they were having delicious meals from the canteen; in the evening, on the way back, they decided which fast food restaurant they would drop by. They all excluded me.

I'm alone.

The tables, the blackboard, the pencil case, the uniforms, the school bogs, the textbooks, the gym clothes, the notebooks; they all seemed to be residents living in a different world from me.

So, please mock me.

So that I can become one with you.

What I'm going to say next is a shameful story of mine.

All the fourteen-year-old kids are idiots, but I'm the biggest idiot of them all. Maybe my brain was corroded in delusions, that I'm afflicted with an extraordinary illness.

So, please be condescending about my breakup, my setbacks, and at the same time, look at me.

See this shameful, indecent, stupid me, whose *raison d'être* is to spite myself, start up a little revolutionary war.

My name is Taku Sugawara.

There are some things only I know.

For example, school curriculum gets really boring without any friends around.

So, I'm always alone in the classroom, seated at the window side, facing the sun, continuing to ponder about a trash's thoughts.

This time, my mind was debating, "Will you choose to be the most unfortunate person in the world? Or the second most unfortunate decision in the world?"

Decide on this in two seconds.

Everyone would agree to be 'want to be the most unfortunate person in the world'.

In that case, that's strange. Unexpectedly, the most unfortunate person beats the second most unfortunate person in this world? This fallacy does seem a little strange. Maybe, if we're unfortunate, we might as well go all out at being unfortunate.

Because, everyone would donate for the sake of the kids in Africa, but nobody would donate to me.

A middle school student, poor grades, poor athletic ability, couldn't possibly get a girlfriend, living a life of not speaking to anyone, not even my own life. Even when living this kind of an unfortunate life, nobody will bother with me

They just think of me as some unimpressive existence.

I, who only live in the classroom as 'air', am unable to get any love from anyone.

And so, I stubbornly transferred my vengeance over to those starving kids in Africa.

(No no, I know that they're really troubled. But they do get love from others. For me, even if I search the entire world, I won't be able to find anyone who loves me, and that's a fact. Ahh, damn it.)

Of course, it doesn't matter that nobody understands me. To summarize, this is just random rambling of a middle schooler who's not too bright.

And then, in October, my thoughts went wild like a trash's would.

That was why I was the thirteenth to last in the Human Power Test.

On that day, when I had a conversation with Kotomi Ishikawa.

That incident happened two months ago.

The Kuzegawa Second Middle School I attend is famous for the loads of group work.

Every Tuesday, each class would be divided into groups of four students, and they would answer a very simple question.

"The brand new tourist attractions in Kuzegawa City", "The things to bring when going to an uninhabited island", "A new commercial activity to replace Valentine's day", these are the questions not even our usual random talk would be about, and we draw lots to team up in groups of four. This was a lesson deliberately arranged for those stupid people who are really bad at talking to be able to speak up.

But I just could not bring myself to enjoy this lesson time at all, it's something I could not explain either. Maybe it was because I felt that teamwork here was just a scoring part of the Human Power Test. We think really hard so that others will vote for us. It just feels stupid.

Thus, I would never join in the conversation while the trio in front of me were talking about 'the newest products of a hamburger store chain'. Even if the topic was thrown at me, I would only say "Look at the era", "Look at the occasion". I really am trash after all.

The elite student Kanda Setogura was initially giving me polite smiles, trying to coax for my opinion, but finally chose to give up and ignore me. The one with the delinquent vibe, Ayaka Tsuda, already viewed it a misfortune to be grouped with me, being spiteful in her words, and sometimes even glared at me.

"Hey, Sugawara. Please, say something."

Finally, Setogura gave me a blank look, saying that.

"I get the feeling that my remaining Middle School life will end without being able to talk to you, Sugawara."

At the very least, I uttered back, "Sorry..." If I apologize, I could let this pass, at least.

And as expected, Tsuda immediately told Setogura, "Enough already, Kanda. Ignore this bastard." With Tsuda pressuring, Setogura barely managed to switch to the next topic.

Sorry, this time, I secretly uttered in my heart, *Sorry for worrying about this trash here*.

And so, our group ended up deciding on a 'bashimi burger'. Of course, it was up to Setogura to present.

The one most able to get everyone in class excited was the group lead by Masaya, which decided on having a 'waffle burger' with wafflers slapped between fruits and cream. A gleeful Ninomiya mocked him, saying, "This isn't a hamburger, isn't it?" only to be retorted by Masaya's nonchalant attitude, "Is there a rule that forbids using the side menu?" Ninomiya played with his long fringe, making exaggerated motions that made everyone in class laugh. Including Tsuda, the girls in class were staring at their dispute. It was the usual group work.

I too watched Masaya, *you bastard*, and cussed quietly as I left the classroom.

It was after our group work, after school, when I spoke to Ishikawa.

The location was the school library, where I often borrowed light novels to read. Fourteen-years-old, and I still skipped on all the Japanese literature greats, picking those easy to read. I'm the kind of person who would boast loudly, "My hobby is reading," and then softly add on, "but only light novels."

At my current middle school, the library contained quite a good deal of light novels, and they were the best companion for a middle school student short on money. Besides, there were two shelves worth of them. I stopped thinking, and started from the right end of the neatly arranged

pocket books, drawing them out from the bookshelf in order. If the illustrated girl on the cover wasn't cute, I'd put it back. This was the way I chose it, seeking my entertainment at home.

It was after school, and there were many students around me, but it did not matter. Everyone else other than me are all background characters. Thus, I was really shocked to hear someone call my name.

I could say that it's headline news for someone to call my name except during group work time.

"Do you come by to the library often, Sugawara?"

There was a girl's voice.

Looking back, the classmate called Kotomi Ishikawa's standing behind me.

She's a lively girl with middle-to-long black hair. My memories of her were that she's always smiling elegantly in class. This girl was standing in front of me like a kid who had found glass, and showed an innocent smile.

"Eh, ah, what?"

I stammered really badly as I asked. Such an embarrassing voice!

But Ishikawa didn't laugh at me, and serious told me.

"You've worked hard on that group work. I feel that the bashimi burger's good, but the class response isn't much. It's a little annoying, isn't it?"

And then, she starting talking away as though she's my friend.

What's with her?

It's true that in that group, there's me, Setogura, Tsuda, and another one, that's Ishikawa. I remembered her saying some really unrealistic answers like 'how about adding miso to the bread', or 'I think adding matcha sauce is a refreshing idea'.

To my classmates Setoguchi and Tsuda, who were grouped with me, who had never intended to discuss, and Ishikawa, who had been saying weird things the entire time, I don't have the right to say it, but, my sympathies.

"Well... I think they have bashimi burgers in Kumamoto."

Since she had already spoken to me, I couldn't just ignore her, and so, I mumbled back.

Ishikawa widened her eyes, "We overlooked that," and commented. She then looked at the pocket book I held in my hand, saying, "Ah, that's a light novel, isn't it... are there any recommendations you'd like to make, Sugawara?"

"..."

My thumbs were exerting so much force, they appeared to be on the verge of ripping the book, the color changing. It's not that I hated light novels, but that I reacted without thinking. I did not understand her intentions. Why would she, who was always chatting excitedly about bands and artists, continue to talk to someone gloomy like me?

Like a hare being cornered, I got wary. However, Ishikawa didn't seem to understand the reason for me doing this, and tilted her head in confusion.

I was tucked between her and the shelf taller than me, the gloomiest corner of the library. For some reason, we remained silent, just staring at each other.

"...I just want to talk to you." The first to break the silence was Ishikawa, "I want you to take me in as your disciple, Sugawara."

"Huh?"

"Please accept me as your disciple."

I couldn't catch up to her rhythm, and while I remained skeptical, Ishikawa lowered her head deeply towards me, showing the beautiful back of her neck. What is this? Is it trendy for girls to do this kind of play? I don't understand at all!

"P-Please, lift your head."

If anyone else was to see it, I'll definitely be misunderstood and hurt. After I earnestly begged, Ishikawa seemed bemused by this awkward me, and chuckled as she got up.

I could say, without it being a hyperbole, that I let out the deepest sigh this year, saying,

"What's going on...?"

And then, Ishikawa finally realized that she didn't make a proper explanation. "Ah," she cried out, and said,

"Because you're an amazing person, Sugawara."



"Amazing?"

"Yeah. Just now, during that group work. You have a really cool, analytical personality that watches everything from above, right? You didn't seem to care about how anyone else think about you. Is it to say that you won't just go along easily?"

"No... that's actually not it..."

"Not actually it?"

"I just don't have any friends..."

I said it, but it's a tragic answer.

But it's the truth, and I can't do anything about it. If I'm deemed someone really amazing, then Ishikawa's on the level of a once-in-a-millennium monster.

Ishikawa shook her head.

"Ah, no, you might have fewer friends, but that's not the case. Speaking of which, it feels like you don't want to make friends. I'll say that you won't really go out to get on anyone's good side. You ignore their opinions; or something like that. Anyway, I find that cool. I really admire that."

You can praise me however you want, but even I wouldn't think that way.

It's rare for me to get a single praise in a year. Yay. I was quietly delighted. Actually, in other words--

"Actually, I do care about what others think about me," I answered.

"For example?" Ishikawa asked.

"Actually, I'm happy to be praised for being 'cool'."

And after I pointed that out, Ishikawa chuckled. She then hit my chest with her fist, causing me to tumble, and she said,

"You're not the type to get bloated by praise. But this is different. Isn't it? It's like dropping a 500 yen coin when walking on the road, isn't it? That's different from me, from us. So... I'm envious of you, Sugawara."

This metaphor I did not understand contained some vague self-reproach. Despite this, her voice didn't get completely gloomy. She sounded as though she was joking when she said that.

And while I was intending to pursue this matter, I could hear a few girls behind the shelves.

"Kotomi. Where are you?"

"She got lost, didn't she?"

It seemed Ishikawa had come with a few friends, and she too seemed to be shocked as she turned around to the voices. Did she come by to meet me without telling them? Seems like she's really lost.

I raised my hand slightly, "They're calling for you. Bye bye," I said.

"I'll ask you about being your disciple again next time," Ishikawa waved her hand. "We'll chat next time, my master-to-be."

What's with that title? I retorted, and started to feel doubts about my feelings.

For some reason, I had some longing after bidding farewell to Ishikawa, or rather, a feeling to sigh. After talking with someone familiar, the fatigue set in. It's a really complicated feeling.

While she intended to leave, Ishikawa finally said something strange to me.

"Sugawara."

"...What?"

"If I let you touch my breasts, can you vote for me as repayment during the next Human Power Test?"

"Huh!?"

Did I hear that wrong?

Of course, I, being asked this out of a sudden, could not answer.

After some silence, Ishikawa gave a mischievous smile, saying, "just joking," and she vanished behind the bookshelf.

When I was in elementary school, I once spoke to a classmate, whose name I forgot, "Let's go home together."

His reply was, "I don't want to get involved with you."

Thus, Ishikawa definitely misunderstood. It really feels stupid.

She shouldn't envy someone like me.

It's true that I don't care about what others think. I only have a little interest in that kind of thing. Just a little. In other words, that's all.

But she didn't know the reason why I became like this.

She didn't know about my ranking on the Human Power Test.

If she didn't know, she could have just called me 'trash' all she wanted. She mustn't get on friendly terms with me.

Even though nobody knew that I was going to swap seating positions, even though nobody paired about with me during P.E. class, even though nobody asked me out during the culture festival, even though no girls actually knew of my first time, even though nobody would care for my help in group work.

Even so, even when I'm trash, ranked 369th, as long as I ignore the stares from everyone else, I can continue to live on leisurely.

"Hello, do you hear me?" this message came in that night.

My parents were working, and often came back late at night.

Also, I have no siblings, so I would surely be alone when I reached home. It's no different from going to school.

Since elementary school, the adults around me were opinionated, worried for me, but actually, I'm more annoyed by being pitied by them. Eating alone too is unexpectedly fine, as long as I'm used to it; especially when it's been part of my daily life since young.

I added cabbage, onions, and pork belly into miso, frying them together, quickly added some green onions into another pot to cook chicken soup, and then served with cooked rice. I wrapped my parents' servings, and put them into the fridge.

In the living room that was more than twenty tatamis in size and arranged in a unique fashion, I started reading light novels alone. Just like the usual days.

And right when I was halfway done with the novel, the computer opposite the TV let out a beep. I approached the screen, and it's a message from Sou. There's a very cheerful message on the chatboard.

"It's been a while, Sou. Didn't you say that you're busy?"

I put my pocket book aside, and touched without looking at the keyboard. Then, he quickly replied.

"No no. Let's not talk about me. I don't have anything really interesting going on. Anyway, tell me what you did at school today."

Just the usual, I guess.

It's been more than half a year, sorta, and though we would contact each other once in a while, Sou would never talk about his own matters. Thus, I don't know his gender, age, or profession.

He (I don't know whether it's a he or a she, so I'll just use 'he' for the time being) was someone I met during computing practical class at school. Every week, during that one information class, I'd be lazing around on the internet, and would then suddenly meet him on the chatboard that suddenly appears.

It feels like he's trying to talk to me. After a few times, we got along.

It looks like he's interested in hearing other people's stories.

So, like usual, I told Sou about what happened today. It looks as though he's interested in Ishikawa. I couldn't mention her real name, so I named her as 'Miss I'.

"Miss I, huh? I can tell from your conversation with her that you're one to give up halfway through."

Written on the monitor's some merciless venom. Same as usual.

"You try to act as the kind of person who won't be rattled by what others think, but you're celebrating the fact that a girl in class talked to you. In any case, you're just an ordinary middle school boy. Ahh, this is embarrassing, embarrassing. If there's an art to being trash, you don't have any artistic scene."

"I don't feel that I'm a special middle school student. I never pursued the artistic either."

Speaking of which, was I celebrating? No, I guess he was slightly correct on that.

"Well, it's not like you embarrassing yourself happened merely once or twice."

"You're annoying. I know that."

"Anyway, the most important thing is your feelings. What do you think of Miss I? No, I can imagine. You're delusional, right? Trash are scary. There's an excess of sexual desire, but nobody to target. You'll get excited immediately once you have a target."

"..."

I reread that paragraph thrice, and out loud once. I stood up from my chair, and drank a whole cup of malt tea. After that, I went to the washroom, opened the faucet to the maximum, and washed my face with lots of water.

The reason was simple. I was trying to hide the fact that I got rattled.

Sou's conclusion was almost entirely correct. Damn it, looks like trash are easy to read through. Such simple creatures. Am I an insect?

Left with no choice, I reopened the chatboard, and typed in, *"You got a problem with that?"*

"Goodness. Aren't you going to work towards being a trash with artistic sense? What? Are you this spineless? You're scolded and don't intend to suck up to others. All you need to do is to slap back at a cute girl wooing you. You just need to be a person who grovels to power and money, trampling on the weak."

"Wait. What's artistic about that?"

"Everything."

"Are you serious?"

"Seriously, I'm worried about you. Which one are you? Do you want to be liked by girls, or not? Are you going to act cool for the rest of your life?"

"I get what you're trying to say. No, actually, I don't exactly understand half of it."

"I see, half. Well, your middle school life is already halfway over. Whenever you are troubled, you can talk to me. After all, you should be thinking about what you want to do with your life, right?"

"Mmm..."

You say what I want to do with my life, huh?

I stared at the screen, pondering. However, I couldn't think of how to reply. I've got nothing.

"Speaking of which, how old are you, Sou? A high school student? Working? I feel like you've been watching from above." I changed the topic.

"I'm shocked. You're trying to change the topic." I could sense a sigh from the other end of the monitor, **"I'll talk about myself one day."**

Sou avoided my question, and logged out.

Who's the one running away? I retorted to no one in particular.

†

Sometimes, I would wonder, if it was Masaya, what would he think.

Or, if I asked him, what suggestions would he give?

If possible, please tell me.

Tell me, who's on the same side as him.

†

It happened five days later.

Is there a specific term for it? Like, everyone experiences this kind of thing before, right? A particular phenomenon of not meeting a particular person before until a particular coincidence, only for the encounters to suddenly spike up.

Anyway, Ishikawa and I met again.

It might be surprising, but I would visit the Planetarium outside the city once or twice per month after school. What I want to say here isn't that I have interest in stars, or that I'll go out just to see the night sky; I couldn't remember how to use the Constellation plate. In other words, I just like the Planetarium. Don't ask me why. In the end, I can only contact those with the trash personality only I have.

Only when I'm in this round building can I forget everything.

And I'll even forget the wish to forget everything.

Thus, it was completely a coincidence that I met Ishikawa in the Planetarium.

She was on the other side of the projector. It was only when I was shown on it that I noticed. Maybe it's because it wasn't the weekend, because the science center was almost desolated, but there were few visitors. Ishikawa and I were the only ones in the Planetarium. The little hemisphere shown on the ceiling projected a countless number of stars, simply swirling around us.

The Milky Way passed by behind her, showing her face.

Something seemed to be refracting light on Ishikawa's face.

Pondering what that thing was exactly, the projection ended when I realized.

"Why are you crying?"

So I asked. Unlike at school, I did not stammer.

Ishikawa probably noticed me at a certain point, for she didn't look shocked.

"I wasn't."

She answered with a serious expression.

I couldn't understand her.

The tears are already trickling down her cheeks, and she still would not admit.

"You look like you're crying though?"

"Yo-you're wrong about that."

"Did you just hiccup?"

"Just your imagination."

"You dare swear to the Planetarium god?"

"Of course."

But she stubbornly refused to admit it. I clenched my fists firmly, and put them hard on my knees, shivering.

I was the first to break. Even if I did prove that Ishikawa cried, it didn't do me any good. Ishikawa didn't cry. Isn't this good? Ahh, such a wonderful world.

So I got up from the stalls, went around the projector, and towards her. I then took out a slab of chocolate from my bag, and handed it to her.

"For you. You won't cry when you eat something," I added on.

Couldn't I have said something more interesting? I really wanted to retort.

Of course, Ishikawa didn't talk, merely receiving the chocolate from me.

Seeing this, I turned my back on her, and quickly left. It was too embarrassing to do something unbecoming of me.

But nobody could continue to do anything unfitting of themselves, right?

I really did something rare, I thought as I headed for the exit.

At this moment, she grabbed my right hand, and tugged at me. Her warmth reached my hand.

I turned back, and found Ishikawa with tears in her eyes as she stared at me. Then, she spoke with a teeny-weeny voice, like a ghost.

In this quiet dome, her voice alone echoed.

"I really envy you, Sugawara..."

That's a lie.

I quickly understood that it was a lie. She merely said it on a whim. Ishikawa couldn't possibly admire trash like me. Of all the people in the world, even if they do amass a large sum of money for the kids in Africa, they won't care about me. There's no reason for me to be envied.

I'll be laughed at by Sou. As he said, trash are simpletons.

But, but even so, even though it was such an obvious lie.

Ranked 369th on the Human Power Test.

A trash nobody will like.

And Ishikawa, who cried saying that she 'envied' me.

That was the encounter I had in the Planetarium outside the city, two months before Masaya Kishitani died.

What did I choose?

Chapter 3 - Secret Weapon

It's time for the secret weapon to show up.

"Sayopon, Sayopon, Sayopon, Sayopon, Sayopon, Sayopon, Sayopon, Sayopon, Sayopon, Sayopon." So I kept calling at the phone, probably about dozens of times, yet she didn't reply. Guess I'll continue to call a hundred times.

That was because I was left with no other choice. I called all the students in the class register, and requested them to give me any possible clues, but they all rejected me, which left me in a rut.

However, I compiled all the events I knew of in chronological order, and realized that with the given information, I couldn't deduce the truth of the matter.

1. The Principal started this weird Human Power Test.
2. In November, there was a bullying revealed on the internet that was started by Sugawara, and his four classmates, Masaya included, were bullied.
3. The school and the mothers of the victims decided to punish Sugawara, supervise him, and tried their best to isolate him from Masaya.
4. In December, Masaya was mentally ill, and killed himself.

How am I supposed to figure this out? This lack of information nearly had me lashing out.

Most inscrutable however is between points three and four. How did Taku Sugawara drive Masaya to despair? Nobody should be able to tell Sugawara off if this isn't cleared up.

Left with a dearth of options, I decided to ask the Secret Weapon Sayo, often known as 'Sayopon', despite being unable to contact her. Sayo and I went to different colleges, but we're childhood friends, and from elementary school, to middle school, to high school, she often helped me out, since I wasn't good at studies.

"Shut up already! Stop leaving messages for me like they're curses, you idiot!"

After muttering Sayopon for a hundred times or so, she finally picked up. It's that usual coarse voice.

"And why have you been calling me 'Sayopon' every time you called me?"

"Sayopon, listen, Sayopon."

"Are you ignoring me now?"

"You know about what happened to my brother, right? I'm currently investigating that thing now..."

After that, I told everything I learned from the paparazzi and my parents to Sayo. I just told her everything without sorting out my intel, and the more I said, the more I got confused.

However, *"I see,"* Sayo said that once she heard everything from me.

"Well, I've been watching the news, so I have a rough idea of what's going on."

"I want to hear out what you think, Sayopon."

I said, but there was no voice from the receiver. It seems she's frustrated too, and soon, there was a heavy sigh.

"This is just a view from a normal outsider," Sayo added as a preface, ***"But logically, Masaya and the others shouldn't have been bullied by Sugawara, right?"***

"...What do you mean?" I asked, feeling all confused.

"Eh, don't get angry with me. I just feel that someone like Masaya can't possibly be scared of a mere middle school kid. I'm guessing that Sugawara said the controversial line 'Bullying is an invention' to pull attention to himself. The mastermind should be someone else, right?"

"Mastermind... there's such a possibility. But, there's something obvious weird here."

I didn't think it was a bad theory, but I had a doubt.

"Assuming that there's a mastermind, why did Masaya only mention Sugawara in his will?"

Right, and that's where things gets tricky. Assuming that Masaya never saw through the possibility of a mastermind, this boy, the representative called Taku Sugawara, had been bullying them 'alone'. Also, this middle school kid was supervised heavily during the month before Masaya killed himself.

I was at a dead end, and sighed. Sayo too seemed to be the same, and she let out a bear-like grumble.

"Ah, I don't understand. Not at all. Hey, besides Masaya, the other three who were bullied did testify to the school, right? What did they say?"

"They said that they were bullied by Taku Sugawara, but weren't sure about what happened after the bullying, that's all. They seemed to be scared of something, and said that they could only reveal this."

"I see..."

"I guess we can only hear from the other students involved. I wonder if anyone's willing to tell me the relationship between Taku Sugawara and Masaya."

"Yeah... Taku Sugawara..."

Sayo paused for a moment, and silent down. It appeared like she's in deep thought. There are moments where she would suddenly go quiet and retreat into her own world. I couldn't hear anyone else's voice, so I could only spend the time tapping the cover of my smartphone.

After some moments, *"Alright!"* There was a determined voice from the other end of the phone.

"Sanae, let me assist you in investigating this."

I could hear Sayo's breathing from the other end.

"I played with Masaya a few times myself. I can't just let it end like this."

"Ohh, what's the matter? I was about to ask you for help anyway."

"Eh... I do have some thoughts on this matter myself, and, it just feels that..." Sayo seemed hesitant to continue talking, and said, *"Most importantly, I'm worried about you."*

Given her usual feisty personality, these words were overly tender from my childhood friend, and it surprised me.

"...Sorry to worry you."

"...I am worried. How can I not, when my childhood friend's younger brother died? You're not forcing any smiles now, right?"

"Hm, a little."

"Don't force yourself. Anything you're unhappy about, tell me. You've looked gloomy in your SNS tweets since last year. Hey, I heard you broke up."

"Oh... thanks. But it's fine now. What's more important is about Masaya."

"I see... then I'll get a little serious."

I could imagine Sayo showing a fearless smile on the other end of the phone.

Right, I'm glad to have a friend who knows me so well. At the same time, I got a powerful helper.

I felt some warmth rising in my heart, and after thanking her, I hung up.

Since the day Sayo decided to help me, two days passed, and again, she called me.

"As expected, calling the parents will only get me rejected. However, it seems some kids are willing to say something."

"Yo." Sayo started without a greeting. However, what she's talking about was what I was most hopeful about.

“Eh? That means?”

“Going smoothly. We’ll be meeting at the station after class today. Will you be going?”

“Of course! As expected of my secret weapon.”

I asked Sayo the details, and it seemed the student from Kuzegawa Second Middle School was the friend of her friend’s brother, Masaya’s classmate. I never expected that she could just get someone appropriate to ask. As expected, she has the social connections I never had.

“I never thought he would agree. If it was me, he would have been shocked and rejected me once I admit that I’m Masaya’s older sister...”

“Seriously, you’re way too honest here... got to watch your tongue there,” Sayo noted in surprise, *“but we can ask him without any other adults around. Maybe the students in the class might know something.”*

“Hm, so instead of a bullying that’s a complete mystery...”

“Leaving it to you. It’s your job to figure out the truth.”

I nodded, thanked her again, and hung up the phone.

I brewed some coffee, and then walked towards the living room, intending to sort out what I’m going to ask next. At this point, I’ve moved back from my apartment to my old house. There’s basically no lessons in the second semester of college junior year, and it’s better not to live far away from Kuzegawa Second Middle School if I want to investigate on Masaya.

So I thought as I tried to remember where the coffee beans at home were, and went downstairs. I found mom seated in the living room. She had her long hair combed behind her head, facing the computer, frantically typing something.

“Mom, what are you doing?”

I asked, and mom lifted her head, showing a fatigued smile.

“Internet.”

“What?”

“It’s a meeting on how to improve the school’s education, but the name’s undecided. We need to get Kuzegawa Second Middle School to work hard, so that sacrifices like Masaya won’t happen again. To do that, you know that I have to show up.”

It’s true that the mother of student who killed himself will have a convincing cause to this. Mom’s intending to change this school, not even digging her heels into the fact that Masaya’s gone. She’s typing with much unfamiliarity. I can tell from her sidelong face that she’s a lot more aged than when Masaya died.

“We have to punish Taku Sugawara severely. Judgement of the devil is needed.”

She was muttering furious as she tapped at her words.

