



ジャンプホラー小説大賞  
銅賞受賞作品

殺戮 × 凶恋 × 人肉 選考会 歴史的の  
超問題作、**解林示!!**

# ピュグ種を蒔く マリオンは

前編

著：坊木椎哉 イラスト：つくぐ

# The Pygmalion is Planting Seeds

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# The Pygmalion is Planting Seeds - Volume 01

## Chapter 01



The red-purplish flower inaudibly withered away after a slant gleam.

At the top of the pot overflowed with dirt, she was holding her knees while

gazing at the empty space with her crystal clear eyes.

I gently leaned down and reached over her bare and smooth skin. Judging from the temperature transmitted through the palm of my hand, I could assume that the time for her awakening had already been set. By looking at her current expression, I can only feel that she's calling for me to wake her up.

Just a bit more and the daylight will completely vanish, making this room sink into the darkness of the night entirely.

I need to behave before the darkness drives out the evening. Otherwise, the retainers of the night will come and take her away again.

I took the dagger and inserted the edge, cautiously, between the sole of her foot and cut off the root.

Contrary to its appearance, the root was soft like a slenderly spun silk thread and didn't transmit the least bit of resistance to the dagger's blade.

After being released from her yoke, her sight did not stop wandering in the hollow.

Five minutes, ten minutes, twenty minutes.

Similar to a child excitedly looking forward to the start of a circus, I kept anxiously waiting for her to speak while swallowing up my saliva.

However, she kept silent the entire time, looking no different from a delicately carved sculpture. The root that was holding her down had already gone, yet she didn't show a sign of standing up and kept roaming her empty sight straight ahead.

I started grinding my teeth.

(Why?)

A sad result again. It's useless no matter how many times I try.

(Just why?!)

Where did I mess up? Is there something I'm lacking? I have no actual clue.

Even after pouring all my efforts, time and everything for her sake, this is the result.

[Why the heck?!]

My boiling anger welled up from my mouth as a loud scream, but she didn't show any sign of being frightened.

I barely stood up relying on my desperate legs and look down at her.

My throat was dried up, and pain ran through my eyes.

The sensation of my hand had vanished somewhere, and I already stopped sensing the smell floating around the house.

People would call this place hell.

They would probably also call me a devil.

No, I'm not a devil.

I am a child picking up stones in vain. The stones that I diligently piled up will mercilessly destroy the devil, over and over again.

I am eternally performing a play in a pitiful, ridiculous, and pathetic scene.

But despite everything, I need to continue stacking up those stones. Believing that one day, she will come and take me out of this spine-chilling wasteland.

It is the only thing that I can do after all.

I moved the blade of the knife directly across her outstretched neck and pulled it out in one go.

Brand new lines of blood started streaming out in this dimly lit room.

\*\*\*\*\*

A flower that can trigger the memories of the graduation ceremony, the first thing that usually comes to mind are cherry blossoms. In the town where I live, cherry blossoms are quite unfashionable, since they always die away, along with their light pink color before even blooming. That's why, the image of the apricot flower that blooms at the perfect time, have the strongest impact on me rather than the cherry blossoms when recalling the graduation ceremony.

Though either way, the graduating students gathering in the front yard of the school don't care about what flower is blooming; they are instead regretting the parting of their friends and the farewell of their typical school.

[Already graduation, three years sure did past in the blink of an eye]

While receiving the spring's sunlight, my classmate Isezaki Akira was looking at the shining white school building with deep emotions. He had entered a prestigious private university early in the new year, and is now peacefully enjoying the last moments of his school life. A world of difference from me, who failed entirely in the first term exams, and is now waiting for the final test results while trembling in fear.

[Indeed, these three years have passed in just a moment]

My murmur didn't seem to reach anybody's ear due to the clatter.

A few girls entering the classroom and handing an autograph collection to the homeroom teacher catches my attention.

On that paper, my name, Mamesaki Kuuya, was not written there. I mean, not having the least idea of what to write and just dashing off some uninteresting words like: [thank you for this year, take care] wasn't something I would bring myself to do.

[Everyone, gather over here, we're taking a picture]

The one who called for us holding a smartphone in her hand, was yet another classmate of mine, Iruse Misaki. With her model-like figure and innocent character, many male students have fallen for her. But out of all of them, Isezaki was the only one who remained in the boyfriend's position for the whole three years.

[Isezaki and Iruse sit in the center. Ah, and everybody move a little bit to this side]

By the guidance of the voluntary male student photographer, a dozen of people were cramped in one place. Making my way inside the crowd, I took the seat right in the back of Misaki and Isezaki.

Thinking about it now, Isezaki and Misaki were in the same class for three years. Which means that they showed off their intimacy every single day to people. Misaki entered a local college, so it was quite clear that their relationship will remain this way for a very long while.

[Alright, I'm taking it!]

At the moment the shutter was pressed, a spring breeze brought Misaki's hair odor to my nose.

As a result, my face was half strained and half slacked clinging to a shameful expression in the photo.

The eighteenth spring, youth's frame.

A few days later, I failed at making it to university, and my new Ronin life had started.

My parents divorced when I was in the sixth year of grade school. I haven't been told the reason.

It was my mother who left the house and me. Since then, we spent two years together before she passed away. It's been more than six years now since I last met my father.

The one who proposed to live with me after my mother's death was my uncle, the little brother of my dad, Haruhito.

Thus currently, I'm living under the same roof with him. Whether my father knew about my mom's passing or not, he kept on sending 50 000 yen every month to my bank account as a child-rearing expense, to which I entirely give to Haruhito as rent.

I was recommended to enter a preparation school, but I positively declined in order to choose the ronin path instead, only because the concentration courses and the trial examinations will end up costing an enormous amount of money.

[A kid like you doesn't need to think about unnecessary stuff like this. If it's about money, I'll somehow manage it, just go!]

I was grateful for his words, but having someone paying for you dozens of thousands of yen the entire year doesn't feel right. At the end of a long discussion, the one who gave in was Haruhito.

Like this, my Ronin life had begun.

I sought the city's library for studying since staying in the house all time made me depressed. So my intention of going out was to change my mood, more

than thinking about increasing my studying efficiency.

The library I go to is separated from the house by three train stations and is situated in the city center. Every time I walk my way through the traffic jam, I become obligated to witness the busy salarymen passing near me and the active faces of the youths strutting through the ground while chattering with each other. I had a hard time acting as if I'm not annoyed by being surrounded by these kinds of people.

I leave the house at nine of the morning, devote myself to studying the whole day in the library, and when the sun sets, I take the train back home, leaving behind the nightly town that gets absorbed by the allurements and lust of people.

My regular life was nothing but the repetition of these days.

As I continued to live this routine full of ups and downs, encountering Misaki again was an absolute coincidence.

On the night of the day when the start of the new rainy season was announced, I chose to walk a different path to the station with fewer people in it this time.

Approaching a small park gulped down between the buildings, I noticed a flower vendor stall, established right below the street light. Cut flowers potted in plainly made pots were garnishing a gorgeous assortment to the sorrowful street corner.

...a flower selling stall at this time of night?

Getting all curious about this unusual combination in the street, I concentrated my attention to the client who was appraising the selling flowers while squatting.

It was Misaki.

Seeing her wearing normal clothes was a first time for me, however, after spending three years with her in the same classroom, there was no way I could mistake her for someone else. Not even two months have passed since I last saw her at the graduation ceremony and she already turned into a beautiful, mature woman.

The person who was dealing with her was a little girl wearing a black summer knit. Perhaps her parents left her to guard the store.

Gazing at her slender figure I can only assume that she's a middle schooler at most.

The little girl unintentionally turned toward me.

What drew my attention, even more, was her mysterious beauty that stood out despite being surrounded with all of those bright flowers in their full blooming stage. Snow white skin not yet touched by anyone, black irises reflecting a melancholic sense, and a well-ordered face starting from a small nose, and continuing down to her young lips resembling flower buds. Her type is different from Misaki's, but she was indeed a beautiful girl. If Misaki is an elegantly blooming dalia under the sunlight, then the little girl is a night-blooming Cereus waiting for the dawn light, while quietly basking under the moonbeam.

However, somewhere inside those perfect looks of hers, I can also receive a somewhat cold impression coming out. That beauty reflected a feeling as if she had slipped up from an illusional painting, drawn by an artist who poured all of his heart and might into performing it, or in other words, a very unrealistic beauty. That is how perfect her looks were arrayed.

[How can I help you?]

A thin voice, as if ringing a brass bell, yet, its reverberation didn't seem to leave my ears.

It took me a small while to realize that she directed those words towards me. I couldn't act naturally at that time. It's only normal, I mean, my mind was so full thinking about a way to call out for Misaki while I was standing like a fool in front of both them.

[Hm, is that you Mamesaki?]

Misaki raised her head. I instantly noticed the little makeup she had on her initially clear face.

[Yeah, I mean, I happened to pass by here and saw a familiar figure you see]

While being all nervous, I tried my best at making a smile.

[Are you returning from a task tonight, Mamesaki?]

[Yeah, I was studying in the library]

Although I knew very well that there was no meaning in putting on airs, I still vaguely obscured the fact of me being a Ronin.

Behaving as if she is not even interested in what I said, she answered with an “I see”, and stood up after seizing a plastic bag with a potted plant inside.

[I'd like to take my time and talk with you, but I am kinda busy right now, so maybe next time]

Swinging my hands while chasing her leaving figure with my eyes, I started considering what to do after this. I didn't have the intention of buying flowers from the beginning. I just recognized someone I know and dropped by to greet them.

[Are you perhaps her acquaintance?]

Just when I decided to stick a random reason and leave, the little girl asked me, of course, I couldn't just ignore her and go on my way.

[She was a classmate of mine back in high school, does she come here often?]

[Yes, she's a regular customer who comes here every once in awhile. Countless people call out to me without even intending to buy anything, so visitors like her are very precious]

Looking at her beauty I wouldn't be surprised by the number of window shoppers. It's a man's nature to be attracted to a talking flower after all.

Thinking about such a thing I checked the price tags and was taken aback. All of them were absurdly expensive.

[Rather than not intending to buy, don't you think that they just lost the intention of doing so?]

[Despite these high prices, some people still purchases them from me. Like a drunk customer who lost control over his wallet, or a salary man returning home in the morning forgetting about his wedding anniversary. Even after

noticing that the prices are higher than the ones in the market, if he can just buy it, then he would gladly pay up]

Throwing away the innocent character appropriate for her age, the little girl started speaking in a mature manner, exhibiting my first mysterious impression I had of her. Maybe taking this attitude which is contrary to her pure and innocent outward appearance is a result of dealing with different people at this kind of place and time.

I didn't plan on buying anything from her in the first place, so I will probably get in the way of her work by staying here for too long. I randomly attached a few words and left the place behind.

[Let me know if you have a particular flower you don't need, I can purchase it from you]

.....A flower vendor, buying flowers from a customer?

Walking my way back to the train station, the strange words the little girl have emitted toward me remained hanging in my ears.

During the time I was on the train, I started recalling the gossip I overheard in my high school days.

The rumor of the flower vendor in the street corners.

The beautiful little girl that appears in the night street corners and sells her flowers to the bypassing people.

Besides the fact that she opens her stall at the night, nobody knows how and from where does she appear from.

Taking the same approach as a phantom and manifesting out of the blue in unexpected places, it is said that all of those who see her gets visited by good fortune.

A silly story made to grab the interest of the youth. Until graduating, I didn't hear anybody saying they encountered her, though.

[A little flower vendor girl carrying happiness along, huh...]

Who knows, maybe they are the same person.

While thinking about the little girl, Misaki's face overlapped as well.

Not the face of the mature Misaki that I just saw earlier, but the one that still had the lingering feelings of innocence back in my high school period.

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Ronin: a person who failed every entrance exam for university and is waiting for another chance.

## Chapter 02

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[I was looking for you]-Mysterious murder-Disappearance-Urban legends

The school building dyed by the evening light.

A heart in the peak of breaking off.

My own heart that got stricken.

The vague smile filled with bewilderment she returned after receiving my Confession.

[I'm glad about your feelings, but I never saw you in that kind of light, Mamesaki.]

Hearing out her reply, I finally became aware that my love was entirely demolished.

The bittersweet twilight memories of the fall of my first year in high school.

That had happened a short while before I heard Isezaki and Misaki started going out.

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15 minutes after moving three stations by train, the townscape began to get considerably empty.

Before the new city center got developed, this place was the heart of the town. Currently, not a single trace of it being used in the past could be detected. The hustle of the high street I left not too long ago seems to be in a very distant world now.

Approaching my house, the figure of females stinking from face powder and holding a nylon tote bag in their hands started to stand out here and there. They're going out for work it seems. Wearing skinny jeans while walking through the street, their fat bottoms were performing a lascivious dance.

Meanwhile, a drunk geezer sitting on the stool folded in front of a liquor store was loudly snoring. The amount of empty liquor bottles rolling on the ground beside him clearly describes how much he had drunk this night. Seeing the comfortable figure of an old man drinking from daytime until the middle of the night wasn't that rare of view in this area after all.

My house is situated in the red-light district, or plainly speaking, the place where the obscene ambiance of prostitution flows around. Back in the days, it was a very prominent and prospering licensed red-light quarter around the whole country; a place that was even admired as the holy ground of lust seekers everywhere. Now however, it became a spot where only vulgar, shameful women and filthy geezers reeking of alcohol could be seen. A worn out district left behind by the flow of time.

The windows of the erotic tea houses joined along the street buildings lined up dazzling lights throughout the road. Inside one of them with a half-opened door, I caught the sight of a well dressed up "flower" kneeling down on the floor.

[This is the new girl who started yesterday. she may look quiet, but she's

pretty amazing once she undresses, how about 18000 yen?!!]

A middle-aged woman was standing next to her and bargaining with the new client, whereas the flower did not speak.

The men who got possessed by the bewitching beauty of the girls inside, willingly open up their wallets and pay up.

People who are seeking lust and obscenity gather every night in this place, exactly like how summer insects swarm around a bug zapper. Those who seem to be at loss and are going back and forth in the same alley, those who intimately exchange greetings with the old maids of the street, the night bargainers and the dead drunkards chased out from the stores. Various human relationships were unfolding in this district where the impure flowers were insatiably blooming in profusion every single night.

Despite being accustomed to the street, the uncomfortable sense of stepping in the wrong place doesn't cease to follow me around. A bit too stimulating of an atmosphere for the diligent youth of society.

Exiting the principal street, a short distance before the shopping arcade, silently stood an ancient geisha house. That building that remained without reconstruction preserving its strong, indecent image was indeed my house, or correctly speaking, Haruhito's house.

[I'm home!]

Taking off my shoes in front of the door, a lively young looking person descended the stairs and came up to welcome me.

[Hey, welcome back! You're pretty late aren't ye?]

[I just dropped by somewhere on my way back. Nevertheless, you were quick to come back this time, Haruhito]

[Dammit, that old man. At the moment when I was about to depart, he contacted me again. The company doesn't provide me with the travel expenses here for god's sake]

Haruhito works as a freelance writer, so he quite often leaves the house for long periods of time to collect information. Not even four days ago, he left a

message saying [I'll be away for three weeks] and departed to Tokyo, but apparently, the information provider canceled the meeting at the last minute.

[I'll be making dinner now, so wait for me in your room]

In this house, Haruhito is assigned with the cooking duty. Being a freeloader, I felt bad about it, so I once tried making something instead, however, instantly after Haruhito ate a mouthful of the dish I made, he displayed a painful expression and I never stepped into the kitchen again since that day.

