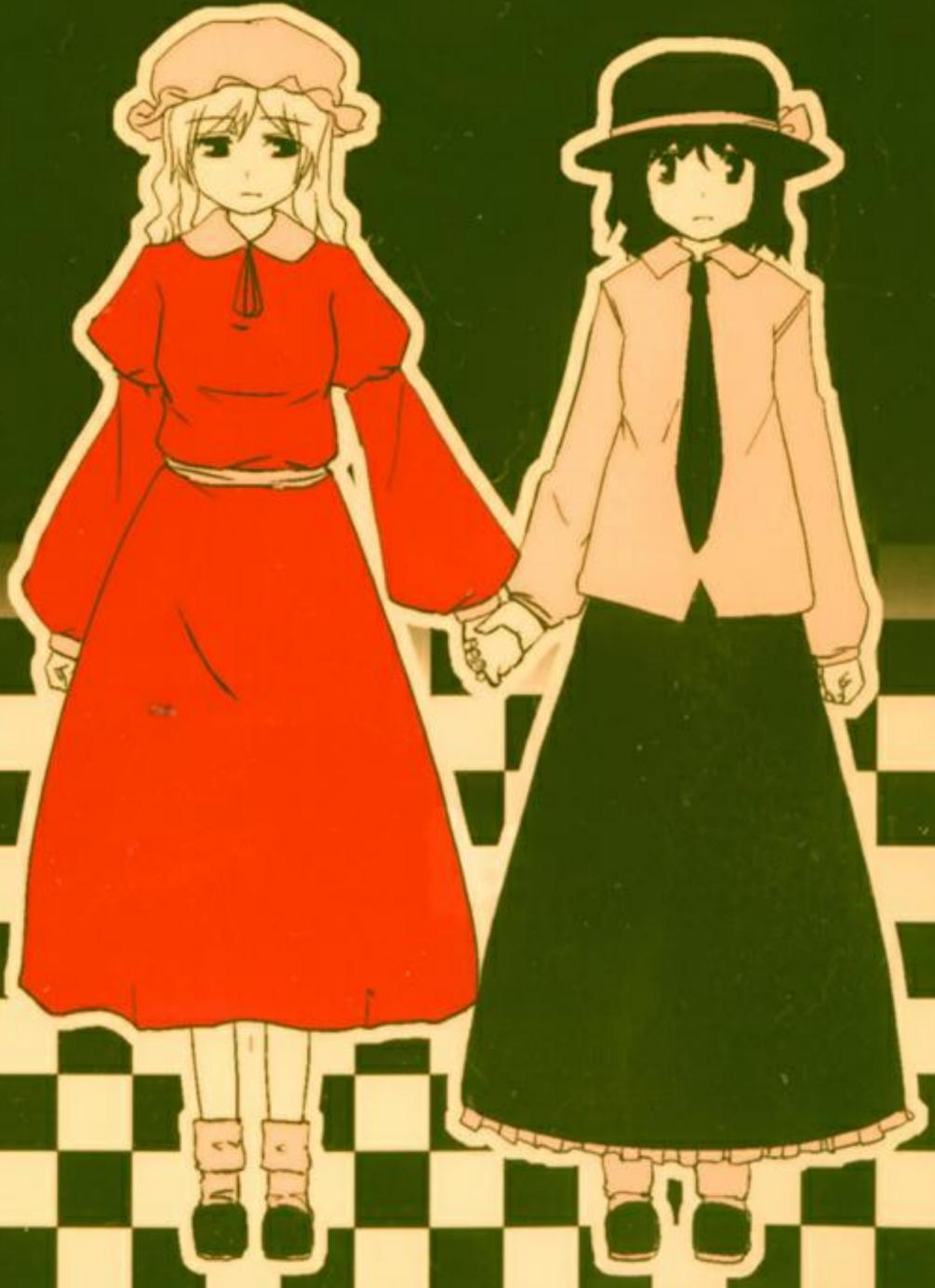
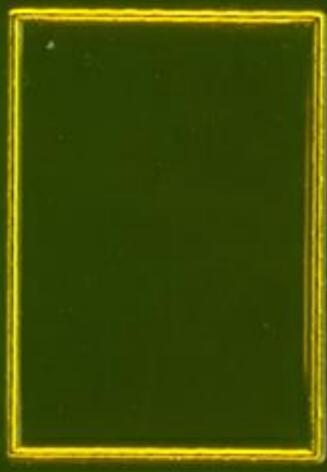


紅白歌



い四  
よ面  
か楚  
ん歌



妖歌集



い四

よ面

か楚

ん歌





そして幻想郷は滅亡した。

And then Gensokyo ended.

Both doors of the world  
stand open:  
opened by you  
in the twilight.  
We hear them slam and slam  
and carry the uncertain,  
and carry the Green into your Ever.

(Epitaph for François)



I reach my hands out. My white fingers wriggle like snakes as they go further and further. My hands are white, my fingers are white—so white they don't give off the feeling of life—and the neck my hands go around is even more white. My fingers wrap around the neck that seems to have even lost the color white, that doesn't give off a presence. My fingernails dig slightly into the skin and draw thin red lines. Like lipstick. The red lines follow my fingers and go around the neck once. My slender fingers wind around the slender neck. The feeling of flesh, bones, skin, nerves, throat, veins, and life. I feel the blood rushing under my fingers.

No one is here.

I'm not being looked at by anyone.

Nothing is here.

I'm not even looking at anything.

Nothing is in the Dark world. Only the whiteness of my hands and neck float in the darkness like ghosts, and I can't see anything else. I don't know if I'm standing, if I'm sitting, what time it is right now, or even where this is. The time and place are being erased in the darkness. Even if I look at the sky, I can't see the stars, there is no moon, and I don't even know if that place where there is only darkness is the sky.

The neck,  
my hands.

The white neck that is being constricted and the white neck I'm constricting are all there is in the world. I don't even know if my eyes, which are supposed to be looking at them, are there, but the feeling of putting strength in comes to me clearly. The feeling of putting strength into my fingers. The feeling of putting strength into my fingers and choking someone. The feeling of my fingers sinking into flesh, the feeling of pressing veins down,  
the feeling of death.

The feeling of choking someone and—the feeling of being choked by someone.

The feeling of life.

Light goes on like an explosion. A light more Red than red, more Blue than blue shines. The feeling of the world breaking. The sky splits and the light that was hidden is released all at once. Only light fills the world with nothing in it. In the light, I saw it clearly.

*The sight of me choking myself.*

And then—I woke up from the dream.



1

“.....-Ahh!”

At the same time I became conscious, I got up forcefully. It wasn't something I did consciously. To escape from the dream, I literally sprang up. The blanket covering me was sent flying, and “Hyaaaah!?”

The one who was sleeping next to me, Usami Renko, was also sent flying.

“.....”

I moved my head, which was not fully functioning yet, and looked in the direction the scream came from. My partner from the Hifuu club<sup>1</sup> and friend, Usami Renko, was rolling on the floor. She didn't just roll onto the floor. Unable to stop, she was still rolling on the floor. In front of me, as I watched, Renko yelled “AAAhhh!?” with a doppler effect while rolling, then “Ah.”

Thud.

With a grand noise, she hit a wall and stopped.

After that—she stopped moving completely. In a position that even a frozen frog probably would have had more charm than, Renko didn't move a bit. It sounded like she slammed her head against the wall, but I couldn't see Renko's head from the bed. Instead, I studied her appearance intently. She had a white polo shirt and panties on. Her skirt was hanging crookedly on a hanger and her necktie was tied on so it wouldn't fall down. Only her hat was properly hanging on the hat hanger, and my hat hung next to it.

I thought it looked terrible, but then I noticed that I couldn't talk about other people. I was like her too. I had only changed into the top half of my pajamas and only had drawers on below. I'm sure I took the bottom half off so it wouldn't get wrinkled.

The inside of the room was almost as bad. I didn't want to look at it directly if I could help it. There was a half filled bottle of wine, open snack packages, bitten cheese, a plastic bag that was full of empty cans; they were all things that required mental strength to look at directly and weren't things one could handle right after waking up. If I were told that a burglar had been here, I might have believed it.

I didn't want to look, so I didn't. I averted my gaze and looked outside the window whose curtains were open. It was still dark outside, and the night sky was beautiful. It was a scene that made me forget about the sight of the room.

“Yeah.....it's a good morning.”

“Whaaaat do you mean 'it's a good morning'!?”

A response that cut what I said to myself to escape from reality came flying. It was a voice that sounded like a monster's. Yeah, this voice could be used in a horror film.

I was afraid of turning around.

I was afraid, but the back of my head was grabbed from behind. I could tell that strength was being put into her hands. Not turning back was even scarier, so I timidly turned back.

There was a demon.

Actually, there was a demon-like Renko.

“Good morning, Renko. It's a good morning, isn't it?”

I was so scared I decided to greet her first. I think an

important person once said long ago that greeting were the first step to establishing good relationships between people. I wasn't sure, though.

“Good Mooorniiiiing?”

With a face that was still like a demon's, Renko gripped my head with her hands from both sides. It hurt a little. It was more scary than it was painful. Looking at her angry so close was a bit of a thrill. It was scarier than grave markers, torii's, or yakitori.

“Mary! Mary! Maribel Han! Exactly what time do you think it is right now!?”

“That's where you start!?”

“It's 3:25 and 45.03 seconds!”

“You're answering yourself!?”



Amazing, it was a one person boke-tsukkomi. As expected of Renko; she was a member of the Hifuu club.....I mean, that didn't really have to do with it. It looked like my head still wasn't working properly. If I said that out loud, she might say, "You're always like that," so I didn't say it.

The reason Renko was able to say the time immediately wasn't because she had a watch.

It was because it was night right now.

If she looked at the moon and stars outside the window, Renko could tell the time and the location. Renko had eyes that were perverted.....I mean, weird like that. It was an ability that was fitting for a member of the Hifuu club, an occult circle. It might be a skill. Whether there was a trick or setup to it, even I didn't know, to be honest, but it certainly was weird.

Of course—

—That was something I really couldn't say about other people.

“Three! It's three!”

“It's time for snacks, right?”

“Snacks are at ate! Three a.m. is the time of three oxes and ghosts!”<sup>2</sup>

“In that case,” I looked at Renko, who had said slightly incorrect things, gave her my best smile, and continued.

“It's time for the Hifuu club. Right?”

“.....”

She must have been convinced by my words. Renko became completely silent. The grip on my head slightly loosened.

Ah, a chance.

“Ei.”

I slipped through Renko's hands and closed the short distance between us. I wonder if the “Ei” I said or my lips touching hers was faster. I closed my eyes, kissed her lightly, and quickly let go of her. It was just a little skinship. Perhaps because I had a weird dream, I wanted to be closer to her than usual.

Renko was frozen with her arms still in front of her. She probably wasn't able to react to my sudden prank as her eyes were still open. Her wide open black eyes were looking at me.....it seemed, but they weren't looking anywhere. Her cheeks were just a little red.

Probably, like mine were.

“Your guard is full of holes, Renko.”

Saying that jokingly, I went away from Renko. Renko was still frozen. I crawled on the bed and looked at the desk, but there was only alcohol and no water. Going to the refrigerator to get some would be a pain, so I drank down the small amount of carbonated water that was left in a bottle. The carbonated water that was lukewarm and had lost its fizz was neither good nor bad.

“You love me a lot?”<sup>3</sup>

Repeating my words—although I got the feeling that the meaning was different—Renko finally regained herself. Looking at me fiercely,

“Mary!”

She called me by my nickname and jumped at me. It looked like she had realized that I had pulled a prank on her. I put the bottle down and tried to avoid her, but that action was too much. She pushed me down on the bed, and after flicking my forehead with her finger, she started messing up my hair.

She was laughing.

Renko and I were laughing.

“Aha, ahaha-!”

“You, you-!”

That continued for over ten minutes, and when it was over,

Renko and I were both lying face down on the bed, breathing heavily. If someone saw us right now, they would probably say, “You two must be idiots” tiredly. There wasn't anything I could say in our defence. I could probably only agree and hang my head.

That didn't matter because it was fun, though.

“So,”

The one who recovered first was Renko. I wonder if that meant she had a higher lung capacity than me. While still lying on her stomach, she put her arms under her chin and looked at me.

“what happened?”

“What do you mean?”

In my flipped view, I saw Renko say “Geez” with a sigh. Because I was on my back, not only Renko, but the whole room looked like it was upside down. Without changing my position, I reached my hand out toward Renko and petted her head. For some reason, I wanted to do that. I combed her tousled hair with my fingers.

Renko didn't push my hand away.

In fact, with a somewhat serious look, “You sprang up because you had a bad dream or something, right? Tell me about it. I'll listen.”

she said those words.

“.....”

I was surprised.

I was so surprised I almost hiccuped.<sup>4</sup>

I really made a sound like a hiccup. That was how

unexpected Renko's words were. I was surprised that she was able to tell that I had had a bad dream, but more than that, I was surprised that Renko was really worried about me. She had a serious expression, her eyes were sincere, and it didn't look like she would let go of me with her eyes. It didn't feel like she was joking or kidding around. From the bottom of her heart, she was worried.

.....Was it because of the dream?

Ever since I told her about my dreams, it felt like Renko started worrying more. She was usually how she always was, but when I talked about my dreams, she became surprisingly serious. I think she said something like, "Next time, don't leave me behind!" but Renko's seriousness couldn't be explained with that.

My surprise must have shown up in my behavior. Renko pouted, and

"What?"

looking the other way, said that.

—She looked like a chipmunk.

Thinking that, I petted Renko's head even more. I wanted to do that. Renko looked so cute sulky.

"Nothing~"

Although I said that jokingly, I most likely wasn't able to keep my happiness from coming out in my voice. If I looked in a mirror right now, I undoubtedly would have seen a smiling face that would make me want to give it a chop with my hand.

Being thankful that Renko was looking the other way, I somehow got my expression back to normal, and

"I was just happy that you were worried about me."

"Hmph.....we are friends, more or less."

"Oh Renko, 'friends' is too much."

"It is!?"

"My mistake. 'More or less' is too much."