“Masaya was definitely killed by him. However, my battle with the devil is not over yet. I’m definitely not going to forgive you. I’m definitely going to rip you apart, drive you to despair, kill you, and mangle you.”

Such words did not seem to come from my mom, and I was a little terrified.

This caused me to recall Taku Sugawara’s words:

“The revolution has yet to end.”

Has this incident ended already? Or is it just beginning?

I had a bad feeling about this.

The person Sayo introduced me to was called Kouta Katou.

The first impression of him was that he’s a beansprout. It’s the first time I’ve ever met such a person with a befitting nickname, and I really wanted to change the location from a café to a beef bowl rice shop. No, I’ve got to buck up! He has long, slender limbs, a face drained of blood, mouth half opened, and uneven glasses. No matter how I looked at him, he’s the Beansprout.

I brought him to an old looking café with lots of renovation. It’s a place that sells a cup of coffee for a cup of coffee 600 Yen. Inside the shop, we sat at a dim place where some light could shine into.

He ordered some hot lemonade, and I ordered hot coffee. Once our drinks were served, I ended the chat, and started asking questions.

“First, anything goes, but do you mind giving me your impression of those two? What are the impressions Kishitani and Sugawara give you, Kadou?”

First, I started off with this.

“Yes,” Katou so whispered.

I would first start asking from the easy one. I had a vague impression of Taku Sugawara’s horrendous personality, but I wanted to affirm this for myself. Also, I didn’t know how Masaya was like at school.

“Masa, ahh, that Masaya Kishitani’s nickname. To put it simply, that guy’s very popular. If there’s any activity, he’ll definitely be the one organizing, and his grades are a notch above us. Everyone

really looks up to that guy. Ahh, of course, I really respect him too. I never thought that he would be a bullying victim. It just felt like he had nothing to do with the bullying, on either side.”

“Well, as to be expected.”

This was as I thought. It’s no different from when Masaya was at home.

“Then what about Sugawara?”

Katou frowned, and slowly said,

“Hm, no, Sugawara... to put it. He’s, not really a gloomy guy, but probably not a cheery one. I don’t think he’s really hated, but in any case, he just doesn’t have any presence. He’s probably the least impressive guy in the class.”

“Hm?”

It’s unexpected. From what I heard from the news and school, he should be a Middle School student who’s more arrogant, eccentric. I reached my hand out, cutting off Katou’s words, and said,

“What do you mean unimpressive? Is he different from the media’s portrayal of him being the demon?”

“Yeah, he’s really scary. We don’t know what he’s thinking. But he’s not some delinquent of a student. He’s dumb, bad at sports. He’s the type who likes to read manga and novels alone during noon break.”

“And... anything else?”

“Yeah, and also, he just seemed uninterested in the people around him. Or I should say, he never had any interest in others. Even if we did talk to him, we would just get ignored. That’s different from anthropobia. He might really be the devil. Just gives a bad feeling.”

After that, Katou emphasized on Taku Sugawara, “He’s really disgusting,” and quenched his throat with the hot lemonade.

During that time, I kept looking at the notebook, and recalled the difference in the Sugawara depicted. Taku Sugawara should be the devil, “You alone won’t be enough to stop the revolution.” But was he really such an unimpressive person? What’s with this difference?

I was really curious about that. But I left the deductions for later—it’s time for the actual topic.

I merely took a few notes and took a deep breath, inhaling oxygen into my brain, and then decided to sort out the truth. I concentrated, and held my ball-point pen, saying, “Then... mind telling me more about the bullying?”

But compared to how enthusiastic I was, Katou's answer was very vague. In an apologetic manner, he answered.

"...I'm not very sure on the bullying at all."

Katou lowered his head, and muttered.

"What happened? Are you saying that nothing seemed to have happened ever since Sugawara hit someone with a water bottle?"

I tried asking with a more specific question.

But again, he shook his head.

"No, that's not it. During that time too, nobody knows everything from beginning to end. Nobody actually saw the bullying, whether it's before the bullying actually happened, or after."

"...Eh?"

The notebook in my hands nearly fell off, but I barely managed to grab it in time. I leaned my body over the table, staring at Katou's face.

And then, I blankly asked,

"What do you mean? The content of the online posts includes forcing people to eat dead bees, needles stabbed into the back..."

"I said that nobody saw all these. Nobody realized that anyone was bullied, let alone saw it. Before those contents were uploaded onto the internet, no, even after they were uploaded onto the internet, nobody realized it. Nobody in class figured out that there was bullying until Sugawara beat Kishitani up with a water bottle."

What's going on?

Even I got confused.

One guy bullied four popular people without anyone noticing? Is that even possible?

It's really ridiculous. The students would have been worried the moment the popular ones showed even a grimace, and there should be a lot of people they could discuss this with. It's impossible.

It was vexing. I took two sugar blocks next to me and dropped them into the coffee. It'll become really sweet, but it's fine since I have a sweet tooth. At the very least, I could get my mind clear.

After a sip of coffee, I asked Katou,

"...Was there really bullying?"

“There are a few signs, so it’s possible. Masa’s gym clothes were cut up before...”

“Signs, huh?”

“Masa, Shun, Taka, and Kouji all insisted that they were bullied, and Sugawara admitted it... given how the victims and bully admitted, I’m thinking there was actually bullying involved.”

At this point, all I could do was sigh.

I thought I could get closer to the truth, but I failed completely. Of course, it’s not Katou’s fault, but it was so deflating.

With that, I couldn’t discover any clues from the victim’s house, email, and cellphone. It’s no wonder the police and school had given up on that. There’s no definitive proof that Taku Sugawara drove Masaya to despair.

Since Katou didn’t know anything about the bullying, there’s nothing more to ask about this. All I was able to do. It’s like I’m cleaning up after the operation failed.

“Then, well, please tell me what happened after the assault, after Sugawara beat up Kishitani with the water bottle. It’s said that Sugawara was isolated.”

“Well Sugawara was already alone. Ah, but it seems he got bullied by some girls. He enraged Masa’s fans, or friends. But anyway, there’s something more painful there, right? The TV stations will air the bad parts of the school...”

“Hm? Bad parts?”

And then, Katou continued on, hesitant to speak.

“For an entire week, Sugawara was forced to kneel, and then was paraded around the school.”

“Huh?” Again, I could only eek out these words, and remain rooted there. I didn’t know anything about this at all. It was an unexpected message. No, I should have heard about this matter, more or less.

It’s said that the school and guardians punished Sugawara severely.

But nobody told me it was so severe, so unjust.

“I heard this was all decided by the school, by the guardians. For an entire week, he was forced to kneel during noon break, going from the classrooms of the third years to the first years. It’s sad, isn’t it? They paraded the bully around the entire school in front of the students.”

“Eh, but why did they do this? Ah, just tell me what you know, Katou.”

"They're probably scared of Sugawara, I guess? He bullied four of our classmates without anyone noticing, anyone knowing. As long as all the students know how Sugawara looks, everyone can watch over him."

It sounded logical. I could get having the students watch over Sugawara, watch the bullying the teachers couldn't. Was there a need to parade him in front of everyone though?

Was this reasonable? This was way too—

"Please tell me what happened after that," I suppressed my feelings, and asked, "So, from the kneeling to Masaya, ah, please tell me what happened until Kishitani killed himself?"

"Nothing special, all I know is that Masa had been acting strange. It felt like he was just hiding from others. He didn't seem to smile much."

"Was it because Sugawara did something?"

"I told you nobody else knew... everyone's Masa's friend, Sugawara's enemy. But nobody knew why Masa broke down. The only explanation is that Sugawara did something..."

Broke down. I didn't like this description at all, but I wasn't so impatient as to throw a fit here. I continued to ask,

"What did the people who saw it do?"

"Of course they got worried. The red wounds really appeared to be hurting. Everyone bullied Sugawara, and did their best to isolate Masaya and the others from Sugawara. The whole school was protecting Masaya, protesting against Sugawara."

"Everyone... nobody stood on Sugawara's side?"

"A-Actually, it's a little excessive to say that. There must be some who would pity that Sugawara."

Pity? For Sugawara?

I tried asking, "Why?" my apologies, my tone's a little rigid. I had a feeling there would be something big.

Katou seemed to have difficulty saying something as he lowered his head,

"Well, those seniors and juniors who didn't know anything might think this way. The impact of Sugawara's kneeling was way too shocking, so it's not weird to have some misunderstanding. Also, there are already some outside our class who hate Masa."

"Hm, why hate Kishitani?"

Katou said,

“Masa’s mom is really famous in the school. She’s one of those monster parents who show up on the news. She often complained about the content of the lessons, how the exams are graded. Those that know about it are really disgusted by it.”

I’ve never heard of this before!

“...Is Kishitani’s mother such a cruel person?” I did my best to suppress my feelings as I continued. This had been my feeling for much of today’s hearing.

“Hm, that’s because she’s the vice president of the PTA, you know? Masa himself seem to really hate her. She would grumble whenever the teacher criticized Masa for forgetting to bring something, or even a graze. That graze could have been inflicted at home, but it’s blamed on the sports department. Masa will hide some things from her, but if she found some excuse, she’ll come running to complain to the school.”

“...I see.”

And so, I heard such terrifying news.

My throat felt a little parched.

At the very least, when I was still in high school, Mom was still normal. During the three years when I entered college and left him, Mom’s personality changed after drastically.

My mind recalled Mom grumbling at Taku Sugawara as she sat before a table a few hours ago.

What happened? Was the key involving my Mom?

I had to ask her. To go to Mom. She’s really involved in this incident; no way was she just someone normally involved. And more importantly, I had my own issues too.

I thanked Katou, and left the seat.

Then, he finally asked something.

“Erm, did I say something weird? You seemed strange midway through this.”

“It’s fine, you don’t have to mind about this. This big sister here acts weird once every five minutes.”

“Ah, I see... then can I ask another question? You’re investigating this incident, right? You should know about Masaya’s girlfriend. Did you hear anything from the news?”

I slung my bag over my shoulder, and said,

“No, all I know is that three days before Kishitani killed himself, she fell from the stairs... and hasn’t regained consciousness, right?”

“Yes... I too, only know this. Some said the culprit’s Taku Sugawara, but back then, he was being told off in the staff room...”

Right, I let this go as I didn’t know what had this got to do with Masaya, but there were a lot of mysteries.

Masaya’s lover rolled down the stairs three days before Masaya killed himself, and she lost consciousness.

This can be said to be one of the reasons why Masaya killed himself, but it may have been just an accident. In any case, my biggest priority would be to investigate Masaya.

I thanked him again, and left.

I didn’t head back home directly,

For I had yet to clear out my thoughts.

I didn’t get any clues on the bullying, but unexpectedly, I obtained a really important piece of intel. Sugawara was forced to kneel in front of everyone as punishment, the one who became the monster parent, the mother of Masaya and me.

So to sort out these messages, I went to the fashion shop I often visited in high school, the bread shop I really liked, the shopping area before the station, wandering aimlessly. It just felt that for every step I took, the venue changed, and I was wondering if I was even walking straight. Eh? Which side’s south?

What got me back to normal was a phone call from Sayo.

The moment I heard her voice, I started telling her everything I heard from Katou. Sayo listened listening, *“Is it really alright?”* and with a calm voice, she asked me.

“It’s fine. I feel a lot better after saying it out,” I answered. “Recovery ended. Time to begin.”

“If you can do such a stupid thing, I guess you’re fine.”

“I might not be suited to be a detective. My head’s in a complete mess.”

“We already knew that centuries ago. Next, about your mom.”

Sayo calmly raised her opinion on what I said,

“...”

But I couldn’t bring myself to agree immediately.

“Sanae, what is it?”

“...No, it’s nothing. Hm, Mom might have hidden something from me. There’s no way she would have done something so weird like parade him around as punishment.”

Rooted to the spot, I nodded firmly.

There’s a lot of mysteries.

—Nobody realized the bullying until the hurting.

—After the hurting, Sugawara gained attention as he knelt down in front of the entire school.

—And also, Masaya who killed himself.

Even so, I was slowly approaching the truth of the matter.

As long as I could unravel the mystery, it’d be fine. I could start investigating from the contact I had with Katou. Since Mom’s really involved in this, I could start here. I’ll get close to the crux from many ways.

“It’s just a bit, but the truth of this matter is going to float. You need to keep working harder, Sanae.”

Sayo’s encouragement came from the other end of the phone.

To be honest, I was really trying my best to be energetic, but there was some uneasiness. Whenever I approached the truth of this matter, my heart would churn out a feeling I should not have. I could only try my best not to mind it.

Regarding this matter, for every little bit I knew.

I would know more about Masaya.

As this useless older sister, I would—

“Right, I’ll do my best.” But even so, I too made up my mind, “It’s for Masaya’s sake.”

If I kept thinking about the uneasy part, there would be no end to it.”

“Hm, nice attitude,” my childhood friend chuckled, *“But before that.”*

Sayo thought of something, and said,

“Sanae, send me the pictures. The pictures.”

“Hm?”

“Masaya, his bullied friends, and Taku Sugawara. There should be a group photo or something, right? I do want to have a look. If we’re talking about bullying, the appearance is also an important factor, right?”

“Ahh, right. Hold on. I’m hanging up.”

I sent the photo to Sayo. The photo of Masaya and friends laughing together, and in a corner of a group photo, Masaya looking bored as he looked at the lens. The contrast between them was accidental, but I sent the two photos over.

Sayo quickly responded.

I picked up the phone, and she spoke with a tone far more serious as compared to usual.

Which was,

“I met him before.”

She said.

Of course, I asked who she met. Sayo immediately answered,

“I met Taku Sugawara before...”

In other words, she was really involved in this matter.

Involved in the revolutionary war of Taku Sugawara.

It was the second day when the mutilated cat carcass was sent to our house

And the message ‘the revolution shall continue’ was attached.

As expected, that thing started.

Slowly, but surely.

Chapter 4 – Revolution

I knew nothing about Ishikawa.

Till the very end, I did not know why Ishikawa cried at the planetarium.

I suppose there's an emotion I can't imagine, that if I interfered out of personal curiosity, I would probably be heavily involved.

Thus, I did not dig further into this, but left the scene. In other words, I ran away.

For I did not want to be hurt.

Trash.

This term was so appropriate in describing my actions.

†

If I had a chance to defend my actions, I would say that I wasn't like this all the time.

A year ago.

I took the same bus ride with Masaya.

Masaya Kishitani's a genius everyone loved, and was already the central figure of the class the moment he entered middle school, males and females always smiling at him. Back then, there was a sports festival, and as the last relay runner, he easily overturned the deficit and won. Back then, everyone was talking, "that's Masaya of Class One," and he was in his most popular phase. Nobody would have the sense to disagree here, right? Other than idiots?

Even I'm really awed by him. Not just once, but twenty five times of awed. To me, who's untalented in every way possible, he's someone I should be hating, but that's not the case for him. Looking down on Masaya made me feel extremely small; he's that kind of special.

It just so happened that I was seated next to Masaya on the bus.

"Oh, Sugawara. Can I sit next to you?"

He sat beside me, giving off the smell of some refreshing hair conditioner. With a very natural attitude, he just talked to me; it's almost a supernatural art.

In other words, he had intended to talk to me.

"Speaking of which, I've hardly talked to you. We never talked at all since the Opening Ceremony, did we?"

"Well, yeah."

He was overly casual, and I instinctively answered. He had a power I couldn't ignore.

"Of course, isn't it? Ahh, it's really shocking and rare. We never got assigned to the same group, and you always vanish after school or during noon break. Club activities are on hold today, so I got this chance to talk to you."

"Eh, but I'm just a weak existence that will vanish at any given moment now, right?"

"Don't just disappear man. There are still people on this world who want to know you."

"From which planet?"

"Earth. What's with that answer? What are you normally thinking of?"

"Hungry kids in Africa or something."

"O-Oh, that sounds amazing."

Of course, I wouldn't say that as a resident living in a first world country on this world, I'm always hating this world.

But Masaya seemed to have misunderstood in thinking that I'm expanding beyond borders to observe history, and nodded away,

"You're amazing. I got a different view of you now. If you're thinking about such things since Middle School, someone like you is going to get a Nobel Prize down the road."

"You're thinking too much into this, Kishitani. I heard that you feel anxious whenever you see people hold chopsticks improperly. Is that correct?"

"It is, it is. Well, to explain it, it's probably because my sister's very clumsy, and that I ended up really picky about it. OCD? Anyway, it's a weird personality."

He just seemed like a difficult person to deal with. As I thought about this, I suddenly noticed something.

I was conversing normally with a classmate. To others, it might have been something really normal, but it's abnormal to me.

Thus, I couldn't help but stare at Masaya; he tilted his head in confusion, but I kept staring at him. In order, I looked at his nose, eyes, ears, mouth, hair, and mole, and understood something. It's been a while since I got interested in someone, I guess?

Masaya Kishitani had a special ability.

The definite god-given ability to attract other people to him.

"Hey, what's with you? You saw a ghost behind me or something?"

I kept staring blankly at him until he spoke up. His ability itself startled me. Or rather, experiencing the ability to notice others left me really startled.

It's like I'm making contact with aliens.

I couldn't even call myself trash, and Masaya's a genius from the moment he was born.

During the two months I conversed with Masaya on the bus, I reverted back to being a normal person.

If anyone spoke to me, I would try my best to answer, and as I ate proper meals, I would try chatting with the girl before me. During class, I would focus on taking notes, never forgetting my homework, and always submitting on time.

I suppose my feelings towards Masaya were jealousy, envy, and respect, and that encounter with him left such a big impression on me.

But as I said, it just lasted for another two months.

"Those guys that get high scores on the Human Power Test get cocky and annoying as a result, right?"

It happened during noon, and I was in a corner of the classroom, and so happened to overhear a chat amongst girls.

I was really reading, and even though I was nearby, they never minded about this.

"Class three in particular, I heard someone just handed over her test card to others."

"The test card for the Human Power Test? Wah, that's pretty high, isn't it?"

"Right right. Twelfth. She's boasting around with it. How shameless."

"Eh? What's her name?"

"That Kotomi Ishikawa has a screw loose in her head, don't you think?"

And the boring gossip started to veer off course.

"Want to tease her?"

Finally someone suggested this.

With a nonchalant look, she said such a cruel line, and it left my back shivering.

So I instinctively stood up. They widened their eyes, rooted to the spot, and I stepped towards them. To be honest, I was terrified by their stares. Ever since young, I was always given such condescending looks.

Perhaps I wanted to get rid of my nickname as trash, and become a hero like Masaya.

“You girls are horrible,” I summoned my courage to say that, “Just rumors, and you think up of such a stupid plan. It’s an eyesore.”

They held down the hems of their blazers, and appeared to be trying to say something, but with more stares gathered upon them, they could only scamper away from the classroom.

I thought I was fighting against evil.

(I was nervous, but I did express myself... maybe I might get everyone’s approval.)

So I had such an optimistic thought.

I stood in place, and had a deep breath, returned to my seat, and continued reading.

However, reality was not that pretty.

Days later, we had a Human Power Test at the end of the second semester.

During the first semester, I was 297th for the Human Power Test.

For the second semester, I was 345th.

It was the complete opposite. I was stunned by this slide in results, holding the Test Card that was given to me, and dumbfounded for moments.

I sat in a corner of the classroom, staring at this number. Suddenly a boy went behind me.

He peered at my grades, and I instinctively turned away. Kouta Katou gave me a look of pity.

“So it slid...” he said, “A few people suggested not to vote for Sugawara.”

How kind of them.

My response probably wasn’t too drastic, and Katou, feeling grieved for me, consoled me.

“You scolded a group of girls, right? That infuriated them, and they went about spreading unfounded rumors, like ‘you peeped into the girls’ toilet’ or ‘you molested them’, or something.”

“Just for that reason...?”

“Yes.”

“Oh... that’s stupid.”

“Right. But, I can understand their feelings, of wanting to bully someone who gets high scores in the Human Power Test...” Katou added with sympathy, “I’m not talking with you again, Sugawara. I don’t want to get involved... bye then.”

Katou hurriedly left the scene, so as to avoid having others realize that he chatted with me.

His actions allowed me to realize something.

I see. No matter how much I worked hard or devoted myself, all I can appear to be is awkward, embarrassing, doing foolish things. I thought I was gracefully swimming freestyle in a lake under the moonlight, but I'm just an abandoned puppy struggling in the drain.

And after all I did, others found me repulsive.

Thus, I gave up on working hard. It's pointless for someone like me to work hard. I should try my best not to attract attention, and become someone unimpressive.

In my eyes, the others have lost their luster.

And so, Masaya himself stopped the harassment of Ishikawa. I always felt that I was worshipping him. My courage would only stoke the flames of their malice, completely meaningless.

Through this incident, I learned two things.

One, I can't be like Masaya.

Second, it's better to be trash.

And so, I ended up not caring about others again.

I decided to continue living as trash.

Or at least, that was supposed to be the case.

"I seem to have some troubles."

I spent two whole days thinking of the reason why she would cry, yet I had no idea at all, or rather, I couldn't have, as my mind's always thinking about random stuff. It's no different from before.

I was a normal person for two months or so, but that was a year ago. After that, I became trash again. She's someone of a different world from me, just like how Masaya's an alien to me.

Thus, I asked my friend Sou, who might come in handy. Inside this lonely room, I awaited his reply.

"Hm, I'm not sure. I never knew her. If you want to discuss this with me, you can be more detailed."

In the end, even he couldn't help me out. I didn't intend to spill the details. I didn't want to talk to others about Ishikawa that easily.

Sou replied with a question mark, one that had a sigh in it.

“A troublesome personality you have. I can only say that you are becoming ever so conscious of her.”

“So I guess that’s it, huh?”

“Right, to a point where you have a crush on her. It is heartbreaking though, to say the least.”

I showed no intention to refute. Crush, maybe he got it.

“But for your sake, I do advise you to know how to exercise restraint,” Sou’s words showed up on the screen, **“You are living as trash, not caring about what others say, but that’s because you won’t get hurt, right? By becoming trash that goes nowhere, you try to guess her thoughts, and in the end, you’re the one hurting yourself. Looking at things objectively, the chances of her liking you is miniscule. Is there anyone who likes you when you don’t know how to dress yourself, hold hands, and are bad at sports?”**

I couldn’t type back in refute. I recalled the foolish futility I did a year ago.

Over this period, Sou continue to speak without holding back.

“It is time for you to make a decision. Sugawara, you should tidy yourself, dress yourself well, and while maintaining your personality, learn how to woo girls for her sake... if you want to be someone normal, you have to go all the way. However, if you never work hard and selfishly hope that she will like you, this is disrespectful to her.”

“...”

“You have to choose between being trash, and being a real human.”

Sou pleaded for me to make a decision. I knew he was right, but, it just felt so surreal. I couldn’t make a decision.

I felt breathless, and closed the chat window. I shouldn’t have discussed this with him.

So I told myself, and I left the computer.

After that, I started thinking to myself.

Kotomi Ishikawa had her own troubles.

Was there anything I could do for her? No, or rather, what was I trying to do for her? “You have to choose.” So Sou cornered me, but what was I trying to do?

“Wait, huh?”

Suddenly, I tilted my head.

“Did I tell Sou my real name?”

Whatever.

Even without Sou telling me so, I knew very well.

As long as I never bothered with the stares of the people around me, I can maintain calm without. This is the fate of the one ranked 369th in the Human Power Test.

As long as I ignore others, I won't get hurt.

It's easier to be trash.

I understood this better than anyone else.

So when she cried and went to the school's garbage dump, I should have pretended not to notice. Back then, I was on the third floor, and even after seeing her, I could have pretended not to notice. It was stupid of me to run over to her.

But I couldn't ignore her.

Right, surely I had fallen for Kotomi Ishikawa.

A trash like me who goes nowhere, and she said she 'envies' me. Those words alone left me falling for her.

She was cutting a dolphin doll in the dumps, and it's a pink mammal the size of a palm. I remembered that dolphin hanging on Ishikawa's bag, and she would shake it from time to time. However, it's cut up heartlessly. The cotton inside was exposed like organs, looking really pitiful. Ishikawa continued to cut the body of the dolphin.

At first, I went towards Ishikawa, who jumped like a little animal, shivering. However, once she noticed it was me, she looked relieved.

"So it's you, Sugawara."

She said with tears in her eyes. It seemed she didn't care about me noticing her.

"Don't scare me. I was really shocked."

"What are you doing here?"

I went straight to the point, and saw her show a grimace. However, she gave a nonchalant look, and said, "I'm dealing with something annoying."

"Something annoying..."

I looked at the cut up dolphin; that should have been her precious thing.

But before me, she again cut stabbed the dolphin with the scissors.

“Life really isn’t smooth sailing. It’s scary, but with mind-reading, it’ll definitely be easy.” Ishikawa continued to trample upon the doll, and said, “I won’t need to do such a thing.”

I nodded.

“Yeah. With telepathy, you might become someone rich, smooth sailing in life.”

“Eh? No, I’m not referring to money.”

“I’m just joking.”

“Ahahaha, so you can joke too, Sugawara.”

The conversation ended; I didn’t know what to say. I seemed to have lost my ability to speak. I wanted to say some nice things, so that I would be worshipped, liked by her; such selfish desires twirled around in my mind, and I didn’t know how to console her.

Like a scarecrow, I stood still, and saw her throw the scissors to the floor. And then, she collapsed weakly to the floor, cupping her knees, crying.

“I was kept in the dark.”

She said this.

“I was kept in the dark. Everyone hid this from me! Everyone’s laughing at how I don’t know anything behind my back, looking down on me, gossiping behind my back. What have I done!? I thought everyone was on better terms.”

“...”

“I’m suffering. My Human Power Test grades will definitely slide. If they’re hiding this from me, it means that they don’t want to share secrets with me, right? I’ve been abandoned.”

“Rather than dropping by 100 ranks.”

I expressed my doubt.

“You can’t stand having your Human Power Test rank drop by ten, right?”

“Of course... the peer pressure is heavy... so heavy that it can crush me.”

She picked up the scissors, and kept cutting at her doll.

“Everyone’s saying the same thing. Mom, dad, the teachers, manga, anime, everyone’s saying ‘treasure your friends’. Even if I’m smart, I have to treasure my friends; even if I’m strong, the most important things are my friends. In that case, everyone around me is telling me ‘I’m not

willing to become friends with you’—does this mean that I’m hopeless? The Human Power Test—is just an indicator.”