Every time I eat the meal that Haruhito makes, I become relieved. After all, that Yurina woman he always hires when leaving for work, forget cooking, she doesn't even know how to use a knife properly. It was the first time I saw someone washing rice using a detergent.

Walking up the stairs, I entered my room.

There are four rooms in the corridor of the second floor. The wall between the first two was broken down and is used as a workplace for Haruhito to set all of his documents in. The third room is Haruhito's bedroom, with the last, innermost one being my own.

Previously, it was being used as a temporary nest for prostitutes and clients to get all well and harmonious, which leaves off various awkward sensations hanging inside, but by driving out these kinds of ideas, it starts to only feel like an old-fashioned wooden house.

I'm terribly tired today. Maybe it's because I was nervous while talking to Misaki.

Getting completely engulfed in drowsiness, I was quickly drawn to the land of sleep.

I saw a dream.

A dream that I've been repeatedly seeing since the day I graduated from middle school.

I was walking down a dark path while my mother drew my hand.

As if she forgot how to bend her neck, she was looking straight ahead the

whole time, without turning her face to me.

I wanted to see my mother's face and started turning round and round like a satellite, but for some mysterious reason, I couldn't see it no matter from which angle I looked up from.

Where are you going?

Looking as if she had been possessed by something, my mother didn't answer my question.

With rushed steps, we continued to walk in the dark.

Those steps gradually got faster, making it harder for me to keep up with her.

I tried my best not to be left in this darkness alone.

With only that in mind, I chased after her back.

Suddenly, a ray of light appeared in front of the path.

My mother started sprinting at full speed.

Wait, mom. Don't go!

I desperately reached out my hands towards the streak of light.

[Hey! Dinner is ready!]

I was drawn back to reality by the calling voice of Haruhito. As if I was living the earlier dream, I realized that my hand was raised towards the ceiling.

Not even ten minutes have passed since I entered the room.

I open the kitchen door, and dinner's arrangement was already made. Placed in the center of the table was tonight's main dish, a large plate of twice cooked pork, along with the spicy miso soup made from frying cabbage and meat in garlic oil. Haruhito's special dish.

In the Mamesaki's evening meals, meat is added to everything without exception, and the refrigerator always has a lump of it stored inside. I think we're the only average family that stocks this amount of meat in their house.

[It's a human's instinct from ancient times to fulfill his desire of eating meat]

Or so Haruhito says.

[The ancient people ate it every time, and as a result, they acquired a more robust body than the one modern people have currently. The principal reason behind the fact that people shifted their eating habits from meat to focused diets was because of the increase in the price. It doesn't have anything to do with their conditions. In that case, to obtain both a healthy body and mind, you need to eat meat whenever you get the opportunity]

He might be going on too much about it by using meat in every single meal he prepares, but I think he's just worried about my health. My body is exceptionally small compared to anyone of the same age, not to mention the fact that I don't have the least bit of manly sturdiness. Because of my childlike face, I was quite often interrogated by police officers whenever I'm walking inside shopping centers.

Finishing dinner, I went back to my room.

I opened my reference book at the top of the desk, but Misaki's face comes back to mind, because of that, I didn't achieve any progress in my studies that night.

Misaki went missing.

I received this shocking information from a communication app one week after I last met her.

The sender was Isezaki.

According to my old classmates, they lost all contact with her three days ago.

Misaki's parents work overseas, so they get back home once a year. She even refused the housemaid they arranged for her, which makes her the only one living in the house. [My parents rarely get in touch with me, so I get the privilege to come back home whenever I feel like it], she said that while laughing, but who would think that her neglect and carelessness would ultimately backfire on her.

It seems that Isezaki was ignoring his university lectures to spend more time

looking for her. His head was full of thoughts about Misaki the whole time to the point where everything else became irrelevant for him.

[If you know anything, no matter how trivial it is, please let me know!]

The bitter message he sent me made it clear that Isezaki was at the end of his wits.

Inside the app, everyone was thinking about a way to find her, putting on the air of a detective or developing their own theory about the situation. They were all emotionally touched by the fact that their old classmate went missing.

While gazing through the long series of conversations, a single idea sprouted in my head.

I want to find Misaki.

Assuming that she was dragged into a kidnapping incident, perhaps if I rescue her and bring her back safe, she will become my girlfriend, leaving Isezaki behind.

A faint delusion without any basis that anybody would probably break out in laughter after hearing it. But for me, who still holds onto a burning unrequited love towards Misaki, I can not help but think this way.

From the following day onwards, my simple daily life composed of nothing but going back and forth to the library was enhanced by the hard task of finding Misaki. I began ending my study sessions earlier than usual to walk around the town seeking for information. A self-satisfactory action I took for my own sake.

Of course, I do feel compassion toward Isezaki who's doing his best searching for her as well, but on the other hand, deep inside my heart, I thought that he deserved it.

So, under this gloomy enthusiasm, I wasn't able to find out any news about Misaki. It's a reasonable result. There's a limit on how much a penniless ronin, without any personal connections could investigate. In the first place, I don't have the slightest idea of where she could go.

I also checked Isezaki's state of progress every day, however, his impatience to find a single clue was sharply transmitted from the message letters. It seems

that he wasn't able to get in touch with her parents either.

A week passed since Misaki's whereabouts were in the dark.

Isezaki's eager investigation is still on-going. Same as him, I didn't know when to give up and continued looking for her figure while roaming around the town repeating the same days full of despair and weariness.

[Hm? Kuuya! It's Kuuya!]

Ending my search in vain as usual, I was walking my way down the old street that was gasping frail light from both sides when a young woman called out to me while stuffing a lollipop in her cheek.

[What could a high school student be doing here in such a time? Wait, Kuuya is a high schooler? Ah right, you're a middle schooler, I forgot]

[I told you that I already graduated from high school! How about you, Sary?]

[I was given a vacation yesterday, but I completely forgot about it and went back to work]

Sary was smiling with a frivolous face like an innocent little girl.

She is a prostitute. Her looks are not bad, but on the other hand, she has a bad memory and forgets about everything said to her after only walking a few steps forward. However, when it comes to remembering people's names and faces, she is the best, to the point where she could memorize every single word her client would say.

[By the way, Sary, did you ever see this person? She's a former classmate of mine]

I brought up the picture of graduation from my phone and showed it to Sary.

She tilted her head while looking at the frame and answered with [I dunno, never seen her~].

Judging from her reply, I understood that Misaki is nowhere around this vicinity.

[I'm sorry Kuuya, I'm not sure, but it seems I couldn't be of any help to you. Want some candy?]

She took out the wet lollipop from her mouth and offered it to me. I gently refused.

[Thank you, but I'm fine. Don't let it get you; everything is okay]

[Is that so? I don't know what's going on but stay strong. Perhaps you want me to comfort you?]

The reverberation of the word "comfort" coming out from her mouth had an awfully mature feeling.

Again, I evaded her question with a vague answer and left the place. Turning around, I saw her standing figure waving her hand and sending me off. By now, she had probably forgotten the fact that I showed her Misaki's picture entirely.

Sary's quite obviously relaxing her guard when I'm around. Not because we're friends, but because she is in love with me. However, I always pretend to not notice her feelings. It's not like I'm being faithful to Misaki or anything as such, but it's just because I don't feel like opening my heart to anyone except her.

A woman who has feelings towards me, and a woman who once dumped me in the past.

I wonder which one's warmth should I seek.

Another layer of weariness was appended to my dead shoulders.

I came back home at the moment when Haruhito finished dinner preparations.

[You've been coming back quite late these days]

[I thought I wouldn't be able to catch up to things, so I decided to stay in the library as long as possible]

I feigned tranquility and deceived Haruhito who's questioning me.

I'm hiding from him the fact that I'm looking for Misaki since I can see him scolding me saying something like, [someone who failed the entrance exams like you, doesn't have the time to play the detective!]

Tonight's dinner was fried meat and vegetables. A simple flavoring using only salt, but goes excellently along with rice.

[It's fine to work hard n' all but try not to stay too late. You could end up having your skin peeled off by the skin-shin old maid you know.]

[What's this skin-shin old maid?]

[It's an urban legend popular among kids around here. The skin-shin old maid who appears in the night holding a knife and peels off the skin of children she catches.]

Since Haruhito's job is often related to the true-stories and gossip kind of magazines, he is pretty knowledgeable about stuff like this. Back in the day, he even got himself pulled into dangerous situations many times.

Nevertheless, an old woman who rips off raw skin.

It's pretty disturbing but too detailed to be true.

[Not sure where kids nowadays get these sorts of ideas to be honest.]

[Well, usually an urban legend always has a basis from where it generates. I remember the incident of the mouth ripping woman, the mysterious murder case that occurred near the city three years ago]

[What's that?]

[The case where a child's corpse was discovered in the mountains. It got featured in the media and became quite an uproar over here as well.]

Now that it was mentioned, something like that did indeed happen.

A five-year-old child admitted into an orphanage went missing when the nurse was distracted and was found dead a few days later, missing his right arm and having his back skin cruelly ripped off. That case caught the whole world's interest, however, three years have already passed, and no news about the criminal getting arrested was heard of yet.

[An urban legend is a derived work based on reality. By messing with the truth a little, sticking some decorations here and there, and giving it a backstory, it will turn into a successful modern fairy tale. So yeah, it's not entirely made up. On the contrary, holding a substance of reality gives it a wicked sense. Especially those carrying a high self-consciousness and who often get under the wrong impression would be easily deceived by such talk. People like you]

[Fft-cough-!]

I was about to gush out the cabbage from my mouth.

[Do I really look like someone who is often under the wrong impressions?]

[If you decide on something, you start stubbornly believing in it, and will not change your mind no matter what other people say. For better or for worse, you will recklessly proceed in your own way. Even after hearing out someone else's opinion and comprehending that you're running in the wrong direction, you're not gonna admit it, and you'll continue running until you fall off a cliff. That's dangerous you know, listen here...]

Before I realized it, the discussion turned into me getting lectured by Haruhito. Interrupting his words, I tried switching the conversation topic.

[By the way, what are the variations of urban legends?]

[Hm? What do you mean? Urban legends are the result of combining people's interests and imaginations after all...]

I somehow managed to avert the course of the talk.

[The motif could be different, but the stories' pattern are generally the same. The motif doesn't matter if it could stir up your interest. Whether it could be about night taxis, unsolved murder cases, fast food, popular anime series, prohibited entry to some ruins of an old coal mine, or even the little girl who sells match in winter]

The little girl who sells match!

After hearing Haruhito's words, as if I was thunderstruck, a flash flickered inside of my head.

I found it! A clue that connects to Misaki's whereabouts.

The little peddler girl in the street corners.

She is selling flowers instead of match, though.

It's rather odd that I forgot about her existence until now.

They both know each other. By some chance, she could happen to know something about Misaki's current location.

I swiftly finished eating my dinner,

[I'm going to borrow a reference book from a friend.]

and left the house behind along with Haruhito's voice telling me, [you can just delay it until tomorrow!], which I pretended not to hear.

Arriving at the shopping district, it was already 9:30 PM.

I continued wandering around the night town while praying not to be caught by a patrolling officer.

I knew that looking for her this way, was as hard as searching for a fallen seed in a sandy beach, but it was the only thing that I could do.

Assuming from the size of the store in my memories, it could not open in the principal streets with a regular footpath, so I focused on investigating large places and public parks since they hold enough space for a florist shop to set up.

Every short while, the sky would groan with deep black rain clouds obscuring the stars and the moon. I remembered the weather forecast reporting that it will start raining in the middle of the night. My foot started hurting from the pain of walking. It's not even definite whether she's in this town or not, yet I couldn't stop being restless about when I will be able to find her.

I didn't spot the flower vendor stall that was silently hiding behind the alley until the next 20 minutes before the date was about to change.

Without any customer to serve, the little girl was reading a book relying on the street light.

I rushed out toward the flower vendor girl, like a traveler who was delighted by finally stumbling upon an oasis.

[Oh, you're the boy from that day. What's with that tired expression, are you okay?]

[I was looking for you.]

Without giving myself a chance to arrange my breath, I instantly answered the little girl who was blankly looking at my face.

[The girl who was with you last time, Misaki, went missing for almost two

weeks now. Nobody can get in touch with her, and she didn't leave a letter behind. Her boyfriend and I are eagerly looking for her, but we can't grasp the smallest clue]

[And so, what does that have to do with me?]

[You're an acquaintance with her, right? I thought you'd know something and was looking for you the whole time. Could you tell me if you happen to know anything about the matter?]

[That's an unusual action to take for the sake of a friend. Why not just leave it to the police?]

[She lives alone separate from her parents, and her boyfriend refuses to ask the police. I know that acting alone won't settle the matter, but thinking that maybe she was dragged into some incident, I can't help but move around]

[You're quite enthusiastic, aren't you? Is it really because of your friendship, I wonder]

Her teasing words pierced right through my chest.

I feel like she saw through my embroidered, innermost feelings for Misaki. I was at a loss for a response.

The little girl gazed at my face as if she found something of intriguing and gently stood up.

[Rain, it seems]

A raindrop fell on my cheek as if it was conducted by the little girl's words.

[I will be closing up the shop today, there were no customers either way.]

The little girl started loading an eight seater parked near the road with her flower pots.

Before the rain started regularly falling, she finished loading the car and with a light jump, slid into the driver seat. As if it was nothing special.

[Come with me to the shop, I will explain everything once we get there]

The dark asphalt which was dry only a few minutes ago got polished by the falling rain.

## Chapter 03

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Shishikuibana- [What if God...]- Skull-The basement

The car drove onto the night street under the pelting rain, and the conversation between us didn't advance since we exchanged self-introductions in the start.

I was astonished by knowing that this little girl named Jinka Erisa, was the only manager of the flower stall, and even more, she had already acquired her driver's license.

I assume she's from the same generation as me, or rather, given the composed manner in which she talks, she could be even older.

[What an unpleasant rain. The rainy season has already begun it seems]

Jinka Erisa didn't open her mouth until we left the town's main road entering the industrial area. Her voice was as thin as a needle. Without being erased by

the sound of the falling rain on the car frame, it readily reached my ears.

[Um, could you please tell me where we are going?]

[You are the same age as Misaki aren't you?]

[Yes, that's correct]

[In that case, you can just talk to me in a more familiar way. It sounds unusual to use honorifics towards a girl with a young appearance anyway, so no need to be humble]

[And so Miss Jinka, where are w-]

[Just call me Erisa, no need to stick the "Miss". I just told you, no need to be humble]

I scratched my head and resumed talking, this time, making sure not to use honorifics.

[So, do you know Misaki's whereabouts?]

[Why do you think so?]

[You didn't say that you don't know earlier]

[Well done! You see, I'm running a small florist in the suburb, and she's over there now]

My chest was heavily stricken by Erisa's abrupt declaration.

I finally found out Misaki's location. Not to mention, I'm already heading there. While trying my best to control my excitement, I asked Erisa.

[Misaki, is she safe?]

[The way you asked me sounds as if you're inquiring of the welfare of a kidnapped hostage]

[I'm sorry if I offended you. It's been a long time since I've last seen her, I was bit worried]

[Don't worry, I'm taking care of her in the shop. Though, it depends on you whether she will go back home or not]

[Depends on me? What you mean by that?]