"I think that's something you're never supposed to make a mistake about....."

Saying that, Renko finally turned her face toward me. Jokes were good for changing the mood.

"So, what kind of dream did you have?"

*"A sad dream."*

I answered immediately.

I answered so quickly that I couldn't have said anything before it. Even though I thought of leaving more of an interval before answering, the words slipped out of my mouth.

Right away, I regretted saying it. I had planned on changing the subject. Seeing Renko look surprised, I felt like hitting myself from a second before.

But time couldn't be turned back.

The past couldn't be returned to.

Because the flow of time was set from the past to the future.

*Because things that were lost couldn't be taken back.*

".....It wasn't a bad dream. It was a weird dream as always."

"A dream about going over the boundary?"

"Maybe it was. Maybe it wasn't. It was a dream—I didn't really get."

"Hmm....."

Saying that, Renko reached her hand out. With her fingertip, she gently poked my cheek. Poke poke. Like she was

making sure that I was here. It tickled.

“While you were sleeping, did you go through a gap in the barrier?”

“With only drawers?”

“That's funny. No, that isn't funny. Yeah, that isn't funny.”

Even though she said it wasn't funny, Renko had a smile on her face. Seeing that, just a little, I smiled too. Just seeing Renko's smile, it felt like the last remnants of the dream that were in my mind melted and disappeared.

One more time, I smiled awkwardly at Renko and—the several tears in the boundary I could see behind her. My eyes that could see the gaps in the barrier were working as they normally did. It was just—maybe it was because I had a dream like that. It looked like the gaps were bigger and there were more of them than usual.

A sad dream.

Yes, it was a sad dream. A dream that was sad like a nightmare. The details of it had disappeared like foam. Only the feeling of sadness clung to my heart.

That was as if—

“I was being left behind by everyone—that was the kind of dream it was.”

I didn't say those words out loud, and they sank inside my heart.

Melting, without disappearing.....sinking and sinking.

Someone is talking.

The voice strangely echoes.

An easy to hear voice.

A hard to hear voice.

The conversation was proceeding  
and only I couldn't hear.

There was nothing else,  
and in the first place—

What was *I*?

The exchange between the two  
was light  
and made me think of XXXXX.  
For them, it was a conversation  
with a moderate distance  
between them.

A sleepy sounding voice and a  
leisurely sounding voice.

The voices went far and came  
close

and were like ripples.

I listened to them.

I want to hear,

I want to know,

that was what I thought.

“.....not like you, at a time like this.”

“Recently, I haven't been having good  
dreams. I wonder if I'm working too much.”

“You're sleeping too much.”

“Sleep is the best for beauty and health.”

“.....sleep through winter as well.....”

“Anyway XXXXX, what about.....? Recently, the hole.....”

“I didn't think you'd worry about that.”

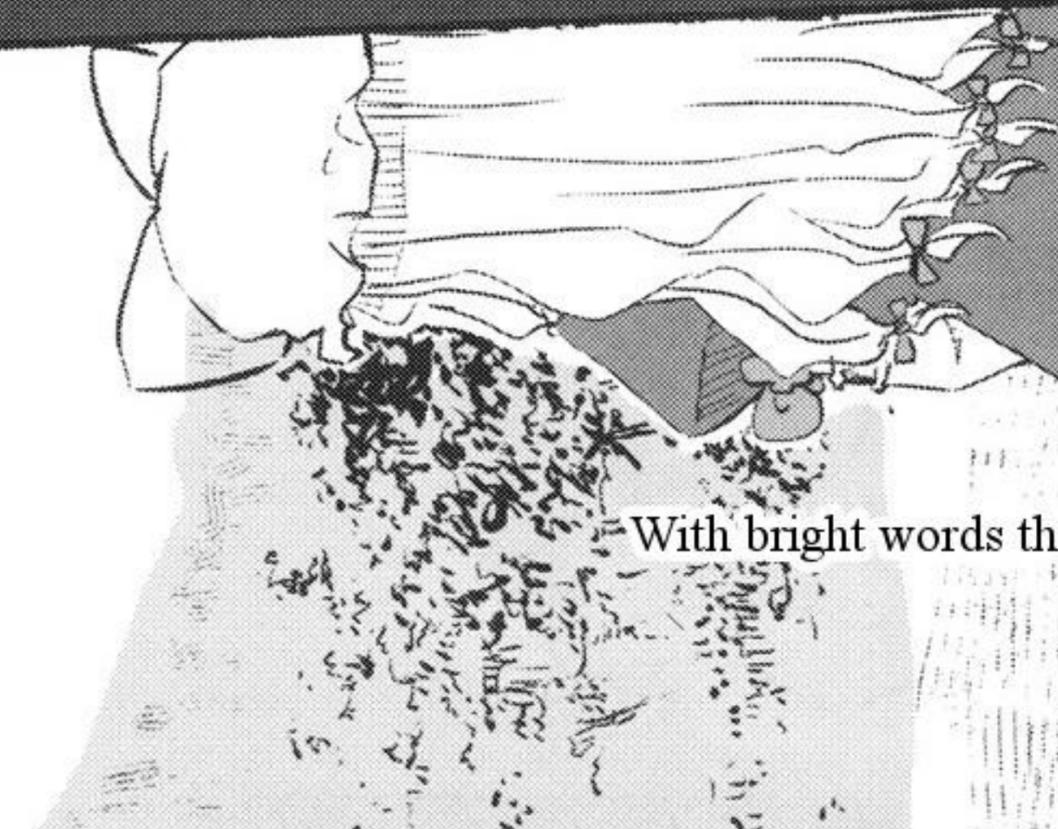
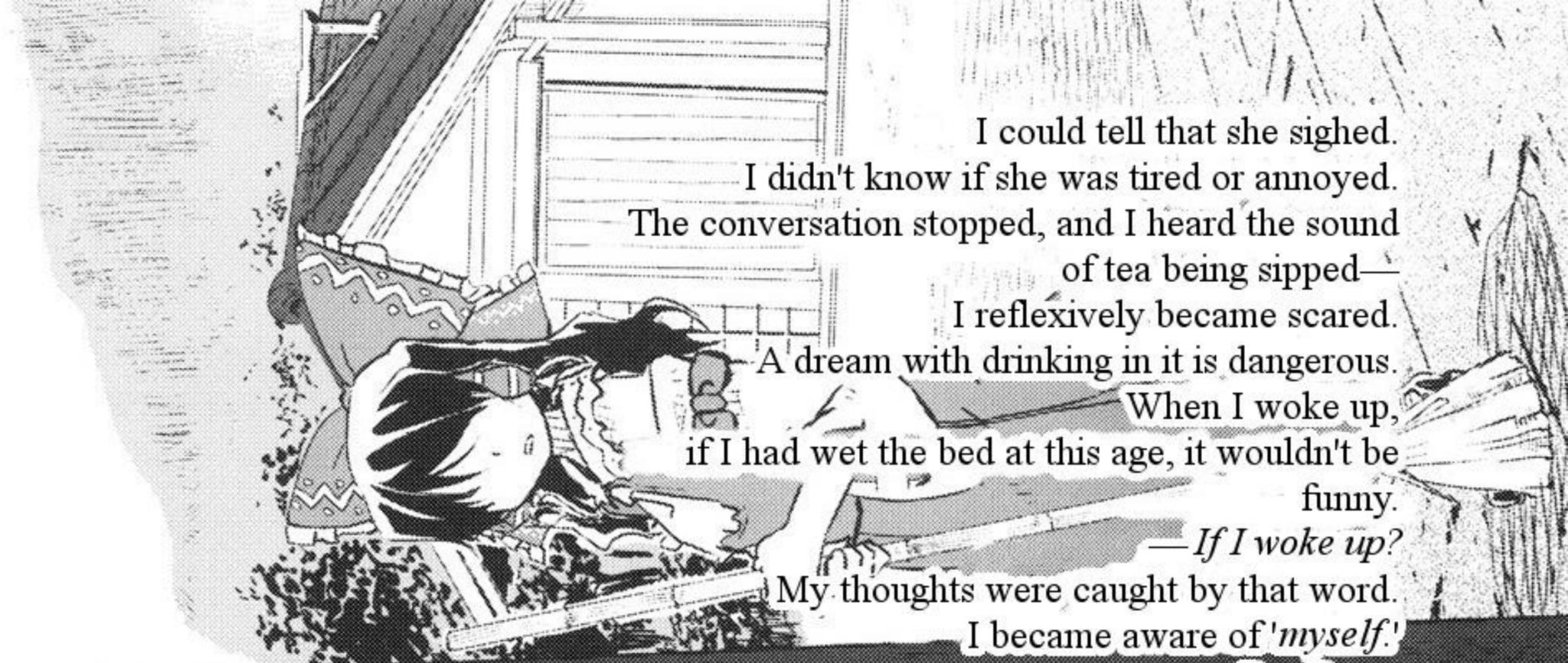
“I am a shrine mai.....different from.....”

“.....risa will be excited again.”  
“If it's a simple incident like that—”

I could tell that she sighed.  
I didn't know if she was tired or annoyed.  
The conversation stopped, and I heard the sound  
of tea being sipped—  
I reflexively became scared.  
A dream with drinking in it is dangerous.  
When I woke up,  
if I had wet the bed at this age, it wouldn't be  
funny.  
—If I woke up?  
My thoughts were caught by that word.  
I became aware of 'myself.'  
I'm, I'm—

“—there might not be anything that can be done.”

With bright words that were like they were freed,  
I woke up from the dream.



“Mary, we’re here.”

I woke up by Renko's voice. I slowly opened my eyes. The evening sun that shone down in a slant hurt my eyes. While putting my hand above them, I cautiously opened my eyes. My blurry vision came into focus.

In front of me was Renko with her hat on.

“.....Good morning, Renko.”

“Good morning, Mary. It’s a great morning, isn’t it?”

Even though it was evening, Renko said that and smiled ironically. I tried to say something in return, but unable to find anything smart to say, I looked around at the surroundings.

No one was inside the bus. No one other than me, Renko, and the driver. Renko and I were sitting in the last row. The driver was looking at us with resentful eyes. The bus was still and didn't look like it would move. This might be the last stop.

“Were you able to have a good dream? You were sleeping until the end—”

“I had—a dream.”

“.....Mary?”

Interrupting her words,

I said that. The words came out like they spilled from the dream. Renko was in front of me. I knew that. And beyond her remained the remnants of the dream. Like they were stacked on top of each other. I desperately tried to grasp them as they seemed like they would go away even now. A dream. A scenery I saw in a dream. A conversation I heard in a dream. A world I was in in a dream.

A dream.

“It wasn't good or bad, but.....I had a dream.”

“.....Mary? Hello? Are you awake? Are you still asleep?”



“I saw a shrine maiden, a shrine, a hole, a barrier, red, white, violet,”

A dream.

A dream that was in a dream.

That was—

*The meaning of that was probably*

“—If you're sleeping, wake up—!”

In the moment in which I was about to grasp the dream, Renko grabbed my collar, her head came near me, and before I could understand the meaning of that, the impact throb, throb, throb, throb. My head hurt what hurt was my head and it wasn't stupid but it hurt.

“—u.....It's the last stop! Let's get off! Let's wake up too!”

Perhaps because it hurt for her too, Renko said that while rubbing her head. The edges of her eyes were slightly teary.

.....If it hurt that much, you shouldn't have done it in the first place.

I thought that, but I didn't say it because I knew she would do it again if I did. It was true that what Renko said was right too. The driver's look was getting worse. If we stayed any longer, we might get kicked out. Getting out of the bus quickly was probably the best.

The remnants of the dream which I had almost grasped escaped to a place that was out of my reach.

I was completely—awake.

I woke up from the dream.

“We're up! We're getting off!”

Brushing away Renko's hand, with which she tried to pull me up, I stood up. I didn't really forget anything. In the first place, I didn't bring anything. Nothing was needed for the Hifuu club's activities. If I had to say there were things, they would probably be a pair of eyes and just a little courage.

Also, a partner. This was necessary.



“Thank you very much—!”

She said that well (energetically?<sup>5</sup>), and Renko and I jumped off the bus as if to escape. The automatic door closed with great force less than a second later, and the bus made a noise and went. We must have made him wait for quite a while. The only thing I could do was hope that the bus wouldn't be caught speeding. Although I didn't think there were any police this deep in the mountains.

Where we got off, there was nothing. At least, nothing modern.

There was a mountain, a river, a forest, a tree, and a dirt road. There were natural things that were rare now; it didn't look like a food manufacturing plant. There might be bamboo shoots or something. That was how much it was of a countryside. Actually, if we didn't take the bus for a few hours, we probably couldn't have come here.

Even though it was left alone after the relocation of the capital,<sup>6</sup> I couldn't believe that this was still Tokyo. At least, there weren't any places like this in Kyoto.

“It's weird that it takes more time than Kyoto to <sup>Hiroshige</sup> Tokyo,<sup>7</sup> isn't it.....?”

“It's faster than walking the 53 Stations.”<sup>8</sup>

Saying that, Renko opened the thick book she had in her hand. What came out from the middle of the book was a single photograph. On the back were a map and address written in her handwriting. The front was, of course, a picture. No people were shown. It was a picture of scenery.

A picture of a shrine.

“This—is our destination this time, Mary.”

Flap flap.

Flapping the photograph, Renko said that. She said that without faltering, and her words didn't have hesitation, but they didn't have eagerness or enthusiasm either; they were very businesslike.

—Destination?

For a moment, I didn't understand what Renko was saying. It looked like I still wasn't awake. I took a deep breath once and sent oxygen to my head and mind. I felt my thoughts start moving slowly like the hands of a clock.

Destination. It was evening. It would almost be night. That time was—

“The Hifuu club's—activity, right?”

“Yes.” Renko nodded and looked up at the sky. I raised my head too. The full moon was rising at the end of the sky, and I could see the stars shining here and there. After one more minute, the evening sun would probably sink completely and disappear. Still looking into the distance, Renko faced the sky and began speaking. “The current time is 18:45 and 27 seconds. Our current location is—”

“A bus stop, right?”

“.....Mary, didn't you learn from Sentai shows<sup>9</sup> that you shouldn't take people's signature phrases?”