“Oh, I see.”

“Why must I be treated this way? Penalized, envied, discriminated, I had enough of this! I don’t want attention.” She vented her frustrations, “I’m scared of being harassed like last year...”

“ ... ”

“I don’t want to be treated badly, like being glared at, people clicking their tongues at me... they think I deserve having my Human Power Test slide, and they’ll look down on me... this pains me.”

Like a kid, Ishikawa gave a weak voice.

Seeing this, I was feeling peeved.

“I know this...”

I blurted this accidentally, but Ishikawa did not seem to have heard this. With a perplexed look, she looked up at me.

Why are you giving me such a look, Ishikawa? I know your suffering. I did summon my courage to fight that evil, but you didn’t know.

I had an urge to express my dissatisfaction, and thinking about the past, I felt pain inside my heart. However, I saw a few cuts on Ishikawa’s hands, and was left speechless. I thought it was because of inappropriate handling of the scissors that got her hurt. Ishikawa kept exerting force, and the wounds couldn’t heal, her palms becoming red.

Looking down at this, I pointed my fingers at my chest, felt my heartbeat, and continued.

“In that case, just give up.”

I said the words that were stuck in my heart.

“What’s wrong with being trash? What’s wrong with being hated? If you’re going to keep being scared of others, living in pain, you won’t be able to come to school. You might as well ignore your friends; it’s easier for you to live on this world this way.”

“How can I do this?” She ignored my words, and shook her head in pain. “Over the past fourteen years, I have been forcing a smile like a clown, making others laugh with silly antics, living for my friends.”

“But if this keeps up, you’ll crumble, Ishikawa. Didn’t you say that you envy me? I’m worried about you. I...” At that instantly, I was hesitant, but I forced myself to spoke, “But I like you. I don’t want you to continue suffering.”

I tried my best to convey my thoughts to her. My cheeks got hot, and I really wanted to dip head first into icy water. However, this wasn't the time to think about strange things, so I turned my eyes to her.

For a moment, Ishikawa stopped cutting the doll, and soon intended to pick up the scissors. However, I picked it up, and threw it into the dump. She could only cup her knees and remained still. If not for her wide eyes, I would have assumed that she fell asleep.

I could hear the cries of the baseball club, and soon, I could hear dribbling sounds from the basketball club in the gym. That's the kind of space we were in, as we remained silent for quite a while. I sat next to Ishikawa, looking up at the sky; the sky was gloomy, like a photo of my youth. Argh, damn it.

After about three minutes or so.

She finally spoke up, "I did envy you, Sugawara..." she said with a vengeance, and then, she corrected herself, "But, I found that I don't envy you at all."

I couldn't understand what those words meant, and could only remain rooted there. Ishikawa stood up, and then gave me a look of pity, saying,

"There's no way I could have envied you. You're Sugawara, and looking around the whole world, there's no one who envies you. Who envies you when you aren't popular, good at studies or sports, Sugawara?"

"But Ishikawa, you just..."

"That was what I thought, but I was mistaken. You don't seem happy at all; you always appear to be in pain, living in hell."

Then, she cried again, and left me.

"Goodbye, Sugawara."

I couldn't answer her, and remained rooted at where I was.

There's a disgusting lone strider trash with autistic social handicaps who was dumped in a matter of moments, and that's me, Sugawara; I never went home directly. I wanted to go singing alone, and I went to the food corner in the supermarket, begging the attendant, "I'll pay up, so just throw the food away." Ishikawa's words were so shocking that they left me reeling.

"I never expected to be rejected so cruelly!"

Even I would need some time to recover. That's why I didn't want to become a normal person. I find that living as trash without hopes for anything as something more suitable to me. A year ago, half a year ago, even now, I realized it painfully.

"Ever since the Earth was created, countless creatures as many as the stars have had sex already! Why am I the only one excluded?"

As the hopeless trash, I always grumbled about such uselessness, and tucked at the fried chicken chunks at the food corner of the supermarket with toothpicks. I had a plate of fried chicken sticks, with mayonnaise dip, so much that it's brimming from the container. I took a sofa for six, and stuffed the oily bits into my stomach like an interrogation. How am I able to taste anything? I grumbled as I kept cursing the world.

From the bottom of my heart, I was glad that I had no superpowers. If I did, a third of humanity would have died because of my wrath.

As I thought about such unrealistic things, I ripped the chicken chunks with toothpicks.

"Yo, boy."

A voice called out before me.

I lifted my head, and found a tall and slender woman standing before me. I couldn't tell if she's a college student or already a member of society, but she did seem young. The first thing I saw were the long legs most Japanese didn't have, and then, I looked up, cowed by the sharp eyes.

"E-Erm..." her eyes looked harsh, and I finally realized something.

I didn't want any trouble, so I hurriedly apologized, "So-sorry, but I have this seat. Pl-please leave."

"No no no, that's not what I mean. Do I look like I'm angry?"



Her eyes looked more heinous than before, and she sat down before me. She just looks angry anyway, right?

“I’m just worried about what happened to you.”

“Huh?”

“There’s no way I can ignore a middle school boy crying, right?”

I put my left hand on my cheek, and the water on my face was more than I thought, even somewhat sticky. It seemed I cried lots, and I didn’t dare to look into a mirror.

“Here, have some.” The woman handed me crepes. The pink packaging was wrapped around the skin, and there were a lot of strawberries inside, “You’ll feel like eating something sweet after eating just salty stuff, right?”

The cream of the crepes nearly touched my chest, and I hurriedly accepted it, thanking her.

“I just got rejected. It’s common.”

I simply explained to her. I could ignore her, but I would just think of it as thanks for the crepes.

“Like I said, I was just naïve. Just failed at that.”

“Oh, so you’re so innocent.”

“No, the motives are thoroughly impure. We’ve only spoken once or twice, but I hardly speak to the opposite sex, and had my own thoughts, got careless, and confessed, and then I got dumped. I’m just trash, feeling awkward talking about this.”

“Oh.” She seemed disinterested, and then said, “Right, the chicken you ate couldn’t sell at all. It seemed ramen alone would have been boring, so the owner came up with a new dish, but it’s not popular at all.”

“Oh...”

“I dropped by here every day in high school, and the owner always complained about this to me. It just feels like I’m the only one who likes coming here to have fried chicken every day.”

“Eh.”

“So today, I get to know a comrade who loves eating fried chicken too. I’m touched.”

Saying that, she looked back and forth between me and the fried chicken, “As proof of our friendship, can I have one?” She pleaded me. Did she just want one? I handed her a toothpick, and she placed a mayonnaise-dipped chicken into her mouth.

Looking pleased, she wiped her mouth with the napkin on the table, “In other words,” and added,

“Even if the motives are impure, the outcome tragic, it doesn’t mean that it’s all meaningless. I love fried chicken, and I know someone else who does. Even though the owner does think of it as a failure, this fact won’t change; so you don’t need to lower yourself.”

It seemed this was what she wanted to tell me. I didn’t know what she meant at all, but thinking hard about it, the logic was weird.

“Thanks for the encouragement... but unfortunately, I don’t have any lucky encounters like snatching other people’s fried chicken or something.”

“Isn’t snatching too much of a word? It’s a show of friendship.”

“Anyway, there’s nothing meaningful that happened to me.”

“Oh, but you’re crying because you got rejected. Don’t you find it meaningful too?”

She didn’t seem to mind as she continued.

But to me, it was an unexpected outcome.

“Over the past fourteen years, I’ve never had any hopes for others,” I said. “I’m bad at studies and grades, I can’t really talk much with people, never been praised for anything I did. I don’t want to be hurt, so I continue living on this world without hopes for anything. How’s someone like me supposed to hope anything for others?”

“I don’t care about the motive or process. I just admit your courage.”

The moment I heard those words, I got up immediately. I wanted to get away at that instant.

“...You can finish the rest.”

“Hm? Really? There’s a lot.”

“It’s fine... you gave me crepes after all.”

After that, I asked a question I was always wondering about.

“Are you Sou?”

“Ah? Eh? Ah? I’m Sayo.”

So I was mistaken. Of course, that guy never treated me so kindly like this lady.

I bowed to her, and turned to leave.

I knew nothing about Ishikawa.

However, there was one thing I knew.

Ishikawa was harassed before. She was scared of gaining attention from standing out too much. Despite this, she summoned her courage to talk to this lonely me.

I did have impure thoughts. My mind's full of sex, and who knew how many times I masturbated while imagining her. I'm just a hopeless trash of a middle school boy, who had feelings completely distant from innocence.

But despite this, the indisputable fact was that I hoped to see Ishikawa smile, to protect her as she cried and shivered. And even till this point, I harbored such thoughts, that nobody, including me, could deny this thought.

So I decided to launch the revolution.

"I want happiness."

The world was already dyed a scarlet red as I left the shopping mall. The skies remained cloudy, but the clouds seemed to be dyed with various colors. Under the scorching scenery, I continued walking in the middle of the road. The cooling wind blew at my hair.

And then, I said my thoughts out loud,

"I want happiness as trash. Even if I'm last in the Human Power Test, I want to keep smiling. I want to donate to developing countries from a position high up. I don't want to be scolded, and I won't bother others even if I'm humiliated. While I'm peer-pressured into strong-arming others, I'm just going to sit back and watch. If I'm cursed with misfortune, I'm going to live a happier life. When I'm cursed by the entire world to be jailed, I won't commit a crime. I'm going to live happily."

This was the last time I cried.

I continued moving towards happiness. I gobbled down the crepes in large bites, and held the remaining packaging.

"And then, I'm going to create a classroom Ishikawa and others can smile in. I'm going to show that trash can be happy. If Ishikawa said that school is hell, I'm going to destroy this. I'm going to destroy this Human Power Test."

I recalled the cramped classroom. Masaya, Ninomiya, Setoguchi, Komuro, Tsuda, Watabe, Ishikawa, Katou, those friends.

And I made up my mind.

"I'm going to be real, authentic trash."

This was the one decision Taku Sugawara made in life.

Right, let's revise this again.

If you had forgotten, please allow me to repeat, my story's to be read in a 'mocking' manner. It's just that simple.

So please look down on the shallow hopes and dreams of this middle school boy. Just make fun of me.

If anyone tried to stop me at this point, the ending to this story would have been greatly different.

But I decided to start this revolutionary war.

No matter the price I have to pay.

Even if I have to be abandoned by everyone, even if I have to be an enemy of the entire world.

Chapter 5 - Biggest Happiness

“I met him before.”

That boy cried because he got rejected, and that’s all Sayo knew. She just so happened to meet Sugawara when she went to her hometown.

If her memory’s correct, it seemed it was a month and half before Masaya killed himself. At this point, I had yet to understand what had that got to do with this?

Frustration due to rejection? How’s that possible? If that was the case, there should have been proper investigations. First of all, the timeframe didn’t match.

How was one person able to dominate four middle school students, including Masaya?

Without anyone notice the bullying?

Taku Sugawara was monitored.

The will, the search details, the violence, forced kneeling, internet articles, there were lots of mysteries.

And then, the infamously strange education system called the Human Power Test.

“But there’s only one thing I can do now.”

I heard from my mother, Akane Kishitani.

She was the one person who knew most about what happened after the bullying, and the one who had been watching over Taku Sugawara.

I knew very little about Akane Kishitani.

After she graduated from high school, she worked as a manager at a SME, met an older man during her working days, and got married at the age of twenty three. On her twenty sixth birthday, she bought her dream home, gave birth to her eldest daughter, and lived a happy life. She could be said to be living the dream. However, when her son was about to be born six years later, her husband died of an accident.

With her parents assisting her, she worked and raised Masaya and me. Her husband’s inheritance was sufficient for us to study till college, but it seemed she kept working to fill up the void in her heart. Following that, I had memories a typical model mother, sometimes strict, sometimes kind.

And after ten years, I, as the elder daughter, started living alone. Three years passed, and I would only return home at the year’s end or Obon, so I had no idea of the changes that happened to her.

According to Kouta Katou, it seemed she became a monster parent, always looking for trouble with the school.

I would say, rather than feeling tense about this, I was terrified.

Yes, it's most appropriate to describe it as this. Ever since I started investigating, I had this feeling several times, but this time, it was different.

Because, maybe...

But, how's that possible? I wiped my uneasiness with a smile. It's for Masaya's sake; how could I be backing away now?

"Hey, Mom."

I started grinding the coffee beans, and carefully poured two cups. The fragrance of the coffee lingered in the room, and with a hearty feeling, I had a talk with my Mom, seated before the computer. She looked back at me, giving a smile.

"Oh, what is it?"

"I'd like to ask you for something, Mom; just tell me the truth you see. Just put the façade aside, don't think much about it, and tell me. What did Taku Sugawara do to you, Mom?"

Mom's expression immediately froze up. Seeing this, I really couldn't help but cringe. However, I forced myself to stop thinking, and gave up on this thought.

Mom pulled a chair slightly, and went towards me. I saw the words on the monitor, and as I expected, it's a proposal for the PTA meeting, that there's a need for heavy punishment to avoid victims like Masaya.

"Do you really want to know?" With a kind voice, mom said, "I know you've been investigating this. The truth might not be useful to you though Sanae, and it might cause more pain. Is this really alright?"

"Yeah, it doesn't matter. Just tell me whatever you heard; I'll hang on until the very end."

I said, and she showed a hearty smile.

"Alright. I'll tell you, a failure, the process of the devil torturing the genius boy Masaya."

I was mentally prepared, but once I heard these words personally, the shock I felt was enough to crush my determination.

Masaya's a kid who's a hundred times more talented than I am. Compared to me, mom had a thousand times more expectations on him.

I knew about this.

I knew I was imperfect.

And so, Mom started talking.

"Actually, it's the duty of a parent to talk about this, but I've had enough, since he's gone. You know that Masaya's different from you, that he's good at everything, had outstanding grades, was chairman of the sports club, and often helped with household duties during middle school. The dishes he cooked were really delicious. He's handsome too, and the aunts nearby were all fans of his."

Mom continued to narrate, as though trying to vent this frustration she had had for a long time.

"Ever since my husband died, it's Masaya who had been supporting me, and you always left me disappointed. You don't have any special traits, study at a low-end college, got cheated by some weirdo, and got dumped. That Masaya had talent since youth if we're comparing to you, and is able to absorb double of what you can learn with only half the effort. There's no doubt he's a genius."

"Well, yeah. Masaya's great at everything," I chimed in. "Like how he had double my score for a maths test..."

"Goodness me. To a widow who lost her husband, her children are more important than she is. I don't have any hopes for your future however. Masaya's basically my everything."

"So that's why you kept complaining to the school?"

"So what about the complaints? Look at his grades; even without looking at it as a parent, he's considered one of the rare geniuses in Japan, in the entire world. It's not just the duty of the parents to protect this rare gem; it's also the role of an educator."

You never had such feelings for me at all.

I had such a thought, but of course, I kept it within me, and bit my lips.

Was my Mom such a person? She's completely different from before. Right, before Masaya entered elementary school, she never made many complaints, at most twice or thrice a year.

"I'm not saying this without valid reason." Again, she started talking, "Until Masaya entered middle school, I was really uneasy. I was worried that he would be unable to handle the jealousy for being too outstanding. If he's too smart, he might not be able to get along with his surroundings, and there's a lot more things to worry about. But my doubts immediately vanished."

“...Why?”

“It’s because of the Human Power Test. When Masaya got third in the year, I really believed he was a rare gem of humanity. It’s a really wonderful test. Not only mentally, but socially, the test results proved that Masaya’s really outstanding.”

Akane Kishitani proudly continued, her face brimming with ecstasy as she smiled.

“And then, what do I talk about next? Ah, yes, that devil. I want to talk about the violence. When the school called and notified me ‘Masaya was beaten by a classmate with a water bottle’, I nearly fainted. I hurried to the staff room, heard of what happened, and realized what happened. First, two days before the incident, there was a bullying incident that resulted as a topic on the internet. A middle school boy bullied four other middle school boys with very cruel methods. “Was this written by one of you?” I asked Masaya, and he, left with bruises on his head, silently agreed, “It’s Takayoshi who typed it into the computer,” So he said.”

At this point, I asked tentatively, “And you believe this, Mom?”

Mom’s unexpectedly calm, saying, “How’s that possible?” With a nonchalant look, she said, “I don’t think Masaya would be bullied. There has to be a catch, one person bullying four?”

However, she immediately switched to a grim look.

“But I immediately dispelled that thought.”

“Why?”

“I didn’t tell you? Masaya’s gym clothes got ripped up. Most importantly, when I met Taku Sugawara in the other classroom, he would smile and say, “I bullied those four. So what?” It’s a really ugly look on his face.”

“Taku Sugawara admitted it?”

“Yeah. That boy never showed a look of remorse. Also, he gleefully described what he did, basically narrating some precious memories, like how he forced Masaya to eat some slugs, and extorted money from the other three. *“This is a revolution. The revolution will come with sacrifices.”* So he smiled as he said.”

That description was different from what Katou described of Taku Sugawara. The Taku Sugawara he mentioned was someone so uninteresting. The only thing that matched was how he never bothered with others.

Thus, was this the key?

Did he choose to live—as trash?

I haphazardly made notes in a corner of my notebook, and kept asking,

“Was it you who proposed to have him kneel before everyone, Mom? Every day, during noon break, at every classroom.”

“Eh? Ah, that.”

For the first time, Mom stammered.

“Now then, who proposed it? I forgot? The other guardians, the Principal and Masaya himself agreed. Sugawara wasn’t willing at first, but it seemed he agreed at the very end. Everyone back then wanted to take revenge for the common cause, to punish that devil.”

“Nobody objected? Hey, Mom, Taku Sugawara might be the devil, but objectively speaking, this punishment’s way overboard.”

“The mood back then was the influence. If you were there and saw the arrogant Sugawara, Masaya with the bruise on his face, and the reveal on the internet, you would have agreed.”

Mom did not seem to be hiding something as she said this.

But this left me a little mystified. There seemed to be some force driving events.

“After that, most of the investigation was done by the school. It was said that Taku Sugawara was forced to kneel, and a lot of negative rumors about him popped up.”

“The school did notice that Sugawara was isolated, right...”

“Yes. In any case, Taku Sugawara was finally forced to succumb. He came to our house to apologize a few times, and not only our house, he went to visit the other victims. He came alone; his parents are always at work, not caring about their son at all. He’s trash created from his household. Then, he pleaded us, *“Please don’t make me kneel down anymore.”* I knew on first glance that it was an act, and he became a little forceful. He slipped up, and said, *“Keep punishing me, and I’ll bully this trash with more savage ways.”* There has to be a limit to how much he underestimates adults here. I recorded everything, complained to the school, and asked them to increase the punishment. Such trash should be given the death penalty.”

Once she was done, Mom slammed the table.

“But as he said, Masaya finally couldn’t take it, and killed himself.”

And she continued to yell, as though driven insane,

“I WAS WORRIED ABOUT HIM! I WAS CONCERNED! MASAYA’S BEEN INCREASINGLY WEIRD! HE HAD NO APPETITE, AND EVEN PUNCHED AND KICKED HIM, YELLING IN THE ROOM! MASAYA HAD NO ONE TO DISCUSS WITH! HE ALWAYS SUFFERED ALONE! I DIDN’T KNOW WHY! HOW COULD I HELP HIM? I TOLD HIM ‘GO VISIT A COUNCILLOR’. I DID EVERYTHING I COULD, AND I DID SO!”

Akane grabbed her hair, and hollered,

“THAT DEVIL DID SOMETHING! HE CAME TO OUR HOUSE A FEW TIMES, AND JUST APOLOGIZED ON A WHIM! HE MUST HAVE DONE SOMETHING TO MASAYA! HE DEFINITELY PUSHED DOWN MASAYA’S GIRLFRIEND! SHE’S IN A COMA, AND LEFT HIM SHOCKED! THERE’S NO DOUBT IT’S TAKU SUGAWARA WHO DROVE HIM TO DESPAIR! THIS IS UNFORGIVABLE! MASAYA’S UNDOUBTEDLY AN ANGEL WHO GOT HIGH POINTS IN THE HUMAN POWER TEST, A GENIUS WHOSE PERSONALITY IS HAILED! I WON’T FORGIVE THAT DEVIL!”

She started coughing, and fell from her chair.

“Mom!”

I hurriedly ran forth, and patted mom on the back. But Mom shook off my hand.

She stood up without a word, basically viewing me as a hindrance, and went before me, to the kitchen, poured a glass of water, and gulped it down. I saw the water droplets fall from her lips. With a vacant look, “Oh, right.” She sighed.

“You’re investigating Masaya’s matter alone, right? Once the truth is out, please remember to tell me the truth. That includes what Taku Sugawara did, what bothered Masaya; investigate everything.”

“...Okay. But Mom, calm down a little.”

“Calm down? Hah! How can I possibly calm down now? That devil’s still living; he’s trying to drive others into misfortune.”

Before I could comprehend the meaning of those words, she took out a bag she left on the table, rummaged through the envelopes, and tossed me one.

“It was placed in the mailbox today, together with a cat carcass in a bag.”

Why would someone send a cat carcass over?

I opened the envelope, and found a letter, with a line of words clearly printed,

“The revolution shall proceed forth.”

That was the line recorded.

“‘Revolution’... there’s no doubt it’s Taku Sugawara,” Mom said. “The devil’s still in this city, planning something... why send a cat carcass over...!? He already condemned Masaya to death! Is he still not satisfied...?”

Saying that, she grabbed her own clothes.

And then, she appeared to be on the verge of tears, glaring at the letter with much hatred..

I might never be able to comprehend the pain of parents losing a child, but mom's expression left me unbearable."

"Last year, Masaya said this," she muttered, "I made a friend, he's called Taku Sugawara, undoubtedly a good friend." I remembered how happy I was for him."

"Eh?"

"Those two were good friends."

Mom pleaded,

"Please, make yourself useful... you're a failure compared to Masaya, so at least you should do something for me, take revenge on the devil who killed his friend..."

I couldn't say anything, and stormed out of the house.

I was inside an internet café located at a street, lying there like a zombie. In the cramped room, I closed my eyes, covering my body with a towel. I seemed to have left this world by doing this, and my soul gained peace.

After a while, my smartphone rang.

It's from Sayo.

I picked it up, and the usual crude voice tenderly comforted my soul.

"Yo, you free now? I got something to report."

"Say it..." I whispered.

My reaction might have been too different from before, and Sayo seemed taken aback on the other end of the phone, but she never pursued the matter, and continued,

"Eh, besides Masaya, there were three others who were bullied, right? Ninomiya, Komuro, Watabe; I went to look for them."

"...Were they willing to meet? If we can get those three to talk, that'll be the fastest way to do this."

"No, it's just through phone."

"Ah?"

I couldn't help but raise my voice.

Due to mass coverage in the media, Shunsuke Ninomiya, Kouji Watabe, and Takayoshi Komuro moved away from this town, and their mothers remained hushed on this matter.

I thought Sayo might have something, but I never expected her to be this quick. As to be expected of this secret weapon.

“Eh, but they never revealed anything now. I tried various methods to call Takayoshi Komuro.”

“So how was it?”

“Eh, I failed.”

Sayo coldly stated,

“He wouldn’t say anything at all. He just insisted that he got bullied by Taku Sugawara, and drove Masaya to despair. He wouldn’t reveal why, and how the four of them got dominated. Till the very end, he was vague.”

“After that incident, Taku Sugawara was supervised. How did he coerce Masaya?”

“He said he didn’t know.”

“I see...”

“So I couldn’t keep asking. He seemed to be hiding something, but I’m not a police officer, and I can’t interrogate him. There’s something in the answer that left me curious though.”

“What?”

“Eh, I asked what’s his relationship with Masaya, and he was serious with that.”

Sayo said,

“An unshakeable friendship.”

“What do you mean?”

“Middle school kids like to beautify their relationships with others, I guess. It’s just that there seem to be something else to his words, so strange.”

So ended Sayo’s report. She never got down to the crux of the matter, but she managed to ask of their relationship.

But their words left me a little confused.

“Wasn’t Masaya’s friend Taku Sugawara...?”

“Hm? What do you mean?”

“That’s what my Mom said. That’s what Masaya told her excitedly last year.”

“Ah? No, but Kouta Katou never said anything about Masaya and Sugawara being friends, and the media never reported it, right?”

That should be the case. I was stunned to learn this fact.

What’s the relationship between Masaya and Taku Sugawara? Good friends others know of?

I pondered over the relationship between Masaya, Sugawara, and the other three.

“Hey,” Sayo called out.

“So? What did your Mom say, Sanae?”

Those words were direct, but very kind.

“You asked her about that incident, right? What did she say?”

“ ... ”

Of course, I couldn’t keep it a secret from Sayo, who had been helping me out, so I decided to explain to her. I didn’t go in order, and there was no basis, but Sayo listened to everything silently.

Mom’s disappointed in me, and pinned all her hopes on Masaya, but she never got to protect Masaya, was devastated, and had a deep grudge against Taku Sugawara—I expressed a lot of my feelings.

As I continued talking, I grabbed the towel firmly.

Once Sayo heard everything, she sighed,

“There’s definitely something wrong with that.”

That was the first thing she said.

“I don’t want to say too much about other parents, but this is really weird here. She actually said such a thing to her own daughter?”

“Don’t blame my mom. I know how she worked hard to make it here when I was still young.”

“But still...”

“It’s fine. I still love my mom.”

At that moment, I felt my eyes heat up. “Ah, damn it.” Even though I had this thought, I couldn’t stop my tears from flowing. I grabbed the towel I borrowed, and covered myself from the top. The tears were absorbed, but I still couldn’t stop crying.

Sayo called out worriedly. She couldn’t see me, and I kept shaking my head, saying,

“But I guess it’s a little hard to take. The more I investigate, the more I see. I see how outstanding Masaya was, even the Principal praised him, and the classmates too, and that’s why Mom’s personality changed greatly. As for me, I’m basically nothing.”

“Why blame yourself? Logically, the strange part should be your family.”

“Yeah. It’s probably caused by Masaya being too outstanding, and me being too useless.”