Erisa's final words carried along an unpleasant premonition. When I asked her about their meaning, she made a puzzling smile and remained silent.

I started thinking about the inner intent of what she said.

I understood the fact that Misaki is in Erisa's shop. However, it is pretty dangerous to trust her proclamation blindly. She might be using this information as a bait to drag me to some sort of plot.

Taking captives, commercialized abduction, accusing me as her crime partner, or maybe even murdering me for her own pleasure. All of those negative ideas were swirling inside of my head. To top it off, I was irritated by myself who carelessly accepted her invitation of riding in her car.

The conversation ended since then and thirty minutes have passed. We arrived at an elegant, refined western style building that is embracing a broadleaf tree forest.

[This is my shop]

The front door opened, along with the sound of a light doorbell right after we got out of the car. A young woman wearing a white and light blue maid uniform came up to greet us.

[Welcome back, Milady. I'm glad to see you safe under this violent rain]

[Milady?]

[I was called this way since a long time ago, that's all]

I received a towel from the maid who somehow gave me the impression of the spring's gentle sunlight, and wiped off my hair and clothes.

[Her name is Kanade. She used to serve my father and is now working for my shop. Since I'm not very good at treating customers, you can say that she's the real manager of this place]

[Oh, please don't say that, all that I do, is sit at the counter the whole time]

[No need for modesty, you're doing a splendid job]

[Was it you who build this shop?]

Interrupting their conversation, I inquired Erisa.

[This place was originally made by a particular country's diplomat as a shed. My father purchased it, and currently, I'm using it as a florist]

And where's your father right now?

I barely avoided asking her such a risky question. Things will probably get awkward if I started touching upon delicate matters.

[Kanade, this person is Mamesaki Kuuya. He's the classmate of Iruse Misaki, the girl I brought in earlier that day. Try not be too loose around him]

Forgetting to greet back Kanade who was bowing her head toward me, I went directly to ask Erisa.

[Is Misaki really over here?]

[Yes, I can assure it to you]

Entering the room I was lead to by Erisa, its interior design had strong remains of it being used as a residence, matching with her earlier speech.

The counter that was supposed to be the former entrance hall was overflowing with different flowers of various colors and shapes, and their fragrance was floating around the whole place. Each flower vase was holding a significant and deep artistic design.

Raising my eyes, I saw a large antique chandelier hanging from the ornate ceiling. The building's insides were clearly far more luxurious than its' outside appearance.

While I was observing the shop left and right, Erisa walked into the back of the counter and pointed to a small door buried inside.

[It's pretty dark over her, so be careful of where you step]

The door was connected to some descending stairs. With Erisa in the front, Kanade in the rear and me entangled between them, we advanced towards the basement relying on the incandescent light of the ceiling lamps.

[This cellar seems to have existed here even before my father bought the house]

Erisa's voice overlapped with our unlined footsteps.

[The top floor is neat and all, but this place looks like plain concrete. The floor and walls were left full of black stains. Fufu, I wonder what this diplomat was using such a gloomy basement for]

A cold chill ran down my spine after hearing Erisa's unconcerned words. Is she perhaps trying to scare me? Or maybe there's some kind of implication included along with her sentence? Looking at her walking slender back, I wasn't able to seize her intention.

After descending the stairs, an iron double door stood before us. Erisa pushed the door open and an awfully chilly white light drove the darkness in the stairs away.

The basement walls and floor were all affixed by pure white coating leaving not even a crack, and a huge refrigerator majestically stood in the interior of the room.

On the left side was a systematic kitchen, and close to it was a tatami sized stainless table.

Looking at the right side, I noticed a solid fireproof vault enclosed by a wide glass wall. With the fluorescent light barely reaching, it released an impression as if something special was stored inside.

At the center of the room, and as if I was the owner of the place, a pure white round table and well-furnished chairs with a curvature design, were automatically arranged.

Above, at the top seat, Erisa silently lowered her back and sat.

[Where's Misaki? Is she over here?]

I inspected the whole room, but Misaki was nowhere to be found.

[Everything has its own order. Let's have a little talk]

Since she was insisting, I couldn't help but take a seat.

Placing her chin on top of the back of her crossed hands, Erisa started to talk.

[Answer me Kuuya, what if God appeared in front of you and proposed to bring one of your passed good friends back to life, would you accept?]

I was at a loss for words after hearing Erisa's unexpected question.

The figure of my late mother popped in my head.

My mom who took care of me after divorcing my father.

I wasn't able to remember her looks, neither the facial expressions she used to show me.

[I just thought I'd ask you about it]

The one who interrupted the floating silence was Erisa.

[It's only natural to regret not doing this and that, or not talking that much with one's passed beloved person after all. It's normal to wish for them to come back from the realm of the dead]

[Is that so? I'd personally prefer to leave them resting]

I was finally able to squeeze out an answer.

[Bringing back someone to life means that you have ruined his last moments. Because life is limited, people give it value, and so they pay their respect toward those who already left for a journey to the other side. Don't you think so?]

[It sounds like an unreasonable talk a priest would say]

[Nobody can countdown the time left that someone has before they step into the coffin. Life is something that is illogically lost throughout time. The end abruptly knocks on the doors, without any prior notice nor restraint. I wonder how many people living a peaceful life were touched by the unforeseen death of their beloved persons]

Once again, I remember my mother.

I don't know the cause of my mom's death. I don't even remember what was I thinking on the day of her funeral.

The only thing I still remember is the fact that the small coffin window didn't open until the end of the cremation.

In other words, I didn't even have the chance to see her resting face.

[Kuuya, do you know about the story of ['The Monkey's Paw'](#)?]

I nodded to her question. It's a famous British story about an old couple who accepted the paw of the monkey that will grant them three wishes and resulted with a calamity befalling upon them.

[You see, the fact their son came back to life wasn't mentioned anywhere. From the couple's conversation, it was hinted that he was involved in machinery and was resuscitated with a torn body. Was it really their son who was striking the door late at that night?]

[If it wasn't their son, then what would it be?]

[From the tale's view, it is indeed the son who was knocking the door. It's a question of interpretation, you see, it is more appropriate to explain the story such that, making a wish which interferes with fate comes along with an enormous price. Even if it was an unforeseen incident for the concerned person, it is still the fate God had determined beforehand and should not be overturned no matter what. The cost that comes along with opposing fate is inestimable. A cost that not even parental love could handle]

[God is pretty unfair isn't he? Why not bring him back to life with his normal shape?]

[I think that God did give humans a bit of talent to overturn reason. What if the ability of The Monkey's Paw was flawless, and their son was resuscitated back to his standard form? They would then, probably throw away the cross and start devoting themselves to worshipping the Monkey's Paw instead. Although I'm not sure whether that would be a happy ending or not]

I was irritated by seeing the cold Erisa exchanging an unreasonable discussion with me.

What's her true intention for talking about this?

I didn't come here to speak about life and death.

I only want to check if Misaki is really safe.

I tried guiding the conversation back to where it began, but I couldn't grasp the initiative and was just writhing in agony instead.

I couldn't just explode in anger in this kind of situation. I felt that the truth

was lurking somewhere inside her words.

From the beginning, she was looking at me with an expression as if she's testing me. If it weren't for a difficult conversation like this, I'd probably already be captivated by her shiny black eyes. She looks like she's waiting for me to touch the core of the matter. Am I supposed to open this Pandora's Box placed in front of my eyes, I wonder?

[Let me change my question a bit. If one day, your beloved person suddenly died, would you think about bringing them back to life]

The ominous words of Erisa gave me a cold chill.

[Beloved person? Who may that be?]

[Anybody you want]

[Look! I don't understand what are you trying to imply here, and I don't want to know either]

I destroyed the seal of Pandora's box.

[Is this perhaps about Misaki?]

I was patiently waiting for the next words coming out from Erisa. Those ten seconds that have passed since then felt dozens of times, no, hundreds of times longer in my perspective.

[Perhaps I rushed things?]

Despite the way she said that, it didn't seem she was reflecting on it at all.

Erisa turned her face towards Kanade who was standing near us

[Kanade, bring her here]

[Understood, Milady]

I was frozen after seeing the object that Kanade brought from the refrigerator and placed it on the table.

Over there was something that exceeded my worst expectations.

What was placed above that stainless table was Misaki's head which had turned more pale than wax.

[MISAKI!]

I involuntarily screamed and picked up that head.

I started thinking of the possibility of it being artificial.

However, the sensation transmitted to the palm of my hand was that of cold human skin and hair.

Both of her eyes were firmly closed, and her lips were slightly open as if she was trying to whisper something.

[MISAKI! Misaki!]

Misaki's head didn't answer my constant calls.

While calling out her name for a short while, I became aware of her condition.

Misaki is dead.

[What the fuck is this!? What the heck is going on here?! How did she even end up this shape? Why only her head? It was you! Wasn't it?! You did this]

[Her death was an accident]

Erisa interrupted me with a calm voice.

[I reuse Misaki was a regular customer of mine, she was the only client who visited very often. Even when I don't talk about when or where I'm planning to set my stall, she still finds me every single time. As if she was looking for me. Sometimes I chose desolated places where people rarely walk by, and she still found me. Did she like flowers that much, or maybe meeting me was her goal, I couldn't tell]

I heard the sounds of meat being grilled and then realized that Kanade was preparing dinner without giving any concern to the matter.

[Did you know, on the night when you discovered my stall, just a little bit before, she told me this, "I want to meet you in a different place". The appointed place she chose was the new construction site near the suburb. Four days later, I went there while wondering what she needed from me]

I started calculating. Isazaki sent me the information about Misaki one week after I met Erisa, saying that he lost contact with her for three days. The puzzle

pieces are coming together.

[At the time when I arrived, she was already crushed beneath the building materials. Did she collapse and fall off, or maybe the piled up material crumbled upon her, I'm not very sure. She lost a tremendous amount of blood and was breathing faintly]

[Breathing faintly? Why didn't you save her? Didn't you at least try to call an ambulance?]

When I suddenly stood up, Erisa shrugged her shoulders and began explaining.

[It was useless. Her head was fine, but her body was all demolished from getting squashed beneath the iron materials. It was certain that her leftover time was about to end. I gave up saving her and cut off her head to bring back with me]

[I can't understand your behavior. Why did you rip off her head then?]

[The main talk starts right now]

Hearing her quiet yet wicked and sharp voice, I ceased speaking.

[Regardless of the details, Iruse Misaki is now dead. And it is impossible for you to bring her back to this world unless a miracle happens. It is the same thing as trying to fix a broken egg by getting both the inside and the shell back together]

Erisa was peeking into my eyes with her black glassy pupils.

[However, what if you get a chance to go against God's divine providence? What will you do in that case?]

[Going against.....]

[You're pretty dense aren't you? I'm saying that there exists a way to resuscitate Misaki]

I lost my words.

Bringing back the dead to life? Is that even possible? I mean, we're not talking about the Monkey's Paw.

This is even worse than an immature girl who can't accept the death of someone and blindly believes of a way to bring them back to life. If she's speaking to me seriously, I think she already crossed the level of mere craziness.

[You probably don't believe me. Let me show you then, the way to revive the dead]

Erisa stood up, approached the vault enclosed by glass and invited me.

By switching on the light, the inside became apparent.

Two potted plants were lined up on the floor. The one on the right was a thirty centimeters long stalk with a considerable puff on its center, taking the form of a woman's upper half. Although it looked coarse as if it was shaved by a chisel, the eyes, the lined nose and lips were definitely those of a human. I could even see her collarbone, shoulders, small breasts and her two slender arms. The belly was absorbed into the stalk.

I knew about the natural objects that take the form of humans and such, the pareidolia effect if I'm correct. But the plant in front me right now held too many details to the point where it could be confused with the real thing.

The one on the left took the shape of a grade school boy sitting while holding his knees and gazing at the space absent-mindedly. He's not wearing any clothes. From his closed thighs, his testes which looked like a peach were peeking out. At the top of his head, a brilliant flower petal was blooming like a spread scarf.

[Shishikuibana, that's the name of the plant]

[Plant? This child over here is a plant too?]

[That's right]

Erisa started talking to me who was dumbfoundedly observing the place.

[It's a species called as heterotrophic plants. Rather than photosynthesis, it feeds on outside organic matter to grow up. You can say they're the same as saprophytic plants if you want. The Shishikuibana changes to complex appearance when they mature.]

[Isn't that the same as the mandragora?]

Mandragora is a poisonous plant. Its toxic root that takes the shape of a human was formerly used as an anaesthesia or sleeping pills. It has even made an appearance in the Old Testament.

From its nature and outward appearance, it is said that it was used to suck up sinners blood as an execution method, or that it screams until death when extracted from the ground and much more other stories that were used as materials for fantasy novels.

Erisa silently shook her head.

[These plants here don't scream nor are they poisonous. They do look like humans from their appearance and feel, but that is all. They can't stand and walk, and they can't talk. All that they do is wander their sight vacantly while sitting in these pots all the time]

[They only look like humans for me though]

[You can try and touch them if you want]

Following her suggestion, I touched the boy on the left.

I felt soft thin hair growing on his tender skin. A weak temperature and pulse were transmitted to my hand as well. A sense of touching a real human body without a doubt.

[I wouldn't understand anything by just touching them. Rather, it only increases my doubt on whether they're really humans or not]

[The flower blooming at top of his head is proof enough that he's not a human. If you lightly stretch it, you will realize that the calyx is unified with the cranium. I planted this boy's seed four weeks ago. Since its hair and nails are already growing, it would usually seem like a naked child sitting on a pot for any outsider]

[By bringing Misaki back to life, you meant as a Shishikuibana?]

[Not exactly, but you did understand the idea]

That absurd nonsense Erisa was talking about only a few minutes ago had finally made sense to me now.

This is certainly a "rebirth".

However, not a perfect rebirth.

After all, it didn't reach the hope I had after hearing that I could bring her back to the living world.

[In other words, it's just a doll that takes on a human shape. In such a case, making a silicon figure resembling the corpse is much better]

[It is indeed better if you're aiming for a souvenir to keep around. You see, strictly speaking, the Shishikuibana is different from a doll. Whilst growing, its internal structure transformation closely resembles that of a human. Skin, blood, blood vessels, internal organs, bones, muscles. It possesses everything a human body could have. If you wound it, blood spouts out. A fully fledged life form. The only thing it lacks is will and intention]

[That last point makes it entirely different. No matter how close the appearance could get to a real one, it is still a doll. There's no meaning in reviving a person who wouldn't talk back to you when speaking to it]

[Did you already forgot about the lesson from The Monkey's Paw?]

Like a teacher who was at a loss by his disciple's wrong behavior, Erisa raised her voice in shock.

[The fact that the son was resuscitated with an imperfect form was the compensation for making use of a miracle. If he turned back to his former shape, the world wouldn't be lacking peace and harmony right now. If you can turn left, you can't turn right. This world's various phenomena are all based on give-and-take relations. If you want to resuscitate her as a Shishikuibana, you need to abandon your mutual communication with her]

I want to bring back Misaki to life.

However, Erisa's suggested method grandly differs with the one I'm wishing for. I'm not interested in the least of making a doll reflecting her image.

But unfortunately, there's is no other way to bring her back to her earlier form. I once heard of a doctor who made a grotesque doll out of his lover's decomposed corpse, though, that wouldn't even be possible in her case. In the end, her head is already separated from the body which turned into a bloody lump of meat.

If I give in, Misaki will revive into an incomplete form.