“That was your.....signature phrase?”

“Yes!”

Renko put her hand on her waist crossly and stuck her chest out. I wouldn't say it out loud—I would never say it out loud—I definitely, without a doubt, would never say it out loud, but, um, even though she stuck her chest out, it didn't really make a difference. I cried inside.

I put my hands together in prayer.

“.....What?”

“No, it's nothing.”

While she looked reproachfully at me, I looked up at the sky once again. I could see the moon and the stars. To me, they were only astrological bodies.

But, not for Renko.

Usami Renko looked at the moon. She looked at the stars. By looking at the moon, she could tell her location, and by looking at the stars, she could tell the current time. Absolute position and relative time. She decided the way she and the world were with her eyes.

Of course, I couldn't do anything like that. That was only Renko's ability, special skill, technique, and talent. I couldn't do it.

—Just,

like how there were things only Renko could see, there were, of course, also things only I could see. Renko probably couldn't see them. The multiple fissures that were in the sky. The gaps that endlessly sucked in the light of the moon and the stars.

The barrier.

The boundary.

The gaps between them.

Renko wasn't able to see them. Only I was able to see them. The holes. The dream world that appeared and disappeared beyond them. That's why she didn't notice. She hadn't noticed. Only I noticed.

That their numbers were slowly, slowly—

“.....”

I stopped thinking about the unnerving thoughts that rose in my head. It wasn't like I had any proof. I hadn't even actually counted them. It was just that they gave off that feeling. What meaning that had—even I didn't know.

Because I could only see them.

Because all I could do was see them.

More importantly, right now, I just—

“.....What's wrong, Mary? Does your stomach hurt?”

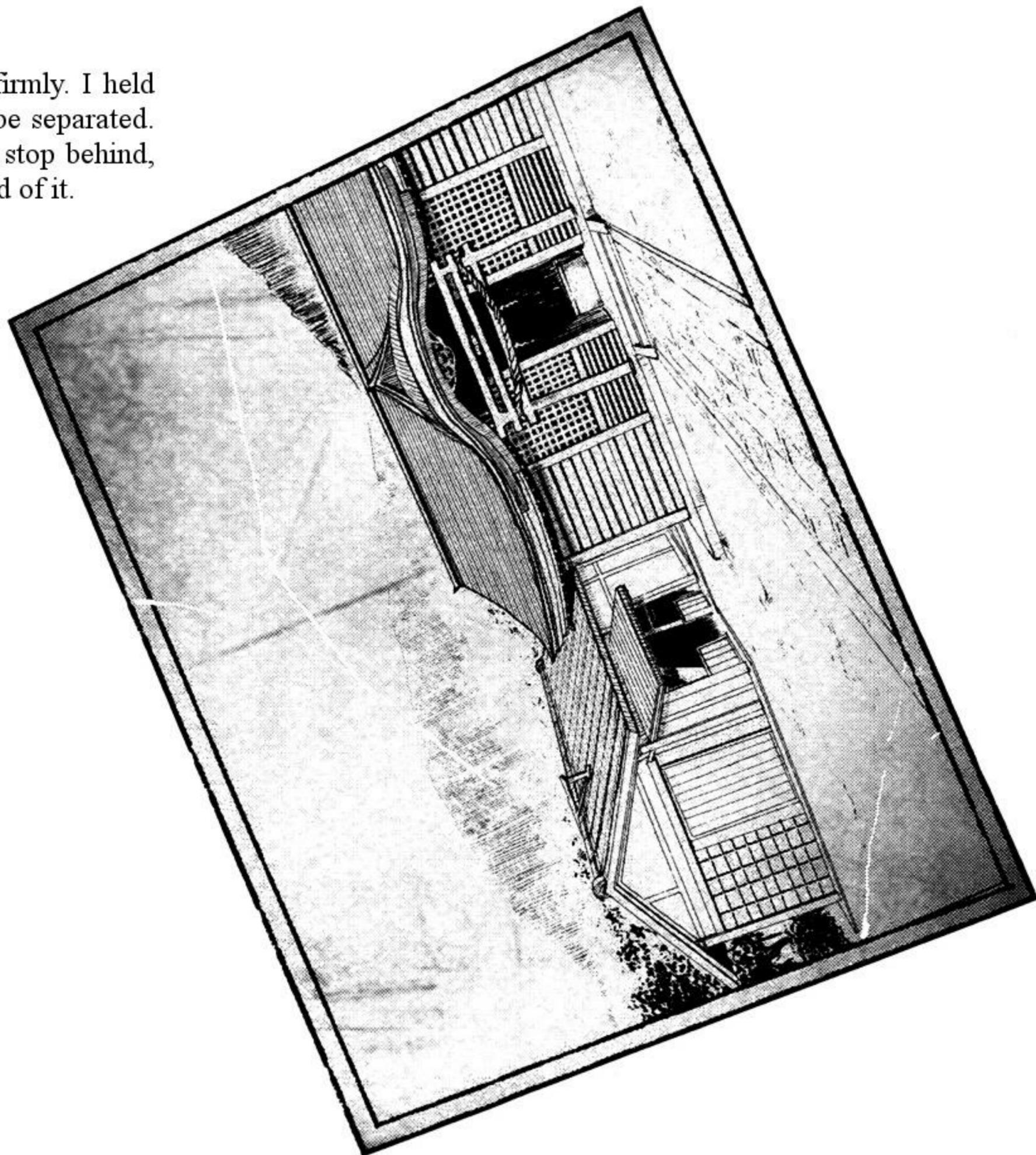
“No. It's nothing. —Let's go, Renko.”

“Eh? Wa-Wawa!”

I took Renko's hand and ran. I held her hand firmly. I held her hand so as not to let her go; so we wouldn't be separated. While laughing, Renko and I ran. Leaving the bus stop behind, into the depths of the forest. To the shrine at the end of it.

Right now, I just

—wanted to spend time together with Renko.



I'm having a dream again.

"Is XXXXX—gonna die?"

The dream hasn't changed. It's a dream so elaborate that I almost can't tell whether it's a dream or reality. Rather than being in a dream, it feels like I'm in reality. Like only my consciousness has been released into the dream world, and I'm looking from it at reality, it's a strange feeling. I'm not there, and at the same time, I'm all that's there. I'm everywhere, the world is filled with me, and I'm not anywhere. Nothing is there. Nothing, nothing, nothing.

*Nothing.  
No one.*

The voices are far. But they're close. Closer than they were before. Farther than they would be next. They go far then come close, and they almost touch then leave. Still, I can hear XXXXX's voice clearly, but I can never see her expression.

Facing her is a little oni.

"Who knows? .....It doesn't have anything to do with me. She loves Genoskyo in her own way—and it seems Gensokyo will accept everything."

I spin around to look at the surroundings/The surroundings spin around to look at me.

The location is a shrine. It's the same scenery as the one I saw in the photo. I get the feeling that it's a bit more faded than the one in the picture. Whether that's because this is a dream or because time passed since the photo was taken is...something I don't know. Something, something, something, some, some, some.

*Someone isn't here.  
Who isn't here?*

“That's right. That's how you are. It's obvious for you, XX. Unmerciful, carefree, impartial—just like the world. The death of just one youkai isn't.....”

“It sounds like you're trying to say something—”

“Not really. It's just sad that.....and Ma.....”

“..... That girl doesn't.....”

“You're saying a lot. Do you not have enough to dri.....”

“Lately, there haven't been any banq.....and to tell you the truth, I like Genso.....XXXXXX, do you think differently?”

“It can't be helped.”

*Someone's missing?  
Who's missing?*

She sighs.  
It's just like someone.  
Who is it just like?  
I don't know.

I don't know.  
I don't know, but I knew.  
I knew, but I can't  
remember.

Because it's a dream.  
Because this is a dream.  
Because this isn't reality.  
Because this isn't my world.  
This is the other side's—

The red-white stops talking. By it stopping, I determine that it's human. The form of what was just a red and white mass distorts. The red and white that was changing its form returns to how it was. But still, it looks like I'm looking at its reflection in a fun house mirror.

The girl wearing red and white clothes is facing the small oni. Inside the shrine. There's no one other than them. There are only the two of them. Two. Two. Just two.

“Geez, the time's *19:21 and 5.03 seconds!*”

..... Eh?

And then, I woke up from the dream.

“Watch out!”

I suddenly felt an impact. The weight I felt on my body told me that this wasn't a dream. It was hard to breathe. Why—Faster than I thought that, I saw. The reason it was hard for me to breathe was simple; Renko was grabbing my clothes, and as a result, I was being choked a little. I realized that Renko saved me from falling down after I slipped.

It was just, I didn't know why I was in this situation.

“Renko.....?”

“Mary, are you all right? You were spacing out, but—now that I think about it, you're always spaced out, aren't you? Yeah, yeah, you're all right.”

“Please don't come up with your own conclusion!”

“I wish you'd say I answered my own question.”

Renko said that triumphantly. Maybe it was supposed to be a signature phrase.

—Signature phrase.

There was something about that word. Without thinking about it too much, I said that word which rose in my head.

“I don't think you should interfere with people's signature phrases.”

“.....?” Renko tilted her head and said, “That was my line from before. You're the one who interfered. I was the one who was interfered.”

“.....?”

Now it was my turn to tilt my head. My thoughts weren't fitting together. Something was off. Everything was off. I felt a



discrepancy between my consciousness and my will.

Timidly, I asked Renko a question.

“.....Right now, what time is it?”

“19:22 and 32.17 seconds.”

Renko looked up at the sky and answered immediately. 19:22. An hour hadn't passed since we left the bus stop. It was around 18:40 that time.

“.....Where are we?”

“A mountain. By the way, you're Maribel Han and I'm Usami Renko. We're the Hifuu club, and we're in the middle of an activity right now. Have I answered all 'kokodokowata dare'<sup>10</sup> questions? All right green?”<sup>11</sup>

“There are no problems other than the English at the end.”

I didn't know what kokodokowata dare was, but she probably said it because I asked weird questions.

Right—that was right.

I didn't have to ask her. Right now, we were going up a quiet mountain path. We were looking for the shrine at the end of it. Looking for the large gap in the barrier that seemed to be there, Renko and I were going up this mountain. We were heading there because I found a picture that showed a gap. Renko wasn't very enthusiastic, but in the end, the Hifuu club's activity started as it always did, we were going up a mountain to the address Renko looked up, and—

We were in the middle of our ascent.

Then, just now—

What I just saw—

“.....Was it a daydream.....?”

“Eh? Did you say something Mary?”

“No, it's nothing.”



I closed my hand and said that. It was because I wasn't confident about what I had said and what I had seen. Certainly, it felt like I had been dreaming. It was a sad and lonely dream. At the moment someone tried to say something important—I heard Renko's voice and woke up.

I woke up from the dream.

I was able to return to this side.

.....Should I thank Renko? She forcefully brought me back here. Or should I be angry at her? Like, “Why didn't you let me sleep longer!?”

“Geez, you trip on things because you space out. If you trip on a path like this, Mary, you'll roll all the way down to the bottom of the mountain like an acorn.”

“I hope there isn't a hole partway.”<sup>12</sup>

“That wasn't an acorn, but a rice ball, Mary. Now, more importantly, let's go. It's only a little further until the shrine!”

Saying that,

“Ah.....”

Renko took my hand and started walking. So I wouldn't fall, I assume. With the hand she wasn't holding the book with, she gripped my hand firmly. She intertwined her fingers with mine so as not to let me go. The way I did when we left the bus stop, this time Renko took my hand.

Renko's back, which was a little ahead, looked more reliable than anything else.

“.....Thank you, Renko.”

“For what, all of a sudden?”

“No, it's nothing.” I pulled my hat down with my free hand. I

hoped that Renko wouldn't turn around. It would be embarrassing if she saw my expression now. "I just wanted to express my appreciation."

"You're weird— No, you're always weird, so you're normal right now."

"..... You're the one I least wanted to hear that from....."

"Why!?"

"You don't know!?"

I was very surprised.

"I can't really talk about other people, but.....you're weird too, or rather,"

"Or rather?"

"Or rather, perverted?"

"....."

Ah, her back froze.

Even though I couldn't see, I got the feeling that Renko was smiling. No, it wasn't that I got the feeling; I knew it from being with her for so long. She was definitely smiling. With a face like a Hannya's.<sup>13</sup>

"If I kicked you right now—"

"You're being too dangerous at the level of supposition, Renko."

"I really want to kick you right now!"

"The sentences aren't following each other at all!"

Still holding her hand, I went a little away from her. There was no harm in being cautious. Renko did things she said she'd do. If she did kick me, I'd really roll to the bottom of the mountain. And then I'd go right into a hole.

Because although there were no holes in the ground, the holes in the boundary—were open all over the place.

"——"

While responding to Renko, who was still muttering things, I looked at the surroundings. The path to the shrine had a lot of trees, but it wasn't so bad that we couldn't walk through it. There were no street lights, but above were the moon and the stars. The path was wide enough for the two of us to walk side by side, and probably because it was hardened by people walking on it for a long time, the path was sturdy and easy to walk on.

But still, I wasn't able to not feel anxiety.

Renko couldn't see them. Only I could see them.

Renko hadn't noticed. Only I had noticed.

That as we went up the mountain path—

That as we drew closer to the shrine—

The gaps in the barrier increased.

"....."

I was the only one who had noticed, and I didn't feel like telling Renko. The gaps in the barrier were small and weren't big enough for a person to go through. What we were looking for was a large gap through which the two of us could go to get to the "other side."

Thinking about it optimistically, that meant that as the picture showed, there was a gap at the shrine, and because of that, the mountain was full of gaps; one could think about it that way. In actuality, I thought that that was correct. The things I could see on the other side of the gaps didn't seem really dangerous either.

But, unrelated to that reasoning—

To me, this scenery—

This scenery full of gaps—  
Made it look like the world had cracks in it.  
The world was cracking.  
So much that it might break even now.  
It was—an unstable scene like that.

“.....”

It wouldn't have been surprising if I didn't continue walking.  
In fact, if Renko weren't here, I might have stopped.