“No, your mom’s the biggest issue.”

Even though we’re bosom friends, even if it’s from Sayo, there are some words I don’t want to hear.

Sayo stopped talking, and I could hear her sigh from the receiver. It seemed she wanted to say something, but she gave up.

Even my good friend had given up on me.

“Sorry,” I apologized. “I’m a little drained. I don’t want to say anything.”

“Wait,” Sayo said. **“For what reason did you begin the investigations?”**

“For Mom and Masaya.”

“If your mom tells you ‘Kill Taku Sugawara’, what will you do?”

“...You’ve been overly protective of Taku Sugawara.”

I said something colder than I expected.

“For the time being, don’t call me.”

And so I hung up, engulfed in silence. I sat alone in the internet café suite.

I laid down on a large space, not moving at all. I didn’t have any drive to read manga, and didn’t want to switch on the computer. I tried to sleep in this little pocket of brown wooden boards. However, my brain kept running, and I repeatedly thought about the truth Mom told me.

I had an argument with Sayo.

I knew I was immature. Even at twenty one, I was still immature.

I switched off the lights, and closed my eyes, “Mom,” I muttered.

“I’m... not a good older sister.”

Sanae Kishitani lacks love. When did I have such a thought? When did I realize the difference in treatment between Masaya and me? Mom doesn’t love me, yet Masaya grew up in a loving environment. When did I start ignoring reality, that to earn my Mom’s love, I started pretending to

be a good older sister to Masaya? When did I become an older sister so lacking in love—an unfilial older sister?

I curled up in the single suite of the internet café bar like a little animal. I have no place to vent my frustrations, and slammed the wall, but nothing happened except for the pain in my hands. I could imagine opening my eyes to ten years back, but it didn't happen.

The tragedy I suffered kept multiplying endlessly.

Ahh, I hated this.

But the bad things just continued one after another.

And then, I was attacked by the 'biggest happiness'.

At eight pm, I left the internet café, and was attacked by somebody.

I shouldn't have chosen to leave this road with few people. However, I never expected to be strangled from the back, and smashed with an ice pick. I tried calling for help, but there was no one.

"Don't move. Don't make a sound. Don't resist."

It's a male who said this, no, a boy who's going through puberty. Sounded like a middle school boy, with a muffler wrapped around him, sounding vague.

He hooked my neck with his right hand, pressing the ice pick with his left hand, and grabbed me to a corner. I could only abide.

There was a silver needle shining at my neck, and the fear caused my rational mind to crumble.

Stop, will I die?

Like how Masaya died at the hands of others.

"Don't interfere. Break away from this."

The assailant said to my ear.

He shoved the tip of the ice pick to my eyeball, and threatened me.

"Don't obey, and I'll kill you. You're an eyesore."

Give up on the investigation.

This boy hinted to me. So, I instinctively blurted,

"Are you... Taku Sugawara?"

Behind me, he was shaking, and it seemed he was shaking. Maybe I was right.

The one behind me was Taku Sugawara?

The devil who drove Masaya to despair?

"I'm... not." However, he denied with a vague voice, "I'm not that trash. I'm the biggest happiness. I'm the biggest happiness. I'm a believer of happiness representing Japan, the school, the class. You're changing my position."

"Biggest happiness...?"

"Enough questions, or I'll really kill you."

He grabbed my neck, and I fell backwards, losing my balance. He swung his right fist at my belly.

Right in the solar plexus.

The sharp pain that came caused me to lose consciousness.

I laid on the ground, groaning, and he began kicking at my arms, knees, neck, waist, shoulders, and thighs, tormenting me over and over again.

It hurts! It's scary! Somebody save me!

No matter how I prayed for help, nobody would save me. As long as I intended to cry out loud, the assailant would use the weapon, so I could only let him attack me.

Once he saw that I was covered in bruises, "Goodbye, social cancer." He went away.

What's going on?

There's another mastermind other than Taku Sugawara?

I didn't know the situation at all.

The closer I got to the truth, I started to be hurt, I received a cat's carcass at home, I got into an argument, cried in sadness, and was attacked. Did I still want to continue figuring out the truth?

I had no idea at all.

What was he terrified of? Biggest happiness? Social cancer?

"I want to run away already... I don't understand at all. What should I do, Masaya?"

I couldn't get up due to the excessive pain, and laid on the road, thinking about it.

Suddenly, I received an SNS notification from my phone.

Who is it? I wondered as I checked, and found it to be someone unexpected.

“I know who the real culprit is. From Kotomi Ishikawa.”

The message was from the classmate who fell down the stairs three days before Masaya killed himself.

And also, this girl was Masaya's girlfriend.

Chapter 6 – Murder

I've decided to quickly explain this revolution.

It's a little tiring, but keep up with me.

During break, after finishing the meals that aren't too bad but not very good either, everyone would just do whatever they wanted.

I was always at a corner of the classroom, reading, so I never once paid attention to all my classmates. On a closer look though, I would find everyone doing all kinds of things happily.

Masaya, Ninomiya, and Watabe were playing poker cards with several girls, while Ishikawa was watching on from the side happily. Komuro was trying his best to copy Masaya's homework, the other girls were chatting away on the corridor, giving annoyed looks at Katou and the others as the latter talked about some degrading stuff. The more otaku oriented ones were discussing the anime airing that night, while calm people like me were reading.

What I wanted to express was that back then, I was not enraged.

When I attacked Masaya with the filled water bottle, I was not that agitated.

So once I made up my mind, I attacked Masaya with a swift, fluid motion when he turned his head around. Of course, it was to be expected; if I was really angry, I would have attacked him with a chair, and Masaya would even have been sent to the hospital. With my feeble muscles, I should have been able to do it.

In any case, it was due to kindness that I chose to attack with a water bottle, and left a bruise on Masaya's face.

"What's with you... Sugawara?"

Every classmate of mine stopped, and there was instantaneous silence in the classroom, with only Masaya remaining calm.

That really impressed me.

So I said, "This is really a good day."

In early November, I began my revolution.

Once I was done with the preparations, I attacked Masaya, as I had described.

And chaos came.

I explained to my class teacher-in-charge Toguchi-sensei, Masaya's mother, and the parents of the other three, and their lashing would have rendered me deaf. A few times Masaya's mother wanted to hit me.

In the center of the classroom, several adults surrounded me, agitated emotions lashing out.

Like a hare mistakenly entering a lion's den, I was left with a terrifying, pitiful experience.

But I never apologized.

I couldn't give up easily, for it's a revolution.

Everyone subjected me to ridiculous punishments, and during noon break, I had to go to every classroom in the school, to kneel down before everyone.

That day, I returned home at eight.

And before I slept, I finally met my father, who made it home.

He took off the heavy coat, took out a can of beer from the fridge, "Don't do anything stupid," and merely told me this.

Just that.

He never asked me anything.

Masaya's mother went berserk like Asura himself, and I was suspended from school for three days; including Saturday, I spent five days on break. During this time, I went to the school a few times, and visited the homes of Masaya, Ninomiya, Watabe, and Komuro.

"Get your parents here!" A few of them called out to me.

But I could only answer, "Please tell my parents yourself." I was not trying to fool them, I was being earnest; however, I got lashed at instead, and I appeared to have been thunderstruck.

I could understand this much.

The problem was that after suspension, I was forced to kneel before everyone.

(Is this the Edo Period!?)

During noon break, I went to kneel before every classroom, regardless of year. Is this permitted in education? MEXT, explain this!

...Well, that's to be expected.

After the first day of kneeling ended, I grumbled inside my heart, and finally gained peace. I patted hard at my dirtied knees and hair, and sighed.

The feeling of pity and condescension from strangers lingered in my heart. Everyone was having lunch happily, and I showed up with the teachers, my head grovelling onto the floor. Everyone was stunned, and unable to say anything; the curious looks became condescension. I never saw their expressions, but that, I felt, was the atmosphere filling the classrooms.

It's one thing for all the students to understand that bullying isn't right; at the same time, it's for everyone to know that I'm trash.

I guess this school won't have any bullying again. Congrats.

(Masaya's mom is really scary...)

I sighed, and heard Toguchi-sensei's voice. He's my teacher-in-charge, the adult who accompanied me as I kneeled.

"Hey, Sugawara."

The young teacher of approximately thirty years old scratched his head.

"You don't seem to have taken this hard..."

"Really?"

"No, it's not like I want to increase the punishment, but I'm curious. What are you thinking?"

"It's nothing. I'm just reflecting on how I bullied Masaya."

I never expected Toguchi-sensei to figure it out, so I tried my best to give an arrogant attitude, a mocking smile, and turned my eyes to a completely different direction.

At the very least, until the revolution ends, I can't open my heart to Toguchi-sensei.

So I mocked,

"Any worse? As long as I kneel down, things will end up well. Are you intending to get Masaya's mom here? I did visit her during my break, but her rage just increased."

"...Well, you're right."

Toguchi-sensei seemed to have given up, and sighed, hurrying back to the staff room. This teacher was criticized for being spineless and afraid of trouble, very unpopular amongst the students, but at this moment, I really was relieved by this.

When I returned to my classroom, I found my pencil case thrown into the dustbin.

It was very unnatural, and I figured it out on first glance. All the contents were spilled out, and thrown along with the pencil box, several mechanical pencils were sticking out from under the grey plastic bag.

I never expected it to begin so quickly.

I felt stares from all over the classroom, different from when I headed out to kneel before every classroom; there's a sense of justice. The proof is that several gazes are looking my way, and not averting. They showed no shame in their ugly inner hearts, and thought that throwing my pencil case was an act of justice.

It's nauseating.

"Is the Human Power Test that important...?" I muttered.

I thought as I glared back at them. I really had a lot to say.

You guys don't have the right to be trash. You're scum. You want approval from others? You want to be praised by Masaya? Or be one with the surrounding atmosphere? You throw away other people's stuff for some stupid reason? How many people have you harmed over the past fourteen years, harking on the term friendship you do not understand?

But it was pointless to tell them this. First, I don't care about these things; even if they're stupid, buffoons, so what? It's just my pencil case thrown away. Just a waste of a minute.

Real trash won't be hurt.

And that's what I saw during the initial phase of my revolution.

The revolution's proceeding unexpectedly well, you know?

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh, I'm tired!"

In any case, once I returned home, I yelled.

I attacked Masaya, faced Masaya's mother in the staff room, visited the victims during my break, kneeled before everyone, my class and school judged me; it's easy to write this, but every single event caused tremendous stress to my mental state.

I snacked on tidbits in the living room, soothing my tired soul. The baumkuchen I bought behind my parents' back was unexpectedly nice. I started peeling the layers and eating them; it's a unique

way of eating I came up with. I collapsed on the sofa. “Uuu,” I murmured. Even trash like me will have a mental collapse.

“I should say that I haven’t done anything decent in a while. My head hurts. They’re cruel. They just tortured this weak kid in the Heisei Era like this!”

Even so, I couldn’t give up.

If not, I would forever have the infamy of being ‘the guy who bullied four classmates and beat up a classmate with a water bottle’.

The die has been cast.

I can only continue on.

I decided to grumble before heading to sleeping, **“Beep.”** There’s a sound from the computer. I approached it, and found the message was from Sou. It’s the usual message.

“Hello, you hear me? Did anything interesting happen today?”

I didn’t intend to tell him “I was forced to kneel during noon break as punishment.” So I made a harmless lie. It’s very easy to make up a lie. My day’s basically the same schedule, almost a staple. Go to school, don’t pay attention in class, head to the library, and head home.

I couldn’t tell Sou about the bullying and incident, but I just wanted to discuss something a little more stupid with Sou.

“Oh yeah, I found that cooking meat buns in soup is nice. It’s easy to complete a Chinese dish.”

At this point, I only need a change of mood, so I started getting greedy, and made a stupid joke.

Just to note, I’ve never had meat bun soup. This should be enough to make a Chinese soup dish, right? I don’t know.

The conversation continued somewhat, and we chatted away,

“So, in that case, if you use red bean bun, it’ll become a red bean soup, right?”

“Really? Sounds like it’ll be really bland.”

“Try making it. I’m looking forward to your results.”

“You should try experimenting it yourself, Sou. This is despicable.”

I joked, and awaited his reply.

After a pause, Sou sent me a message,

“Anyway, why did you beat up Masaya Kishitani, Sugawara?”

At that moment, I stopped thinking.

I kept reading that message, and then checked through my chat log with Sou. There was proof that I had never revealed my personal information to him.

I felt thirsty immediately, and was unable to say anything.

But Sou kept sending messages to me on the computer.

“I apologize for saying this out of a sudden, but do you mind sharing this with me? I might be able to help you out. Why did you hit Masaya Kishitani? Why did you act so arrogant before Masaya Kishitani’s mother? How did you dominate the four students?”

What’s going on? I inadvertently explained,

“I know you, I have hopes for you, and I am worried about you, so please tell me your objective. Taku Sugawara, that classmate of yours called ‘I’ is Kotomi Ishikawa, right?”

I instinctively switched off the computer.

My breathing got hasty, and I frantically unplugged the computer internet cable before leaving the living room.

Why did that guy know me?

Who exactly was he?

I felt something breaking apart, and had an ominous premonition.

Just in time, the doorbell rang. It’s not my parents; it’s impossible for them to be home at this time.

Someone’s here.

With my heart pounding, I sneaked to the window, and peeked at the entrance.

The guy standing outside was someone I didn’t expect, someone I didn’t want to meet.

(Masaya...)

Masaya had a bandage on his face as he stood at the door. Seeing that figure, I backtracked, and wanted to leave the scene,

“Taku, you there?” he called out to me through the window, “Why did you do that? What did you intend to do?”

Masaya called out to me, and I covered my mouth, holding my breath.

But a genius is really scary, and Masaya seemed to have realized my presence. He turned the door handle, saw that it was locked, and said,

"I know you're hiding behind the door. If you don't want to come out, it's fine. But please, tell me, what is your aim?"

I couldn't answer.

And Masaya said,

"You don't have to kneel anymore. I never wanted you to do this. I'll tell everyone in class not to be so narrow-minded and throw your pencil case. This is all I came to tell you. Hey, say something already, please."

Even though he was being kind to me, I couldn't answer. Only silence engulfed us as we were separated by this three centimeter thick door.

"Hey, Taku..." Masaya muttered, "We're still bullies, right? Allies, right?"

"Yeah... but, sorry," I said. However, I was thinking that once everything ended, we could go out and eat together; of course, I couldn't just invite him out.

He's an ally member of the TakuMasa alliance.

But at this point, I couldn't be his good friend.

So after that, I chose to remain silent.

Several minutes later, Masaya still remained at the door, several times about to say something, then he finally gave up as he kicked the door in frustration, turning away to leave.

I closed my eyes, remaining at the corridor.

I had to keep torturing Masaya until the revolution ended.

For my own happiness.

I was worn out, and laid at the entrance; at this time, the doorbell rang again.

It was probably after about ten minutes or so, and I got wary again, wondering if it was Masaya again. I was curious as to who the visitor was and returned to the living room, and peered through the window; I saw the standard deep blue bag of our school, with a grey ribbon on it. Just the ribbon? There seemed to be something else tied to it. Yep, this seems familiar.

To see it clearly, I reached my head towards the window, and hit the glass accidentally. The visitor turned over upon hearing the hit, and our eyes met.

It's Kotomi Ishikawa.

This was the first possible timing. She was the one person I didn't want to see, more than Masaya. Things were going bad. The grey ribbon was a leftover of that doll. I couldn't pretend not to be at home, however, so I nodded and went to the entrance. At the dim entrance, I switched on the white fluorescent lights, unlocked the door, and it was shoved aside, almost eagerly. She ignored the entrance I would typically clean up, and rattled away.

"Why did Masaya visit you, Sugawara?"

She asked. It's a harsh expression I had never seen before, as though I was being interrogated over the sins of my past incarnation.

I averted her intense eyes, and said,

"Did he? I wasn't sure."

"You're lying. I saw Masaya leave your house, Sugawara. Please tell me. Why did Masaya come here?"

"...I didn't see him." I tried to be as careful as I could as I answered, "I ignored him. He was yelling outside the house, but I didn't know what he was yelling. Probably the New Testament."

"Masaya isn't a Christian."

Ishikawa's rebuttal sure was typical of her, and I was dumbfounded.

"Then it's probably the Old Testament."

"Again with that attitude... you'll get bullied, Sugawara."

It's a tone of pity and rage; over the fourteen years of my life, this was the first time I had heard such a strange way of speaking.

"Everyone hates your guts, Sugawara... because you beat up Masaya. So, please tell me honestly. This is my one request... did you really bully Masaya?"

"...I did. Komuro spilled the beans of what I did on the internet, and Masaya has to bear the responsibility, so I beat him up. That's how it is."

My tone was colder than I thought. However, what I said could never be taken back.

Ishikawa shook her head before me.

"That's a lie too. Even though I'm not smart, I know Masaya isn't the type to be bullied."

"In that case, why didn't Masaya deny it before the teachers and the parents? If he had said 'I wasn't bullied', I wouldn't have said anything. He never denied it, because he couldn't, because it's a fact. You should have asked Masaya, right? What did he say?"

When I rejected Ishikawa with words, I felt a sharp pain in my heart. I had a strong urge to apologize immediately and embrace her. I was mentally prepared, but I never expected being enemies with Ishikawa to be so painful.

While I was wondering if I made her cry, she unexpectedly gave me a slap. It was weak, but it was enough to send this weaker me sprawling on the floor.

Her breathing was as frantic as a wild animal as she looked down at me,

“Why... wouldn’t you tell me?”

Her eyes were filled with tears, and she lashed out at me,

“Please tell me honestly! What should I do!? Whose words do I believe? Please tell me the truth... or... I’ll have to bully you... Sugawara...”

“Shut up...!!!”

While on the floor, I retorted back with all my determination, pushing back Ishikawa and my first love with determination.

“Stop trying to act goody-goody and say what sounds nice already. What you see is just others; you don’t hate me, right? You’re just scared of being treated cruelly again, hoping to be accepted by the other students. Stop determining other people’s crimes with that kind of motive. Stop running away from reality!”

“—!!”

She let out a verbal sob when she heard those words, and looked down at me in tears. She appeared to have something to say, but she seemed unable to say anything.

I guess I was right. Such an obvious response helped me out; it’s because of this that I started the revolution.

This is fine, so I convinced myself. Even if I was hated by Ishikawa, I couldn’t get her involved. This would be fine.

I felt the cold from the marble floor, and to avoid her gaze, I looked towards the pottery plant at the entrance. The dark green leaves were shaking as I kept waiting for Ishikawa to leave.

Finally, Ishikawa said in pain,

“Please shut up... you don’t know the suffering others have. You won’t understand.”

“Maybe.”

“You aren’t reflecting on this at all right, Sugawara? You spilled ink on Masaya’s textbook... just like you cut up Masaya’s gym clothes in September... you kept bullying Masaya... you’re horrible.”

“...Eh?”

I turned back, and asked, but she had already left.

I wanted to give pursuit, but my train of thoughts couldn't catch up, and my body couldn't move for the time being.

Again, I was left alone on the corridor.

But unlike before, I had clear doubts in my mind.

“Did I spill ink on Masaya's notebook? Did I cut up his gym clothes?”

Those weren't me.

Some people did these behind my back. I recalled Masaya's anguished look.

Was I thoroughly mistaken about something?

Something laid hidden.

And was progressing to a place different from my revolution.

I have few wishes.

To fulfill these minimal wishes, I had to start this revolution.

To ease the burden of my friends.

Even if it's a little, I hoped to ease Ishikawa's burden.

I wanted to wreck the Human Power Test, and get happiness.

So I had such expectations as I started this revolution alone. And then, even if it wasn't at me, I hoped she would show a hearty smile again.

It's fine for us not to be loves.

Trash won't hope for such unrealistic things.

However, a month after I beat up Masaya, my wish wasn't fulfilled. Instead, it appeared before me in a twisted manner.

Even I wasn't sure of what happened during this time; I could deduce something from the known information and rumors, but deductions are just deductions. Of course, the one thing I could be certain of, was that the source of everything was me.

My revolution started creating turmoil, affecting various people; there's no doubt about this.

Ishikawa fell from the stairs, and lost consciousness.

Once I heard that news, I stopped thinking. However, the worst possible outcome happened three days later.

Masaya Kishitani killed himself.

When I heard of this through the phone call, I collapsed to the floor due to hyperventilation.

Ahh, please, just mock me.

Laugh at this shallow me.

This is the one thing you can do, my single hope.

For I look down on myself, more than anyone else.

So when you make fun of me, our emotions will become one, and we'll be a kindred soul.

Following this was the real hell.

Interlude 1 - Youtube 'TK's Easy Cooking' Freetalk on December 5th

TK: “Thank you for tuning in to TK’s cooking as usual. I have to apologize for this news though. While I have been introducing food recipes once every three days, I shall become a little busier due to work, and have to do so once a week. I do apologize greatly to all the audience.”

George: “I do look forward to seeing the 100-yen world cooking series. It’s a pity, but please do your best in your work. Anyway, what is your profession?”

TK: “It’s a secret. To do with education though...”

Himuhimu: “Is it about the Kuzegawa bullying and suicide incident?”

TK: “No, it’s just a coincidence. Just so happened to be of similar timing.”

George: “Thank goodness, I’m relieved. That scared me (laughs).”

Sou: “No, aren’t you the teacher-in-charge of the class in question? His name can be written TK as an acronym.”

TK: “It just happened to be a coincidence, right?”

Sou: “Once a week? Are you kidding? Your class has issues, and you have no intention to investigate. You’re just not concerned at all, devoted to your social website. Are you even a teacher?”

TK: “I said that you’re mistaken.”

Sou: “There are people who know your voice and fingerprints, and that’s enough. I’m going to report this to the media, and have you, the irresponsible teacher, be the number one enemy of Japan along with the cruel mastermind S.”

TK: “Are you kidding me!? Who are you!? That has nothing to do with me, right!?”

Sou: “You figured out something, didn’t you? You are the adult closest to them, and you couldn’t prevent the suicide.”

TK: “What could I do!? There wasn’t any bullying! No witnesses! No signs at all! It’s all that devil’s fault! I’m the victim!”

Sou: “You’re so incompetent, acting like an outsider. Farewell.”

Chapter 7 - The Final Puzzle Piece

It's an obvious action, nothing to be proud of, but I summoned my courage and replied to Kotomi Ishikawa.

Of course, I was scared of knowing the truth, and terrified of the assailant. Despite this, there was a reason why I couldn't give up. It's pessimistic, but I decided to begin investigations.

She was the first girlfriend Masaya made in life.

What did she see in that classroom? Why did she fall from the stairs?

Kotomi and I agreed on a time to meet.

I contacted her through SNS, but it seemed she really wanted to meet me, so we arranged a time for me to meet her at the hospital, and I visited her at a ward.

Her ward room was a nicely maintained single bed room. She was seated on the bed, and the whole room was completely white, like white pain; there was a suffocating feeling, but it emphasized more on her beauty. Strangely, the middle-length black hair and tense face was the same as before.

However, she did not have proper nutrition, probably as she had passed out for days, and lacked lots of flesh, giving a holy presence as a result. The youthful vibrance befitting her age when I met her had vanished, and she seemed exceptionally mature.

She sat on the sofa, holding a large Narcissus flower.

I entered the room, and she looked at me, smiling peacefully.

"Hello, Sanae."

Her tone is filled with pity and merciful love. It's so unlike a fourteen-year-old.

Surely she had learned that Masaya killed himself.

"To be honest..." she pointed at the chair, probably intending for me to sit, "I already recovered a long time back, but I wasn't allowed visitors. Isn't that too much, you think?"

"...You took a hard hit though, so that's to be expected, isn't it? There are still some parts unclear about the brain in medical research."

After hearing my answer, she answered, "I see, it's a blind spot!" She chuckled, and looked at her hands with a serious look,

"So... I had enough time, to sit here, to think of what happened till this point."

She was holding something in her hands. On a closer look, I found that it was a cellphone.

With an adorable look, she stroked her cellphone, saying,

"About the class, Masaya, Sugawara, the Human Power Test, and myself. Like an idiot, I was just thinking about friends. I was wondering, what would I do when I got shunned by others? If I can't catch up in topics or grades, and if I get bullied, what do I do? It's no wonder that Sugawara mocked me, "What you see is just others.""

"Are you familiar with him?"

"No, but before the incident happened, we talked a few times, rather in-depth. So I decided to follow Sugawara's words, ignore others, and take some time to think. After thinking about it for a while, I realized that Sugawara was caring for me through his own way."

"What else did you think of?"

"Like why Masaya pushed me down the stairs."

She put the cellphone to her chest.

"I'll tell you the truth, who actually killed Masaya. The sins Ninomiya, Watabe, Komuro, and I did."

There's no doubt Kotomi's one of the central group in the class; she's third in the Human Power Test, and her popularity's obvious (to note, of the thirty five in the class, Masaya's first, while Taku Sugawara was thirty fourth). Her cheerful personality was such that it wouldn't be discomforting to be with her; whenever anyone was with her, there wouldn't be a dampener.

However, when she expressed that a year ago, she was harassed by some girls. She accidentally showed her friends the Test Card of the Human Power Test, and due to her high rank, she was envied. Before the malice showed from the others, a certain popular person said something that easily solved this matter.

That popular person was Masaya. The both of them got on good terms and, two months later, they started dating.

I once asked about Masaya's girlfriend, and he looked really disgusted, but he did introduce his girlfriend to me. "She's good at easing the mood, so I guess she gets along with you well. She looks silly, but she really cares for others."

However, I could personally sense that the way she treated others was due to her past fear.

“So when Masaya started hiding things from me, I was really hurt. I was scared of being abandoned by Masaya, that I had to face the naked hatred by myself.”

Slowly, she said,

“I didn’t know what to do, and I vented my frustrations on the dolphin doll Masaya gave me... I was an idiot. It’s the precious doll Masaya gave me for our first date... but it really shocked me. Masaya, no, he, and everyone else, including Ninomiya, Watabe, and Komuro, all of them are hiding something from me, isolating me.”

“When was that?”

“About two weeks before Sugawara triggered that incident.”

“Do you know know what they hid from you?”