If I don't give in, Misaki will be lost for eternity.

I wonder if either of these choices would satisfy me.

I wonder which choice would Misaki wish for me to take.

[How can I..... revive her?]

My ego decided on the conflict inside my head.

I wasn't ready to accept the abrupt death of Misaki.

[First thing you need, to raise a Shishikuibana, is to plant the seed]

Erisa indicated to the Shishikuibana's head with her index finger.

[.....In her brain. By making a hole in her skull]

[In her brain?!]

[Don't bring me those typical ethics like getting cursed by the dead. The brain is an indispensable seed-plot for the Shishikuibana. The seed sucks up the information accumulated in the brain in order to take a similar outward appearance of the corpse. Do you understand the reason I cut off Eruse Misaki's head now?]

Erisa and I went back to those chairs and Misaki's head was placed on the stainless table.

[Let me confirm this, Mamesake Kuuya. After hearing out my explanation, are you willing to revive Iruse Misaki?]

[Yes, I do!]

My hesitation had disappeared.

[Does it mean that you will carry on any risk following this action?]

[What do you mean by risk?]

[Will you take any measures to bring her back, and never give her up? You can call it as resolution if that fits for you]

I wavered a little bit, but then strongly nodded. Erisa's expression merely changed into a one of relief.

[That's good, you finally made your resolve. I started thinking about what to do if you refused]

[Why would you think so? I mean, you had the intention to revive her from the beginning, didn't you? And in the case I didn't meet you I'd still be looking for Misaki right now you know?]

[I could've just revived her on my own, but the Shishikuibana's seed are precious. I can't just go on wasting them. So I am indeed thankful for your arrival]

[Then why did you cut off her-]

At that moment, my words were interrupted by the sound of someone knocking on the iron door.

Arrogantly, without the least consideration.

[We have an uninvited guest, the person who wastes these precious seeds]

Erisa disgorged those words with a troubled face.

## Chapter 04

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[scratch your finger tip]- dismantling-human flesh-Pygmalion

When Kanade opened the iron door, a young man wearing a black denim and dangle shirt entered the room.

Looking around his twenties apparently, with light brown hair, unshaven face and an expression aloof from the world, his image overlapped with Haruhito in my mind.

[Eh, did I interrupt something here?]

While not seeming to feel bad about it at all, the man said as such.

[Yes, you're in the way, every time. What do you need?]

[Greetings there, I just had a hard time bringing you some goods without borrowing any help from the Mogura ye' know? How about ye' thank me for

that at least?]

The man was grasping a long case from its handle.

[I'm not interested in some junk like the one brought to me last time]

[Don't be like that now. This time, I brought the real thing. Fresh quality goods]

By opening the case, a raw, sour, stinky smell struck my nose. Stored inside was a girl's body split into pieces. Bloody traces were standing out from the cut sections and her long hair was hiding her face.

[She's a runaway girl. Unfortunately, there was no information about her. I don't know her name nor her age. But hey, I found a sanitary napkin along with her, so it's fine right?]

[Oh my, you're a brute wearing human skin aren't you? Well, at least it's better than a suicide corpse you could pick from an abandoned building. The insides seem to be safe this time it seems]

Erisa leaned over the corpse and took its slender white arm.

[Her condition appears to be fine. Although, I'd prefer the blood to be extracted more]

Like a restaurant chef who is checking the quality of the market vegetables, Erisa inspected every single piece of the dead girl and brings her nose closer to it. I was about to lose control of my legs by seeing this unusually cruel scene in front of my eyes.

[By the way, who's that boy over there?]

The man pointed towards me who was standing still like a good-for-nothing pillar.

[The same as you, someone who's looking for seeds. He's a pretty brave boy who was searching for me at this time of night for the sake of his beloved girl]

[Wha-!?!]

My heart leaped up after she guessed my crush for Misaki.

[You thought I wouldn't know? It was too obvious; a woman is very sensitive

to a man's glances, especially those that are holding a yearning towards them. Women who don't recognize such a glance are even scarcer than a protected species you know]

Hearing Erisa's unconcerned words, I started thinking of the possibility that Misaki had realized my feelings, and my brain suddenly got hotter.

[To top it off, he's trying to revive her, knowing that she already has a boyfriend. Honestly, I was touched by his pure conduct and decided to give him the seed for free this time]

['ey c'mon that's not fair~ I turned my bath into a blood ocean trying to dismantle the corpse here. Aren't ye' gonna acknowledge my efforts at least?]

The man said that in a dissatisfied manner.

[I can see you getting all spoiled if I do that. And either way, you are seeking seeds too much. Rather than a service, I'm thinking about charging you additional fees this time]

[As always, a cute face and a harsh personality. Just like a rose with steel thorns]

[I will accept your words as a compliment. The fact of being a rose doesn't change after all]

Erisa lightly parried the man's sarcastic words, fetched a small box from the vault and passed it to him.

[I'm fine dealing with you like this, but these seeds are very rare, don't go wasting them around]

[I know, I know...]

[You're in a good mood as usual, aren't you? I'm busy right now, if you don't have anything else to say, I'd like you to leave then]

[How cold of you. Guess I'm done over here, well then!]

Holding the box in his hands, the man left the room with a satisfied face. The room is left with me, Erisa, Kanade, and the blood covered marionette without strings.

[Who was that?]

[An upstart acting all tough. He's a nasty man. I feel sorry for the flowers raised by him]

Erisa said these words as if spitting out. However, her cold facial expression didn't change the least.

Despite being in this shop for only a short time, I already understood that Erisa doesn't show very much emotion or facial expressions, making me receive the impression as if she's a bisque doll imitating a human's behavior. Somehow, I can't imagine her face getting all red from anger or see her clapping her hands while roaring with laughter.

Erisa closed the case and called for Kanade.

[Take care of this after planting the seed in Iruse Misaki's head. retrieve the ovary, cut the meat and store it in the refrigerator]

[What should I do with the fingers? There are still many of them not used yet]

[Throw them away if there are too many]

[Understood, Milady]

While serving up the dish on a plate, Kanade answered with a broad smile. She wasn't disturbed at all by seeing a corpse in front of her eyes. The same face she made when delivering up Misaki's head, looking like a waitress serving us afternoon tea. It was evident that she was used to dealing with corpses in her daily life.

[What do you mean by taking care of it?]

[Peeling off the skin, removing the fat and separating the meat from the bones. That's all]

[I didn't ask you about your crafting skills. Why are you doing with that in the first place?]

[To make it edible of course... for me]

A plate of steak along with sauce was put in front of Erisa. The side options are asparagus and carrots. The slight smoke being raised from the plate reached

my nose as a sweet smell.

[Excuse me now, I'm starving]

In an elegant manner, Erisa carried the meat to her mouth. While chewing, her lips were wiggling the steak and I was absent-mindedly gazing at her white neck where her faint throat swallowed the bite.

[I'd like you to stop staring at me when I'm eating. It's embarrassing]

Erisa's hands stopped moving because of my unreserved glance.

[What kind of meat....are you eating now?]

[The abdomen of a medium build man. A simple medium rare grilled steak with salt and pepper as a seasoning. Not grilling it too much gives it a uniquely delicious taste]

The pure-hearted girl was boldly explaining to me a human cooking recipe.

Behind her, the young maid was drilling a hole in Misaki's head while smiling.

[I'm not sure why are you doing that, but eating human flesh is...you know...not]

[Are you going to tell me that it is wrong to do so?]

Erisa asked me after drinking the mineral water filled in a glass cup.

[Could you explain to me why is it wrong?]

[Well, that's because.....yeah, the law...]

[There's no act that prohibits the consuming of human flesh in this country]

Erisa crushed down my likely answer.

[It is indeed quite impossible to obtain human meat without violating the law of killing a person and damaging their body, however, eating human flesh itself is not prohibited by law. There are some other countries which banned the act of eating human flesh, but those kind of laws that were taken from their own morals are not enough to restrain the desire of some people who want to eat it]

[But instead of human flesh, there are plenty of other kinds of meat, like cows or pigs]

[There is a significance in eating human flesh]

Erisa wiped off the sauce left in her mouth with a napkin.

[It is true that eating human flesh is considered as the greatest taboo for humanity. However, no basic explanation of the reason could be found. You must not hurt a person, you must not steal things that don't belong to you, you must not lie. People repeatedly learned about these sorts of taboos from their teachers and parents in their childhood, but no one taught them that eating human flesh is wrong. By getting rebuked for committing an error, the person understands that what they did was wrong and throughout their days, they discover the society's norms and standards. By getting scolded for it, a strong negative impression is scorched in their hearts, and so, the next time, they behave without repeating the same mistake. However, there is no procedure used against the deed of eating human meat. In the end, you can't find a book explaining how to deal with a child who ate his friend's flesh]

That's true, if a teacher found out a kindergarten kid eating his friend, he would just be stunned instead of scolding him.

[By following the question of why is it wrong to eat human flesh, we will just run into another problem like, "is it good or bad to eat the flesh of living beings despite being able to live by eating plants". If we are going to consider it as a bad deed, then we can also just call those who eat bears or weasels as evil. To sum all of this up, it is adiaphora, a question without answer]

Erisa put down the knife and the fork.

[If killing people and eating their flesh wasn't a taboo, everyone would probably start to kill in order to eat. After all, humans are an existence that prefers to take the easiest choices]

The empty tableware was removed, and Misaki's head which was put into a small pot, was placed instead. Her face was slightly visible within the wood chips. A thirty centimeter hole was drilled in at the top of her head. I felt both sad and relieved by seeing her resting face.

[I'm going to have you carry back the pot with you. I wouldn't mind raising it until it takes a human shape, but doing that by your own hands from the beginning will spring up attachment between you, wouldn't it?]

[But wait, how am I supposed to do that? should I just give her water?]

[It grows by drinking blood. But not as much as you think. Just scratch a finger tip and dribble a few drops a day. When she develops a face, you can make her suck on your fingers. There are some people who're addicted to this kind of stimulation you know]

[And how much should I give her?]

[Only a small amount is enough. An amount much lower than what you give in a blood donation]

[Is that the risk you told me about earlier?]

[No way]

[Then what is this risk?]

[Slowly, but surely, you will realize it. Soon enough]

[Mr.Mamesaki, here..]

Kanade handed me a small army knife.

[I'm giving that to you. When you don't feel like seeing her face anymore, don't think about reclaiming. The roots will suck up the moisture and start growing everywhere]

I got chills just just by imagining a few roots growing out from her eyes and mouth. I'd do anything to avoid seeing Misaki in such a condition.

[I will be escorting him now. I'm leaving the rest to you]

[Understood. Farewell, Mr.Mamesaki]

By the time I got into the car again, the rain had already stopped falling. On our way back, the road was full of puddles and the tires were splashing water while moving. With the car pushing its way in the darkness, we leisurely aimed to the district where I live.

[A displeased deed by the Pygmalion]

Erisa's sudden words broke the silence.

[Who?]

[A Greek myth about a sculptor. A miserable man who fell in love with his sculpture and wished for it to turn into a human. In his case, that wish was granted out of sympathy by Aphrodite. But you'd better understand that a goddess's mood wouldn't descend upon everyone who's praying for it]

[What do you mean by that?]

[Realize your stature, and don't desire too much. That's the meaning]

While I was trying to understand Erisa's strange words, the care halted in the entrance of the flower quarter. The light of the lined up night stores had already disappeared and the district had fallen into a peaceful silence. It didn't take even ten minutes for us to arrive.

[Well then, we shall meet again]

Erisa went back, leaving a short salute behind.

Without having the composure to see her off, I ran towards a light pole by the roadside and started vomiting. By the time I finished disgorging everything in my stomach, I did not realize that she purposely obscured a very important bit of information from me.

## Chapter 05

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It is for you to choose-blood absorption-knife- The prohibited path

Two weeks after I took charge of the Shishikuibana....Misaki, I was called by Erisa on a late-morning. This is the third time I'm meeting her.

Standing below the sunshine, her beauty did not change in the least. Her clear white skin was bouncing back the sunlight increasing her brilliance. Standing in this hot weather, she was the only person that felt like she doesn't belong to this world.

[I want you to meet someone]

I was brought to an old residential area.

After making it through a series of hedges and block walls full of moss here and there, we finally arrived at an old fashioned isolated house. The garden was full of withered grass and bushes, but what gave me the strongest impression

as if I stepped in the wrong place, was the brilliant hydrangea in the summit of their blooming. The name carved in the doorplate burned by the sun heat was Arisu.

The moment Erisa ringed the bell, a middle-aged woman came to receive us.

[Oh my, Miss Jinka, what could be the matter?]

[I thought I'd visit and check the situation]

[And, who may this person be?]

Arisu released a suspicious glance towards me.

[My new assistant. I brought him with me for practical training]

[Is that so. Well then, please come in]

Completely believing the imprudent lie Erisa had bluffed, Arisu started lining up slippers inside.

While the house was pretty neat, there was not a single sign of decoration or refinement. A house made for the sole purpose of residing in. Cardboard and clothing cases were piled up in the narrow corridor. Although some hints of living in could be noticed everywhere, personal dispositions and valuable things couldn't be seen at all.

[I will be bringing my husband now]

We were guided to a living room with a solid wood carved low table and cheap looking dressers occupying most of the space. The woman went to the inner room.

[Leaving aside the random speech earlier, what did you want to show me?]

I whispered to Erisa next to me.

[I thought it is the suitable time. I mean, you will start pondering about your future actions soon enough, in any case]

[And what do you mean by the suitable time?]

My question remained hanging due to the door's sliding sound.

Arisu walked in while carrying her husband from both his arms.

[Even if it's just a fingertip, I couldn't bring myself to wound it, so I gave him the blood of a stray cat I caught instead]

Arisu placed the pot on the table.

A forty centimeter stalk was puffed out taking the form of a slender man featuring a fastidious facial expression. His approximate age was the same as his wife, Arisu. Thin white lines were running all over his body.

[It looks like he was raised in a favorable condition]

Erisa changed her sight from the Shishikuibana towards Arisu.

[Did you make your decision yet?]

[No, I'm satisfied with this for the time being]

[If you're content with the current situation, then your choice is correct. That way, you wouldn't have to be burdened with any more unnecessary stuff]

I was hearing out Erisa and Arisu's riddle-like exchange while keeping silent the entire time. Sometimes, I caught the word of a forty-one-day old body mixed in the conversation. It seems that not too much time has passed since the death of her husband. After staying inside for twenty minutes, we took our leave from the Arisu house.

Erisa and I went back our way below the dazzling sun rays. She didn't use her car today saying, "My legs would dull if I don't walk every once in awhile.". The small rattle basket she was holding in her hand was shaking in synchronization with her steps.

[Despite her looks, she is in her early forties]

Walking on the street, Erisa said as such.

[Her husband fell into a massive debt due to his business failure and was overworking himself until the end to make it up. One day he had a heart attack and did not rise anymore. Trying to sustain the household economy, it seems he made her go through a lot as well, which kind of explains her fast aging]

[Even so, she was deeply in love with him to the point where she resuscitated him as a Shishikuibana in order to stay together]

[Did it seem that way for you?]

[Am I wrong?]

Erisa floated a wicked smile.

[On the contrary, she deeply detested her husband. He fell into depression because of his downfall and cleared it away by blaming everything on her. For her, it was probably something unbearable. Far from being thankful for her devotion, he even used her as a vent for stress relief. She was constantly in fear from his tyrannical rage]

[Why did she turn him into a Shishikuibana then?]