I squeezed her hand. I felt like the warmth that came from  
Renko's hand would give me courage.

“.....What's wrong?”

Perhaps she felt my anxiety through my hand. Renko  
stopped walking and turned back toward me. Her eyes looked  
intently into my eyes. Eyes that saw time and place. Black eyes  
that told her how she was; the complete opposite of my  
unstable ones.

When she looked at me with those eyes, I felt relieved.  
When I was looked at with Renko's unwavering eyes, I was  
able to become very aware that I was here.

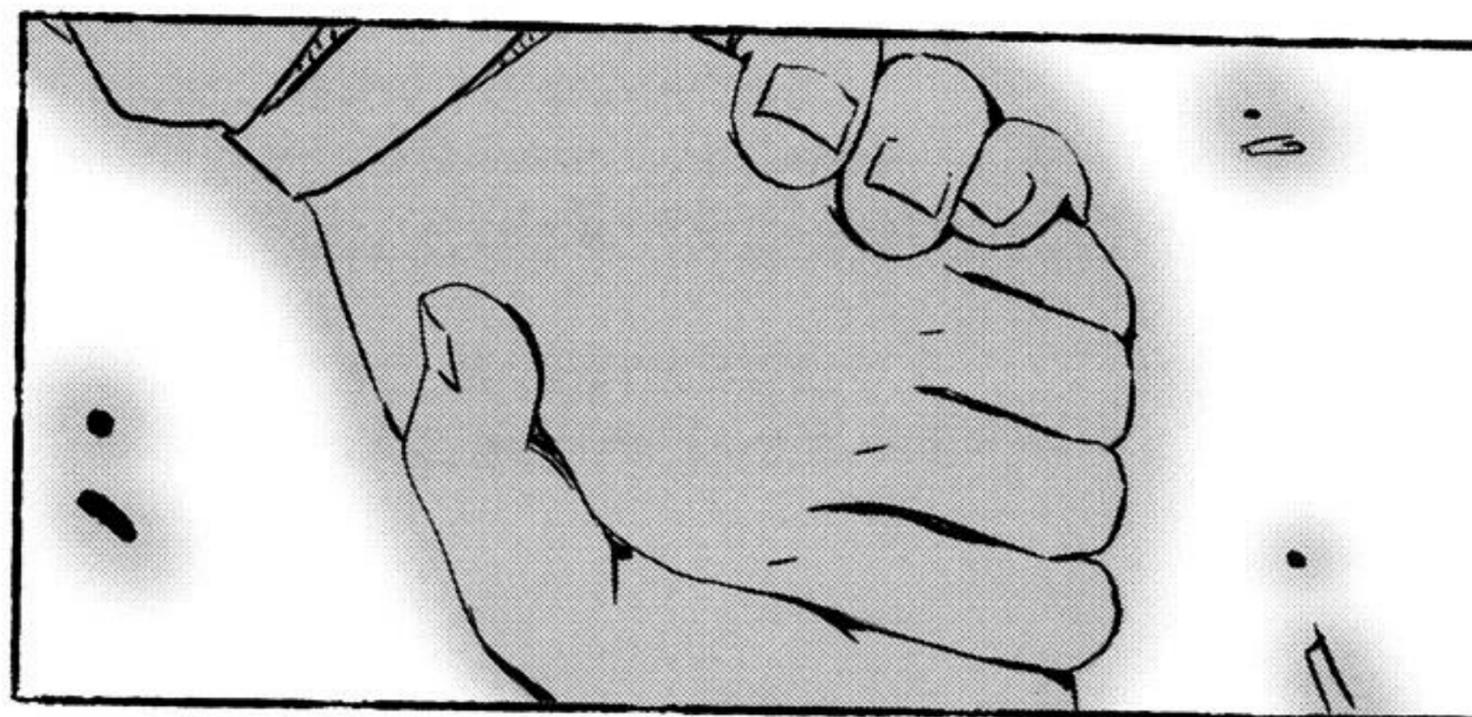
That was why—

I didn't want to make her worry.

“No, it's nothing.”

I shook my head, and this time I started walking. The  
mountain path was gently sloping, so walking up it wasn't that  
hard. At least in terms of physical strength. What was required  
was mental strength and courage, and I could feel both of them  
flowing from her hand. The two of us could go anywhere. We  
could get anywhere.

That was what I believed.



“.....It's true that I'm getting tired, though.”

“We don't usually walk up mountains. To be honest, I regret not wearing sneakers now.”

“I don't think sneakers match those clothes.....”

Well, I couldn't talk about other people. In the first place, did Renko have athletic shoes? When I thought that, suddenly, I thought about another question.

Without thinking too much about it, I said it.

“Hey Renko—”

“What? If you're going to ask me to piggyback or carry you, I refuse. You're heavy.”

“I'm not heavy! .....I mean, how did you know we were close to the shrine?”

It was a little question. The path continued for as long as I could see, and there weren't any flags or signs or anything. Even if Renko could tell 'where this was' with her eyes, she shouldn't have known information like 'there are only a few meters until the shrine' that rivaled navigation systems. If she had eyes that were that convenient, I would be more envious of her.

While saying, “Ah, yeah, about that,” Renko scratched her cheek. It was clear that she was hiding something. It was so obvious that I almost laughed.

“Is there something else?”

I tried helping her out. Renko looked like she wanted to say it, but she couldn't.

As if my help were a godsend, Renko looked at me and smiled.

“It's a secret.”

“.....”

“I was joking. I know because I came here before. The reason I came here this time was half for the Hifuu club, and half for another reason.”

“Which is?”

“A se-cret. You'll find out when we get there.”

Renko winked like a kid who thought of a prank. ....That was unfair. If she made a face like that, I couldn't keep asking.

Instead of responding, I dropped my shoulders and sighed. Renko smiled even more. It was almost too bright to look at.

“Now that your questions have been answered, let's go! Our destination lies just ahead!”

“You're right— Let's go.”

I went after Renko, who started walking after smiling. When I looked at her back, which kept going forward, I felt like I could go anywhere. Not stopping, her will advanced further and further. Her smile gave me courage.

But the holes got bigger and bigger. More and more of them appeared. The further we walked and the closer we got, the greater the holes in the boundary became in number and size. Beyond them was the dream world. The one I visited several times in my dreams—each time, I brought back various things like bamboo shoots—looked like it was overlapping with this reality.

A dream like reality?

A reality like a dream?

The border was getting thin.

—I was scared.

The fissures that came from the hole spread as far as I could see, and the world seemed like it would break even now. It felt like the next time I went, I wouldn't be able to come back.

In front of me was Renko's back. If Renko weren't here, I wouldn't have been able to stand it. Scared, I would have crouched down and refused to stand up or walk— Maybe it would have been better if I did that.

Why?

Because the ground was starting to become level, Renko started walking faster, and I saw it over her shoulder. The forest cleared. The moon was illuminating them. A red torii, an old shrine I felt like I had seen before, and

*a large, large hole in the world that seemed like it would swallow up everything.*

—Ah.

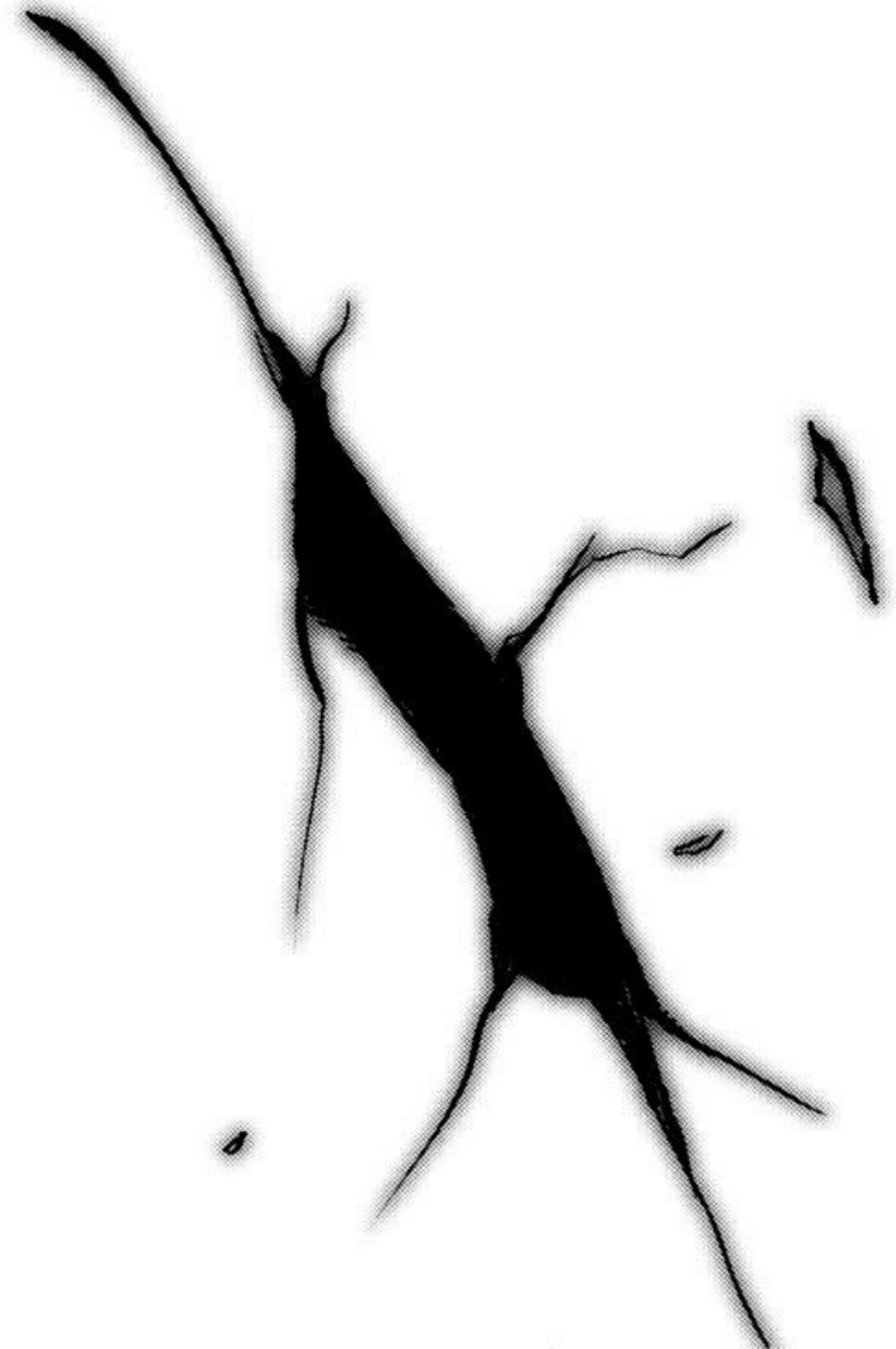
It was over. I understood that.

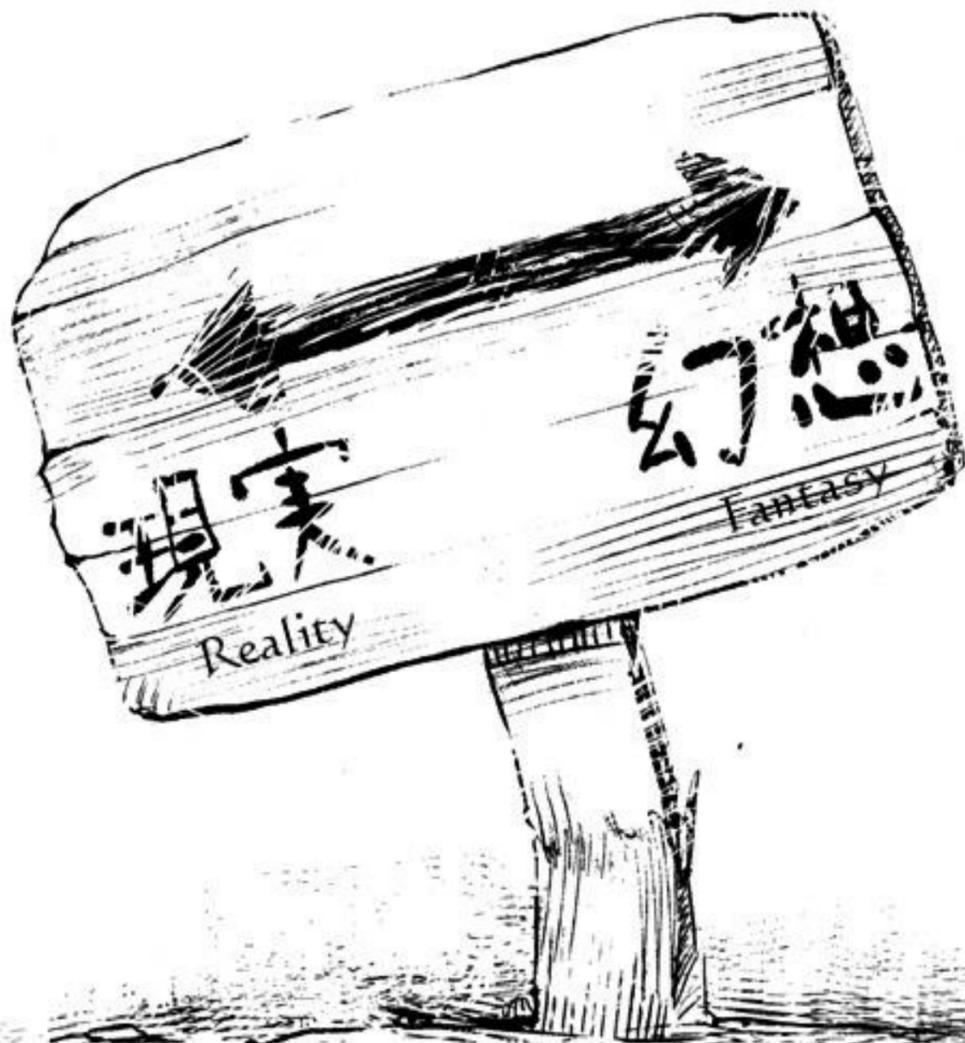
It was final  
and it was fatal.