“Yes.” She nodded back at my question.

“I think Ninomiya, Watabe, and Komuro were bullying Masaya. To be exact, it’s Masaya and Sugawara.”

She slowly elaborated, and then, suddenly, she hastened her words,

“They bullied them behind everyone else’s back, without anyone realizing. It’s more convincing that Sugawara alone bullying four people, at least. Masaya’s gym clothes were definitely slashed thanks to them. I knew something was amiss, so they planned something.”

“...They had Sugawara attack Masaya, and let Sugawara be the scapegoat.”

“Yes, you’re right.”

She affirmed my words, and hastened her words as she said,

“The reveal on the internet was faked by them. After that incident, Sugawara and Masaya lost contact. Masaya started to act strange. Was it because those three’s bullying got out of hand? Was it because Sugawara, who was bullied, was isolated from everyone?”

“Good friends...” I muttered.

“After Sugawara beat up Masaya, I saw Masaya run over to Toguchi-sensei. Sensei didn’t have any enthusiasm, and only cared about himself, so surely he did ignore Masaya. But Masaya did ask others for help. He visited Sugawara once, keeping it a secret from his parent. I didn’t know what his objective was, but it’s enough to prove that he and Sugawara were once friends.”

“Hey, in that case, what sin did you commit?”

I asked, and she closed her eyes, stating the truth in pain,

“After Sugawara’s incident, I bullied him along with the rest of the class... everyone threw his pencil case, and badmouthed him right in front of him. They added rubber scraps to his meal, and hid the homework he was going to submit.”

With tears in her eyes, Kotomi hugged at the white blanket, shivering.

She continued to confess her sin,

“Back then, I didn’t know what to do... I didn’t know what to believe. For Masaya, no, Sugawara may be angry if he hears this. My mind’s just thinking of how to improve my ranking in the Human Power Test, how not to let it slide, so I punished Sugawara, to him, who used to be Masaya’s friend—”

“...”

“And that’s why Masaya pushed me down the stairs, maybe because I bullied the one person who could have been Masaya’s emotional support.”

Finally, she cried and exclaimed,

“That’s why I feel that I caused Masaya’s death. I never realized the truth to this, and drove him to despair. Ninomiya, Watabe, and Komuro all bullied Masaya, and I bullied Masaya’s friend—that’s the truth to this.”

In my mind, I reflected upon her anguished confession.

Suddenly, I had a thought in my mind. Right, a thought. No matter how contradicting it was, how shocking it was, there was something unsurprising yet unimportant.

I looked at her.

And then, I said, “You have the courage to admit your sin.”

She wiped her tears, feeling confused.

“Eh? What do you mean?”

“Ah, no, I just feel that you’re different from others. There’s the Principal who started this strange education system, Masaya’s mom who’s always next to me, and the classmates who should have noticed the bullying; nobody wants to admit their responsibility in the matter. Eh, whether they do have responsibility, I’m not sure.”

All of them pushed the responsibility to Taku Sugawara and stated their innocence by saying “I don’t know.” But she didn’t.

With a firm will, she opened her eyes, and held my hand firmly, stating the truth.

She didn't try to be a goody-goody before me, but instead, she analysed the situation in an abnormally calm manner.

Upon hearing my words, Kotomi chuckled.

"Someone told me 'not to run away.'" It's the first time she showed such a kind smile, "Don't care about how others look at you and forget the real important thing. So I decided not to run away. I can't run away from reality anymore; I won't run away from the fact that I doomed Masaya."

"Who said that to you?"

"My master."

"What do you mean?"

Kotomi seemed bemused, and smiled.

"Sugawara."

With a blushing face, she said,

"Surely Sugawara wanted to tell me something important."

She again held her cellphone, and tossed it to the ceiling. It spun in the air, and landed on the bed.

I imagined Sugawara in my mind. The unpopular guy the Principal talked off, the devil child mom said, the unimpressive student his classmates said, and the sage-like existence she said. Which one was it? Which one was the real him?"

"Don't run away." Sugawara once said this.

Ah, that was the case. I couldn't just run away. Even this girl who's younger than me by seven years figured out the cruel truth through her own hypothesis, that "I'm the killer."

So, I—

"Hey, Kotomi, let me figure out the truth first. What you just mentioned, like the teacher being unenthusiastic, Masaya discussing it with the teacher, after the incident, Masaya visited Sugawara at his house, that after the incident, you all bullied Sugawara. It was Masaya who pushed you down the stairs. That's a fact, right?"

I lined up the facts I had known for the first time, got Kotomi's affirmation, and jotted it down in my notebook, comparing it to what I heard.

"E-Erm." With a worried look, Kotomi asked, "Was my deduction wrong somewhere?"

"I don't know. But I've decided not to run away, and keep fighting on. Let me continue investigating this a bit; there's something very suspicious in your deduction, Kotomi, about how

'Masaya was bullied'. Hey, how is it possible to control that genius? I'm not boasting, but Masaya's capable of fighting and studying. It's a little difficult for others not to realize."

"That is a blind spot... let me think."

"Let's think of this another way, maybe he was threatened. There was a 'prevent eavesdropping' search record in Masaya's computer, so he's definitely scared of something. Do you have a clue?"

"Eh, I remember he has something he's hiding from me, but I'm not sure what it is..."

Saying that, Kotomi lowered her head.

"Sorry, I don't have definite proof. I can't be a famous detective."

"No, I didn't really have any hopes for the evidence... this is different from a murder or theft, there won't normally be any traces or murder weapon left behind."

"I see, that makes sense. This is a blind spot."

"Is that your mantra?"

I chuckled. What Kotomi said left me curious.

'Blind Spot'? A possibility of being excluded?

Th-there's not just one? Blind spots nobody thought of?

I flipped through my notebook before Kotomi, and checked through all the intel I had.

Even if there wasn't any conclusive evidence, it was fine. I could deduce the current situation through imagination and logic.

Grades, popular person, Taku Sugawara's family conditions, prevent eavesdropping, unenthusiastic class teacher, no signs of bullying, the PTA vice president infamous for being a monster parent, friendship—

I started to slowly understand the environment Taku Sugawara and Masaya were in.

All kinds of elaborate plot became the truth, floating to the surface.

"—!" I shrieked.

It was a bone-chilling truth, the demonic truth.

I didn't think it was a coincidence. It was a completely perfect dominion.

"Sanae, your phone's ringing."

Right when I had a hypothesis,

I could hear a familiar ringtone from my bag. I never noticed it at all.

“You can pick up the call here. They allow people to use phones here.”

I was grateful to Kotomi for telling me this, and picked up my phone. It’s from Sayo.

“You got a park near your house, right? Hurry there.”

With a stern tone, she said,

“Taku Sugawara’s there now.”

“I’ll be right there.” I answered, and hung up.

Next to me, Kotomi showed a curious look, so I said to her, “I’m going to meet Sugawara.”

She probably realized the seriousness from the words, and nodded towards me, pointing at the Narcissus by her bedside. The white flower was blooming brightly, and the ward room had a faint fragrance lingering.

“It’s from Sugawara. He asked the nurse to give it to me.”

And then, she held my hand.

“Please unravel all the mysteries. I too want to know why Masaya died. Why did Sugawara beat up Masaya? Once everything is clear, please guide them, let Masaya die in peace, and Sugawara be happy.”

I didn’t need her to remind me that.

I held her hand back, and left the ward room.

†

There was a mistake in Kotomi’s deduction.

So, it’s time to clear up everything.

I had to meet Masaya’s killer, and personally talk to him.

Since the revolution has yet to end, I’ll end it right there.

†

Taku Sugawara just so happened to be seated at the bench Masaya and I used to sit at.

It’s a spacious park with a large grassy place, and during the holidays, kids would come to play baseball. There’s a large playground at the higher-up place, and at the back, I could see a wilting Sakura tree. There’s rubbish thrown into the lake, and the plastic bottles floated on the surface like a boat.

The scenery before me was completely dyed orange.

It's a really pretty evening hue.

The orange light tenderly wrapped around me, engulfing this world. It's the park I'm so familiar with, but it just didn't seem to fit in.

For Taku Sugawara appeared right before my eyes.

How could I describe my first impression of Taku Sugawara?

It's different from the impression others had described.

Of course, as they had said, his appearance wasn't impressive, and he's not tall. He seemed weak, a lot gloomier than I thought. He had the appearance of an ordinary middle school student; this simple describe aptly fit him.

But even so, there was some pressure from him, unlike his appearance. He came here with some determination, or maybe it was because I was feeling tense.

At the very least, I couldn't help but gasp.

Those were the feelings I had when I met Taku Sugawara.

Taku Sugawara was seated on the bench by the park, looking at me.

"You're Masaya's older sister, right? Both of you look alike."

He said before I could speak up.

"Yeah," so I could only answer.

He averted his eyes from me, his upper body leaning forward as he started to speak. His voice was a little deep; perhaps his voice was breaking.

"I don't have anything else to say. I bullied him and drove him to suicide. Looks like you're investigating the truth to this matter, but this is the truth. I do feel sorry to you, his older sister, but have another way to redeem myself, so that's it for today, right?"

"But Sayo told me 'You're going to tell me everything.'"

"Sayo? Oh, the tall one? Sorry, I change my mind. There's nothing much to say."

"Tell me. I'm not going to run away from the truth."

"Like I give a damn about you."

He was arrogant, speaking with uppity. No wonder mom didn't like him at all.

" ... "

But it's all an act. He didn't sound like what his classmates said about him, and looking closely, he seemed really stiff. He's just an ordinary middle school boy acting tough.

So, I said; to fish out the truth from him, I told him the answer I got,

"You were the one bullied, right? By Masaya Kishitani, Shunsuke Ninomiya, Kouji Watabe, and Takayoshi Komuro, the four of them."

I linked all the clues together, and that was the only answer I had.

"And it wasn't just bullying. It's perfect. Four vs one, let's not talk about that. Nobody else realized, there's no records in the emails, they were careful about not being eavesdropped, and your actions were controlled during that time. While you did try to report the bullying, your parents aren't interested in their child, and the class teacher has no motivation. If the report succeeded, you'd be facing the monster parent, the PTA vice president, and then the most popular in class, nobody else would stand on your side. You're alone, so everything's pointing to you. It's perfectly layered planning... no, so perfect that it was basically calculated."

I said.

The strange force that did whatever it did from behind the back, the true identity would be—

"The devil was—Masaya Kishitani."

"..."

"Tell me, how did you fight against the devil? What happened between you and Masaya?"

I stated my hypothesis, and for the first time, Sugawara's expression showed a change. The condescending look vanished, and he looked up at me with shock.

His mouth moved twice, thrice, becoming an inaudible cry. He suddenly started covering his mouth, and coughed, shaking all over like a clock. He then fell from the bench, panting hard.

He finally smiled happily. "You've passed," he said.

However, he never told me the significance of those words.

Once his breathing eased, he said,

"Please give me some time to buy some cocoa. I'll tell you the rest later."

There's no doubt he had a smile on his face.

But something was amiss. That smile was way different from 'an ordinary middle school boy'. That expression could only be described as 'evil'.

And this was the final step.



Chapter 8 – Judgement

Starting from the day after Masaya killed himself, I hid in my room.

I left my room several times, explaining the situation to the visiting Toguchi-sensei and various people. I did explain, but all I could only say was basically “I don’t know.” And continue to act. I had to keep up the arrogant impression, and had to go all out. “I was watched. There’s no way I have anything to do with the suicide,” I said, and got punched by my dad, the blood in my mouth spreading.

However, it was indisputable that there was no proof.

I might as well reveal everything now, I guess? Show my hand with regards to the revolution.

A few times I had such a thought, but the answer was always “No.” I didn’t think the people around me would trust me.

Thus, I could not do anything, and kept hiding in my room until times when I had to go out. I sealed my window sills tight, but I still couldn’t calm down, and sealed up the gaps with tape, ducking under my blanket.

I could only shiver.

It was hell.

My parents were yelling at each other, quarreling downstairs.

The TV in my room showed the news, describing me as the ‘demonic middle school boy’, who dominated four people, and while being watched, one of them was driven to despair.

“No... I’m just some worthless trash.”

There seemed to be a group of media personnel gathered before my house. I peeled the tape slightly, poked my head out from the window, and shivered when it seemed I met them in the eyes. Ah, speaking of which, the aunts living nearby seemed to be saying on TV, “He’s a gloomy one. I can’t tell what he’s thinking.” Enough with that nonsense. How is anyone living nearby able to understand me?

They knew nothing of the Human Power Test, Masaya’s talents, and my revolution.

“Damn it. I need to keep on living... I will be mocked by anons, but I’m going to be gleeful trash...”

I couldn’t admit defeat. Didn’t I already decide that no matter the sacrifices, I’m going to keep on going and become real trash?

However, the last punishment Masaya dealt to me was way too heavy.

All of Japan had been cursing me to “Die”.

I panted heavily on the bed, and at this moment, the smartphone on the table rang. That smartphone would only be used to contact my parents, so I was wondering who it was. I leaned forward, and picked it up.

The sender was Sou. Ah, right, I did send him my email address.

“I was worried as you weren’t online. Eh, is this the revolution you wish of?”

“NO!”

I yelled. I tapped hard at the keys, and sent him a message.

“This isn’t the revolution I wanted. I wanted a different outcome. I never expected Masaya to kill himself.”

And he immediately messaged me back, as though on a chat.

“...I suppose. I know you aren’t the type who would really wish for others to do. However, you are the one who caused this. Do you understand?”

“Shut up.”

“To be honest, I am disappointed. I had hopes for you, hoping that you would discuss this with me one day, but it ended up this way. You made the prodigy Masaya Kishitani kill himself, and that Kotomi Ishikawa you like is in a coma.”

“I said to shut up.”

“Hey, Sugawara, as you said, you aren’t the last in the Human Power Test, right? In other words, someone voted for you. Do you know that person might be Kotomi Ishikawa? Do you have anyone else who voted for you?”

“Shut up, shut up. Stop talking like you understand my predicament.”

“She’s bound by the Human Power Test, and really envied you for not caring about others. She worshipped you, had hopes for you. You betrayed her, and she fell into a coma.”

Sou continued to send messages.

“You disappoint me, Sugawara.”

I threw my phone to the wall, and it let out a weak thud, with a little dent on the wall as it bounced back. The battery slipped out, and landed on the floor, but other than that, the phone remained undamaged. It’s due to me being weak.

I took a few breaths, and took out two bubble gums from the can on the table, popping them into my mouth. I leaned on the table, closed my eyes, found the scattered phone and battery, reassembled them, and sent a message to Sou.

“You know something, don’t you? Why did Masaya die? Say something. Who are you? Answer me? What did you do to Masaya? Did you kill him?”

Ever since I started interacting with this guy, everything changed. Surely he knew something.

But his reply was aloof.

“You seem to be mistaken. I have nothing to do with this. Even if you do shift the blame to me, the situation will not change for the better.”

And the message ended off with this,

“But I do suppose my interaction with you shall come to an end, Sugawara. I do apologize, I never had any intention of breaking up your peaceful lifestyle, and it is my fault for being unable to build up trust with you. Farewell. The interaction till this point had been enjoyable.”

After I saw the message, I sent a few more back, but there was no response.

Sou left me.

That night, the house was really noisy, and later on, I realized my parents had left in the night.

It was only the following morning that I realized they had abandoned their son and ran away. There was a letter with printed words on the table, and I spent a lot of time to realize this. Like dinner, I was in charge of preparing breakfast, so the first thing I did was to head to the kitchen. I popped the bread into the toast, mixed eggs and bacon on a frying pan, and brewed some red tea. My parents still did not wake up, and I was skeptical, until I found that letter.

The content of the letter was simple.

They took leave from their companies, and left this house. There’s a week of household fees for me, and they hoped I wouldn’t leave the house, and not contact their companies.

“...They abandoned me.”

I muttered. It seemed they wanted to leave everything to me. I caused it all, so I could understand their pain. But they left without saying a word; would parents do this?

Even my parents abandoned me.

“Those two wouldn’t listen to me in the end...”

And the empty house was like a prison.

My appetite worsened. As I kept thinking about the incident, my gut would feel a heavy pressure. I tried eating several times, but I would vomit.

But even while living this life, my mind was exceptionally active.

So, without anyone noticing, I sneaked out of the house in the middle of the night, through the back door, and went to a certain place.

I came to my destination, and pressed the doorbell several times, kicking at the door. An unfamiliar, ugly, fat middle aged lady came to open the door, and I shoved her aside, storming into the house. I didn't care that I was an intruder.

"Kouta Katou!"

I yelled with all my might.

"Get out here! You're here right!?"

Kouta Katou, dressed in pajamas, came from his room, and the stunned face immediately broke into timidity, so I grabbed him by the chest, and he howled sheepishly.

I shoved him to the door.

"You were the one who harassed Masaya, right?"

After the violence, someone poured ink onto Masaya's notebook. I had been thinking on who the culprit was, and finally thought of the one person stupid enough to do this.

"You thought I wouldn't notice? You thought that you could use that time to push all the blame to me, right?"

But Kouta Katou shook his head to deny,

"No-not at all. Enough with that nonsense. Th-that was you, right, Sugawara?"

"I never approached Masaya's table that day. Everyone in class was watching me, so I know every well. Also, it's a brand different from me."

"I-I'm the same! Look at my calligraphy bag, it's a different brand!"

Once I heard those words, I punched Katou in the face. His mother standing by the side let out a short shriek, but I didn't care.

Katou collapsed to the floor, and I stomped my foot on his head.

"I never said that it was 'ink', idiot!"

Such a guy should be thoroughly punished.

I wanted to vent all my rage on Katou, but his mother shielded him, "I'm calling the police!" she sobbed and yelled. I wanted to smash the phone in the living room, but I held back.

This guy's unimportant.

I shoved Katou's mother aside again, kicked Katou once, and turned to leave. At this moment, I noticed that I came in with sneakers on.

Really, staying in this place will only cause my IQ to drop.

So I thought, but someone suddenly called out to me.

"Sugawara! No matter what nonsense you pull, you're doomed!"

It's Kouta Katou. I intended to leave, so he thought he had the upper hand, and began boasting at me.

"Everyone will think that you did it! Sure is nice to bully Masaya here without any risk! If anyone discovered that it's me, I'm going to declare that I was threatened by you! You're the devil middle schooler!"

"Oh, so student A who revealed everything to the media was you?"

I turned around, saying this.

Katou leered.

"I only did it once! Masaya wasn't doomed by me! No matter what, it's you who doomed Masaya! You murderer!"

I'm a killer.

But then, do you dare to say that you have nothing to do with Masaya's death?

I didn't intend to continue lecturing Katou. I had lots to say to him, but like me, he's dumb, and he wouldn't understand no matter how much I tried explaining to him, and even if he did, it's pointless.

So all I did was to divert my rage. All I did was to be furious at Katou.

"So, foolish creatures wouldn't know how to safeguard against eavesdropping, right?"

I threatened, and took my smartphone out from my pocket.

The blood drained from his face immediately, and later, he lost strength as he collapsed to the floor.

"Good for you that you have your mom comforting you."

I mocked, and turned to leave Katou's house.

Skin was torn as I swung my right fist into Katou's teeth. I stroked it, and returned home under the winter sky. I didn't feel that I had won; just letting my rage explode caused me to feel more devastated. On the way back, I puked. I leaned on the traffic signboard, trying to let myself calm down.

"Damn it..."

Actually, I did not record it, I just threatened him. I was too naïve after all; only going to his house to throw a tantrum. I was downhearted at how useless I was.

But even if I did record, all the blame would be shifted to me. Nobody would believe that a single harassment would drive Masaya to despair, and nobody would seriously look at the evidence I might provide.

The one who doomed Masaya was undoubtedly me.

I'm trash.

Once I got home, I found that my beloved classmates had sent me a message. It's been a while since I checked through this, so only at this point did I find it.

The opening was basically something only the class knew of, and this proved that it wasn't a prank.

There were thirty lines or so in the main text, all of them writing the same thing, with different handwritings.

"To the devil who killed Masaya, die."

The letter's filled with such words.

It contained the wrath of my thirty two classmates, excluding Masaya, Ishikawa, and me.

I used it to wipe my nose, rolled it into a ball, and threw it into the trash.

Other than Katou's house, I would head out alone.

I couldn't eat at all in the day, and after sunset, I felt really hungry. During such moments, I would head out. My own deduction was that "young man lacking calcium intake", "lacking iron", and various things that resulted in excessive stress, so I went out to the convenience store, and pair my purchases with some Kanto food or simple dishes. Most of the time, I would eat by the road, for whenever I went home to eat, I would end up puking.

The one place I really liked to be at was the top of the overhead bridge.

This road was basically the pulse of our city, and even at midnight, several cars were passing through. Eating hot food on this overhead bridge was unique, to say the least.

I looked afar at the long road my eyes couldn't see, and prayed that I could escape everything. For I didn't have the courage to kill myself.

Alone in the darkness, I stared at the headlights of the cars, and filled my stomach.

The cold of December left me thoroughly shivering to the bone.

After seven days, I finally took action.

A week of agony passed, and I decided to start the revolution again. There was no other choice, and if I made another choice at this point, the price I paid would be for naught.

And thus, it's because of the price I paid that I couldn't give up.

I gave up on myself. I was already in a self-destructive mindset.

"The whole world's my enemy, but so what? I'm judged with the death penalty by all people, described as a psychotic by the media, abandoned by my parents, rejected by my friends, cursed by my classmates to 'die'. But, nobody stood on my side in the first place... nobody on this world will love me... who do I think I am? This is the real me."

Masaya had no qualms sacrificing his life to destroy my revolution.

So I decided to move to the next phase—the 'second revolution'.

This time, I would bet on my life, and change this world.

"Hey, Masaya. I'm going to continue fighting against you."

That was a painful choice.

A single middle schooler couldn't do much.

At this point, my plans were all ruined by Masaya, or rather, they were overturned on me. My words would only be empty excuses, and most importantly, the one I intended to take action against vanished, greatly affecting the revolution.

Masaya Kishitani's plan was more perfect than before.

Over these three days, I drank fifty six cups of red tea, and chewed on fifty three bubble gums. I didn't try to act cool and learn smoking, only because I'm trash with insufficient guts.

I boiled hot water to brew the fifty seventh cup of red tea, and slowly repeated my thoughts.

As I had not been cleaning up every day, the rubbish in my room was all scattered as I kept writing with a ballpoint pen.

I kept revising the plan and reflecting on it, thinking.

But in such a precarious predicament, I couldn't do anything, and at most, I could only send a cat carcass and a strange prelude to Masaya's mailbox. I didn't want to meet Masaya's mother again, but without eliminating 'her' as the great threat, the plan probably wouldn't succeed.

And so, about two weeks after Masaya killed himself, there was a great chance in the second revolution.

It was when I was eating potato chips on the bridge at night.

A lanky woman appeared before me again.

"Yo, Takkun."

It was the woman I met at the food court before, and if I remembered correctly, her name was Sayo. As a female, she's exceptionally tall, taller than my dad. It was the first time I met someone so suited to be dressed in a rider suit. She showed up on the bridge, and not on the road. That alone seemed so out of place.

We had met before, but she called out a strange name. Maybe she was mistaken.

"Who's Takkun? I don't have that name."

"I know. You're Taku Sugawara, right? That's why you're Takkun."

It was very strange, but there was something more important. So I couldn't help but shrink back.

She knew my name.

I didn't know how much she knew about me, but it's way too dangerous now that she knew my name.

"So I know everything that happened in your class. But relax, I don't know the truth to the matter; all I know is that I know nothing."

Saying that, she quickly reached her hand out and grabbed my collar. I was easily grabbed, probably due to my poor athleticism. I tried hitting at her hand, but I was forced into a different position, and pressed onto the railing of the bridge.

A second later, an icy metal feeling entered my chest through my clothes.

It wasn't a situation where I could relax at all.

"What is it?" I lowered my voice, "Want some extras? There's some potato chips on the ground."

"Who's going to eat that? What did you do to Masaya Kishitani? What is the 'revolution'? Just tell me."

Ah, I realized immediately. She's telling me off too. She once encouraged me, but at this point, she's questioning me for my sins.

Damn it, I'm way too sad.

Everyone chose to leave me. Nobody was willing to stand by my side at all. Once I realized this, I felt sadness within. So trash really have it difficult to survive? Was it that tough?

I felt like sobbing. I bit my lips and stomped hard at Sayo's foot. However, she held me down with more force, not faltering.

Damn it, damn it, damn it.

"I SAID EVERYTHING. I BULLIED THEM ALL!" I yelled, "MASAYA HAS TO BEAR THE RESPONSIBILITY OF REVEALING EVERYTHING ON THE INTERNET, SO I SMACKED HIM WITH THE WATER BOTTLE. I KEPT DRIVING AT HIM, AND DROVE HIM TO SUICIDE. HE DESERVES IT!"

I could no longer stop.

Whether it's the plan, or the revolution. I gave up on everything else, and just yelled.

Because all of Japan hoped for it, right?

Is this happiness?

"BULLYING'S AN INVENTION THAT SPANS THROUGH CIVILIZATION! NO NEED FOR DREAMS AND COUNTRY FATES, JUST LOCK THIRTY YOUNG PEOPLE INTO A SAUNA! IT'S AN ANTIDOTE TO THE BORING DAYS! WITHOUT EXCITEMENT, HUMANS CAN'T LIVE!"

Damn it, damn it, damn it.

"MOTIVE? JUST JEALOUSY! MY FIRST LOVE WAS MASAYA'S GIRLFRIEND! THAT GUY'S THE POPULAR ONE! IT'S NO WONDER I HAVE HIM AS A TARGET! IT'S CALLED A REVOLUTION! ISN'T IT COOL!? IT'S A FLAWLESS, PERFECT CRIME!"

Damn it, damn it, damn it.

"SO I'M GOING TO CONTINUE WITH REVENGE! I'M NOT GOING TO FORGIVE MASAYA'S MOTHER! SHE FORCED ME WITH THE STUPID PUNISHMENT TO KNEEL BEFORE EVERYONE! NO WAY WILL I FORGIVE SUCH SCUM! I'M NOT GOING TO FORGIVE KOTOMI ISHIKAWA FOR LIVING ON! EVERYONE'S UNFORGIVABLE! EVERYONE CAN DIE FOR ALL I CARE!"