[For the sake of the revenge she couldn't fulfill in his lifetime. For her to secretly put his headless body in the coffin and to choose an immediate burial, she should have harbored quite the grudge towards him]

[By revenge, what does it specifically mean?]

[By looking at her husband, didn't you notice something?]

Erisa referred to the small wounds in his body.

[Every time she gives her husband blood, she wounds his skin with a knife. Since he's grown to this level, his body fluid composition is not much different from real blood, and so she's making him taste pain as a human. The reason I visited her today was to check whether she went too far with it or not. She will continue carving him until she either clears away her resentment entirely, or he stops regenerating one day. I wonder which one would come first]

That man....no, that Shishikuibana is kept alive for the sole intent of damaging it.

In my case, I'm raising Misaki just because I want her to be with me.

Leaving aside the common point which is the Shishikuibana, I thought that I would never cross the same path Arisu did.

[Humans possess both love and hate. Their allocations may differ from person to person, but both of them equally exist]

Erisa said that as if she read my thoughts.

[Kuuya, what would be the reason for pursuing Iruse Misaki in your case?]

[Well, that is...]

Erisa struck me with a teasing glance while I was faltering to give her an answer.

[It's fine if you don't answer. As long as you don't lose sight of the emotions you're holding for her]

During our conversation, we ran into a public park near a kindergarten.

Young children were raising shrill voices and playing while their mothers were having fun talks sitting on the distant benches.

A gift from the break of the rainy season, a peaceful late-morning scene that makes you yawn.

[Let's take a little rest]

Erisa sat on a blue bench near the entrance. I sat next to her as well. Glittering sunlight made its way through the gap of the poplar branches and leaves, and the occasional crossing breeze gently stroked my moistened shirt making me feel even more comfortable.

[Kanade handed it to me when I was about to leave. Is it fine?]

Erisa took half a sandwich from the basket and bit into it without waiting for my affirmation. The sound of biting into a fresh lettuce leisurely reached my ears.

[It's a Panini made from the meat of that dismembered girl you saw before. This time, I'm using her splenius, the part that connects her head and back together]

Without giving much concern to her unappetizing recipe explanation, I went straight to inquire Erisa.

[I want to bring back Misaki as a human]

Instead of returning those words to me, Erisa fixed her gaze on my face.

[I want to restore her to her former shape, just like that boy you showed me in your shop. Tell me the way to do it]

[As expected. I was right about the time]

I was finally able to understand the meaning of, “the suitable time”, which Erisa declared a while ago.

Misaki’s growth was going favorably.

The next day after planting it, the seed had quickly sprouted. Three days later, it had grown by twenty centimeters and start taking a human shape. Since the plant’s growth was extremely fast, I found myself watching over her development all day long, forgetting about leaving for the library. There is the saying that, “a watched pot never boils”. However, this proverb does not apply to her. I didn’t release my sight from Misaki.

In the evening of the fifth day, Misaki’s familiar face started taking its shape. Her face didn’t reach ten centimeters with her eyelashes and eyebrows weakly growing up, but her facial features were clearly distinguished. I wounded my fingertip with a knife and pressed it against her lips like I was teasing her for a kiss, then she started sucking the blood similar to a baby sucking on his mother’s breast.

Misaki is drinking blood.

My own blood.

Her body is absorbing the blood and incorporating it with its’ own.

For Misaki, my blood is an indispensable beverage for her to come back to the present world.

I was entranced by this feeling that gave me a sensation similar to having sexual relations with her.

By the seventh day, the stalk extended and puffed out more and more until her upper half came into sight.

The lower part starting from her hips was still connected with the stalk, but the upper body grew to look exactly like that of a young woman. Long and thin tissues were gathering on her head instead of hair and an almond shaped flower bud rose on its top. I kept making the forty centimeters long Misaki drink my blood while shaking from the sensation of her biting my finger every time.

However, these blessed days did not last too long.

Misaki stopped growing any further while continuing to drink my blood, looking no different from a doll.

The taste of cooked white rice is exceptional when being hungry, but gradually, white rice started to become unsatisfying for me. I want side dishes, my tongue wants something with a strong flavor, I want a sweet and delicious dessert after my meals. Every time I fulfill a desire of mine, a new one wells up.

To sum it up, I gradually became hard to satisfy.

I recalled the Shishikuibana boy in Erisa's shop.

I doubted whether if blood is the only thing necessary for him to grow up to that extent, but now that Misaki has stopped developing, the answer became apparent.

Blood is probably not enough for a Shishikuibana to mature.

At the time I thought about contacting Erisa to ascertain my doubts, she called for me instead. Of course, I accepted her perfectly clocked invitation.

[Since it's already been two weeks now, a flower bud should have grown on her head, am I correct?]

[It's neither blooming nor showing a signs of withering away]

[Even if you leave it like that, it won't bloom. There's a necessary condition for it to do so]

[Condition?]

[You need to change the feed you're giving it. I have already told you before that the Shishikuibana doesn't create its own nutrients. It requires an organic matter externally. Although blood could be sufficient for it to keep on living, it still needs a different feed in order to take a complete form]

As I thought. However, I can feel something triggering in her words.

[That's a weird term. Isn't it usually called as fertilizer rather than a feed for plants?]

[That is if the Shishikuibana was a common plant. And you're quite aware that

it's not, aren't you?]

She's not wrong. A normal plant wouldn't take the form of a human and doesn't drink blood. It doesn't use a person's brain as a seed-plot either.

[And so, what could this feed be?]

Erisa held up the Panini she was biting in.

[This]

Human flesh.

Not only Erisa, but even the Shishikuibana eats human flesh.

[Originally, it was my father who started the cultivation of the Shishikuibana. He was quite a dilettante person and spent an enormous amount of money for the sake of his occultic hobbies along with his work. For such a father, discovering the rumors of Shishikuibana was inevitable]

Erisa stopped talking and bit into the Panini.

[He skimmed over every ancient document and archive until he learned of the existence of the plant and found a way to manufacture the seed. However, regarding the basic cultivation method, the only thing that was mentioned was drinking blood. Even so, the Shishikuibana was able to develop into a human form, which was enough to satisfy my father's ambitions, in the beginning.....]

Erisa lifted her right hand and pointed to the sky with her index finger.

[But it gradually started to become unsatisfying for him. The same as you right now. My father thought that increasing the amount of the given blood would result in a further growth, then gravely wounded his finger to advance the bleeding. And as you would expect, his finger's recovery couldn't keep up with this daily activity. My father's finger became torn off with blood constantly dripping down. To the point where he didn't need an ink pad for a thumb print anymore]

He bent his finger.

[One day, my father bit off his finger. At that time, the flesh was all bare allowing the Shishikuibana to sense its smell. I guess it should be obvious now, that the Shishikuibana's name originated from its' eating habits.]

By hearing Erisa's story, a cold chill ran down my spine. Maybe if she didn't tell me all of this, I'd be walking down the same path her father did.

[For my father, this accident was like the first rain after a drought. The flower started blooming, and the Shishikuibana had a sudden growth. My father was very delighted by seeing this drastic transfiguration]

[Delighted? Even though he bit off his finger? This might be rude out of me but, your father is a strange person]

[This suggests how serious and eager he was with the Shishikuibana's cultivation. Since the day he knew that the plant requires meat to grow, he commenced his long series of trial and error. Starting with pig, with cows and chickens next, then continuing with a deer, bear, horse, duck, whale, rabbit, dog, cat, raccoon, crocodile, snake, lizard, frog, turtle and every other animal you could think of. Despite trying all of them, the Shishikuibana didn't react at all. And when he finally arrived at the correct answer, which is human flesh, his fingers had already decreased to seven. My father had literally sacrificed his body to leave behind a journal featuring the cultivation method, to which I am using currently. You can say that the fact you are keeping Iruse Misaki's plant right now is thanks to my father's fingers]

[Isn't there a different way for the Shishikuibana to mature without having to eat human flesh?]

[Unfortunately, there isn't. The conduct of the people entranced by the Shishikuibana are generally the same. They get unsatisfied with the flower, and they're then entangled in the dilemma of whether they should cross the prohibited path or remain clinging onto their humanity. Although, based on my own experience, most of them make the former choice]

I stared at my hand and began ruminating on the story of Erisa's father.

Misaki wants me to give her both my blood and flesh. I wonder how far I should cut myself just to bring her back to a human shape. Merely by imagining the knife blade cutting deep into my finger, my whole hand started itching.

[Obtaining human meat is not an easy task. However, even if that's the case, thinking about giving her your own flesh is a foolish choice. The Shishikuibana is surprisingly gluttonous. If you keep on giving it what it desires, not even cutting

your four limbs would be enough]

Erisa interrupted my thoughts as if she saw through them.

[There is no need for you to offer it yourself. In the first place, if you tore off your entire body, you wouldn't be able to appreciate the Shishikuibana later]

I understood what Erisa was trying to imply.

If I want to resuscitate Misaki perfectly, I'm going to need to acquire another person's corpse. A corpse I could offer it for her.

For me right now, the only way to obtain human flesh is by relying on one person.

[Could you share some of the meat you have at your store with me?]

[I don't have the resolution to continue fulfilling your sprouting desires anymore. In other words, I can't do that]

Erisa coldly refused after stuffing the last bite of the panini in her cheeks.

[I am not so soft to the point where I would help you get an easy result. Human flesh is a valuable thing for me. I wouldn't just go and offer it to you for free. If you want her to stay with you, then it is necessary to taint your own hands for her sake. The ridiculous wish to raise a Shishikuibana without carrying any risks until the end is the same as a cat who wishes to catch a fish without soaking his leg in water]

[Could you at least give me a hint about a way to acquire it? Leaving me to step inside an unknown world alone is too much you know]

[It's your choice whether you will be stepping in or not. But still, if you're inquiring for some advice, I can give you some. Although their execution is up to you]

Erisa moved her face closer and lowered her voice.

Exactly like a demon trying to tempt a human.

[The measures don't matter. You can just kill someone, search for the corpse of a person who committed suicide, or collect the scattered remains of a traffic accident victim. There is even the choice of sneaking into a morgue or a funeral

hall, however, I wouldn't recommend this one for you]

[Leaving aside the recommendations, all of them are impossible for me]

[If you think like that, then it will indeed become impossible. As long as you have the resolution, there's no need for physical strength nor special skills. All that's left is luck and timing. If you successfully obtain a corpse contact me. Although it would cost you a decent price, at least I can take care of the body recovery and dismantling]

I shook my head.

[If it's about money, I can't pay it. I'm just a freeloading Ronin after all]

[I am not talking about money. It's about half of the corpse]

[Half of it?! Your extravagant prices don't only apply to flowers, do they?]

Erisa somehow made a disappointed expression.

[In that case, you can make it on your own. If you can]

I couldn't even find an excuse against her heavy argument.

No matter how I struggle on my own, it was quite clear that I will find myself relying on her at the very end.

It's regrettable but, that's reality.

[It's up to your own convenience whether you ask me or not. All that I did was show you the way. No matter what kind of result is waiting for you, it's your own responsibility. If you do not like any of these choices, then just throw away the Shishikuibana, along with your resolve. I wouldn't blame you if you did so. It is much more of a relief than getting crushed by your distress]

Leaving those merciless words behind, Erisa left the park. Bluntly, as if she had finished a hard task.

The "risk" that I heard of when I took in Misaki for the first time, along with what Erisa mentioned just earlier was overburdening me. An excessively large weight I could not carry on with a half-hearted resolution.

Sitting still on the bench, I remained gazing at the peaceful scenery in front of me until I gathered enough energy to stand up.

The sight of the active children playing and their mothers watching over them.

Perhaps if one of those kids' lives were to be abruptly lost, their mothers would wish for them to come back to life even if it means stepping out of humanity's path.

After I spent an hour sitting on the bench lost in thoughts, I eventually went back home with a low spirit.

I entered my room, wounded my unrecovered finger again, and gave it to Misaki to suck on.

I wonder if I can remain satisfied by just giving her my blood.

Or maybe, she will end up eating my finger after it gets ripped by the frequent wounding one day.

While pondering over different worries, I sustained my gaze towards Misaki.

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Shishikuibana: in the original novel, it's writing in katakana, which doesn't really give a clear idea about the meaning. But if it was to be written in kanji, it should be like this: “肉食花” meaning the meat-eating flower.

## Chapter 06

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[he could just eat the kid]- God's forgiveness-body

On the night of the next day I met Erisa, I was roaming around the town.

After I had spent a long night lost in thought, I was finally able to conclude that “continuing to deceive myself was no longer possible.” As I wished from the very beginning, I want to resuscitate Misaki to her perfect shape. In order to make this desire feasible, cutting down a copse and extracting its flesh is necessary. I left the idea of offering her my fingers as the final measure to take.

However, having no idea about a way to accomplish such an unachievable mission, I just kept wandering around without any actual plan.

In the first place, a human corpse is not something you'd conveniently find rolling on the road, nor is it something that is sold so conveniently in public. There's no way a miracle like some sort of serial murderer visiting my house and

offering me a corpse as a present would occur either. Even if I was lucky enough to witness a murdering accident while passing by, I'm not very sure if I could snatch away the body before the police or the ambulance arrive. A person's death is usually concealed until the end.

I choose to circle silent alleys and abandoned buildings with less traffic nearby, but far from finding a corpse, I couldn't even notice a single finger around.

I tried moving according to Erisa's advice and followed the railway while checking if something unexpected could be seen, but again, it was all in vain.

I recalled the talk about the dangle shirt man picking a suicide corpse near an abolished building in the outskirts and went excitedly there to give it a try too, however, all that I found was a large ground full of overgrown grass with not even a single rat roaming around.

[As I thought, there's no way I can find a corpse]

Losing all hopes, I went to a lonely public park located between the buildings and sat on its swing. The park's dazzling lamp lights were illuminating this worn out place. A bit further away from this light circle, I noticed a group of crude residences made from pipes and blue sheeting. It's probably the community of the homeless people separated from the town area, and this park as well, is yet nothing but a single part of this community.

A loose sigh passed from my lips.

I wonder what I am doing at such a place. Searching for a corpse with no strategy or knowledge is like I'm searching for a sunken ship in the middle of a desert.

My fruitless effort resulted in a languish feeling hanging on my back.

Whenever I got the urge to throw away everything and give up, I remembered Misaki inside my closet.

If I give up, Misaki will stay in that shape forever.

She doesn't have the ability to revive herself alone after she was given a chance to come back to this world. It is my duty to accomplish this mission. I'm

the only person who could clasp her hand and pull her up to the ground from the spider thread she is clinging on at the current moment.

However, what am I supposed to do to achieve this task?

My five senses which were driven by irritation had suddenly sharpened.

I felt something was inside the copse near the park.

It is kind of difficult to describe this feeling. Maybe something like a sixth sense would be appropriate to say.

The only thing I had was a presentiment telling me that I will reach my goal if I entered that place.

As if I was reeling in an invisible thread, I slowly walked towards the copse.

Far away from the light emanating from the roadway, I advanced inside the dark forest while being careful not to trip from the juttred roots of the trees.

After my eyes gradually became accustomed to the darkness, I noticed someone's shadowy figure a few meters away.

That figure's aspect was quite strange.

It was floating in the air without moving at all.

By freezing my sight and looking closely, the shadowy figure started to become apparent.

A hanging head watching the ground and feeble drooping limbs.