I wasn't able to stand it. Like I was anemic, like I was having a daydream, my consciousness, all of me disappeared. Because I saw. Because I saw what was on the other side. But still, just one—faintly, I could see the one important to me, and when I noticed it, I was shouting.

“——Renko!”

At the end,  
*Crack*—I heard the sound of something breaking.





## ■Intermission: Dream

She got the feeling that someone called her name.

For a long time after, Renko would regret not turning back at that instant. She would think that if she had turned back, she might have made it in time—that even if not one thing changed as a result, she might have at least been able to hold on to her hand.

But, that would happen later.

But, that would happen after.

It was something Renko, who did not have eyes that could see the future, could not know, and it was something she could not notice. Because at that moment, Renko wasn't in a state in which she could turn back. Because rather than the voice that might have called her, her attention was taken by the scene that suddenly spread before her.

No—nothing had changed the way it looked. It was still evening and there was still a mountain path inside a forest. The feeling of stepping on the dirt, and the appearance of the dark path, had not changed. She could not see a shrine, but only the night forest.

But still, she was able to become aware of it.

That it changed.

It felt like the top and the bottom, the bottom and the top were flipped over. She was able to sense it so clearly that she could have called it a feeling.

Somewhere that wasn't here.

The air—was different.

She got the feeling that she heard something breaking.

She got the feeling that she went under something.

“.....”

Only the appearance didn't change. That was why Renko raised her face. Not turning around, first, she looked up at the sky. What she could see beyond the branches and leaves of the forest were a white moon that hung in a sky that was covered in darkness after the sun had set, and stars that had begun to increase in number. Both of them together told Renko the time and the place.

The time was 19:39 and 12 seconds.

The place was—

“! Mary! Mary!”

While being excited at the information she was able to gain from the moon, Renko turned around this time. She wasn't able to suppress her excitement. At last, they had reached the other side they had wished to go to. The dream world Mary visited; Gensokyo— In order to convey her happiness and excitement to Mary, Renko looked at the place Mary was supposed to be. Of course, her Hifuu club partner was supposed to be there—or she should have already noticed and be showing an expression of surprise too.

But—

The things Renko imagined weren't there.

None of them.

And, finally,

Usami Renko learned of Maribel Han's disappearance.

Ba-bump.

Renko heard her heart beat loudly once.

“—Ah.....”

Her voice was hoarse. When she drank her saliva, the inside of her mouth was so dry it felt painful. She felt cold. And yet, her hand was damp with sweat. While being enveloped by a mysterious chill, Renko blinked, and looked again.

In the place Mary was supposed to be, there was no one.

There was nothing. All that was there was the mountain path they had been walking. The night forest was so dark, even if she shined a light at it, she couldn't illuminate everything. Only the flashlight Mary was supposed to be holding was on the ground, and was vainly illuminating the space with nothing in it.

The white light drew the border between it and the darkness distinctly. The darkness around the light looked even thicker because of the strength of the light. Maybe Mary was hiding in the darkness— Driven by that thought, Renko waved her flashlight left and right.

There was no one.

“Ma...ry.....?”

The light only illuminated the night path and the forest, and she wasn't able to make out anyone's form. But still, Renko did not stop moving her flashlight. Thinking that if she kept on moving it, she might find her, she continued to search the darkness.

It was strange.

There was no way that could happen; there was no way Mary



could disappear—thoughts like those spun around in her head. They had just been walking together. They had been talking. She had been right there. There was no way she could disappear. She wasn't supposed to disappear. It was as if—

*she were spirited away.*

Suddenly, she felt fear.

“Mary! Mary! Maribel Han!!”

She yelled. Ignoring her throat, which was in pain, Renko yelled Mary's name as loud as she could. Because she wouldn't have been able to stand it otherwise.

She noticed it.

That Mary might not have disappeared—the fact that she passed the border and was standing by herself in Gensokyo. That perhaps Usami Renko was the one who was spirited away.

Did Mary disappear?

Did she disappear?

Either way, the two membered Hifuu club became one membered.

That was why she yelled. Although she understood somewhere in her mind that “she wasn't there,” Renko yelled like she was wishing for her to be there. The night forest was quiet, and her voice was spread out far like a ripple, but the voice she truly wanted to hear did not come back.

One word would have been enough.

Just one word would have been enough; just hearing “Renko” said with Mary's voice would have been enough— Even though that would have been enough, the night almost heartlessly returned only silence. She felt the coldness of the night that she had not noticed at all.

It was no good. Unable to stand still in that place any longer,

Renko ran. It wasn't as if she knew where to go. I'll find Mary—  
Thinking only that strongly, she crouched to pick up the  
flashlight on the ground, and

Swish—

Something sharp grazed her hat.

“Wha—huh...?”

Kneeling, she pointed the flashlight she picked up at that  
something. Her instinct was telling her, 'If you have the time to  
be doing that, run away,' but reason, common sense, and  
confusion suppressed it.

At the end of the light,

there was something that didn't make sense.

A green ball of light. Something that could only be described  
that way was embedded in a tree. The ball was around the size of  
a human head, and it was embedded inside the trunk of the tree  
and was discharging some electricity. Inside the darkness, only  
that place was bright like a street light was lit.

It was embedded in a tree— Renko thought about that fact. If  
it embedded itself into a tree, it could probably embed itself the  
same way in a person. And, if she hadn't crouched to pick up the  
flashlight, that ball probably would have collided with her. As  
Renko watched, the ball of light disappeared as if melting into  
the darkness, and only a hole was left behind.

The meaning of that—

Faster than she could think of the answer,

“Did I miss? Did you dodge it?”

there was a voice.

Mary— Stopping herself from saying that name, Renko turned  
around to the direction the voice came from. It wasn't Mary's  
voice, and it wasn't her voice either. The one who spoke with a  
voice she never heard before was someone she never saw before.

A girl with gold hair that was tied with something like a red  
ribbon

was floating in the air.

“\_\_\_\_\_”

Of course, humans couldn't fly.

First she doubted her eyes, then she thought there was a  
trick, then she doubted her mind. No matter how she looked  
at it, the thing that looked like a small girl was floating in the  
air. Rather than flying, she was suspended in the air like a  
balloon. Floating like gravity didn't affect her, she looked  
intently at Renko with her gold eyes.

Their eyes met.

After hesitating a little, she spoke.

“Good evening?”

“Itadakimasu.”

The girl bowed her head while still floating. Renko also  
bowed, and

—Itadakimasu?

When she raised her head while puzzling over the word  
that wasn't an appropriate response to “Good evening,” she  
saw that the girl had also raised her head. Nothing about her  
had changed. What changed was not the girl but her  
surroundings. The same ball of light that had stuck into the  
tree was rising from the girl's body.

Not one.

Not two, not three, or four—she couldn't even count them.  
The balls of light that came out one after the other increased  
in number, and filled up the space around her before she  
knew it.

The things, even one of which could kill Renko, spread out  
like layers and layers of curtains.



—Danmaku.

“Wh— Time out! Wait! Stop!”

“For how long?”

“Forever!”

Her gold eyes curved as she smiled. She spread her arms to the side as if to make a cross. Her mouth—which was twisted into the shape of a crescent moon—slowly opened vertically. What could be seen behind it were fangs and a tongue that was red like blood.

Her tongue moved. Like a snake. Licking her lips with her tongue, the girl smiled, and

“—*Itadakimasu.*”

Along with that word, the danmaku moved. Fifty-nine balls of light came near Renko to surround her.

She couldn't move. Although she was unable to understand what was going on at all, she still thought that she had to avoid them, but there were so many bullets she didn't know how to. She saw each ball of light that came near her clearly.

Her hope that there was no way she could die since this was a dream was shattered by the reasoning that even if it were a dream, she would die since she

recognized it as reality.

—Was she going...to die?

It didn't make sense. All of a sudden, Mary disappeared. All of a sudden, a girl who could fly started attacking her with balls of light. Without even knowing what was going on, was she going to die all alone? More than fear, Renko's anger at that injustice filled her.

Alone.

All by herself.

*Leaving Mary behind, just by herself!*

“—Maryyyyyy!”

When she noticed it, that name was already coming from her. With a loud voice that sounded like it could reach the balls of light that were approaching, the girl beyond them, and everywhere that wasn't here, Usami Renko yelled.

The name of her Hifuu club partner.

A response to that voice—didn't come.

There was no voice that called back “Renko,” and the voice of the one she wanted to hear wasn't there either.

Just, instead—

—*there was light.*

A pillar of light came from the sky.

“Bright.....-”

At the light that was like it switched from night to noon, Renko involuntarily covered her eyes with her hand.

A pillar of light.

Light that shone gold came from the sky and stuck into the ground in a straight line— That was how it looked. The green balls of light and the girl with the ribbon were sucked into the light. She thought she heard a cute “Kyah,” but she didn't have the time to think deeply about it. By the force of the pillar of light, the air shook, and it took all she had to not be blown away.

But still, while bearing it, Renko yelled.

“What exactly—is going on!?”

She became aware of it; that she was an outsider. Mary disappeared, or she disappeared, and she went to the other side from her world. There, it was a devil's world far from heaven where girls flew while shooting balls of light, and on top of that, light rained down from the sky. That was okay. Anything was possible in a dream, and it wasn't impossible to accept that there were things like that in the wide world.

But, it was a different story if she were suddenly wrapped up in it.

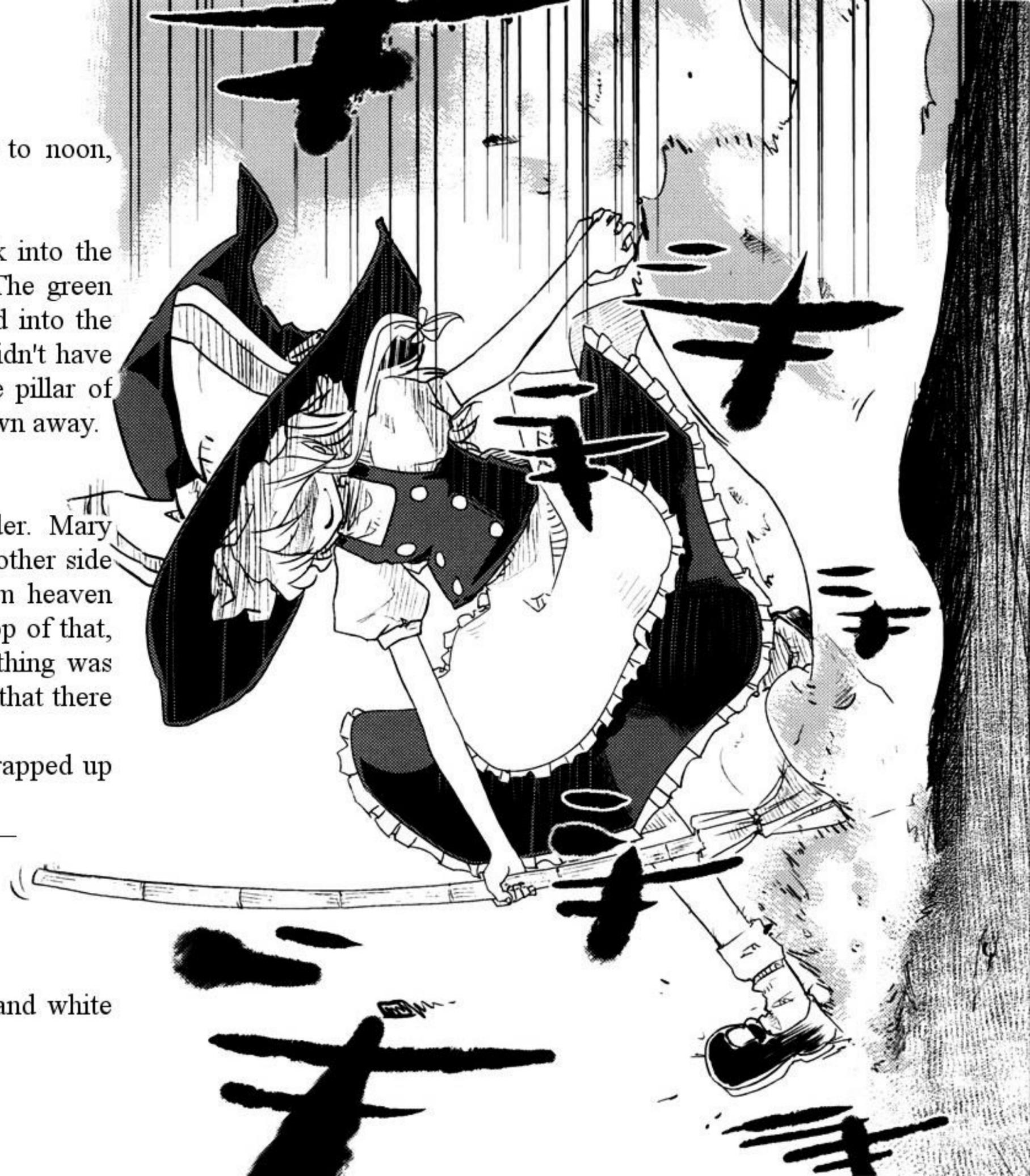
Whether she was being wrapped up in something, or—

“.....Is this how things usually are around here!?”

“*More or less!*”

The one who answered was—

Coming from the sky, a magician dressed in black and white riding a broom.



There was a wall she couldn't go over.  
There was a back she couldn't reach.  
She only thought about catching up.  
Working in a way no one would notice.  
She wished that she would be able to reach that back.  
When was it from?  
When she thought that she wanted to overtake that back.  
One day, her thoughts changed.  
Not just to go over that wall,  
but to go to the world that spread beyond it.  
On and on,  
even going past the moon— As far as she could go.

To be able to go anywhere; that was what she wished.