“Takkun, enough.”

Sayo said by my ear. As she changed her position, I regained my senses immediately. She embraced me, from top to bottom.

I could feel her head pressing on my chest. Due to the rider suit, I couldn't feel the body warmth, but I could feel her hands hugging me.

“That's enough. There's no way you could have bullied others...”

She seemed to be forcing her voice out.

“I spoke with Takayoshi Komuro over the phone. Surely he's at fault. It's just that those watching the news couldn't tell, and the police and teachers with the evidence couldn't tell, but in any case, you're not the one in the wrong.”

“What do you mean... it's illogical.”

“It's not a question of logic, but what I can feel. Ahh, this is nuts; it's the sixth sense. I don't think someone who would whimper away due to rejection would be the devil who drove his classmate to suicide.”

Surely there are such people in the world, I thought, but I couldn't say it out loud. I couldn't say anything. And for some strange reason, I wanted to cry. But I wouldn't cry. When I launched the revolution, this was what I decided on.

I didn't resist, and I continued to stand on the bridge. With Sayo embracing me, I looked down at the vehicles driving under the bridge, accelerating away as though they ignored me. The bridge we were on was shaking.

After some time, and though reluctant, I nudged Sayo's arms away. I'm no longer a kid; no way could I keep relying on her.

“You're still a kid. You can keep relying on me.”

Sayo said, as though reading through my thoughts.

I shook my head.

“I'm fourteen. My voice is breaking, and I can masturbate.”

“You sure like your dirty jokes.”

Sayo chuckled.

“Mind telling me what happened?”

“Why?”

“Masaya’s older sister is investigating this. I’m her assistant.”

She’s called Sanae, right? I remembered Masaya mentioning her a few times. Whenever he talked about his sister or mother, he would keep on going.

Considering the possibility of the revolution, I probably should meet her, but there’s a risk for some strange reason.

“I won’t talk, and you won’t believe me anyone. Any idiot who believes my words wholeheartedly will only pull me down.”

“Pull down what?”

“My revolution.”

“Then tell Masaya’s sister yourself. No way she will believe you. She’s not going to give up until she gets an acceptable answer. She’s a little timid now, but I believe she’ll pull herself through again.

“...She’s scared of something?”

“Well... I don’t know. She seemed to be hiding something. If I keep ignoring this, she might take revenge on you. You know about Masaya’s mother too, right? Tell me the truth, trust me.”

She smacked her chest with her fist. Sayo’s brilliant smile was before me, and I could hear the thumps and rubs of the rider suit. She seemed to be encouraging me.

I stared at her earnest look, and thought of a few plans. However, due to my prior agitation, my mind couldn’t work well. With her prompting me, “Alright,” I couldn’t help but say.

Given that Sayo said this much, I could only meet her.

Sanae Kishitani, the older sister of the victim I drove to suicide.

Of course, I understood the meaning of this.

Please laugh out loud and mock me.

I drove my friend to despair, got hit by my first love, abandoned by my parents, cursed by my classmates ‘to die’, and even abandoned by my internet friend, and the whole of Japan wanted to judge me with the ‘death penalty’.

But when embraced by a woman, my heart weakened. How foolish I am. I should be lambasted for being a perverted middle schooler.

And thus, I was betrayed by the one I trusted.

The next day, I was on the bench.

I gave Sayo two conditions.

Once, she had to keep this a secret until I met her.

Second, I would decide the time and place.

So, around four pm, I went to a park a five minute walk away from Masaya's house. If there were no hiccups, Sanae would be here.

"She might be the last puzzle."

I fiddled with my earphones as I pondered. Unlike the event at the bridge on the prior day, my thoughts had calmed down greatly.

I couldn't embarrass myself again. I had to face this calmly.

And then, let the second revolution succeed.

"And there's something I want to ask her."

There was just one doubt I had.

There was something Ishikawa said that I couldn't figure out. I thought it was Katou, but it seemed I was wrong.

In September, Masaya's gym clothes were slashed.

Of course, that wasn't me, and that wasn't Ishikawa.

According to what I heard from Toguchi-sensei, before the fifth period, Masaya took out his gym clothes, and found that they had been slashed by something sharp. I was at the library, so I wasn't a witness. I could determine however that there were only a few people who could take out Masaya's gym clothes from his bag, cut it up, and put it back. It's completely different from spilling ink onto a notebook.

College students were still on summer vacation in September, and many returned home.

Sayo said that she was hiding something.

So I had to get this clear.

Was the one who cut up Masaya's gym clothes Sanae?

There were footsteps behind me.

And this was the final step.

Interlude 2 - LINE: Group of Class 2-1 ☆ December 16th – 18:25.

—Kanda Setoguchi joined invited Taku Sugawara into the chat—

—Taku Sugawara has joined the chat—

Ayaka: Go die already, Sugawara.

Konoha: Die.

Hanaka: Go kill yourself. Die die die.

Sunuu: What are you saying now? That's disgusting.

Morii: Ahh, it's because of you that we're even bombarded on the internet.

Morii: That we as classmates ignored the bullying. You can go ahead and die.

Kouta: How's Kotomi doing now?

Kouta: still in a coma?

Honoka: Probably. If she's still in a coma, Sugawara's really trash.

Taku Sugawara: Did you blackmail Masa with something?

Jun: Probably? How's that disgusting creep capable of killing Masa then?

Yuki: you killed our friend. Don't think we're going to let you off.

Youki: Say something already, Kouji, you guys

Ayaka: Not now.

Sunuu: They already deleted their accounts. Couldn't contact them.

Honoka: Shunsuke should still be in the room, just not talking.

Honoka: Say something already, Sugawara.

Taku Sugawara: So, you got me to join...

Taku Sugawara: What?

Hanae Lala: Die. "What?" To hell with that.

Jun: Kill yourself right now, you murderer.

Nanoe: Die.

Miharu Furuta: Just die already.

Taku Sugawara: Hey, why wasn't Masaya saved?

Ayaka: Haaa?

Sunuu: Don't get you.

Ayaka: Die die die die die die die

Taku Sugawara: Answer me.

Kanda Setoguchi: Hm? Why do we have to answer you?

Konoha: Don't get cocky here.

Taku Sugawara: Why did Masaya die? Nobody else knows?

Hanae Lala: Murder, just shuuuuuutttttttt uppppppppppp

Yuki: Answer me (haah) trying to act cool there LMAO

Morri: Just kill yourself right now.

Taku Sugawara: Ahh, I see. A bunch of idiots you guys are, so no wonder none of you answer my question. Masaya killed himself, and you just keep going 'die'.

Konoha: You're the dumb one. How much did you get for your English?

Jun: Just to ask, what's your rank for the Human Power Test? You're a loner with social disorder.

Taku Sugawara: None of you guys figured out the truth. You guys don't want to face the cruel truth, just repeating the same scolding. A bunch of retards, the lot of you.

Ayaka: Go to the hospital already.

Youki: And kill yourself.

Sunuu: Masaya killed himself because of your bullying. That's what Masaya wrote on his will. Why Is it our fault now? Are you mentally retarded?

Kanda Setoguchi: It's because someone like you don't understand 'friendship', Sugawara.

Taku Sugawara: I know, it means corporal punishment executed in groups, through words, right?

Kanda Setoguchi: You're wrong.

Taku Sugawara: What's wrong with that?

Taku Sugawara: Masaya died, and you guys just didn't know the reasons while scolding me. I want to ask you guys, do you know what 'friendship' is?

Taku Sugawara: If you want to talk about how friendship is so amazing, don't use it as an excuse to attack others and use it as a reason to validate your actions. It's just annoying.

Hanae Lala: Shut up. Die.

Ayaka: Hey, can we provide all these to the media?

Ayaka: And broadcast through all of Japan lololol.

Yuki: Sugawara recording (LOL)

Jun: So cool, senpai ROFL

Hanae Lala: Anyway, go die already, Sugawara. Soak yourself in hot water and die three minutes later.

Shunsuke: Kill yourself.

Honoka: Shunsuuukkkkeee!!!

Kanda Setoguchi: It's been a while.

Ayaka: Ahh! You feeling alright!?

Shunsuke: Look, Sugawara, I was always scared of you, but now I got the guts to say this.

Shunsuke: Kill yourself right now. Please understand.

Shunsuke: it's not just this class. The whole Japan wants you to die.

Shunsuke: This is the biggest happiness to Japan, justice.

Shunsuke: Kill yourself for everyone's happiness.

Sunuu: So cool, Shunsuke! I agree!

Jun: Well said there.

Youki: KYS! KYS!

Kouta: Kill yourself right now! Die die die die!

Ayaka: I'm in love with you, Shunsuke. Go kill yourself, Sugawra.

Lala Hanae: Go kill yourself, Sugawara. Die for our happiness.

Taku Sugawara: So you finally showed up...I've been wanting to settle this with you, Ninomiya.

Shunsuke: Strange. I'm the same here.

Taku Sugawara: And so,

Taku Sugawara: You guys haven't noticed?

Shunsuke: What?

Taku Sugawara: Haven't you guys been asking me? "Why did Masaya die?"

Taku Sugawara: Hey, you guys really think "Taku Sugawara can really drive Masaya to despair alone"?

Shunsuke: Shut up. Stop talking.

Taku Sugawara: Ninomiya, what are you nervous about?

Taku Sugawara: You're basically saying "did I say something that will hurt you"?

Taku Sugawara: All I'm asking if you guys ever wondered the possibility "that I got an assistant?"

Shunsuke: Wait! Sugawara! You!

Taku Sugawara: In other words.

Taku Sugawara: It's the possibility of.

Taku Sugawara: "Is Shunsuke Ninomiya helping out Taku Sugawara?"

Taku Sugawara: Haven't you guys doubted this? Can you all agree to this? The reason why Masaya killed himself, and why Ninomiya's kicking up a fuss here.

Shunsuke: Enough with that.

Taku Sugawara: Hey Ninomiya, explain then. Why did Masaya die? How did I control four popular guys? No way you wouldn't know, right?

Shunsuke: Don't get cocky, Sugawara...

Sunuu: ...Hey, to be honest, I hope you'll tell us.

Ayaka: Yeah, I'm not doubting you, Shunsuke, but it's time to say it.

Hanaka: We're friends. If there's something bothering you, you can discuss with us.

Shunsuke: Are you guys idiots? Don't be bluffed by Sugawara!

Kanda Setoguchi: No, this has nothing to do with Sugawara's words.

Kanda Setoguchi: We're kinda curious as to why Masaya would kill himself, you know?

Taku Sugawara: Well, it's impossible for him to say that.

Taku Sugawara: He intended to push the blame to me, and get out of this unscathed.

Shunsuke: Shut up, Sugawara!

Jun: Shunsuke, if you're not a traitor, tell us already.

Morii: Please, Shunsuke.

Hanae Lala: Say something, Shunsuke.

Hyouta: Come on, Shunsuke.

Konoha: Just reveal something, please?

Sunuu: Why aren't you willing to say anything? Got a reason?

Yuki: Are you really...Sugawara's assistant?

Shunsuke: Stop joking.

Shunsuke has left the group chat.

Ayaka: Eh...why wouldn't he say anything?

Hanae Lala: Is that true?

Jun: it's a lie, right?

Taku Sugawara: It is a lie.

Ayaka: Huh?

Taku Sugawara: It's all a lie. Ninomiya's not my assistant.

Sunuu: Enough already! Even Shunsuke!

Morri: You're terrible. You can go die already.

Taku Sugawara: What? Was I wrong? I'm scolded by you, and after a little bait from me, you guys questioned him. Is that my fault too?

Taku Sugawara: To be precise, I didn't lie. I only raised the 'possibility'.

Taku Sugawara: But was it me who hurt him and forced him out of the group chat?

Taku Sugawara: Please, realize this already. You guys are just acting like friends, but you're just blindly following a group for the sake of the biggest happiness.

Taku Sugawara: You couldn't protect Masa, you can't kill Sugawara, and you hurt Ninomiya.

Taku Sugawara: The Human Power Test rankings is just designed to falsify feelings.

Taku Sugawara: You guys can boast of many friends, but that's just one ability.

Taku Sugawara: You guys don't have the right to deny everyone's personalities. You guys are the weird ones for not realizing this.

Miharu Furuta: ...

Miharu Furuta: Is that what you're trying to do, Sugawara?

Sunuu: What do you mean 'that...?'

Miharu Furuta: It's nothing. I'm just starting to feel what he's getting at.

Ayaka: Eh, I don't get it at all. He did something cruel to Shunsuke too.

Jun: What are you saying, Furuta?

Hanae Lala: I don't understand.

Youki: I think I can understand a little...

Youki: but this is different from causing Masaya's death.

Taku Sugawara: Yeah, but that's enough. I don't hope for you guys to be my friends.

Taku Sugawara: Because it's impossible. I drove Masaya to despair. No way will I dare to dream of such a good thing.

Taku Sugawara: So just keep mocking me.

Taku Sugawara: And be witnesses to my revolution.

Taku Sugawara has left the group.

Chapter 9 - Revolution Eve

After about five minutes, Sugawara returned with two cans of cocoa in hand. I was wondering if he would run away, but it seemed he had no such thought. He asked if I preferred the bitter one or the sweeter one, so I chose the sweet one, indicating that I would pay, but he shook his head slightly. It's strange for a college student to have a middle schooler treat them.

He sat next to me, and pulled the ring tab. He did not speak; surely he was thinking about something.

Both of us sat in a corner of the spacious park, remaining silent; it seemed so weird, so I decided to take the initiative and talk.

"Did Masaya really bully you?"

"Yes," Taku Sugawara immediately answered. "There's no proof. Masaya wouldn't be so stupid as to leave evidence behind.

"Why did he do that much... did you incur his wrath or something?"

"Well, who knows?"

Sugawara coldly answered. I realized then that I asked the wrong question; it might be that I was too eager to figure out the truth, or that I was somewhat biased such that I asked a terrible question.

There was no real reason for the bullies.

"...Is it fine to let me explain myself as I like?"

After a short silence, he said,

"I'll explain my relationship with Masaya, and why he killed himself. It may take some time, but this will be fine."

I nodded.

I had to know no matter what, no matter what the truth was.

Again, he repeated to me,

"I don't know if I can explain this well."

"I'm not good at explaining this to others."

"I'm an idiot, completely stupid."

“So I’m not going to bother with honorifics.”

“And then I hope you’ll find that I’m really stupid.”

“I’d be happy with that. It’ll be as I thought.”

“You can become one with me.”

“So, while describing this with partial truth and partial conjecture,”

“I’ll explain why Masaya killed himself.”

“It was in May, during our second year, when Masaya started bullying me. The bullying wasn’t exactly going overboard over time; he snatched my money, and punched me in the gut. He then ganged with Ninomiya, Watabe, and Komuro, attacking me while I was on my way home, and beat me up. I took him as a friend, and I was betrayed.”

It seemed Masaya did say that he was a good friend?

“Yeah, we viewed each other as good friends. I had some heart to heart talk with Masaya before. It’s not the type to go out together during the holidays, and we wouldn’t be together during noon break, we wouldn’t send messages to each other, or play games together. But if we met while on the way home, we’ll chat. It probably lasted from Autumn in our first year to Spring in our second year.”

“I had few words, and it was Masaya who kept talking. He grumbled a lot to me, probably because I didn’t belong to any group. He couldn’t just grumble when the Human Power Test was being executed in class, and I thought he wanted to soothe himself by venting his frustrations at me. Personally, I was happy to be able to talk to the genius Masaya.”

“On the way back home, we would share all kinds of things, like our future dreams, the ones we hate and like in class, grumble about our unreasonable parents, unhappy at the overly lax teacher, and the uneasiness that’s taking shape.”

“Sometimes we would skip over to the park, and chat till late at night.”

“Those were really happy days.”

“Every single viewpoint of his was different from me. Whatever I said, he would say, “It’s so typical of you.””

“We were once good friends.”

“But then, during May in our second year, I suddenly got punched. He set me up without anyone else figuring it out.”

““Sorry Taku, you understand, right?” He brought three friends along and whispered this to me.”

“Until I got punched, I didn’t understand at all. No, even after I got punched, I didn’t know what was going on.”

“To the victims, bullying is something unreasonable. I didn’t know the reasons and motives, and I was robbed, blackmailed. I was shocked, not because I was hurt, not because of the money, but Masaya beat me. I thought there was a misunderstanding.”

“I once respected Masaya Kishitani.”

“I also had respect for Ninomiya, Watabe, and Komuro. I knew very well that they’re a lot better than I am.”

“But they continued to bully me, tormenting me in places nobody would have found out. They forced pencils down my stomach, punched me in the stomach, stole my living expenses, and forced me to masturbate; nobody else found out.”

“It was only later that I found out that someone of those three told everyone else to bully Masaya. They created a commotion over the fact that Masaya once spoke to this unimpressive me, and mocked me. Masaya was scared of being left out, and he punched me. I guess they said, *“So uncool. Don’t make friends with such a disgusting guy,”* and *“Punch him. Who are your friends? Us or him?”* or stuff like that. When the bullying started, that’s what they said.”

“It seemed Masaya had the thought to refuse at first. That’s the feeling I had at first, but he had to succumb to them before his three friends. Soon after, I quickly gave up on that thought. I could tell.”

“For a genius boy, there’s no way he can resist after the first bad thing.”

“He crumbled.”

“He experienced the joy of bullying and dominating others.”

“His talents were such that none of the other three could compare.”

“The leader of the bullying became Masaya. He was always overly calm. My matters were never exposed. He was always able to avoid the situations easily, never leaving any records. Have you wondered if anyone can do such things? Masaya can. He’s a genius, with three outstanding lackeys.”

“The only one figuring out something was amiss was Masaya’s girlfriend, Kotomi Ishikawa. Even so, she only figured it out in October, and she didn’t know the details. Their methods were really perfect.”

“He perfectly controlled everything, not allowing a single mistake.”

“When I intended to talk about this with my teacher in July, Masaya figured it out three times, and beat me up so badly I was puking. The fourth time, I succeeded, but Toguchi-sensei never

thought much about it. "You thought too much." So he chuckled, and wouldn't pay attention. He's also scared of Masaya's mother, and ignored my pleas. Also, I didn't have any proof; the two recorders I had were broken."

So when you remained so defiant, did Masaya not feel any danger when he bullied you?

"He's different from the ordinary ones. It seemed he thought 'this will cause some larger psychological pressure, and that's more effective than finding out new targets' whenever he found a new recorder."

"You know about my family background? I can't even rely on my parents. I did request my parents to let me 'transfer schools', but I was ignored. Masaya knew that my parents showed no care for their son."

"And then, Masaya knew that I had no friends."

"It's a bullying method so terrifying."

"There's no proof of bullying. I can tell my teacher has no enthusiasm, and my opponent's the popular guy with a genius mind, the parent's the monster parent of a PTA vice president. I could only submit to Masaya."

"Everyone was my enemy."

In fact, Katou and Kotomi once said, "There's no way Masaya could be the bullied."

"I guessed so. I could only feel despair, that no matter what plan I came up with, Masaya had his friends supporting him, the trust of the guardians, and no proof of bullying; from then, I had no chances of winning. My parents and teacher would help, I didn't have any friends, and I was dismissed for spouting nonsense."

"No matter what I did, I was always bullied."

"You know what? They can't trust those of low ranking in the Human Power Test. Unlike academic tests, this is a proof of popularity."

"So I was forced to swallow slugs, lick their shoes, steal my parents' watches, doused in hot and cold water."

"Nobody reached out to me."

"I didn't know who else I could ask for help."

Speaking until this point, Sugawara stopped and drank his cocoa, sighing, and went silent. For some reason, his body seemed smaller and weaker than before; his tone inflicting sadness for some strange reason.

What he said was likely to be the truth. I should say that it's utterly ridiculous for Taku Sugawara alone to dominate four people. My little brother was bullying another classmate heartlessly, planning everything to a terrifyingly perfect setup. I recalled the image of Masaya I saw this summer, and couldn't help but bite my lips.

The winter winds blew in December, and Masaya's position just so happened to shield me, but my legs were icy cold. I immediately began to regret coming over in a long skirt instead of pants. Why did Sugawara choose this location?

"Eh, I don't have any proof at all. I have a receipt of the second recorder, but this might look suspicious instead," Sugawara noted in a self-deprecating manner.

"At the very least, it's more convincing than you alone bullying four people."

"Thanks."

"But I still don't understand the real reason as to why Masaya suddenly bullied you. Of course, I know it's cruel of me to ask this of you."

"The reason to pick me as a target was simple. I act alone, and it's easy not to be found out even if I was bullied. In fact, nobody else found out."

Sugawara patted the chest of his coat, twitched his body slightly, and muttered.

I couldn't help but ask,

"But you can imagine this? In a certain way, you're closer to Masaya than anyone else, Sugawara."

I thought it might be a hyperbole to say that, but I had no intention to correct myself. As Masaya's good friend, surely he viewed Masaya in a different way from everyone else.

With a hesitant look, Sugawara rubbed his fingers on the edge of the can, and said,

"Peer pressure..."

With a hoarse voice, he said,

"Did Ishikawa mention this? The class has been overly conscious about the Human Power Test, and those with low rankings are basically those who are told 'I don't want to get involved with you.'"

"Yeah, she was suffering due to this, right?"

"...It's not Ishikawa alone who was suffering because of this."

"Eh?"

"I did say this before right? Masaya was bullied by his three friends, couldn't refuse, and could only obey them. Even he, that kind of genius, couldn't fight back against peer pressure."

“Or I should say,” Sugawara continued on,

“Everyone in class felt pressured due to the human relationships. Of course, I’m still a middle schooler, and even without the Human Power Test, I would feel pressured. The Human Power Test though increased the burden greatly, and crushed the other personalities. With poor grades in that, one’s own existence is basically denied. It forced us to learn how to observe, getting along with others is a must, and the theme was not to break the harmony. Everyone was living in a hell they were being watched in, and there was a tense atmosphere of a survival game of friendships, swords drawn and clashing.”

Taku Sugawara continued on.

“So Shunsuke Ninomiya, Kouji Watabe, Takayoshi Komuro, and Masaya Kishitani had to find a form of entertainment that they wouldn’t be found out. Kotomi Ishikawa was bitter that her boyfriend was hiding something from her, and she started bullying me along with the rest of the class. Kouta Katou himself started to harass Masaya Kishitani—”

“So Masaya Kishitani killed himself,” I said.

“And Taku Sugawara launched his revolution,” Sugawara said.

At this point, our conversation paused for a while.

The middle schooler seated next to me gulped down all of the cocoa.

“Sorry, there’s a little mess in the timeframe, and I described Kouta as a bad guy. That’s not true. He’s just one of the reasons, Masaya definitely had various reasons to commit suicide. Several people harmed him for various reasons. Of course, this included me.”

He calmly smiled.

“I’ll continue on then.”

“After summer vacation, I was robbed of my valuables several times, and tormented over and over again. In October, there wasn’t any improvement, nothing changed. Entering the second semester, dismissal time was earlier, and my bullying time got longer.”

“I went through days of despair.”

“It was a hell I couldn’t escape.”

“And then, at that moment, I, yes, that.”

“I fell in love with Kotomi Ishikawa.”

“Because she smiled at me.”

"I didn't have any friends, my grades remained far inferior to everyone, and my Human Power Test scores were low. I was labelled trash, betrayed by my good friend, tormented over and over again, and then, she kindly spoke to me."

"I was really happy. She even said "I'm envious of you." It defied reality, but I really felt happier than ever. Such a tragic person like me was actually envied. Someone actually acknowledged me."

"That night, I cried alone."

"After that, I had several times to meet her. She told me things I didn't know of, the peer pressure of being isolated."

"So I finally realized that Masaya and the others had the same predicament. They bullied me to keep living in the suffocating classroom. Ishikawa and Masaya were suffering, and kept struggling."

"Before that rubbish dump, I saw Ishikawa crying due to the peer pressure she suffered. My heart was breaking."

"I felt an emotion, close to rage."

"So I decided to start the revolution."

"Being at the bottom of the Human Power Test left me happy. No matter how much others looked down on me, I decided to become trash that could protect what I believed in, not knowing how to observe others."

"I decided to fight back against Masaya, and end the bullying. I wanted my own happiness, for everyone else to be happy. I decided to end the endless hell of bullying Masaya single-handedly came up with."

"Of course, it's an utterly foolish thought."

"But this was all I could only do."

"Naturally, I had no chance of winning with common sense in the face of Masaya's thoroughly planned bullying."

"As I had said, his bullying methods were so perfect. First, I didn't have the help of my teacher and my parents, and even if I did ask the other teachers for help, trust-wise, I lose out to Masaya and the others. Also, Masaya was very wary of me talking to the teachers alone, or eavesdropping on the bullying scenes."

"And even if I did succeed in reporting, I had to face that yapping mother. Nobody in class noticed that I got bullied, and those guys were all adored by my classmates. My words would only be nonsense. Even if I did complain through the internet or MEXT and cook up the fuss, nobody in school would admit to the bullying, and it'd be all for nothing."

“But even so, I had to keep on fighting.”

“I had to start the revolution.”

“There was only one plan I thought of.”

“It would be to use his plan thoroughly against him.”

“So I went with the opposite action. First, I posted something shocking on the internet about the bullying, like **“In Kuzegawa Second Middle School, there was a student who bullied four others,”** and I wrote it in detail.”

“Many on the internet enjoy themselves through bullying, and there wouldn’t be as much fun if nobody killed themselves. But then, some immediately called the school to protest, *“There’s a bullying incident in school, and your school isn’t going to do anything about it?”* or *“Who allows their kids to study in that school?”*”

“Of course, it did seem that some suspected *“Four people bullied one instead,”* or *“He’s using the internet to continue with the bullying.”* That’s not important though. Once news spread in the school, I used the water bottle to beat Masaya up.”

“Masaya probably predicted that I would lose control emotionally. After long periods of vicious abuse, I would explode one day. In such a situation, his fiery mother would come to school, interrogate the lethargic teacher who insisted that there were no witnesses to the bullying, that it’s a student with some psychosis issue playing his own act, to calm things down.”