The rope tied around his neck was dangling from the tree's branch.

In front of my eyes was a man's hanging corpse.

My mind cracked up after witnessing the sudden appearance of a formerly living person. I tried turning back, but reason seized my ankles.

I'm not going to achieve anything if I run away. Just recall what you were doing just now. I was roaming around in the night town searching for a corpse, right? I couldn't find anything and was about to give up, right? And when I decided to enter this forest on a whim, here I discover an unexpected corpse hanging in front of my eyes! Divine grace, a one in a lifetime chance has descended upon me. There's no way I would let it go. All right, let's draw out

some courage and-Turning my sight back, I perceived several human figures gathering around the corpse.

There are five of them at most, all possessing a short height and wearing tattered clothes. As for their facial features and bodies, I wasn't able to grasp them completely in such a situation.

No, actually they were six of them. The last one climbed the tree with a monkey's agility and was cutting the dangling rope.

All of them were standing still nearby, seeming to pay no attention to me. The sound of the knife cutting the rope meekly resounded in the copse.

Soon after the rope was cut and the corpse fell, the five other figures instantly caught it in the air.

One of them took out a bag from his pocket and quickly stuffed the corpse inside.

Just like those stagehands taking care of the stage scenery during an intermission, they quickly carried away the body without faltering for even a moment.

Before I realized it, the mysterious human figures disappeared from my field of vision.

All that was left were the dense trees and thick overgrown grass blended into the night, with me who was showing a stupefied expression while standing alone.

Even if I cleared my ears, the sound of the breeze shaking the tree leaves was the only thing I heard.

I turned back and tried to run away.

Hoping wholeheartedly to leave this place as fast as possible, I eagerly moved my limbs which were barely reacting as I want.

I was entranced by a feeling as if those people were pursuing me, and kept running through the abandoned buildings leaving behind the homeless community and choosing a road with the most traffic and people.

Leaving aside the feeling of being victimized by having the corpse snatched

away from me, all what I thought about was my good luck for not directing their attention towards me.

When I finally regained my reason, I had already got on the train, cramped within the people's breath and warmth.

By the time I got down to the nearest station, my fear had considerably calmed down. However, I couldn't help but feel downhearted. For the first time, the obscene scenery of the flower district felt kind and gentle as if it was welcoming my cowardly self back.

I went back home, directly entered the living room and lied down on the sofa.

Recalling the earlier event which I already became unable to distinguish whether it was a dream or reality, my heart started to break up.

I had no idea about who those people were, nor what were they doing in that copse, but one thing in my mind was for sure, and that is the idea of not wishing to meet them ever again.

Realizing my uncovered cowardliness and fear, I felt useless and a deep sigh slipped from my mouth.

[I don't know what happened but, don't let it get to you. Eat food and stay in spirit!]

The person who noticed me all dejected and was trying to cheer me up using awkward Japanese was a woman named Rosari. That's indeed a name that gives the impression of a young noble woman, but in actual truth, this Rosari who's grilling a hamburger steak for me in the kitchen is just a normal woman with darkish skin. It's pretty hard to call her beautiful since she possesses the looks of both a frog and a pigeon. However, her culinary skills are high class. I haven't yet seized the standards Haruhito is using to choose a woman for my cooking duty, which makes the risk way too big, but this time it seems he picked the right person.

Haruhito went for a trip to collect information two days ago. Thanks to that, I can now freely wander anywhere and anytime I feel like it. However, Haruhito will eventually come back, and I need to consider what to do at that time. I shouldn't let anybody discover the grown up Misaki in my room.

While eating the hamburger steak Rosari made for me, the TV news was talking about a parent and child who were rejected from the livelihood protection, passing away from hunger. It was said that when they discovered the bodies, no essential utensils were around and all that was inside the refrigerator was some oxidized mayonnaise.

In this country, more than ten million tons of food supplies are disposed of before reaching the dinner table. Even so, people who don't obtain a single piece of bread and starve to death still exist. How ridiculous.

[If he was hungry he could just eat the kid]

Rosari who was sitting in front of me on the table, released some unbelievable words while looking unconcerned.

[Does such a disturbing habit exist in your home country?]

[Selling blood, selling hair, selling internal organs because of poverty is normal. But no eating a child, God would not allow it]

[Then why did you say he should eat the child then?]

[Do not kill him. If he die alone, he can eat him. If he can stay alive by eating him, God will permit it]

Hearing Rosari's opinion full of hand gestures, I remembered the accident of the plane with forty passengers that crashed in the mountains when it was flying to South America. Sixteen of them returned alive after surviving a long while in an extreme situation on the high mountains, depending on only small provisions for food. However, it was confirmed that they resorted to eating the diseased flesh of their own to make it this far. An incident that confused the whole world. There was even a devoted Christian among them who said: "their souls have already separated from their bodies and are departing towards God. Their remains are nothing but mere flesh". And after confessing their act to a Catholic church, the answer was: "If no different measures existed to survive except for eating a passing person's flesh, then nobody would blame you for that conduct, and there is no need to worry about it". In other words, the church's opinion implied that there was no necessity to ask for God's forgiveness.

Perhaps this is what Rosari was trying to say, even though I'm entirely against it. Despite it being an indispensable act to remain alive, human flesh is still human flesh.

Erisa considered "cannibalism" as something to not deeply analyze and judge. But still, I do think there's a certain line that a person shouldn't cross.

[There are people who eat human meat in Japan. There are even people who make others eat their own meat]

[Making others eat their own flesh?]

When I asked back without holding my astonishment, Rosari started talking about her personal experience.

[It's a story about when I still was in Yokohama]

Back then, she was working in a brothel. Her job was to receive the order from customers, head to the appointed room and offer them a sexual service. I recall Haruhito mentioning something about it being established in some places unknown to ordinary people. A type of occupation that doesn't cease of troubles with the customers.

Rosari's appointed client this time, was a wealthy man in the prime of life. He was wearing some high-class clothes and held a kind personality, indeed a gentleman. The man was pleased with Rosari and began nominating her every fifteen days.

On the fifth appointment, he instead called her to his mansion rather than the usual hotel.

[It was very wide and very pretty. I felt jealous and was thinking if only I lived in such a lovely place]

When she was washing his body in the bathroom, the man assembled his resolved and decided to break the ice.

–Can you eat my body today?

[I was surprised. I told him no, blood will come out. It's okay, I will call a doctor. And you see, a razor was in the bathroom]

In front of Rosari who was firmly denying his request, the man took the razor

and started slicing the flesh of his palm. While letting out a cold sweat and continuously groaning, he proudly raised his bloodstained hand towards Rosari and cut off a part of his palm.

Do you want it to be sauteed? Or maybe you prefer it completely fried?

The man was trying his best to bring out a smile while hiding the pain and the exposed bone in the deep wound of his hand.

Without answering nor wiping her body, Rosari left the shower, quickly wore her clothes and ran away from the mansion.

[After that, he called me very often, but I told the staff “no no”. They should not answer him]

Rosari made a cross with her fingers. From that day, she requested the staff not to accept a nomination from a pervert gentlemen anymore.

[It's weird. What is good about making someone eat your meat? What is enjoyable in making painful memories? If he only asked me to eat beef or pork, I'd happily answer yes!]

Looking at Rosari who was arguing with passion, I felt a huge envy for her past situation.

I earnestly wished for someone to appear before me and offer his flesh as well.

Because of Rosari's strange story, I had a weird dream that night.

I am sitting at the kitchen table.

Not in the old geisha house.

It's the house where I used to live with my parents.

My mother made a dish and lined up several plates on the table.

The main dish was a hamburger steak along with cheese on top of it.

My mother's special recipe.

When I was about to reach for the steak with my fork, I noticed something.

Hey mom, where's your right arm?

You told me you want to eat a hamburger.

I was satisfied by my mother's answer after witnessing her gentle smile.

That's right, mom chopped her right arm for my sake.

While having a friendly chat with my mother, I started eating her home cooking.

The hamburger made from my mother's flesh was so sweet and its flavor remained on my tongue.

Mom, this hamburger is too sweet.

Did I perhaps put too much sugar?

You forget things easily, don't you mom?

My mother smiled.

I do forget things easily, Mom is ashamed of herself.

I was confused and used Kuuya's hand instead of mine in this hamburger after all.

The fork I was holding with my right hand fell off.

After waking up, I kept lying in bed for a while reflecting on this dream.

Was that really just a dream?

The setting had an awful déjà vu feeling following them.

I am pretty sure I have already experienced that scene.

The times where we were eating at the same table, and having a friendly chat.

Of course, both of us weren't one handed.

Those blessed, brief moments full of happiness I shared with my mother remained in my memories for as long as I can remember.

However, at the same time, something in my mind screamed that such a memory didn't occur.

Thinking back again, I recall that my mother was very cold towards me when I was still a child. Whenever I wanted to be spoiled and drew near her, she

cruelly brushed my hands away. For me, my mother wasn't someone who would gently pat my head, she was an existence who didn't bring me anything but pain and loneliness.

My mother loathed me. I became aware of that fact not very long after I was born. I didn't understand why she frankly directed those emotions towards me until she passed away. No, I still don't know even after she did.

My dream mother filled me with her gentle smile, to the point where calling it a simple vision would be too easy.

And when did she direct that smile towards me in reality? Was it beautiful? Was it really that gentle? As I thought, I can't recall my mother's face.

On the night of the next day I met Erisa, I was roaming around the town.

After I had spent a long night lost in thought, I was finally able to conclude that "continuing to deceive myself was no longer possible." As I wished from the very beginning, I want to resuscitate Misaki to her perfect shape. In order to make this desire feasible, cutting down a copse and extracting its flesh is necessary. I left the idea of offering her my fingers as the final measure to take.

However, having no idea about a way to accomplish such an unachievable mission, I just kept wandering around without any actual plan.

In the first place, a human corpse is not something you'd conveniently find rolling on the road, nor is it something that is sold so conveniently in public. There's no way a miracle like some sort of serial murderer visiting my house and offering me a corpse as a present would occur either. Even if I was lucky enough to witness a murdering accident while passing by, I'm not very sure if I could snatch away the body before the police or the ambulance arrive. A person's death is usually concealed until the end.

I choose to circle silent alleys and abandoned buildings with less traffic nearby, but far from finding a corpse, I couldn't even notice a single finger around.

I tried moving according to Erisa's advice and followed the railway while checking if something unexpected could be seen, but again, it was all in vain.

I recalled the talk about the dangle shirt man picking a suicide corpse near an

abolished building in the outskirts and went excitedly there to give it a try too, however, all that I found was a large ground full of overgrown grass with not even a single rat roaming around.

[As I thought, there's no way I can find a corpse]

Losing all hopes, I went to a lonely public park located between the buildings and sat on its swing. The park's dazzling lamp lights were illuminating this worn out place. A bit further away from this light circle, I noticed a group of crude residences made from pipes and blue sheeting. It's probably the community of the homeless people separated from the town area, and this park as well, is yet nothing but a single part of this community.

A loose sigh passed from my lips.

I wonder what I am doing at such a place. Searching for a corpse with no strategy or knowledge is like I'm searching for a sunken ship in the middle of a desert.

My fruitless effort resulted in a languish feeling hanging on my back.

Whenever I got the urge to throw away everything and give up, I remembered Misaki inside my closet.

If I give up, Misaki will stay in that shape forever.

She doesn't have the ability to revive herself alone after she was given a chance to come back to this world. It is my duty to accomplish this mission. I'm the only person who could clasp her hand and pull her up to the ground from the spider thread she is clinging on at the current moment.

However, what am I supposed to do to achieve this task?

My five senses which were driven by irritation had suddenly sharpened.

I felt something was inside the copse near the park.

It is kind of difficult to describe this feeling. Maybe something like a sixth sense would be appropriate to say.

The only thing I had was a presentiment telling me that I will reach my goal if I entered that place.

As if I was reeling in an invisible thread, I slowly walked towards the copse.

Far away from the light emanating from the roadway, I advanced inside the dark forest while being careful not to trip from the juttred roots of the trees.

After my eyes gradually became accustomed to the darkness, I noticed someone's shadowy figure a few meters away.

That figure's aspect was quite strange.

It was floating in the air without moving at all.

By freezing my sight and looking closely, the shadowy figure started to become apparent.

A hanging head watching the ground and feeble drooping limbs.

The rope tied around his neck was dangling from the tree's branch.

In front of my eyes was a man's hanging corpse.

My mind cracked up after witnessing the sudden appearance of a formerly living person. I tried turning back, but reason seized my ankles.

I'm not going to achieve anything if I run away. Just recall what you were doing just now. I was roaming around in the night town searching for a corpse, right? I couldn't find anything and was about to give up, right? And when I decided to enter this forest on a whim, here I discover an unexpected corpse hanging in front of my eyes! Divine grace, a one in a lifetime chance has descended upon me. There's no way I would let it go. All right, let's draw out some courage and-Turning my sight back, I perceived several human figures gathering around the corpse.

There are five of them at most, all possessing a short height and wearing tattered clothes. As for their facial features and bodies, I wasn't able to grasp them completely in such a situation.

No, actually they were six of them. The last one climbed the tree with a monkey's agility and was cutting the dangling rope.

All of them were standing still nearby, seeming to pay no attention to me. The sound of the knife cutting the rope meekly resounded in the copse.

Soon after the rope was cut and the corpse fell, the five other figures instantly caught it in the air.

One of them took out a bag from his pocket and quickly stuffed the corpse inside.

Just like those stagehands taking care of the stage scenery during an intermission, they quickly carried away the body without faltering for even a moment.

Before I realized it, the mysterious human figures disappeared from my field of vision.

All that was left were the dense trees and thick overgrown grass blended into the night, with me who was showing a stupefied expression while standing alone.

Even if I cleared my ears, the sound of the breeze shaking the tree leaves was the only thing I heard.

I turned back and tried to run away.

Hoping wholeheartedly to leave this place as fast as possible, I eagerly moved my limbs which were barely reacting as I want.

I was entranced by a feeling as if those people were pursuing me, and kept running through the abandoned buildings leaving behind the homeless community and choosing a road with the most traffic and people.

Leaving aside the feeling of being victimized by having the corpse snatched away from me, all what I thought about was my good luck for not directing their attention towards me.

When I finally regained my reason, I had already got on the train, cramped within the people's breath and warmth.

By the time I got down to the nearest station, my fear had considerably calmed down. However, I couldn't help but feel downhearted. For the first time, the obscene scenery of the flower district felt kind and gentle as if it was welcoming my cowardly self back.

I went back home, directly entered the living room and lied down on the sofa.

Recalling the earlier event which I already became unable to distinguish whether it was a dream or reality, my heart started to break up.

I had no idea about who those people were, nor what were they doing in that copse, but one thing in my mind was for sure, and that is the idea of not wishing to meet them ever again.

Realizing my uncovered cowardliness and fear, I felt useless and a deep sigh slipped from my mouth.

[I don't know what happened but, don't let it get to you. Eat food and stay in spirit!]

The person who noticed me all dejected and was trying to cheer me up using awkward Japanese was a woman named Rosari. That's indeed a name that gives the impression of a young noble woman, but in actual truth, this Rosari who's grilling a hamburger steak for me in the kitchen is just a normal woman with darkish skin. It's pretty hard to call her beautiful since she possesses the looks of both a frog and a pigeon. However, her culinary skills are high class. I haven't yet seized the standards Haruhito is using to choose a woman for my cooking duty, which makes the risk way too big, but this time it seems he picked the right person.