## Notes

- 1 Hifuu club: Secret Seal club.
- 2 time of three oxes and ghosts: These actually refer to two a.m.
- 3 You love me a lot?: This sounds like what Mary said (suki darake).
- 4 surprised...hiccuped: These rhyme (bikkuri, shakkuri).
- 5 well (energetically?): These rhyme (keiki yoku, genki yoku)
- 6 relocation of the capital: In the Japan Maribel and Renko are in, the capital was moved to Kyoto.
- 7 Hiroshige: A bullet train that goes from Kyoto to Tokyo. It is described in *Retrospective 53 minutes*.
- 8 the 53 Stations: The 53 Stations of the Toukaidou were rest areas along the Toukaidou, which was a coastal route that ran from Nihonbashi in Edo (modern-day Tokyo) to Sanjyou Oohashi in Kyoto.  
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/53\\_Stations\\_of\\_the\\_T%C5%8Dkaid%C5%8D](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/53_Stations_of_the_T%C5%8Dkaid%C5%8D))
- 9 Sentai shows: The Super Sentai Series. Probably best known here as the source material for the *Power Rangers* series. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Super\\_Sentai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Super_Sentai))
- 10 kokodokowatadare: Short for "Where is this? Who am I?" (koko wa doko? watashi wa dare?)
- 11 All right green?: Renko says this in English.
- 12 I hope there isn't a hole partway: Reference to a folktale that involves an old man who drops a rice ball that rolls down a mountain into a hole.
- 13 Hannya: A mask used in Noh theater. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hannya>)

## Credits

Translation/Editing: kamyu  
Raw: Lunar972



acefantasy

One more word

The prince of overproduction

# 第二章 霧雨魔理沙

Chapter 2

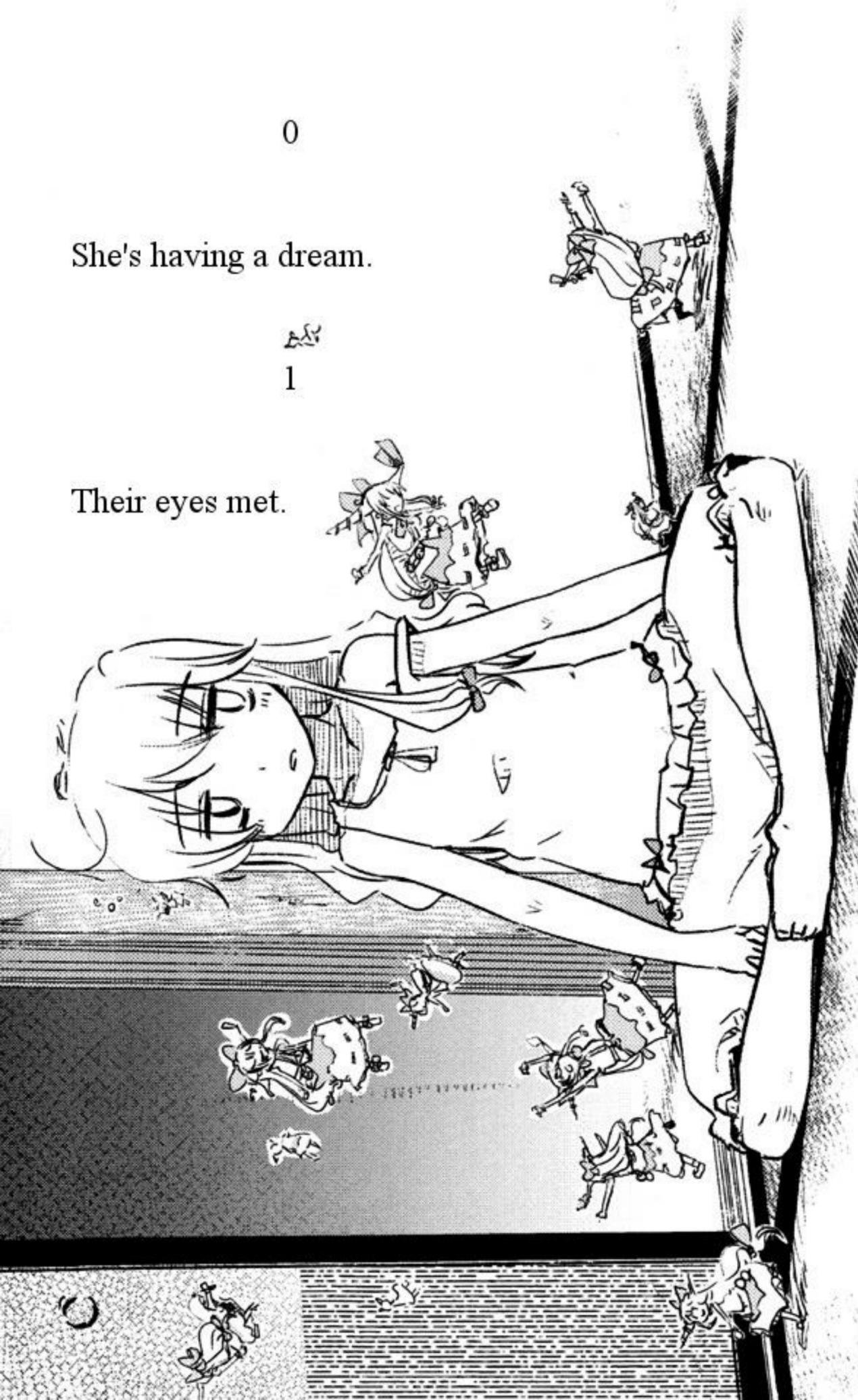
Kirisame Marisa

its...  
 Along...  
 significant...  
 place...  
 fully...  
 E...  
 ities...  
 with...  
 crit...  
 man...  
 Washing...  
 B...  
 it...  
 econom...  
 ics...  
 has...  
 been...  
 the...  
 driving...  
 force...  
 In...  
 compar...  
 ison...  
 with...  
 the...  
 U.S.,...  
 Europ...  
 is...  
 still...  
 an...  
 unde...  
 rdeve...  
 lop...  
 ed...  
 mar...  
 ket...  
 for...  
 Japa...  
 nese...  
 comp...  
 anies...  
 In...  
 three...  
 impor...  
 tan...  
 ce...  
 coun...  
 tries...  
 France...  
 It...  
 y...  
 and...  
 Spain...  
 —...  
 severe...  
 re...  
 sult...  
 ions...  
 are...  
 appl...  
 ied...  
 to...  
 Japa...  
 nese...  
 goods...  
 of...  
 I...  
 an...  
 tou...  
 ched...  
 Jap...  
 an...  
 too...  
 Not...  
 Eu...  
 rop...  
 ean...  
 relat...  
 ions...  
 are...  
 more...  
 bitter...  
 than...  
 the...  
 treat...  
 y...  
 of...  
 I...  
 an...  
 priso...  
 ners...  
 dur...  
 ing...  
 Worl...  
 d...  
 II...  
 by...  
 Imp...  
 er...  
 for...  
 ces...  
 and...  
 yet...  
 here...  
 aga...  
 in...  
 it...  
 is...  
 of...  
 this...  
 fate...  
 ful...  
 war...  
 time...  
 clash...  
 of...  
 Bridge...  
 on...  
 the...  
 River...  
 —...  
 a...  
 spec...  
 tive...  
 view...  
 of...  
 the...  
 and...  
 victo...  
 r.

This is an extraordinary achievement...  
 Arab, Indian and Irish voices from among...  
 thousands' have derided Lean's gen...  
 eral...  
 cultur...  
 ation...  
 The...  
 New...  
 York...  
 film...  
 critic...  
 ing...  
 of...  
 "R...  
 y...  
 's...  
 Da...  
 u...  
 gh...  
 ter...  
 "...  
 deeply...  
 woun...  
 ded...  
 Le...  
 an...  
 helps...  
 to...  
 expl...  
 ain...  
 the...  
 15...  
 -year...  
 delay...  
 until...  
 the...  
 app...  
 e...  
 A...  
 Pass...  
 age...  
 to...  
 India...  
 ."...  
 Nor...  
 is...  
 cultur...  
 e...  
 comple...  
 ment...  
 ion...  
 that...  
 one...  
 has...  
 to...  
 see...  
 a...  
 mov...  
 ie...  
 before...  
 turn...  
 ing...  
 of...  
 Boris...  
 Past...  
 ernak...  
 ,...  
 E.M...  
 .For...  
 ster...  
 and...  
 Lav...  
 er...  
 Never...  
 the...  
 less...  
 ,...  
 Lean's...  
 huma...  
 nism...  
 on...  
 an...  
 epic...  
 s...  
 helped...  
 har...  
 vest...  
 the...  
 huma...  
 nity...  
 that...  
 is...  
 with...  
 in...  
 us...  
 imperial...  
 vision...  
 ,...  
 but...  
 a...  
 huma...  
 ne...  
 one...  
 .It...  
 was...  
 also...  
 artistic...  
 great...  
 ness...  
 P...  
 or...  
 the...  
 Bath...  
 Pa...  
 r...  
 t...  
 to...  
 remove...  
 Sad...  
 d...  
 am...  
 in...  
 the...  
 re...  
 cre...  
 ating...  
 a...  
 Le...  
 an...  
 resistance...  
 de...  
 U.N...  
 su...  
 p...  
 port...  
 ing...  
 it...  
 U.S...  
 .It...  
 was...  
 the...  
 fail...  
 ure...  
 of...  
 the...  
 Uni...  
 ted...  
 States...  
 and...  
 other...  
 coal...  
 ition...  
 lead...  
 ers...  
 to...  
 the...  
 deep...  
 and...  
 iner...  
 adic...  
 able...  
 oppo...  
 sition...  
 to...  
 the...  
 Ba...  
 ath...  
 gov...  
 ern...  
 ment's...  
 total...  
 itarian...  
 ,...  
 dec...  
 central...  
 control...  
 that...  
 led...  
 to...  
 their...  
 surpr...  
 ise...  
 opp...  
 res...  
 sion...  
 by...  
 the...  
 wide...  
 spr...  
 ead...  
 up...  
 ris...  
 ing...  
 thro...  
 u...  
 gh...  
 our...  
 Iraq...  
 after...  
 Des...  
 ert...  
 Sto...  
 rm...  
 had...  
 dest...  
 roy...  
 ed...  
 nk...  
 s...  
 t...  
 th...  
 gh...  
 at...  
 all...  
 of...  
 the...  
 heav...  
 ily...  
 au...  
 th...  
 or...  
 ity...  
 of...  
 the...  
 n...  
 Gu...  
 ard...  
 ,...  
 the...  
 prin...  
 c...  
 ip...  
 al...  
 con...  
 trol...  
 .It...  
 leav...  
 es...  
 a...  
 slow...  
 re...  
 luct...  
 ant...  
 to...  
 face...  
 a...  
 pl...  
 osive...  
 reb...  
 ellio...  
 us...  
 ness...  
 among...  
 Iraq's...  
 diss...  
 id...  
 ent...  
 fac...  
 tions...  
 that...  
 will...  
 con...  
 tinue...  
 to...  
 chal...  
 lenge...  
 any...  
 tight...  
 cen...  
 tral...  
 tyr...  
 anny...  
 When...  
 the...  
 presi...  
 dent...  
 appe...  
 al...  
 ed...  
 to...  
 "the...  
 taph...

She's having a dream.

Their eyes met.



“.....Ah, she woke up.”

I'm being watched—still sleepy, Kirisame Marisa thought that in a daze. Saying that their eyes met was correct and incorrect. Their eyes had met, but instead of one pair, there were many pairs of eyes. Beyond her just opened eyelids, several Ibuki Suikas were gathered and were looking at her intently.

It didn't feel real since there was something wrong with her depth perception.

“.....”

It wasn't that there was something wrong with her depth perception, but that Suikas smaller than her eyeballs were hanging around in front of her eyes—Getting to that thought, her mind finally started functioning. It started functioning, but she still felt like she was having a dream, so even though her recognition caught up, her understanding didn't.

She blinked. There was no change in her vision.

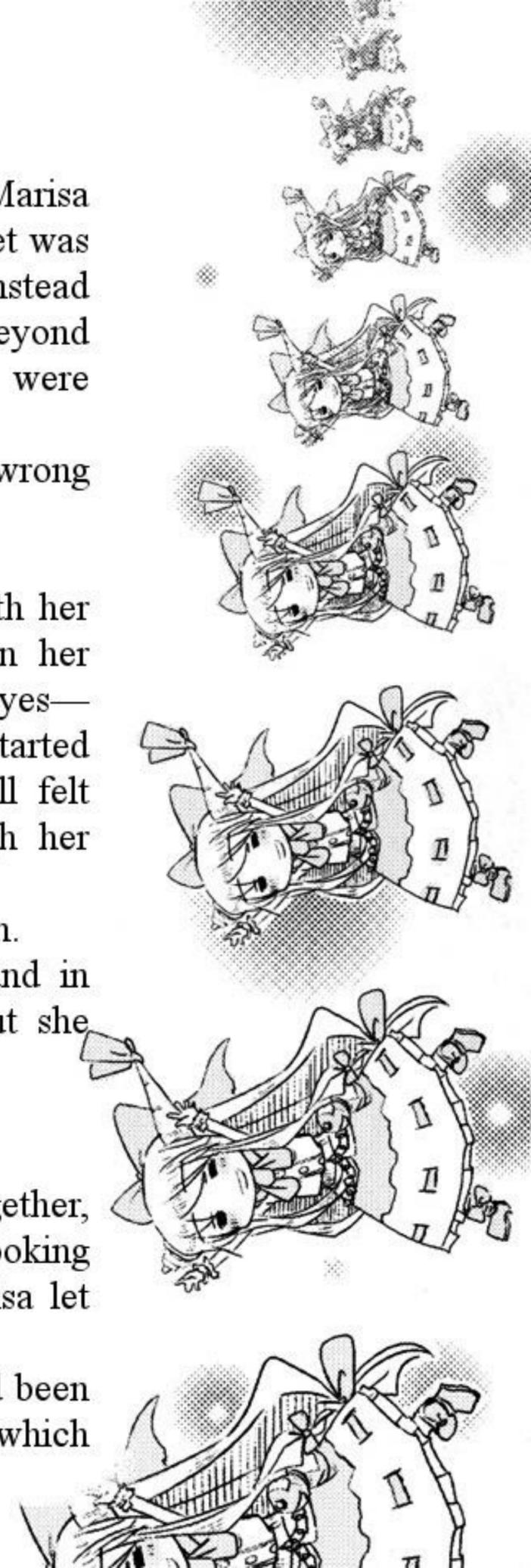
As before, small Suikas were hanging around in front of her. They were saying something, but she couldn't understand.