“My plan proceeded successfully, so successfully that even I felt it was weird. I pretended to act arrogant, and had everyone have the worst impression of me. The school started receiving lots of protest calls in regards to the bullying, and the aftereffects kept burning. I was etched with the moniker of the devil.”

“And as Masaya’s mother hoped, I was heavily punished. They exceeded my initial expectations greatly, and had me persecuted by everyone else.”

So the punishment was suggested by mom?

“I was the one who laughed, *“You want to punish me by making me kneel in school?”* and I added, *“Bullying is an invention that crosses through civilizations,”* but this was just imitating what Masaya did. Anyway, all I did was a little taunt, and she fell for it. Masaya and the others wanted to continue tormenting me, so I kept on leading them. Takayoshi even pretended to cry. All I did was to diminish Masaya’s mother, and they easily got baited. Then, I was finally forced to parade around and kneel.”

“It was chaotic, but Masaya and the others weren’t unhappy with what happened till this point. Some parts were a little different, but it progressed as I planned. After that incident, Taku

Sugawara was viewed as a bully not worthy to be pitied, and the true identities of the bullies were never revealed. After that, Taku Sugawara was severely punished.”

“But things were proceeding too well.”

“I chose to become the bad guy. This action was way beyond their expectations, and it got out of hand.”

“Before knowing what was actually written in the post, *“I wrote it,”* I just admitted that.”

“The original conclusion of ‘Taku Sugawara is suffering from mental disorder’ ended up being ‘Taku Sugawara is the bully’ because of that post and my testimony.”

“That was in my plan too.”

“Masaya was probably the only one who figured this out, but at this point, there was no turning back. He could not discuss this with the other three, and they were forced to admit that they were bullied before their parents and the teachers.”

“And so, it was finally my moment to counter.”

“Slowly, I drove Masaya and the others to despair.”

“To a middle schooler, ‘being bullied’ has a negative vibe to it. Aren’t some people unwilling to admit that they were bullied? It’s not just that they’re scared of further retribution from the bullies; most importantly, “I got bullied, and asked the teachers and my parents for help,” by admitting that, they made themselves look more pathetic. It’s not a proud thing.”

“But as I kneeled down before everyone, I got the entire school to know.”

“They were saying stuff like ‘It’s one vs four, and they got dominated by the unimpressive guy in class, trembling before him,’ or ‘they’re so active and amazing in the clubs, yet they’re just embarrassing dudes who got bullied.’”

“Stupid pride? Maybe. But middle schoolers are all like this trying to act cool. No matter what others say, for guys, being bullied is undoubtedly a humiliation, and furthermore, it’s the guy who they bullied in the first place.”

“Through my kneeling, I declared to everyone the predicament of Masaya and the others. They could only ask the teachers and parents for help.”

“Surely everyone else would be shocked to learn that their respected seniors and friends were actually being secretly bullied.”

“But Masaya and the others could no longer say *“We’re the ones who got bullied”*. If they did, the commotion triggered in school would end up being their fault, and their sins would be revealed to

all. They subjected me to extremely cruel punishment, and they never imagined the punishment being inflicted on them.”

“While they were feeling frustrated, I visited their houses a few times, pretending to apologize for my actions, and kept taunting them. I got their parents fuming, raising the matter way beyond, and drove them to despair.”

“I thought I would collapse.”

“But I continued to kneel before everyone. I nearly crumbled, but I endured. Even though I got beaten by their parents and kicked by my classmates, I would never give up.”

“I continued to spread this falsified truth, while being an enemy to the entire school, and enduring the humiliation.”

So everyone believed you? It’s not weird for others to doubt you, right?

“Probably, but that’s not important. To those suspicious, “Masaya and others are cruel beings who subjected me to bullying, and shifted the blame onto the victim.” The kneeling before everyone had such a great effect, but only a few suspected.”

Why? Only the adults saw your arrogance and the four of them whimpering. Logically, the other students should be feeling suspicious.

“Because there’s valid proof.”

Proof?

“The bruise. There’s a severe bruise on Masaya’s face. That’s why many believed. I beat him up with the water bottle. Surely he looked like the victim there.”

“So I ended up becoming the cold-hearted trash who dominated my four classmates, and they ended up being shameful brats who got dominated by one boy.”

“Peer pressure.”

“Thanks to the Human Power Test, the approval of others became all the more important, and classmates would start to grade one another.”

“They definitely couldn’t accept it. Pitied by their parents, classmates, and girlfriend, “it hurts, doesn’t it? Sorry for not noticing it.” And they’d be consoled. They’re the popular ones at school, but their prides would surely be damaged. Once they saw how cruel a punishment I was subjected, they couldn’t say “*We’re the bullies.*””

“To their seniors and juniors, they were bullied by an ugly, uncharismatic guy even though it’s four vs one, forced to eat slugs, apologized to by their parents, and carefully treated by their friends.”

“Their rankings in the Human Power Test would definitely drop, probably with some sympathy votes here and there. However, the bullying victims had no leadership skills and charisma. It might sound pitiful, but that’s the cruel rule set amongst us. The adoration from before had vanished, their rankings dropped, and their self-worth would drop.”

“They were the real bullies, but for some reason, the school viewed Taku Sugawara as the victim.”

“Just like that, I drove them to despair.”

“Two days after that incident, Masaya once came to be to reconcile, but I had no intention to forgive him. I still had hatred against them, and if I easily forgave them, they might regain the same attitude again.”

“During that time, I hardly got any bullying from Masaya and the others. Luckily, due to the mistaken justice everyone else had, I was able to stay away from them. Masaya and the others were deemed to be the victims, and naturally, there was no way they could be looking for me, since that itself would have been suspicious.”

It seemed Masaya did go look for the teacher to talk it out.

“I knew. I didn’t know what it was about, but Toguchi-sensei is a spineless bastard, and just casually threatened me, *“If this doesn’t end well, Kishitani’s mother is going to be really scary.”* Toguchi-sensei definitely ignored Masaya’s words, and for him, the best way to end this is to think of me as the villain.”

“I had been taunting their parents every day, angering them, and gave them no room to relax at home. There was no way they could say to their parents, *“actually, we’re the bullies,”* when their parents were already on their side.”

“The situation was completely reversed.”

“The spineless teacher ignored me, and the popular guys in class were suddenly pitied, doted by their overbearing parents like kids, and no proof of bullying, so they couldn’t regain their prides.”

“However.”

“I thought I overdid it.”

“Because I’m trash, having ignored the atmosphere in the classroom.”

“And I ignored Masaya’s feelings.”

“I didn’t know how to hold back, and couldn’t determine their actions.”

“That’s why Masaya killed himself.”

"I don't know if you're willing to believe me, but back then, I was wondering if I should forgive them. I was thinking if I should pretend that the kneeling never happened, that I could continue to go out with Masaya and the others like normal friends again, gather at some place to play video games, drop by at a fast food restaurant on the way home, chit chat about the girls we like."

"You probably think that I'm stupid."

"But I was serious."

"Or rather, that was the compromise Masaya could only do. If he kept it up, even if the kneeling ended, the impression of him being the bullied wouldn't vanish, and the fact that he's terrified to tears of the unimpressive guy called Taku Sugawara wouldn't vanish. However, he couldn't bully me openly, for surely someone would figure out that my testimony was a lie. It was already suspicious to begin with."

"The only thing he could do was to act all chummy with me in public and change his image; to put everything in the past and be good friends with me again."

"At the very least, that was what I thought."

"To avoid having them bully me again, once Masaya and the rest learned their lesson, I intended to propose this."

"For example, *'if you make fun of me in class, I'm going to make fun of you in class, and everyone gets to laugh, forget about that, and think that we made up.'*"

"Masaya's popular, and I was the guy everyone in class feared."

"As long as we worked together, surely we would succeed."

"That we would create a class where the popular ones and the unpopular ones could laugh together."

"It might be a shallow wish, but that was my ideal revolution."

"Even if it didn't succeed, as long as I didn't get bullied, I would be happy."

"I wanted my own happiness."

"I didn't want to be bullied again."

"I wanted to go home together with Masaya, just like before."

"Even if I couldn't be Ishikawa's boyfriend, it was fine as long as I could ease her burden."

"I suppose something amiss happened after the incident. Only two to three weeks later did I realize it, probably the moment when I stopped kneeling before everyone and went about visiting Masaya and everyone else's house."

“Back then, I was bullied in class. The guys were terrified of me, and they didn’t bully me, but a group of girls led by Tsuda intended to take revenge on me. To be honest, I thought it was the toughest part to deal with. It’s really stupid.”

Kotomi said that it was punishment. Of course, part of the reason she did that was to gain Masaya’s approval.

“And so Ishikawa couldn’t ignore the looks from others, but at the very least, she was self-aware. The other girls prided themselves as hero, or went along with the class, and threw my stuff into the dustbin.”

“But this was another reason that drove Masaya to despair. It’s immature, but guys hate having girls protect them. This action led to another situation. Some of the boys ended up looking down on Masaya, that he was bullied and beaten up by someone like Taku Sugawara, protected by the monster parent and the girls in class.”

Was Masaya the center target again?

“Eh, he’s the most popular of the four, so some did feel envy, since the girls only cared about Masaya. The one most involved should be Kouta Katou, I guess. He already had lots of envy directed at Masaya.”

“Of course, he didn’t do anything too obvious. After the incident, the most he did was to spill ink onto Masaya’s notebook. Right, he did that. I’ll tell you his address later, so you may visit him later. He thought that I had proof on hand, so he’ll definitely admit it. Other than that, there’s nothing obvious he did. The school was sensitive to bullying at that point.”

“But I sensed this atmosphere. The petty tricks were heinous, hard to detect, but they were there. They were laughing at Masaya behind the back, for being bullied by someone like me.”

“And that’s why Katou spilled the beans to the media outlets, “I don’t know anything,” “Taku Sugawara is weird.” He’s scared of retribution, and that’s why he went about spreading the news.”

“Of course, it wasn’t just Katou alone who caused this. Others were involved too. Jun Niwa and Konoha Harada both despised Masaya, while Nanoe Hada, Yuki Kunimoto, and Kana Mori pitied Masaya.

“I was too shallow.”

“I lacked imagination.”

“So anyway, many people hurt Masaya’s pride, way more than I expected. Masaya was crushed by the peer pressure. Later on, I noticed that he was acting weirdly, but it was already too late.”

“I was isolated from him, unable to do anything.”

“He was already mentally scarred beyond repair.”

"The popular guy in class with outstanding grades sank into the sense of superiority when he bullied me without anyone else noticing. He then got pitied by the people around him, became the one to protect for the girls, looked down upon by the boys, saw me grinning away while I was the one bullied, and ignored by the teachers. It was no wonder his ranking in the Human Power Test fell."

"Also, he had excessive concern from his mother, always questioned about his situation in school like a kid entering kindergarten, and this damaged the pride a middle schooler should have. With the parent showing up every day at school to 'Watch if there's any bullying at school', it was basically humiliating him, and even his girlfriend, who would be consoling him, was pitying and worrying about him."

"But at this point, he couldn't say that he was the bully, and that meant having to endure the pity and discrimination in school and at home. 'I saw that guy who kneeled down. Doesn't look impressive,' The seniors were mocking him with that, 'Leave Sugawara's punishment to us,' while the juniors were being all arrogant."

"His intense pride couldn't allow for all that, but there was no one he could discuss this with."

"By my deduction, it was out of impulse."

"Masaya had nowhere to go, and was frustrated by his overly worried and protective girlfriend, so he impulsively pushed her. He had no intention of hurting her, but she just so happened to be by the stairs. He felt an unbearable sense of self-loathing, and feared retribution when his girlfriend recovered."

"And that's why he finally made that decision."

"To take revenge on me."

"To do the one final move."

"To kill himself."

"He silenced the other three, and chose to commit suicide. At the same time, I became the one enemy to all of Japan."

"'Taku Sugawara is the devil. Nobody should believe his words.'"

"Even the will was well planned, and after leaving those words behind, he killed himself. Of course, I couldn't defend myself."

"The greatest bomb left behind by that genius was to let those who read the will be terrified of me."

"He created this world, I distorted it, and he overturned it on me again."

“He gave up his life.”

“Of course, I don’t need to explain what happened later. I became the lowlife who drove my classmate to despair through bullying.”

“Part of this is my imagination, but this is all I know.”

“Masaya and the others bullied me hard through thorough planning. To end the bullying and destroy the Human Power Test, I launched the revolution. It went well, but it damaged Masaya’s pride, and drove him to despair.”

“To summarize everything, there’s only one conclusion.”

“I can’t laugh with him again.”

“I can’t get happiness.”

“Masaya’s dead.”

After that, both of us went silent, sitting on the bench without moving.

I stared at the park I played at with Masaya, and pondered over the relationship between Taku Sugawara and Masaya.

What sin did he commit? He was the reason why Masaya killed himself. In the name of revolution, he kept torturing Masaya. However, considering what Masaya and the others did, it might seem like nothing much. From his perspective, he was just defending himself from the bullies. Was there any other way? In the world Masaya created, there was a way to fight back against Masaya. It was a plan to destroy the devil’s plot.

A certain critic once said, “The exclusive news showing up on the internet is very surreal.”

The reason was simple. Sugawara basically wrote down what Masaya and the others did to him.

He might have been forced to eat pencils, been beaten up, had his pocket money stolen, and doused in hot and cold water.

The other three, Ninomiya, Komuro, and Watabe insisted not to reveal the details, for they feared slipping up, that their acts would be discovered. Though they had beautified this as ‘friendship’

One of them should be the one who attacked me.

He attacked me because of Sayo’s call.

(So Masaya deserved his demise?)

Was this the conclusion? How’s that possible?

However, there was no flaw to be found in Sugawara's words. It's a lot more convincing than the illogical saying that a person dominated four.

"It matches... with most of the intel I collected."

I tried my best to eek these words.

Sugawara shook his head.

"You can believe whatever you want, Sanae. I don't have proof saying that I was the bullied, but there's no proof to say that Masaya and the others were bullied."

"Ishikawa told me her deduction. She said Ninomiya, Watabe, and Komuro bullied Masaya and Sugawara."

"That's stupid. In that case, Masaya's will wouldn't have my name on it. That guy's world is always full of blind spots."

"So is what you say the truth, Sugawara?"

With a vacant look, Sugawara ignored these words, and diverted the topic to a completely different direction.

"...How's Masaya like to you, Sanae?"

He suddenly started with an unrelated question.

I didn't know the intent behind that question, but he gave me a sharp, harsh look, and I felt an invisible pressure weighing on me.

"An outstanding little brother," I answered. "That's what everyone said about him during this incident, but he's really smart, definitely doesn't look like he's seven years younger than me. Mom wouldn't leave Masaya alone at all."

"..."

"She even ended up becoming a monster parent. Of course, this isn't right, but it's really because Masaya's really outstanding. He didn't stand out during elementary school, but once he got to middle school, his talents started to show. He's top for academics, chosen as a starter for his sports club, and only then did I realize that he's a real genius. Even when I was beginning to prepare for my college exams, Mom just kept cheering him on."

"And that's when you cut up Masaya's gym clothes?"

Sugawara interrupted me.

I turned around to glare at me, his eyes widened, the grim expression emitting a terrifying presence.

At that moment, I couldn't breathe as normal; I tried drinking the cocoa to calm myself down, but I realized the can had already fallen to the ground.

"Hey, I did say it before, right? Before Masaya bullied me, I heard him voice lots of frustrations. You know what he said? Most of it was about his family, that his sister returning home would be rough on him, that his mother has exceeding expectations on him, all about that."

The middle schooler next to me stood up before me. I wanted to back away, but the hard back of the bench was behind me, and I had nowhere to go.

The forceful glare was right on me.

"Reason for the bullying? Do I still have to say it? Peer pressure at school, and the twisted expectations and jealousy at home. There was nowhere for Masaya to escape, so he bullied me; only by bullying was he able to feel solace. You say this is just me guessing? Think about it then! Did Masaya discuss this with you before? Did he ask you for help? Did he leave a will for you?"

"No..."

"Nobody in our class is able to cut up his gym clothes without him knowing! I can tell that it's you the family that doomed Masaya, old hag! You tooted Masaya's horn and gave him so many expectations; are you making him a pet!? Talking about college everyday!? That'll only increase the pressure on Masaya!"

Saying that, Sugawara took out the smartphone from his chest. It's shining, in the middle of a call. The one on the other end must be mom.

Sugawara had Mom listen to everything!

He probably did it when he went off to buy the cocoa.

I intended to defend myself, but I couldn't say anything.

"Mom's trash, sister's trash. Are your actions just for self-satisfaction!? Do you feel guilt over Masaya's death? Are you trying to redeem yourself? Or are you trying to gain your mom's love!? That's what Masaya hated most about you! "You're annoying!" That's what he always said!"

"I said that's not it..."

"Stop lying already! This is the 'truth' you're scared of, right!? Stop playing dumb! You only care about yourself! I'll tell you this, the ones who made Masaya suffer most are you two! The Human Power Test did cause him much pressure, but he was basically just complaining about you family! That's why he chose to bully me! And killed himself! The root of the cause is you the rotten family!"

No, that's not it.

I had an impulse to refute immediately, “How did he know?” but at the same time, I had this contradicting thought, and finally understood why Kotomi had interest in Sugawara. The words he said would bring about fear, the urge to resist, and yet the urge to admit to everything.

My motives to investigate this matter were down to these two points. One was to make up for my useless self, and the other was the desire to gain Mom’s recognition.

This definitely was the truth I was scared to face, for I had a vague feeling that the ones who drove Masaya to despair were us—

I couldn’t defend myself. At this moment, he brought the cellphone to his lips; it was probably in speaker mode before this, and with a gruff tone, he said to Mom,

“Hey, Masaya’s mother, what do you intend to do? You simpleton, you got baited by my taunt, and started some weird group, right? Are you going to ignore my testimony, and continue to pretend that you aren’t involved? I intend to fight until the very end. Thank your daughter for collecting testimonies everywhere. Or are you going to retract your words? “I thought Taku Sugawara is the bad one, but Masaya’s the real bully. I’m sorry,” Try saying that!”

With a deep voice, he hissed,

“If you aren’t willing to do anything, kill yourself. Relax. You received the rope in the morning, right? I tied it up for you. You can hang yourself off the ceiling at home, just like your son.”

Sugawara took off the earphones from his phone.

Mom’s shrieking could be heard immediately. I had never heard such a mad shriek before. She appeared to be trying to say something, but they were no longer words, just mad ramblings.

Mom probably had been wondering how Sugawara could drive Masaya to despair.

She probably never expected that it was herself who caused Masaya to turn out this way, one of the reasons why Masaya killed himself.

And with a kind tone, Taku Sugawara said to the phone,

“If not—you can look at that rope and think of what to do.”

He showed the smirk of evil from before, the expression so unlike a middle schooler.

Masaya might have been the devil, but Taku Sugawara himself—

“You planned everything, didn’t you?” I yelled. With much determination, I strove not to give up on the investigations. “Mom set up the organization to wipe you out, until there’s no turning back. You hid the truth from us, right? You even sent us the cat carcass to taunt us, didn’t you?”

I shoved him aside and stood up, growling from the bottom of my heart. However, Sugawara didn't seem to care, merely looking at the scenery afar as he gave me a gloomy look. Then, he merely said,

"You're not going home yet? Then, are you going to let your mother die?"

The next moment, I was running away.

Mom!

Tears blurred my eyes before I knew it as I dashed back home at full speed.

What did I do wrong, exactly?

I did my best to act the part! Even though it's lacking in love, I still gritted my teeth to endure my heart breaking inside; I wanted to be a kind older sister!

I did cut up Masaya's gym clothes. I did beat up the brother seven years younger than me. I was so jealous and spiteful towards him. I never had any expectations placed on me, and vented my frustrations on my brother, who had the expectations on him. I could no longer hide the fact that I was a 'flawed older sister.'

Mom! Mom! Mom!

I called out for the one person most important to me on this world.

Interlude 3 - Twitter: '#Kuzegawa2ndMiddleBullyingSuicideIncident' Search

Konose: "S is a scumbag. Give him the death penalty already."

THYD: "It's really unnerving."

Mifue: "Logically, it's already a crime. Death penalty. Death penalty."

Motohana: "I was bullied before, so I have to say that we can't let such scumbags escape scot free."

Nomura TV: "Kuzegawa Second Middle School Bullying Suicide Incident. S's Tragic Family Conditions."

Motou-mo: "Thinking about how this might me my own kid, I'm really terrified. How could he drive someone else to despair?"

Hiinamatssuurii: "This is absolutely unforgivable. Unforgivable."

Kunihiko Fuyuta-Sasatoku Town: "What is education? Why was the devil S born? We should be reflecting on this."

Hahako: "S: Bullying is an invention (LOL). Yes yes, death penalty it is."

Motomachi news: "Bullying suicide incident. What's happening in the education scene? S's terrifying methods were?"

Matase-☆Mangaka☆: "A photo to remember the dead K by". Deemon, Yoshitomo East Middle School, "I matched up against the victim K in a match before. He's unbelievably strong... too bad. S is terrible."

Honohono: "S should be judged! We can't have a second, or third victim!"

Beef rice seller-Tetokon: "Our chairman graduated from this middle school, We hope for the truth to be revealed, and give our blessings to the victim K."

Shiki Kumoto: "As an educator, I really do find this really unsettling. I am inconvenienced to say anything given my viewpoint, but S should be judged, right?"

QQQ: "Go die Go die Go die Go die S."

Strawman News: "The content of the W K left behind was heartbreaking, riveting as a civil topic."

Hasebe: "The shame of Japan LOL. This Kuzegawa 2nd Middle School Bullying Suicide has gained attention from foreign media."

Kumiko Edomoto (educator): “Considering S incident, there has been an increase in voices calling for more dire punishment.” Popular discussion topic, “Anyone leaving ‘Go and die, S’ will have a kitty pic.”

Speed news: “The review on S has been very terrifying.”

A certain voice actor: “I’m prepared to be scolded, but S shouldn’t be allowed to live.”

Convenience store owner TT: “Remember S. Right now, stationery store giving a 0.05% discount.”

Kirikiriblog: “You guys call for S to die, and even after being through many different education scenes, I’m calling for S to die.”

Wafu Kimchi Ueda, actor and comedian: “There has to be punishment for all wrongdoing, or rotten people like S are going to increase in numbers.”

Nagamasa Mimoto: “Go die, S.”

Kurikuri: “Go die, S.”

Wahaha: “Go die, S.”

Mimura: “Go die, S.”

IamABot: “Go die, S.”

Tanaka Nakata: “Go die, S.”

Black Jelly: “Go die, S.”

Miso Soup Assault Team: “Go die, S.”

Real female voice-bot: “Go die, S.”

Kumiko: “Go die, S.”

Shigechi: “Go die, S.”

Anon: “Go die, S.”

Born Tsukkomi: “Go die, S.”

Mini High School Girl Secret Meeting: “Go die, S.”

Amonuu: “Go die, S.”

Chapter 10 - Eve of the Revolution

The call remained on.

With my earphones on, I turned the voice up, and immediately heard an afternoon serial drama of family love and hatred. It was so shockingly loud, and they seemed to be quarrelling. Ten minutes later, it seemed to have calmed down.

The mother who only had eyes for her son called out her daughter's name in a doting manner, and the daughter who envied her little brother apologized for her sins.

I hung up.

I thought that it was a ruckus, but I really was grateful that Masaya's mother didn't kill herself. I didn't want more pain in Masaya's home. He grumbled a lot, but he really loved his family.

"The reason why I chose this park was to make sure the daughter would get back to save her mother immediately."

I muttered. I picked up the can Sanae dropped, and turned to leave the park. It's already six pm, and as it was late December, the sky began to darken.

I wanted to take action quickly.

I kept waiting for as long as I could, and this time, the phone rang. It was from Masaya's mother.

"What should we do...? What do you hope for?"

That was the one thing she immediately said, "I just hope for you to promise me something," so that's all I said, "so that there won't be another victim like Masaya."

I earnestly prayed for them to be happy again, and decided to head to the next destination.

"Now all the pieces are in place, and all that's left is my determination."

"Did you plan all this?" Sanae did question me loudly, but that's not the case. If not for the goddess of luck letting her show up, I probably wouldn't have been able to complete this plan. No matter how much I would say, being alone, nobody would trust me.

To convince Masaya's mother, I needed the strength of her daughter.

She remained aloof to her daughter, but the fact that her daughter did abuse Masaya left her really shaken up, and her form of strong-armed education was unexpectedly a torture to Masaya.

"I hope for you two to be happy," so I muttered.

And so, I headed for the end.

To Kuzegawa Second Middle School.

This really was the end.

I decided to walk towards my destination.

Normally, I would take the bus, and if I walked, it would take about an hour. On my way there, I went home; I had to prepare myself, so I spent a little more time.

But even so, I continued forward.

I didn't know when would be the next time I would take this road, or whether I would have the chance to take this road again.

The last time I took the bus home with Masaya, we had this discussion. It was February, during our first year.

"It's still better than your family, but my family's kinda twisted..."

Masaya sat by the window as he suddenly said this. He kept looking outside, not looking at my eyes, but his tone was unexpectedly grim.

He leaned his head on the window of the bus, and grumbled with hatred.

I sat next to him, cupping my bag that's on my knees.

"Twisted?"

"Yeah, strangely twisted. Mom suddenly talks about grades and college without warning; she has high hopes for me. Sis always bullies me whenever she returns home. She envies me; it's disgusting."

"Because you're a genius, Masaya?"

"Yeah. It seemed the reason was that she was dumped badly during college. After I had a girlfriend, she kept pestering me. It was annoying."

"Masaya, your sister's pretty right? She sounds popular."

"Maybe."

"Let me have sex with her."

"Don't say this to her brother."

"You want me to say this to her brother-in-law?"

“Why are you getting married with my sister!?”

“But you seem really gloomy today.”

I asked, and Masaya didn’t respond immediately.

After a second or two, he started talking, and there was mist on the glass window.

“You remember Kotomi Ishikawa?”

It was an unexpected name. Of course I remembered that name.

“..I wanted to save her, but I failed.”