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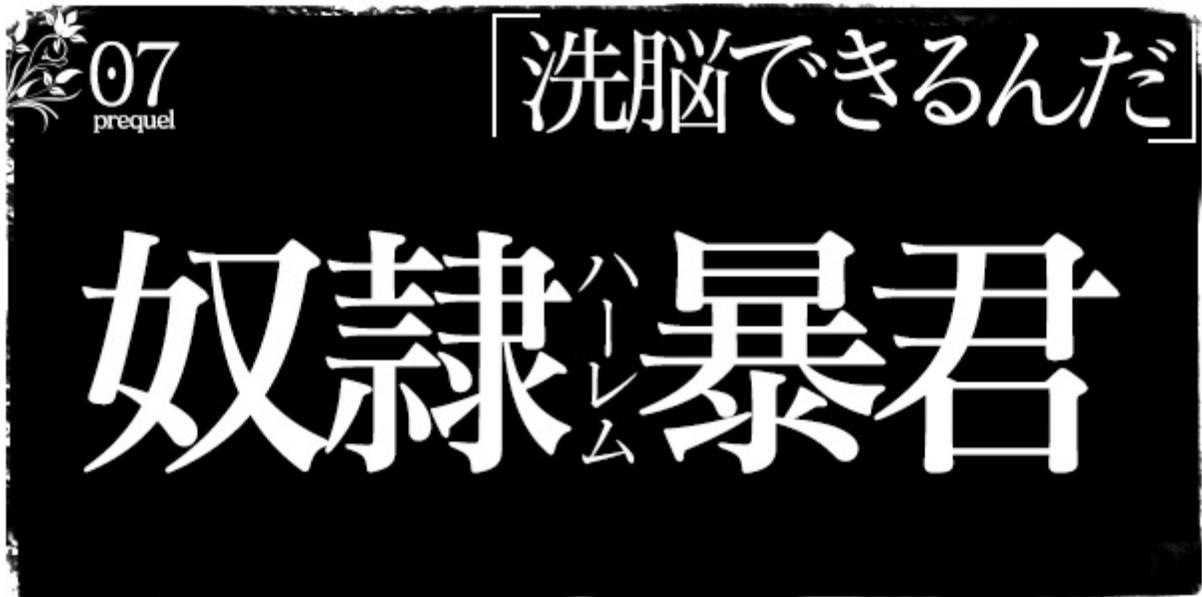
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And when did she direct that smile towards me in reality? Was it beautiful?

Was it really that gentle? As I thought, I can't recall my mother's face.

## Chapter 07

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[You can use brainwash]- slaves-Harem- tyrant

The weather news announced the end of the rainy season and summer has officially arrived along with the glaring sun.

Under this fine weather, women were exposing their shoulders and legs as they were seducing the young men and lecherous geezers.

Children are excited about the upcoming summer vacation and are making promises with their parents to visit an amusement park or to go to the beach.

In this happy season when everyone was jumping up in excitement, my heart was sinking in the dark instead.

A completely different feeling of despair and weariness from the time I was

searching for Misaki was crushing me while I was pointlessly wandering the town then going back home. This is the fifth day I'm repeating the same routine.

I already made a plan to acquire a corpse. I also made the preparations for executing it. However, the last piece to bring up the resolution I need in order to move according to this plan is still buried somewhere I can't reach. I'm still not confident whether I have enough courage to put it into effect.

I silently walked around the town which was slowly swallowed up in the darkness.

Passing by a cafe bar, I saw the figures of some college students sitting oppositely in its open terrace and having a talk. Judging from their facial expressions I can tell that they're discussing an important matter.

Speaking up your troubles to a friend. Only this simple deed makes me terribly envious.

For as long as I can remember, I was bad at measuring my distance with others. I didn't have the least idea about how far I am allowed to step into someone else's heart, or how much I should confide to the other party to make them trust me. Whenever I received a favor from someone, or whenever they waved their hands towards me, I sensed from them the feeling of wanting to draw back. Even at this age now, those who I consider as friends could be counted on one hand, not to mention, these valuable friendships of mine have completely disappeared due to the long distance.

Even if supposedly, I had a friend whom I can speak to with a calm mind and spirit, I don't think I would go on and ask him for a way to obtain human flesh. In the end, keeping a distance with the other party is better than speaking my mind clumsily and having them report me to the police.

I wonder how am I supposed to deal with a secret anguish sealed deep inside my heart.

When I was walking my way through the streets with a dispirited mood, in front of me, a man wearing a red aloha shirt and sunglasses waved his hand while looking at my direction.

[Heey, boy! It's me! me, me! Don't get the wrong idea though, I'm not a fraud]

That man leisurely marched toward me and removed his glasses.

It took me a short while to make a connection between the face before me and the one I met in Erisa's shop.

[What are you doing in such a place with that gloomy face?]

Same to you, why is a fine adult like yourself aimlessly loitering on a weekday?

I endured the urge to answer him back with a similar question and briefly explained my situation after hearing out that flesh is necessary to the Shishikuibana from Erisa.

[That woman's got a mischievous personality as usual. She could just have told you that from the start and everything would be nice. She's definitely a sadist right. She enjoys watching the Shishikuibana's owners going through a hard time. Just because she's a cutie doesn't mean she can get too full of herself like that]

The man started bad mouthing Erisa without controlling his voice. I recall the exchange between both of them last time. Perhaps he was forced to undergo a bitter experience by her as well.

[By the way boy, you still have some time to spare?]

[My name is Mamesaki Kuuya. And yes, I still have a bit of time]

Honestly, I just wanted to go back home and comfort myself by gazing at Misaki. But thinking about the pain of refusing his invitation, I decided to go along.

[Aight then, Soramame, let's invite you to my house. I can help you with some advice as your senior in this field]

[What's Soramame?]

[Kuuya and Mamesaki. By using the initial kanji in both of them it becomes Soramame. Don't you think it's a good nickname for a shorty like you?]

–Sorry for being a shorty.

It's quite irritating having someone making fun of my appearance, but I thought it wasn't interesting to complain about it currently.

I followed the man called Andou to a tower mansion near the station. Passing the entrance after a fingerprint confirmation, I noticed a security guard room in the frontward. Countless security cameras were installed in the elevator hall surveying the interior without leaving any gaps. Looking at this strict security, I easily understood that this is not a mansion of common rent.

[Rent price? Something close to blowing off the income of an average hard-working salaryman I guess]

When I asked him about it in the elevator, Ando answered me casually without hesitation.

The chosen people, this sentence crossed my mind after hearing the answer.

Ando's apartment was on the fifty-first floor.

[Open]

In response to his short order, I heard the sound of the lock automatically moving in the door.

[It's a voice identification inserted to an auto lock module. I drove the landlord to install it for me no matter what. It doesn't open for anyone expect me, from both the inside and the outside]

By opening the door, a young woman wearing an oversized T-shirt was using a mat instead of a futon and sprawling in a careless posture.

[Huh!? Don't tumble around in places like this you bitch!]

The young woman jumped up by Ando's kick and leaped to the inner room with high speed.

[Dammit, what a brute! Well, I'm not providing them with a bed to use, sleeping on the floor is only natural I guess]

When I was guided to the room where the woman went, I was startled by seeing what was in front of me.

There was a vast living room connected with a counter kitchen. Behind the counter, western liquor bottles were placed on a shelf and released a faint light. The furniture was high class to the point where it makes you hesitate to even touch it. In one of the walls opposing the window, a huge aquarium was standing still and tropical fish were comfortably swimming and weaving their way inside the aquatic plants.

I heard he was an individual investigator, but I can't spot any research documents or equipment in here. Maybe his work place is in another room.

[What an amazing room!]

Ando's reaction to my compliment was weak. He's probably accustomed to hearing this kind of boring words of praise every single time.

Two young women dressed in camisoles were sitting on a leather sofa. Without caring to stand up, they kept staring at me with their contemptuous gazes.

['ey! Why are you lazing around! How many times did I tell you?! If a guest enters, then fucking welcome him! Now move!]

The women stood up reacting to Ando's maniacal roar and moved their peach-looking round butts to hide behind the counter.

The one who was lying down at the entrance was squatting in the room corner holding her knees and peeking at Ando's expression with a frightened glance.

[You too! Stop making that irritating face and prepare the feed, stupid woman!]

The T-shirt woman stood up and went to the kitchen while dragging her leg that received the earlier kick.

[I showed you some shameful stuff for the first time, didn't I? Dammit, it looks like they don't care. Even if they're quite attractive, dealing with a dog or cat is much better than this]

[Are you raising the Shishikuibana over there?]

[Ah, that's right. I didn't call the Soramame boy just to inspect my house, did

I? Aight, let's get to the real thing]

It looks like he forgot the original intention of inviting me until I reminded him.

I was guided to an eight tatami western style room. Apparently, it was a guest room in the past.

The interior had no furniture installed. However, around ten potted plants were lining up on the wooden floor.

All of them were “female”

I had trouble to figure out where to place my eyes, but I persuaded myself of the fact that they were plants and not humans.

The plants were in different states of growth. There were some with an ambiguously shaped stalk seeming to have started puffing not too long ago, and there were those with a full grown body and a withered flower hanging in their heads. All the Shishikuibana that have developed to a human shape were sitting while holding their knees. I remember the Shishikuibana boy in Erisa's shop making the same pose. Maybe all of them take this stance naturally when maturing.

[I like them to be at this approximate age]

Ando pointed to a beautiful black haired Shishikuibana stretching till the hips. She is pretty erotic indeed, though, she was lacking the feeling of youth.

[This one was a thirty-three old divorced woman. Stating she got all lonely after breaking up with her husband, she started spending every night with a different man in the street. She didn't understand that her unfaithfulness was the original cause of the divorce. Her body's affinity was not bad, but you see, I hate women with this kind of character]

[So that's why you turned it into a Shishikuibana?]

[That's correct]

The long T-shirt woman sluggishly walked over us while carrying the “meat” in a stainless tray.

Ando received the tray and drove her away from the room with a hand

gesture as if he was chasing out a dog.

[Is this the flesh of the girl you brought to Erisa's shop that day?]

[Nah, I delivered her the whole thing that time. Giving her the entire body is the condition of acquiring the seed after all. I initially thought of offering the girl to stay one night if she was willing to flirt with me, but once I remembered the seed, I decided to take the opportunity and kill her. Nobody would care where she is in any case]

[Whose flesh are you feeding the Shishikuibana then?]

[Eh? You inquiring for information? Mine are pretty expensive you know]

Cold sweat ran through my neck by having my scheme seen through.

Ando kept glaring at me while biting his lips, but he eventually became unable to bear it and burst out into laughter.

[I'm just kidding! Just kidding! It can't be helped it, let's give the confused Soramame boy some information for free, shall we? It should turn out to be useful for you]

Ando gripped the flesh from the tray and waved it in the air.

[We usually send in living children from certain destitute foreign areas to Japan. Using money of course. The market does actually exist, since there are plenty of rich people who are willing to offer cash in order to adopt them. For the parents, it doesn't only reduce another mouth to feed, but they can also gain profit from it. Although they don't have the slightest idea that their children are chopped off and fed to a plant]

[Immigrating children with the false purpose of adopting them?]

[I wouldn't go to the troubles of adopting them since they will be turning into meat anyway. That's why we're smuggling them. If we use the legal route, there are enough chances of getting suspected by the authorities]

After Ando offered the foreign child's flesh to the widow Shishikuibana, he approached his face near its ear.

[You are blessed, aren't you? You got released from this world's ties to end up living in my place. Just forget about that husband who threw you away. Such a

man doesn't exist here anymore. All you have to do is stay with me and feed on flesh. Getting raised by me is your prime delight, and nothing makes you happier than devoting yourself to please me]

He said the same thing to the other Shishikuibana as well. Every single word he whispered to them was fraught with arrogance and deceptions.

[Do you do this every day?]

[You see, you can brainwash the Shishikuibana if you do this. These fellows do not only have the same internal organs as humans but also the brain. They can maintain the memories and personality they had before dying. But It's possible to erase the inconvenient memories or even to alter their past life. They're still unable to use their mouth, but their ears are working just fine]

[But what's the purpose of doing all of this if they can't talk or walk? They are nothing but humans growing in a pot and made for viewing pleasure I mean]

[Huh? You don't know? The Shishikuibana is able to talk and move]

[Eh?]

I didn't believe my ears after hearing Ando's few shocking words.

[Are you serious? Could they move? I never heard about this]

[Oh c'mon. She didn't talk to you about this either?]

Ando scratched his head while looking both surprised and confused.

[You know about the flower that blooms on their head, right? Before that flower turns into light brown and withers away you need to cut the growing root behind their legs. It's pretty thin, so just a small cutter would do the job. And...that's it I guess. They will eventually stand up alone and start talking]

[How did you know all of this?]

[Around the time when I started raising them, I pressed that woman for an answer. I caught her naked at that moment and took advantage of the situation. After asking her "tell me how to do it!", she easily spilled out everything without resisting]

[Wait! Does that mean all those women in the living room are Shishikuibana?]

I unintentionally raised my voice.

[That's right. They're not only useful for housework and miscellaneous stuff, but they also take care of my body. Just to let you get the correct idea, I'm not getting nursed, in other words, am using them as sex partners and doing them whenever and however I want. Very convenient slaves if I say so myself]

[In that case, why not just do it with a real human? With all the money you have, you can just hire a maid or surround yourself with lovers anytime you want]

[You can't make a woman as your own without throwing all your money at her face. Even if you surround yourself with lovers, they will keep on annoying you "I want to eat that" or "buy me that", and if you reduce the amount you're spending on them just by a small bit, they will immediately leave you behind. Speaking of maids, you never know what will happen if you choose the wrong one. Once she finds your cash vault, she will keep on absorbing it till it's left with only air. You can acquire a human heart using money, but you can never buy their souls. Women are often seen as foxes in the end. Behind that forced smile she makes in front of you, she is actually looking down at you while sticking out her tongue]

I ignored Ando's intense complaints about women and observed the Shishikuibana in the room. All of them were killed and turned into plants in order to bring his ideal harem into reality. To top it off, their memories and personality got overwritten by him. Even if he's feigning innocence, I don't think it's forgivable to kill people casually like that.

My chest started to gradually hurt while I was lost in deep thoughts, so I excused myself from Ando's apartment.

[That's unfortunate, I was planning on showing you more stuff just now. Oh well, we shall do that at the next opportunity I guess]

While I was putting on my shoes near the door, a sudden question popped up in my mind.

[I wonder why Erisa didn't tell me that the Shishikuibana could move]

[That's because she has her own reasons to not tell you]

[Did something happen in her past perhaps?]

Ando welled up a suspicious grin.

[You can just ask her if you wanna know. Though am not sure whether she will answer you or not]

The door opened again after Ando's short "open" command.

[Well then, later! Next time you visit bring your Shishikuibana along]

After exiting the mansion, it was already nighttime and darkness surrounded the place.

Ando's haughty attitude was indeed disturbing, however, getting invited to his house was definitely a fortune for me. I will turn the Shishikuibana, Misaki into a human. At the moment I realized that I could adapt this empty dream into reality, my heart was refreshed. Witnessing the moving Shishikuibana earlier served for a great push.

However, at the same time, countless problems started emerging.

The first problem is as usual, How can I acquire human flesh.