“.....Fua,”

She yawned a little, then slowly rose.

Saying “Kyah,” the small Suikas came together, united, and got bigger as they ran away. After looking until she couldn't see her back anymore, Marisa let her gaze wander with a dazed expression.

The first thing she saw was a shouji<sup>14</sup> that had been left open. There was a small hole in the edge which



had been left without being repapered. The floor was tatami, and on top of the futon that was laid on top of it was Marisa. She didn't have a pillow. When she moved her gaze even more, she saw that she had rolled to the wall for some reason. At the edge of the eight mat room<sup>15</sup> was a round table on its side, and on one of its legs was hanging her pointed hat.

It was a Japanese-style room.

It was not her house, which was in the Forest of Magic. Where is this? Still half asleep, Marisa thought that. She already recalled almost everything, but was not able to notice since the last piece was missing.

Standing up would be a pain, so she went on all fours and crawled on top of the tatami. Outside the open shouji was a wood paneled hallway, and the feeling that came to her bare hands and legs was cold and felt good. She lied down without thinking. She wanted to become a cat.

While enjoying the comfort of the floor, Marisa rubbed her sleepy eyes with her balled up hands. There was nothing beyond the wood floor, so the dirt of the ground was exposed there. In her level view, the ground continued as far as she could see and mixed with the blue sky at the horizon. As if to delimit a boundary line, there were trees in several places—and, a red torii.

—A torii.

Her eyes stopped at it, and  
“.....What are you doing?”  
a voice came from above.

Roll. When she rolled over, she made eye contact again. However, this time, it didn't look like there was something wrong with her depth perception. In her upside down view, she saw Hakurei Reimu standing with a somewhat exasperated look on her face. At her side was Suika, who had returned to her normal size and was smiling happily.

Her mind finally became clear.

Still upside down, Marisa spoke.

“Good morning.”

“Good morning.....? Why don't you wash your face and change?”

“Ah.”

With those words, she remembered how she looked and where she was. Even though it was a shrine people rarely came to—and things other than humans came to visit, lying on the ground half naked in a place that could be seen from the torii wasn't good.

Standing up, she stretched and breathed in. Reimu turned around, and Suika put her gourd to her mouth while smiling. After taking another deep breath, Marisa said, “Okay.”

—She remembered.

This was the Hakurei Shrine.



If one were to ask what the Hakurei Shrine was, one could get several different answers.

The center of the concept of Gensokyo, and its physical border. The shrine that stood in the boundary between reality and fantasy. Where youkais drank tea. The place where banquets were held night after night. The shrine that maintained the Hakurei Border that enveloped all of Gensokyo—and, Hakurei Reimu's residence.

For Marisa, it was just her friend's house. She came to drink tea and alcohol. When there was a banquet, she came flying, and she also enjoyed danmaku play in the garden. There were also times she stayed over, as she did yesterday.

“Youkai are good guests, aren't they?”

Reimu said that while skillfully picking up the sansai<sup>16</sup> with her chopsticks. The futon was already put away, and on top of the round table was breakfast. Seeing how it was already laid out when Marisa had finished changing, it seemed like it was made before she woke up. Would she have kicked me if I was a little later in waking up? While wondering that, “.....Why?”

“Because they go home before morning.”

She almost spat out her miso soup.

Without minding Marisa, who wiped her mouth, at all, Reimu continued to eat. At another part of the round table sat Suika, and rather than eating, she kept on drinking and smiling. Being drunk was normal for her.

“Is that sarcasm!?”



“It's irony.”

“There isn't really a difference.....”

“But there is one.”

She sighed.

But you still prepared enough breakfast for me to have a share— She thought that, but hesitated and didn't say it. She quietly went back to eating breakfast. It wasn't anything fancy, but it tasted good. Even though she just woke up, she felt like eating it. Eating tasty food, she started not caring about anything, and a smile rose naturally to her face.

While looking at Marisa out of the corner of her eye, Reimu began speaking.

“In the first place, Marisa,”

Stopping her words once, Reimu put her chopsticks down. Wah, what is she going to say? While Marisa put herself on guard, Reimu reached her hand out, poured tea in a teacup, raised it with both of her hands, and drank it. After drinking about half of it, she put it down on the table, took her chopsticks, and

started eating again.

“What's the rest of it!?”

“I'll say it even if you don't rush me. You're not calm.”

“.....”

While Marisa was unable to say anything, Reimu didn't put her chopsticks down this time, and as if it were part of everyday life—

*Why are you so calm when—you came here to solve an incident?*

said something like that.

“Well—that’s true, but...”

“But?”

That was right.

Nothing came after that. Although it was late, Marisa remembered what she had come here to do. It could be described as normal. She had come to the shrine to solve an incident that was occurring in Gensokyo.

*An incident.*<sup>17</sup>

A change that was unusual—something different that had happened.

For example, a red mist,  
an unending winter,  
an unending night,  
flowers blooming wildly,  
an unending banquet,

and new gods coming from the outside. Kirisame Marisa had solved the incidents that occurred now and then. At least, she had tried to solve them time after time. In the end, the one who solved them was Reimu, and Marisa didn’t know what counted as ‘solving’ them in the first place, but—anyway, she had been involved.

Mostly because of curiosity.

By her own will.

This time wasn’t an exception, and she went out in high spirits because an incident was obviously occurring. In the process, in order to see what Reimu was doing, she had made her way to the

shrine,

and was eating breakfast with her for some reason.

“.....You’re taking it easy too.”

Reimu answered Marisa by drinking tea. After that, she didn’t say anything. Not speaking, she didn’t do anything.

She didn’t do anything.

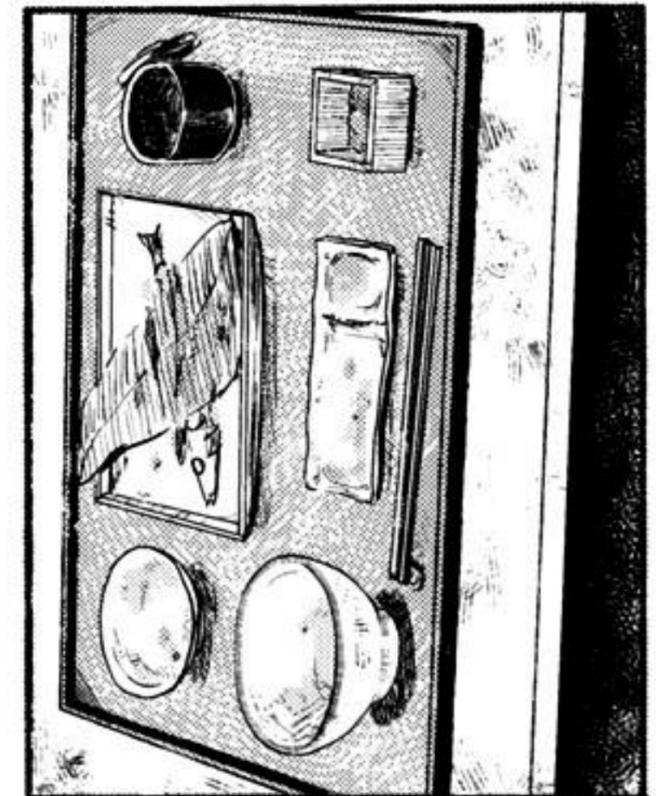
Hakurei Reimu wasn’t doing anything— That was the reason Marisa stopped for a night. When Marisa visited the shrine the day before, Reimu was sweeping the garden as if nothing had happened. It was true that Reimu only acted after an incident had clearly occurred, but Marisa thought that there was already an incident that was enough for Reimu to act. In addition, for this incident, it wouldn’t have been strange if Hakurei Reimu had acted first—that was the kind of incident it was.

Despite that, she drank tea, laid out a futon, and went to sleep. After doing the same as her, Marisa was now enjoying Reimu’s breakfast, but Reimu wasn’t supposed to have the time.

The Hakurei shrine maiden.

“What? Is something fun going to happen?”

The one who started talking was not Reimu, but Suika. Her eyes were shining. As an oni, Suika enjoyed drinking and liveliness—in other words, she liked banquets. Incidents were probably in that category for her. It seemed like she wanted to join in.



“.....That won't happen.”

The one who answered was Reimu.

Murmuring that as if saying it over her shoulder, she gathered her dishes and stood up. There was still food left on the large plate, but she didn't even look at it. Turning around, she tried to go out of the living room.

“Wait a minute!”

Marisa said that to her back. Unconsciously, she had tried to stand up. She couldn't sit down again.

Reimu obviously tried to end the conversation. Her back, which stopped but did not turn back, silently stopped Marisa from questioning her.

—Something was wrong.

What was wrong, she didn't know. But, the time she spent with Reimu, which was not short, made it feel like something was different about her. Reimu normally wouldn't show her disturbance so clearly.

Instead of being evasive, she stopped talking.

That was—a definite sign that she didn't want to talk about it anymore. It was an attitude that was hard to think of coming from her, who dealt with everything impartially and treated things as if she was floating.

There was something.

Marisa didn't know what that was, and Reimu knew what it was. Because she knew what it was, she didn't try to talk about it.

To continue her words, she needed resolve.

Marisa took a breath, looked at Reimu, and

“.....There's still food left, you know?”

let the words escape. Marisa wasn't able to gather the resolve needed to question her. What's going on? That feeling was strong, but she hesitated to ask her.

Reimu didn't turn back.

She didn't turn back to Marisa.

What expression does she have? That interested her.

And, Reimu spoke without turning back.

“I'm not hungry.”

The conversation ended with that. Moving her feet again, Reimu went outside the living room. Her footsteps receded and could not be heard after a while.

A slight silence filled the room.

Next, the strained atmosphere relaxed, and Marisa sighed and sat down. She noticed that she had been nervous by her pulse. When she put her hand to her chest, she could almost hear the sound of her heart beating.

She looked beyond the still open fusuma.<sup>18</sup> Reimu wasn't there, and it didn't feel like she was coming back. She was probably somewhere in the shrine, but it didn't feel like she really was.

Because Reimu's behavior concerned her more than the incident that was occurring outside now.

A difference.

Or, doubt. If an incident was something that wasn't normal, then that was an incident.

—What was Reimu in a hurry for?

In a hurry—irritated. That was how Reimu, who appeared to be the same as usual but seemed different, looked to Marisa.

That was as if—she knew everything.

What was happening,  
what was going to happen;  
knowing everything—but still not acting.

As if she couldn't act.

It was a strange feeling like that.

“.....”

It didn't seem like the answer would come even if she thought about it. She shook her head and stopped thinking about it. Doubt still stuck to a corner of her mind, but she consciously decided not to pay attention to it.

First was breakfast.

Returning her attention from the outside to the living room, when she happened to look to her side, she saw Suika pointing her gourd at her with a straight face. She looked at Suika beyond the gourd.

“.....What?”

While looking back at her, Suika spoke.

“—Want to drink?”

“I'll pass.”

She was finally able to smile.



Gensokyo was a world with an end.

It was an unalterable fact that a limit existed for Gensokyo. Even though it was large, it wasn't infinite. As long as it remained a paradise separated from the 'outside' with the Hakurei Border, a clear end of it existed.

But, when she was flying as she was at the moment, she didn't really think about it. The Hakurei Border was not a physical wall, but a conceptual boundary. Whether the edges were connected or whether one was sent back before she realized it, if one tried to go to the end, she ended up in another place before she knew it. As one couldn't get in from the outside, one couldn't go out from the inside either.

But still, it was just that it couldn't be seen, and it was certainly there.

A boundary that separated the inside from the out.

".....She's definitely weird, that Reimu."

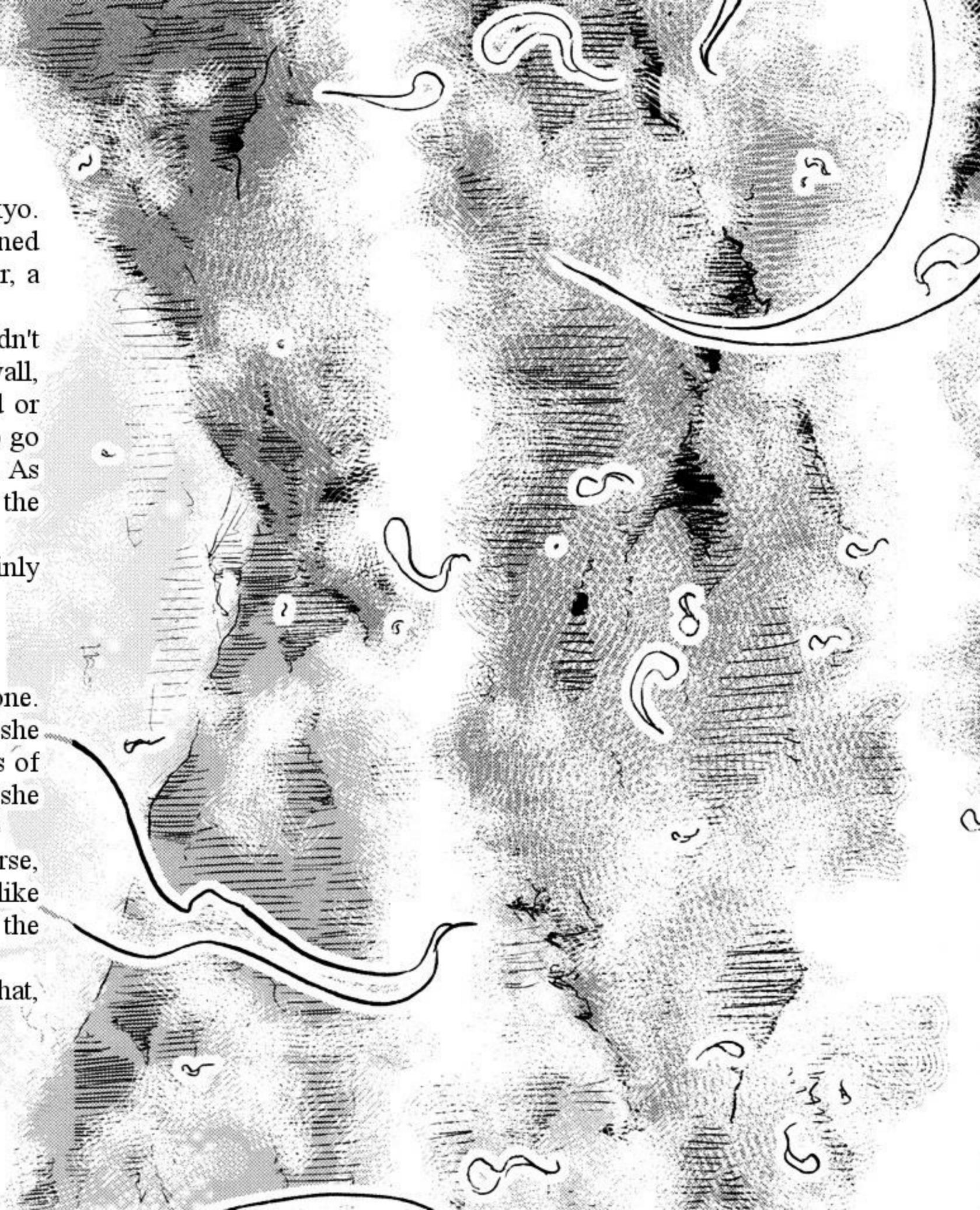
She said those words to herself, and they did not reach anyone. No one was flying near her; Marisa was by herself. Because she was flying considerably high, the air was a little cold. The roofs of houses looked small like toys. Not going against the wind, she drifted in the wind more than she flew.