And also, she’s the girl going out with Masaya.

Upon hearing my answer, “Don’t say that it’s a failure. That was the right choice,” Masaya refuted.

Such comforting words. So I thanked him, and asked why he suddenly mentioned Ishikawa.

“That Kotomi’s still scared of the Human Power Test, and being graded by others. She’s a little overly reliant on me.”

Masaya said as he continued to look outside the window.

“Oh,” I answered listlessly. “That harassment really left her shocked, huh?”

“Seems that way.”

Masaya nodded, and sighed.

“But recently, I’ve started to understand Kotomi’s feelings.”

His tone had a little melancholy to it, so unlike someone of my age.

“Everyone calls me a hero, but human attitudes change easily. Those girls jealous of Kotomi started being nice to her after I went out with her. Even I was terrified when I saw that. I was wondering that one day, my friends might betray me.”

“To be honest... there is this possibility.”

“Yep. So I started to feel uncomfortable about human relationships. Annoying... well, it’s a little different from that.”

Masaya looked down at his palm. Of course, we couldn’t change this depressing reality.

“There are still scars in Kotomi’s heart... I’m affected too, though I have to protect her.”

“...I see... I want to help her to.”

I answered without thinking. I latched the strap of my bag onto my fingers, and watch it redden as I said that.

However, Masaya seemed to have realized my thoughts through these words alone. He stuffed his hands into the pockets of his pants, and looked at me.

“Just maybe, but you like Kotomi, don’t you?”

As to be expected of Masaya. He got it immediately.

Maybe my thoughts were written on my face.

“Not to the point where I like her,” I chuckled, trying to avoid the incoming hostility, “I do admire her somewhat, but relax, I’m not the trash who’ll steal my good friend’s girlfriend.”

Masaya chimed in,

“Eh, that’s impossible for you.”

“I’ll kill you.”

“You said you wanted to help her, right?” Masaya ignored my retort, and answered seriously, “Really? You failed once, yet you... you aren’t scared?”

“Didn’t you just say “Don’t say that it’s a failure”?”

“I swear I have no impression of that.”

“...To be honest, I’m scared.” This time, it was my turn to ignore Masaya’s antics, “I didn’t want it to end that pitifully. I had a bumpy life; I don’t want to be hurt again.”

“I guessed so...”

‘But... if she’s really frustrated, and if you’re powerless, just tell me. I’ll definitely protect Ishikawa.”

Masaya chuckled.

“It’s so like you.”

“Don’t envy me. I might as well save you too, Masaya, beat your classmates along with your family.”

“You’re doing that as an afterthought.”

“What else?” Saying that, I continued, “So, when I’m in trouble, help me out here, Masaya.” I then added on, “You know... I have family troubles too.”

Masaya nodded, his face becoming kinder.

“Leave it to me. No matter whether I’ll be arrested or persecuted, this genius boy Lord Masaya shall drop by to help you out. Next time, you can tattoo the words ‘Taku has Masaya’. That’s nice.”

“Don’t wanna... you love to act tough there. You became good friends with me because you and I both have twisted families, right?”

I said.

“Yeah, we’re good friends, allies.” His face reddened as he said that.

Then, he reached his fist out at me.

“Those of twisted families shall help each other out. This is the TakuMasa alliance.”

What’s with that name? I thought, but I never denied it.

“Righto.” So I tapped his fist with mine.

I still remembered the TakuMasa alliance.

Masaya seemed to be the same too.

He left two wills for me.

One was the one directed at the media and society at large, “Taku Sugawara is the devil.”

The other was the one he left in my shoe locker, on the day before he killed himself. That was the one love letter I had ever gotten in my life.

The pretty words written on printed paper were textbook-like. It was Masaya’s handwriting. This was the only word written:

“Traitor.”

Looking at the outcome, I thought he was right.

I couldn’t save him.

We couldn’t go home together, or go back to the days of chatting endlessly. From that word, I understood this very well.

We deserved it.

Masaya bullied me, and ended himself dejectedly.

I had a ridiculous goal, and struggled in despair.

Both of us deserved it.

However, I seemed to be the lucky one, not too bad.

After Masaya died, even with my reputation in tatters, I still had a girl waiting for me to give her happiness.

At the very least, I could complete half of what I promised with Masaya.

And thus, this long revolution would finally come to an end.

This revolution was bigger than I expected. All of Japan was cursing me, and foreign media was reporting.

The entire world's my enemy.

All of humanity is cursing me 'to die'.

On twitter, newspaper, 2ch, youtube, entertainment magazines, TV, facebook, LINE, Google+, letters in my living room, inside the bus, LINE, internet podcasts, foreign news, classrooms, Mixi, cafes on the streets. Everyone was slandering me.

"But even though I'm the bad guy, I have a good guy-like wish."

For I was a real trash.

As long as she could smile again, I was fine with falling into hell.

"Right now, I'm going to execute the real happiness."

I would drop by Kuzegawa Second Middle School every day, but this might have been the first time I showed up at the parking lots. I passed by it before, but typically, I wouldn't really take notice of the place called the 'parking lot'.

It was way past dismissal time, and no student could be seen. The parking lots were at the back of the school compound, the size a quarter of a gym. There were only half of the cars that were parked at noon. The lights in the middle were flickering, and I had lots of places to hide.

The asphalt during winter was cold as ice, and as I sat down, my butt ached. I hid in the darkness, waiting for my target to appear. I huddled my body, recalling Masaya and Ishikawa, hoping for the revolution to end.

Several teachers boarded their cars, looking very lethargic, and did not seem to notice me. Then, I lowered my head towards where they left. No other meaning.

As time passed by little by little, I felt my heart pounding increasingly.

I mustn't get anxious.

All I needed to do was to make up my mind.

After a while, I saw Toguchi-sensei head for the parking lots, but he's not my target either. I was disinterested in him; surely someone would judge him. There were some comments on the internet criticizing the teacher-in-charge. If I kept blaming him, he would look really pitiful.

Thus, I watched his car leave without doing anything.

Bye bye. Stay safe.

By the time I realized it, most of the teachers had already left, with only two cars left. It's eight pm. Even as civil servants, the profession of teaching really is tiring. One of them should be a staff member, and I knew who the other one was.

"I never thought you would wait until the end."

And so, I showed up right when Principal Fujimoto showed up.

His eyes widened slightly, but he did not seem particularly shocked.

"Oh Sugawara. What is it?"

Of course, it was not the first time we met. I had met him twice, first when I hit Masaya with the water bottle, and second when Masaya killed himself. We hardly talked directly, but we knew each other's appearance.

At this moment, I took out a survival knife, and pointed the tip at the principal's chest.

There was a five meter distance between us as we faced each other.

"So you want to kill me?" Principal Fujimoto didn't move, "Why?"

"To end the Human Power Test. We don't need such a thing," I immediately answer. "We're living in a nightmare. The media's ripping apart the cons brought up by this new education system. Once you die, the Test will definitely vanish from this world."

"Then you should be saying it to everyone, and not use violence."

"Looking at your attitude, even a middle schooler can tell that you don't intend to tell. If you want, Kishitani's mother will."

Hearing that, "Oh?" the Principal seemed a little surprised.

"So you convinced Akane Kishitani? You?"

“Yeah. I sent her a cat carcass, did my best to taunt her, growled at her, and got her to submit. I really wanted to tell her how hard it was to stuff the cat’s carcass after it got ran down in an accident.”

“I see, you had her... it’s a little tricky now.”

“It’ll be easy with your death.”

I held the knife with both hands. As long as I stabbed it into the Principal’s chest, I should be able to keep him. Even with my poor athleticism, as long as I have a weapon, I should be able to beat this old uncle.

All I needed was to make up my mind.

I couldn’t just tremble.

To encourage myself, I continued,

“All I want is just happiness. I won’t become a superstar at school, won’t be able to go out with the school idol, and all I need is to remain in a corner of the classroom while everyone’s able to laugh. For this reason, I started the revolution. I wanted to end Masaya’s bullying, destroy the Human Power Test, and the hell of human relationships.”

The knife in my hands was shaking.

“That alone is good enough for me.”

“But then, Masaya Kishitani killed himself,” with a deep growl, the principal said.

I yelled,

“Yeah! The revolution failed! This is the final gambit from me, the forced hand. I’m going to kill you, and end this Human Power Test!”

“It won’t end. First, is there a meaning to this? Even if you do kill me, Class 2-1 won’t be back to normal, not the class you want again.”

“No, this is no longer for my own sake,” I mocked myself, “it’s for a certain ‘normal friend’, who’s scared of the Human Power Test.”

So, I had to kill this guy.

I gathered all my strength, and aimed my knife at the Principal’s heart. I kicked the ground, and lunged with all my might.

But the Principal moved first.

He took a step back.

Just a step back, and it felt like a superpower had sent me to the side. Someone leaped at me, wrapping my body with their arms, and locking me with a technique I didn't know of. There was an abnormal pain from my right hand.

I couldn't take the pain, and couldn't help but let go of the knife. That person then switched position, pinning me to the ground. My face was stuck on the icy asphalt.

"Takkun, enough already!" she yelled at my ears, her voice cracking, on the verge of tears, "There's a limit to everything!"

That person was Sayo. I didn't know why she was present, but with her holding me down, I couldn't move at all.

"You're betraying me too!?" I lashed out, "Why!? Why isn't anyone standing on my side!?"

"Shut up! I was on your side the entire time!!" she yelled, basically arguing against me.

I tried my best to nudge my body out, but I couldn't break free from Sayo. I couldn't beat her at all, whether it's strength or skill.

I saw the Principal pick up the one weapon I had—the knife. I pinched it with his fingertips, and looked down at me as though he was touching something filthy. I couldn't escape from that look.

"She told me everything about you, and that's why I dithered this long. Also, we did spot you hiding in the parking lots, so I was wary beforehand. Sugawara, what you did lacked thought."

I turned my head towards Sayo, and she sheepishly uttered, "Sorry." I guessed Sanae told her everything, and she figured out that I might attack the Principal.

Perhaps she had a bad feeling about the words "The revolution has yet to end."

If that was the case, I was really careless.

"Hey, Sugawara, what do you wish for?"

The Principal kneeled down, and was basically caressing me.

"The Human Power Test isn't some meaningless, crude interest. Academic tests alone won't be enough to survive modern society."

"I know," I answered. "But what do you think about this society? Are you going to promote it? Celebrate the erosion of academic history? Don't blame everything as 'society's fault' without thinking!"

"I see. So you do understand this."

"DID YOU UNDERSTAND THE FEELINGS OF THOSE WHO GOT LAST IN THE HUMAN POWER TEST? DID YOU HELP THOSE WHO WERE BULLIED? YOU DID NOTHING! YOU DIDN'T KNOW

MASAYA'S PAIN, YOU DIDN'T KNOW ISHIKAWA'S TEARS! ALL THE BIG TALK ABOUT HOLLOW THEORY, ACTING LIKE YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE SOBER IN SOCIETY! THAT'S WHY I HAVE TO DESTROY THIS TEST! I WANT TO END EVERYTHING!!"

I yelled on the floor abysmally, I might have been yelling, or maybe it was just plain regrets.

I failed.

In the end, I couldn't accomplish anything at all.

Sayo eased up, probably because I didn't continue to resist. But at this point, I had no intention to run away, and laid down on the ground, tragic and crestfallen.

Principal Fujimoto indicated for Sayo to let go of me, and said,

"I wouldn't say that I didn't consider this; I would contact those ranked low on the Human Power Test and try to interact with them. The Human Power Test itself is imperfect, and I do need to hear the students' voices. There was no way I could let my students suffer."

The Principal patted my cheeks, dusting my face.

With a stunned look, I stared at the Principal.

"Wait, you're Sou?"

"Yes. I had exceptional hopes for you in particular. Of course, I did realize the increasing tension in the student interactions. However, you remained at the bottom, still continuing to live on. I kept praying for you to realize, able to prove that personality is just one of the factors forming humanity."

The Principal then derided me,

"But you were thoroughly shallow. There's not just good and evil in this world. Those that we assume are good can be deemed evil from another perspective, and if we switch it around, the same logic applies. You should understand this better than anyone else, Taku Sugawara. Did you indulge in your sense of superiority in the face of the ignorant masses? Did you despise Masaya as a kind person, along with those classmates of yours who hope that you die?"

Such perception in the words were undoubtedly 'Sou's'. Those words the Principal said shook my heart harder than those on the internet.

"So for some reason, you became a fanatic who deemed me someone to be eliminated in order to remove the Human Power Test, swung this knife, unwilling to talk to me, and ignored me when I was the 'Sou' who had been watching over this lonely you? Absolutely preposterous, shallow, silly. Do you think you are a sage? Did you not realize that you are one of the foolish masses too?"

"Shut up..."

I could only respond weakly. What the Principal said was completely correct, so much that it was absolutely cruel.

“You always boast such logic, and persecuted others. You’re the one who provided Toguchi-sensei’s youtube account to the media, right...?”

“Even after investigating this much, do you still not understand? So what if you destroy the Human Power Test? Are human relationships going to be easier? In modern society, humans have to rely on other people’s opinions. You could have understood this if you worked a bit.”

Finally, the Principal said,

“How stupid you are. Please talk to those around you when you are in trouble. I would have to keep reminding you of this. If you had discussed this with ‘Sou’, none of this tragedy would have happened.”

“ ... ”

Adding insult to injury there.

Nobody noticed the bullying, and I had no adult around me to talk to.

I had lots I wanted to grumble about, but I didn’t want to admit all that. It was called being despicable. The reason why I never did this till this point was that I didn’t want to be a despicable kid criticizing a despicable adult.

And then, this was all I had left for my willpower.

The one thing I did after my revolution failed—

An utterly revolting resistance.

“However—” the Principal said as he turned around to leave, “given how you’re about to force that feisty Akane Kishitani to stand by your side, I do find that impressive. It seems I will be a little busier; there is a need to make changes to the Human Power Test.”

“ ... ”

“A cruel reality it is, but education does always come with failures. I have made many mistakes that can be considered nightmares, but we won’t give up just because of singular single mistakes; we have to learn from experience, and continue moving on. Masaya Kishitani, Taku Sugawara, thank you for your valuable data. It is inappropriate to say this now—but good job there.”

In a self-satisfactory manner, the Principal walked towards his car.

Good job there. Those words were coldly spat at me, and I couldn’t shake them off my mind.

Reality was not that nice. Nothing changed with Masaya’s death, and my efforts were for naught.

“Can...” subconsciously, I said, “Can I get any happiness...?”

“You should know now, right?” the Principal coldly stated, and finally vanished from my sights.

In this freezing parking lot, I did my best not to cry.

†

Everything I did, and this was the outcome.

A bad end without redemption.

†

Now then, my story comes to an end here.

A shallow, pitiful revolution, isn't it? Amazing, isn't it? As I expected, it's really lousy.

You might think it's for nothing.

I didn't grow up.

Masaya's suicide was pointless.

Nobody cared about this.

It didn't matter at all.

The revolution failed, and I nearly committed murder.

I drove my one and only friend to his death.

My first crush was severely hurt because of me.

I couldn't destroy the Human Power Test she was so terrified of.

Such a tragic ending it is, so mock me. Don't have any more hopes for my story.

Mock me for being so shallow in thinking. I got bullied by my good friend, my classmates called for me to 'die', all of Japan hoped for me to kill myself, so just despise for. That's all I want from you. Moral of the story is, don't say anything like “you want to be like me.”

Ahh, right. This story isn't important at all. It's basically trash.

It's pointless to discuss a trash's life.

I know this well—so then!

“...Why am I still narrating at this point?”

“Because you hope for others to listen, don’t you?” Sayo’s voice came.

Epilogue - At the End of the World

“Because you hope for others to listen, don’t you?” Sayo’s voice came.

Until she said this, I never noticed myself muttering at all, and it seems I blurted it out subconsciously. This is really embarrassing. I hastily cover my mouth. Before I know it, I have an embarrassing habit of ‘telling a story’, and this is to allow me to merge into this world that’s hard to survive in, give how I have difficulties getting along with society.

Right by me, Sayo smiles at me.

I don’t like that understanding look at all, but unfortunately, I don’t have the strength to fight back.

“Takkun, there’s no way you can be trash. You love humanity too much for that.”

Sayo says,

“In the end, you couldn’t kill anyone. What’s with that knife wielding? Even without move, you wouldn’t be able to aim properly.”

“ ... ”

“Didn’t I tell you already? To rely a bit more on me? Hey, tell me more about your story.”

“Why...?”

I always wanted to ask her this,

“Are you standing on my side, Sayo?”

She has been encouraging me, helping me, got me to meet Sanae. She had been on my side the entire time.

“Because I had been cheering you on.” She shows a teasing smile, “My name’s Sayo Fujimoto. I was abandoned by my real parents, and my uncle, the Principal, single-handedly raised me.”

My family secret’s so secretive, not even Sanae knows about it, Sayo chimed in.

At that moment, I realized why she was so secretive.

She was raised by that Principal who was so passionate about education, and surely she was extremely outstanding, able to fish out news from her uncle, and greatly benefited Sanae in her research.

And she’s Sou’s niece.

At this point, she starts to say,

"I heard from my uncle of a certain middle school boy's family background and thoughts, the brave boy who didn't want to admit anything to anyone and continue to live on strong. Thus, I have been cheering him on the entire time, you know? I didn't expect him to be the boy crying at the food court."

"How's that brave?"

"I told you not to mock yourself now. I feel somewhat similar to you, since I was coldly abandoned by my own parents. I heard how to dare to face this world greatly, and was encouraged by it. Even now, I'm endeared by your efforts."

Just as she was on the bridge, Sayo embraces me, but with more tenderness, and says to me,

"This world isn't filled with as much despair as you think, Takkun. I love you, so don't say that you're trash again."

Within her embrace, I can't move a finger. My body weakens, lost with regards to everything. I never had such an experience in my life before, but for some strange reason, it seemed nostalgic.

Something seems to be breaking away in my heart.

I want to yell, but there's a strange feeling, and I can't voice out.

All my memories, starting from my childhood, start to scatter in my mind like firecrackers.

I was ignored by my parents, kicked around at any given moment, and slept outside every night, shivering. Nobody taught me how to bathe, and nobody bought decent clothes for me. During elementary school, nobody was willing to approach me. Whenever I cried "we shouldn't have given birth to you." I was always told me. When serious, "I'm trash." I was forced to sit before the mirror and mutter that. Once I was ten, all the housework was shoved onto me, and as long as I did something wrong, I would be thoroughly beaten up. So many times did I want to kill myself, and I earnestly wanted to vanish from this world.

"Don't just disappear man. There are still people on this world who want to know you."

A certain boy seemed to have read through my thoughts when he said this to me,

"...Don't do this." I say, "Why love someone like me...such consolation is completely meaningless."

"Really?"

"Yeah!"

From within my heart, I growl, wanting to erase such pointless hope.

But because I obtained Sayo's love, I had an impossible delusion pass through my mind, so much which it's not self-loathing.

What replaces it is a foolish possibility in my mind.

Masaya's final will was overly cruel, "*Taku Sugawara is the devil*", those were the words written, and no doubt it would raise a sense of justice to everyone in the world. However, was Masaya really the type not to admit his own mistakes, someone who would unreasonably determine others to be guilty? No, that genius' not that stupid as a human.

The message Masaya left for me was weird. '*Traitor*'—it sounded like I was the one who broke the promise, Masaya abided by it, right? Or that mean that only Masaya didn't betray the 'TakuMasa Alliance' formed from twisted families.

Only one answer alone can solve these two mysteries.

That Masaya destroyed my family utterly, releasing me from my parents.

Such a stupid delusion lingers in my mind. How is this possible!?

"Also, this isn't the redemption I ask for...what I want is a different ending..."

In my memories, where I was never loved by my parents, my inner wishes become my life support. In the classroom, I spent days with no interaction with anyone, and my wish became purer.

I hope to be mocked, to be despised. As long as they can stay by my side, I'm willing to do anything.

I hope for others to look at me.

I hope for others to speak to me.

Anything will do. All I wish is to speak to 'you'!

"What I wish for, actually, that alone would have been good enough..."

I utter, and I have difficulty breathing. My eyes heat up, and my muscles shiver all over. A second later, and tears gush out of my eyes like a dam. I can't help but cling onto Sayo's clothes.

I already decided not to cry.

Sayo gives me a kind smile, and embraces me in her clutches.

Feeling Sayo's body warmth, I cry for a long time.

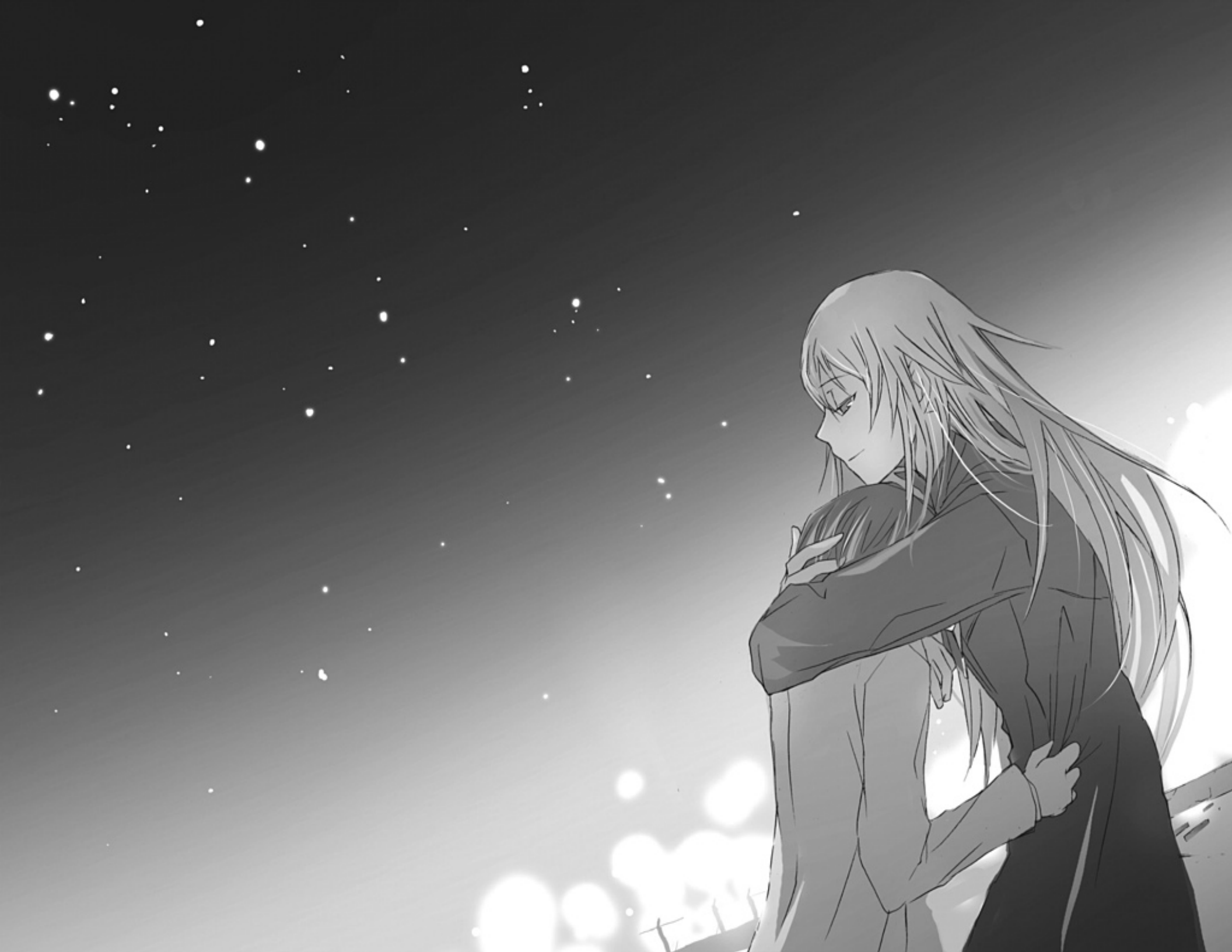
Trash won't be able to get a happy ending. However, the way this revolution ends isn't necessarily a completely bad ending.

Because this ending is so warm.

Ahh, maybe I'm no longer trash.

At the end of this long revolution, this is the one answer I find.

So surely, I will be able to gain happiness.



Afterwords

Nice to meet you. This is Ryouya Matsumura.

While writing this 'afterword', I'm suddenly reminded of my middle school memories. The memories of happiness and bitter experiences of the past seemed to flash by my eyes. Those who could talk well were very popular, and those that knew their own styles well would be popular with the opposite genders; stupid these, I had fun fooling around with the friends I was close with, and happy that girls would take to me. However, I would still secretly admire those popular ones from time to time, and often did stupid things, anguishing because of my shame—

And then, I realized.

...This does seem similar to an afterword, yes.

Surely, other authors will write better 'afterwords' through their own ways! Humorously describing other unexpected incidents while writing, or something like that! While I'm hesitating on how to describe this useless self, a popular author will definitely be designing some witty character, and getting lots of fans through the afterwords alone. This is tough. This isn't time to indulge in past memories! There is a huge problem 'now!' I got to figure out how to solve this afterword...

Well, luckily, I wised up after I graduated from middle school.

At the very least, I became good at flattering others.

Anyway, first, the thanksgivings.

To the two editors. Both of them kept stopping me from going out of control while editing my work, and I really don't know how to express my thanks...I always reflect on my actions after I end the phone calls.

To Miss Miho Takeoka, in charge of the illustrations, Sayo's so cool, cute and scary. I'll continue to work hard on writing, and not to let down your beautiful illustrations.

To my buddies in the social sciences classes and college research, if not for you guys criticizing my work all over the place, this work surely won't get published. At the same time, to my friends who gave thoughts on my work, the classmates in my high school, and to my buddies in the club, I'll have to grovel down to express my thanks.

And finally, to the readers picking up this novel. I did my best to write this novel, so as to make it enjoyable for you. If you can spend 90% mocking the protagonist of the book and loving him with the remaining 10%, I as an author will be really elated. I do earnestly thank you for the purchase.

...Ah, this isn't flattery. These are my true thoughts.

Ryouya Matsumura