As expected, Ando's method is impossible for me to execute, simply because I don't own enough money and connections. Probably, the only option I still have is wandering in the town and praying to stumble upon a corpse.

The second problem is the unclear intentions of Erisa. Why didn't she inform me about the Shishikuibana's matter?

Judging from Ando's information, it is safe to assume that she was hiding it from me on purpose. I still don't know her plan for doing so, however, if it held some kind of disadvantage in her side, then all I have to do is to turn Misaki into a human in order to expose it.

While I was walking my way and thinking about all kind of possible circumstances, I spotted Erisa's street stall.

But, she was not alone. A slender man wearing a dark suit in this summer season was arguing with her. His facial expression showed that he was pressed by something urgent, but by switching my sight to Erisa again, she looked as unconcerned as always. After the conversation reached an end, Erisa nodded

her head, quickly cleared the stall and rode her car with that man.

I kept observing the whole scene in a place far enough to avoid getting noticed by her.

Who is that guy? What are they doing? I decided to stop thinking about such useless doubts and returned my thoughts to the beginning.

Ando told me that I could brainwash the Shishikuibana. I'm not sure whether that was the result, but those women in his apartment did indeed seem a bit dull. Seeing them willingly following his orders gives an impression as if they were tamed.

What kept me insecure in his place, was the glances of the Shishikuibana who were peeping at his face in the living room. Rather than respect or fear, I felt a different emotion accumulated in their eyes.

I considered going back to check on these uncertainties floating in my mind, however, that never happened.

In other words, this was the first and last day I visited Ando's apartment.

## Chapter 08

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[You finally crossed over]- residents of darkness-grim reaper-murder

[‘ey there young man, wanna have a good time? How about two, no, one thousand yen?]

When I was returning from Ando’s apartment, an old woman hiding in the darkness of the alley behind the shopping street was waving her hand to me.

She’s probably one those old prostitutes called the thousand yen grandma in this town.

In the red light district I’m living in currently, witnessing the sight of prostitutes standing on the street corners is not that rare. In the end, this place is the fallen remains of an old, well-known land of prostitution.

It is often said in rumors that these grandmas were old timers in this extinct land, but you can tell that by just looking at them and guessing their age, which

probably exceeds sixty.

But leaving this talk aside, the “thousand yen grandma” nickname apparently originates from the price that they request. I’ve already heard about this weird bit of information long ago, however, this is my first time meeting the real deal.

For a young man, he would most likely refuse to sleep with an aged-old hag even if she offered him the thousand yen instead. Though, in my case, I approached the thousand yen grandma while gulping.

[Are you really fine with one thousand?]

I took out a thousand yen bill from my wallet and handed it to the grandma prostitute. By getting closer to her, she looked as thin as a dried persimmons and an intense scent of sweat and garlic was emanating from her body.

The grandma’s confused sight kept switching between me and the thousand yen bill.

A few seconds later, she smiled at me while showing her uneven teeth.

[Hehe, thank ya, thank ya! You’re a pretty handsome boy aren’t you?]

After spelling out her fake flattery, the grandma took the bill and quickly pushed it into her bust. It appears she’s one of those women who don’t use a wallet.

Following this action, she dragged me from my sleeve and brought me to an old shop in a small alley. Lights were turned off, outer walls were full of cracks and the glass inserted in the entrance door was smashed and shattered everywhere on the ground.

The shop doesn’t seem to be in use.

[There’s no electricity in this place, so sorry about that. Careful not to trip]

I just came to realize it, the door’s lock was broken.

She’s obviously using this ruined shop as a workplace without permission.

Following after the grandma, I walked inside the shop. The wide concrete floor seeming to be used as the actual workshop was connected with a living room in the interior. Right under the stile of the room, an empty soy sauce

drum without a label was set as a shoes holder. When the grandma placed her shoes in, the drum echoed a disturbing sound.

[You can go for it raw. Big sis is already done with that phase after all]

Who's the big sis?!

Before I noticed it, a near-dead battery lamp was releasing a faint light and illuminating this dim place.

The grandma went above the laid futon and started to hastily undress. Her dried skin and faded limbs made their appearance after she took off her worn out slip dress. Of course, there was no sexy ambiance floating around at all. I wonder who would be willing to pay a thousand yen just to embrace an old hag like this.

The reason I accepted her offer was not because I desired her withering body.

It was in order to achieve my plan to bring Misaki back to life. If I want to have the fish, I'm going to need to get in the water and get my legs wet.

From the moment I saw the moving Shishikuibana in Ando's apartment, I felt a burning desire inside of me, but I remained hesitant, unsure whether it is possible to snatch away someone else's life for Misaki's sake.

At the time when I blew off the last piece of my wavering and perfected my resolution, I happened to pass by the grandma. She's a person who makes a living by prostitution, there's no way she could have someone to rely on. Even if she disappears from this world, I doubt there will be anybody who will grieve about her death.

I will kill the thousand yen grandma.

It would be much better if I could turn Misaki into a human without having to use this method, but in the end, it appeared that this is the only possible way for me.

I took out the blackjack I ordered by mail from my back pocket (a tool with the shape of a spoon covered in leather and filled with lead. A blunt weapon made from simple ingredient, however still have enough power to wound and kill a person) and snuck toward the back of the grandma who was steadily

folding her clothes.

A sudden loss of nerve struck me, making me close to dropping the blackjack.

I recalled Misaki's face. That carefree smile she made while she was still alive.

I noticed grandma's hand still holding the slip dress.

Don't hesitate! Do it!

Getting pushed by my inner thoughts, I aimed for the back of her head and struck a hard blow.

I heard the breaking sound of a flower vase following the collapse of her dead tree looking body.

Without giving her a chance, I made a second and third hit aiming at her cranium while grandma's body responded with a cramping pain. A very short while later, she stopped moving entirely.

I breathed heavily and looked down at the unmoving grandma. I lost the sensation of the blackjack in my hand and my legs wouldn't stop trembling. My heart was furiously throbbing to the point where I sensed as if it was going to break through my chest.

[SHtoP iT, CusTOmer!]

Grandma suddenly stood up as if she was possessed by a certain something and began loudly screaming. Her bra slipped off by that swift move making her wilted breast and dried dark brown nipples exposed.

I was taken aback by her unexpected behavior and fell on my backside.

Grandma bent her neck toward my face and scowled at me with her eyes which turned into a yellow color.

[SHtahP!]

A few moments after she made her second scream, the thousand yen grandma collapsed on the floor after letting out a huge fart and didn't shift anymore. I was about to suffocate from the dispersed rotting smell filling the room.

I waited until clearing my throat and then hit three more blows to her head in

succession till her eyeball flew out. While having this strange wonder about her eyeball being glossy although her body is all rigid, I went to contact Erisa.

[I acquired some flesh and I want you to take care of it]

After informing her of the location, I remained to wait outside. The stench of the corpse inside the room was about to make me faint. The smell churned my stomach, but not to the point of vomiting.

I turned toward the dirty glass of the outside door and noticed my own reflection being projected within it. That standing figure which was skillfully tracing my moves like a doll looked very distant to me.

Erisa arrived at the designated place twenty minutes after I contacted her. Dressing in black from head to toe, she looked like a grim reaper coming to harvest a soul.

[The body is inside?]

I nodded and asked her about how she will transport it.

[It's not me who will transport it. The cooperators will take care of the job]

I heard a squirming sound coming from the dark back alley right after Erisa finished her last word. Several short shadowy figures wearing worn out clothes appeared from the darkness.

I recalled the people who snatched the hanging body from the branch in the copse a few days ago.

[They are the Mogura]

It seems that's how they're called, according to Erisa.

Judging from their timing, it looks like they were concealing their presence in the dark near me while I was waiting for Erisa. At the instant I realized this fact, a cold chill ran down my spine. All this time I was defenselessly standing still in this darkness, unaware of these goblin-like group being right beside me.

[There's a river around this area that became a closed conduit. Currently, water has already stopped running through it, so these people are settling within its laid out remains. They reside in the darkness and make their living from eating human flesh. The reason they're called as Mogura is because they

rarely crawl out above ground in the daylight]

When Erisa whispered them the instructions, the Mogura went inside the room.

Although I can hear the sounds of their operations and movements, not a single voice reached my ears. Come to think of it, they were also speechless last time I saw them in the copse. Maybe they don't have a language, or perhaps they have a regulation to not talk while working in order to avoid unnecessary disturbance. I wouldn't go out of my way to confirm the truth anyway since I'm not in the least interested.

[Did you know them from a long time ago?]

[Yeah, from my father's generation. Whenever I needed someone to deal with my corpses, I turn to them for a request. It's also the main reason why I go set my flower stall and deal with those window-shoppers in uncommon places. And of course, the Mogura require half the body to do the job]

Then does that mean that the man I observed earlier riding the car with her is one of the regular customers?

[Give and take for the sake of coexistence, is that it?]

[That's right. The price I suggested to you that time doesn't leave for me anything of profit. If I can take only a small portion to fill my stomach from the other half left for you, then that would be enough]

Now I'm feeling all ashamed for thinking about her as a greedy profiteer.

As if she sensed my regret, Erisa made a meek expression.

[It's fine if you think of me as a cowardly woman who abuses any opportunity to acquire flesh without any labor]

[I wouldn't think of you like that. You're the only person who could dismantle the corpse for me, and in the first place, I wouldn't have acquired the body if I didn't meet you]

[Hearing that makes me at ease]

The Mogura troupe exited the room holding a huge bag. They work fast, as usual. After seeing off the Mogura disappearing into the darkness, Erisa rode

back her car which was stationed near the alley.

[Leave the rest for them and come with me to the shop. They should have already delivered the corpse by the time we make it back since they're pretty familiar with the underground construction]

Erisa didn't ask me about whose flesh it was or how I obtained it at all.

While the car was bouncing on the way, I kept gazing at the distant night view. I wonder how many thousands, how many millions of lives were lost in these kinds of places and moments. Maybe among those lost lives, many of them were suddenly snatched away. Just like what I did tonight.

[You finally crossed over]

I didn't ask her about what she meant.

The only reaction I had to her spoken words was a loose consciousness of me finally becoming a murderer.

\*\*\*\*

Upon seeing the wrinkled corpse cut apart in front of her, Erisa revealed a confused frown.

[What could this be?]

[What shall I do with the unneeded parts, Milady?]

[Throw them out, or give them to the Mogura, what a waste. If only they gave us the lower half. Can't be helped now]

[Did something happen?]

Adding oil to fire with my question, Erisa answered me with a grim face.

[It did! A big something! Leaving aside the freshness that doesn't exist, the age you picked is too old. It goes without saying that nobody would eat such a meat, the quality of human flesh drops through aging after all. Didn't you know that the flesh of an old person is not delicious at all?]

[I never tasted it so I can't tell]

[The second problem is this]

Erisa took a meat cleaver and cut through the thousand yen grandma's stomach section. Then without caring about the spilling blood she extended the cut slit with her hands.

[As expected.....hey, stop making that pale face and look over here. All her internal organs are suffering serious damage. Looks like she had enough of a hard time finding something to eat to the point where visiting a doctor was out of the question]

Erisa used the cleaver again to cut a blackish organ peeking from grandma's ribs (probably her liver) and dark red blood started dripping in a straight line.

[Did you know, the taste of blood changes depending on the stress the person receives before they die. A sudden move, fear, pain, intense excitement, starvation, and even sickness. The stress takes away a huge amount of energy from the flesh, which drops its quality]

Erisa carried on talking while holding a part of the corpse's stomach and inspecting it.

[The Shishikuibana's growth condition is also influenced by the quality of the flesh. The more inferior the quality, the more negative the influence. It is preferable for the body to experience an instant death with the less possible pain. Accident and jumping suicides, or in general, the situations where the person is not aware of their death are the best. Comparing the flesh you brought to the earlier anticipations, I can't give it even a passing mark]

I was pushed down into a deep feeling of despair. After I was finally able to accomplish my resolution and obtain a corpse it ended up to be disqualified. All of what I did was nothing but a waste of labor.

[You don't have to get all dejected like that. If we choose the useful parts you should be good]

After Kanade finished cutting down the corpse while muttering "useful" and "unuseful" she sorted the flesh into two piles. The unuseful pile was the biggest.

[Erisa, why do you eat human flesh?]

In the free time during Kanade's work, I inquired Erisa about something that's

being bothering me for a while now.

[Is this your pure curiosity asking?]

[You did tell me about cannibalism being not wrong nor right last time, but you seem to be conscious about it being socially not allowed. I want to know why, despite knowing that, you keep on seeking the hardest meat to obtain]

[It's like you're asking me why does a koala feed on eucalyptus]

Erisa began her explanation while Kanade didn't remove her sight from her task.

[There are various kinds of reasons as to why people conduct an act of cannibalism. Eating the flesh of your enemy in wars is a way to convey revenge. Sometimes it's done in order to steal the strength, the experience and the wisdom of the prey and gain a new vitality. For ranking up with one's self and having a chance to interact with God. To show sympathy to the dead. To expel a disease eating into one's body. To make one's stomach as a substitute for a grave. Gluttony. And even for the sake of surviving in a critical situation]

I heard about this in a class, at times of severe famine, when eating cats and dogs becomes unsatisfying, people resort to eating the flesh of those who died by starvation in order to avoid the same fate.

[Those kinds of emergency conduct takes place in lots of countries. The long established cultures and morals have exterminated cannibalism, however, its dark shadow still exists in everyone's heart waiting for a chance to make its appearance again]

[Out of all these examples you told me, which one is in your case?]

[You can say that my case applies to one of them while at the same time applies to none. My eating habit doesn't exceed ten per cent of the eucalyptus a koala eats, but what's certain is that I follow the same unbalanced diet as they do]

[I still don't have the least idea about what you're talking about]

During our short chat, Kanade finished her work.

The considerable amount of flesh left on grandma's body seems to be

unnecessary. The quantity of useful meat was about the same size as her head.

Kanade took the biggest half of that amount, stuffed it into a plastic container and gave it to me.

[Sometimes I think about this. Perhaps the Shishikuibana is the negative legacy of the taboo that humans abandoned during the process of their evolution into an intellectual being. Maybe inside the Shishikuibana lurks the black records of the human history which was not even allowed to be left for the future generations]

[Negative legacy....hm]

While parroting her words, I fell into deep thought, thinking about Erisa's idea.

The miserable Shishikuibana that was forcefully brought back because of human's ego. If Erisa's approach is correct, then that makes the inside of Misaki who's waiting for me to feed her flesh is hiding a black history of humanity that should be locked away. The blood of the same color it bears should manifest the redness of the sins that humanity have carried along. If we boil down that blood in a pot, it is possible that a deep and muddled black color would result from it.

[I wonder how did the first person who performed cannibalism think about eating his kind]

[Maybe he was curious to know how does a human taste when eaten. Who knows, the prohibited fruit which Adam and Eve ate when breaking their promise with God could've unexpectedly tasted like human flesh as well]

If Erisa was an inhabitant of paradise, she would definitely step in the taboo, leisurely stuff the fruit in her cheek and gladly get herself expelled.

The pleasure garden for her only exists above ground, where a large number of human beings live.

Am I also banned from paradise now that I have murdered the thousand yen grandma for her flesh?

***END***

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# **The Pygmalion is Planting Seeds - Volume 1**

Author: **Bouki Tsuchikana (坊木椎哉)**

Illustrator: **Tsukugu (つくぐ)**

Translated by **Moon Rabbit Translations**

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*[Translator's site.](#)*