From this height, she could see most of Gensokyo— Of course, there were places that couldn't be seen from the outside like Eientei, so she couldn't see everything, but it was certain that the view was better than at ground level.

Turning her head, she took a look around. Just by doing that, she could see most of it, and she could see the abnormality in it.

"There's no way.....she hasn't noticed it, is there?"

Marisa was the only human flying.



But, there were other things. That place that was far from the ground was lively. After all, half transparent souls were floating around. The innumerable souls were flying around without order. Perhaps because they were interested in her, they surrounded Marisa from a distance and without going near her.

The sight was familiar.

During the spring incident before, she saw enough of them to make her sick. Souls. Human souls. Those things that used to be human were called ghosts by most people. Losing their human forms, they looked like white tadpoles, but it seemed like they had consciousness— That was what the phantom's servant said.

Of course, Gensokyo wasn't so absurd a place where things like that floated around everywhere. Normally—in other words, when there weren't any incidents—the ghosts were only at the end of the sky, where Hakugyokurou was. The ground and Hakugyokurou were separated by a barrier, so one couldn't go to and from there. Those like the mistress of Hakugyokurou, Saigyouji Yuyuko, came to the ground to visit, but they were exceptions.

Ghosts couldn't get out. That was how it normally was, and it was because Reimu broke the barrier that ghosts flooded the ground during the spring incident.

Something like that was occurring now.

“There aren't as many as that time, but.....is there a leak?”

If the spring incident was the breaking down of the barrier, this time was the opening of a hole— The gate was slightly open.

Putting strength into the hand which gripped the broom she was on, she tilted her body slightly. Overtaking the wind, she drew near the ghosts. There weren't only a few of them, but there weren't that many. If the barrier between Hakugyokurou and the ground broke, there would be more. The ones that noticed the opening came out to play— That was the impression she got.

“What meaning does a barrier you can go over.....”

The ghosts that noticed Marisa nearing tried to escape, but were slow compared to the speed of the broom. Marisa grabbed the tails of the ghosts that couldn't escape.

They felt cold.

The ghosts that were captured flailed around and tried to escape, but Marisa said, “I won't eat you,” with a smile and didn't let go. Hearing those words, the ghosts flailed even more as if they were afraid.

The feeling she got from holding them was the one from a ghost. Their bodies had lost the heat they had when they were alive. The feeling of holding them was light, and they didn't give off a presence. Not having any eyes, noses, or mouths, they couldn't express their wills.

Not fakes; real ghosts.

“.....”

Marisa wondered what it meant. They were certainly real. Sometimes, during summer, she sometimes caught them and used them for cooling, but—even when she did that, there were never this many.

Was something happening at Hakugyokurou again?

If the incident had only involved ghosts, she probably would have decided that and headed toward Hakugyokurou. However, on the ground—

“iiiiIIYAAA-!”

A voice with a doppler effect interrupted her thoughts.

Before she noticed that that was the yell of someone above her coming down, Marisa reflexively pulled back the hand she was holding the ghosts with. The ghosts that were released escaped, and between her hand and the ghosts,

“—HA-!”

faster than wind, a Japanese sword passed by.

“.....”

A moment later, the wind from the sword hit her body. The one who stirred up the air with her fast speed stopped suddenly, and the wind that was created made the ghosts spin around as it pushed them. Almost falling off, Marisa hurriedly put her hands on her broom in order to keep her position.

If she had been even a little slower to let go, her arm would have been cut off— While thinking that, Marisa yelled the name of the one who tried to cut her.

Without having to look, she knew who it was.

“—Youmu!”

Click.

Moving her sword back, Konpaku Youmu glared at Marisa. Her skirt fluttered by the wind that was created, but she didn't try to hold it down. Unsheathing the second sword at her side,

“Another evil deed.”

They were sharp words.

The half ghost part behind her—its appearance didn't differ from a regular ghost's—shook its head vertically as if to say, “That's right.”

Both of the tips of the Japanese swords were pointed at Marisa. Although they were in midair, there were around ten steps between them, but she knew that that distance didn't mean anything since her opponent was Youmu, so she couldn't move carelessly.

Konpaku Youmu.

The half ghost gardener who served the mistress of Hakugyokurou, Saigyouji Yuyuko. During the spring incident, to collect 'spring,' she tried to do something like tsujigiri<sup>19</sup>, and fought Reimu and Marisa. After that, many things happened—to be more specific; banquets, banquets, incidents, banquets—and now they were on familiar terms.

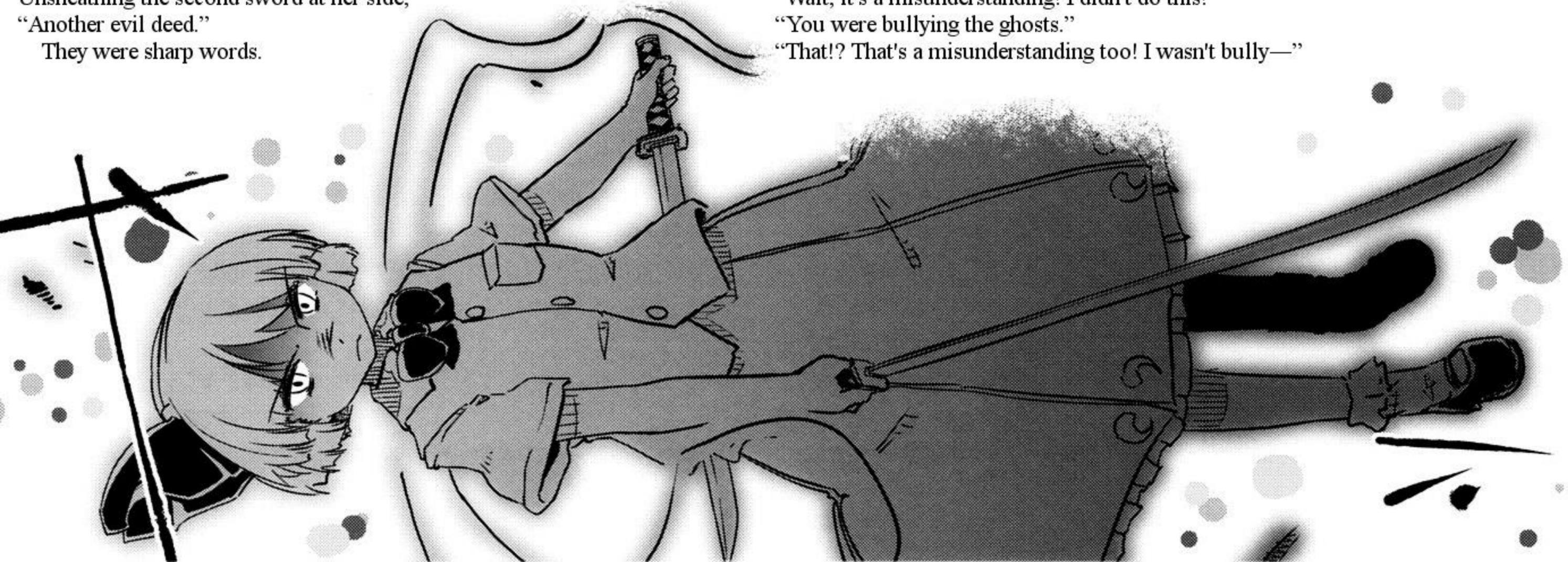
There was only one thing that hadn't changed about her since she got to know her.

If one did something wrong, she would cut her without hesitation.

“Wait, it's a misunderstanding! I didn't do this!”

“You were bullying the ghosts.”

“That!? That's a misunderstanding too! I wasn't bully—”



In response to Marisa, who was glossing over what she did with her hands in front of her, Youmu shook her head from side to side, and looking somewhere far,

“.....All bullies say that.”

“.....Sorry.”

Hearing those words that were full of feeling, she apologized.

Now that she mentioned it, Youmu was played around with Her since she was serious—she thought that, but she also thought that that wasn't bullying, but a type of affection no matter how she thought about it, and while doing that, Marisa went back slowly. She did not want to be Youmu's opponent when she had her swords out.

Of course, it seemed like a useless struggle. As Marisa went back, Youmu slid her feet on the air and moved forward in a way particular to kenjutsu. If she were to believe her spellcard's name, even if Marisa, the self proclaimed fastest in Gensokyo, were to escape at full speed, she would still be within her range.

“Anyway, I'm not the one behind what's happening now or the reason it's happening. What about you? Did you become a second stage boss or something?”

“No. I—”

Stopping her words, Youmu looked away from Marisa. What she was looking at were the ghosts that were looking at them from a distance. She was looking at that scene which was like a repeat of the spring incident with a bitter expression.

Something clicked in her mind.

“Were you going to do tsujigiri again.....?”

“No!”

“Then, a surprise attack?”

She silently raised her swords. If she kidded around again, she would definitely be cut. When Marisa covered her mouth with her hands, Youmu sighed deeply and lowered her shoulders. While slightly sympathizing with her, Marisa put in a little effort to be serious and asked her.

“Did something happen?”

“It's as you can see.”

Youmu let her gaze wander again, looked at Marisa, then looked at the empty sky, and

“.....Where's the shrine maiden?”

“She's becoming an eat and sleep youkai<sup>20</sup> at the shrine.”

“So the shrine maiden— isn't doing anything.”

—*Then it's different.*

Murmuring that, Youmu became quiet like she was thinking about something. Marisa could tell what she was thinking about. She probably thought that Reimu came and broke the barrier again. Since she accepted it so quickly, Youmu must not have believed it either.

Because if Reimu had done it, the barrier would have broken completely.

A situation like this where a hole was open—was something else.

“Couldn't it be your <sup>Yuyuko's</sup> Lady's doing?”

This time it was Marisa's turn to ask. Youmu raised her face, hesitated, then

“.....No, it doesn't seem that way. It appears that she knows something, but when I asked her, she dodged the question. I came here to investigate myself, but.....I, I.....wonder if Yuyuko-sama doesn't trust me.....”

“No, that's not it. That's not it at all.”

She shook her head. In fact, as far as Marisa could tell, that was something like overprotection or what doting parents did. It was like deciding to let her dear child try doing things by herself, and watching over her intently from the shadows. If she didn't tell her, she must have had a fitting reason.

Marisa didn't know if Youmu knew that, but Youmu smiled and said, “R-Really? Yeah, that must be it,” embarrassedly.

It was scary that she was smiling happily while holding her swords, so she wanted her to stop.

“Doesn't she just not want you to stick your neck into this incident?”

“I wonder..... No. However, this is Hakugyokurou's problem, and—”

“No, look.”

Interrupting Youmu's words, Marisa spoke.

While pointing down—at Gensokyo.

“It doesn't look like an incident is only occurring at Hakugyokurou.”

“Eh——”

Hearing that, perhaps she finally noticed.

Youmu looked down and looked stupefied with her mouth open. Seeing her face, Marisa felt slightly superior. It seemed like she had only noticed that Hakugyokurou's border was weakened. Or perhaps that was so important she didn't look at anything else.

That wasn't all there was to the incident.

One could probably call being able to see sunflowers, cherry blossoms, and autumn leaves at the same time an incident. One could say that the ice floating in the lake in front of the Scarlet Devil Mansion was the work of an ice fairy, but the snow piled up here and there were different no matter how one thought of it. Flower fairies, ghosts, and ice fairies were dancing around.

It was abnormal.

An incident was clearly occurring— However, as if it were natural, the fairies were cheerful as usual.

Still in a daze, Youmu spoke.

“.....What month's it again?”

The way she spoke changed because of her surprise. The words she used changed when she lost her sternness. The swords in her hands hung down limply. She must not have imagined that the ground was like that.

“The way I see it, it's close to the flower incident before, I think— Like that, but worse. *Here and there, a lot of things are getting weaker.*”

“Getting weak.....ker.”

Hahaha, laughed Marisa, like she wasn't part of it. In actuality, she wasn't part of it, but Youmu, who was part of it, brought her eyebrows together. She brought her swords up—but, she put them back into their sheaths. She must have known that it wasn't right to cut Marisa. Instead of flying at her, she sighed, and putting her fingers through her hair,

“.....so, you're doing what you usually do?”

Youmu said that as if she were spitting the words out. The only answer Marisa gave was, “Yeah.” She didn't have to go out of her way to add an explanation. The spring incident, the night incident, the flower incident, and the oni incident; during all of them, Marisa went against Youmu. Youmu must have known well how Marisa acted at times like this.

The problem was—

“I don't know what she wants to do. Who's the one behind this? What goal does she have in mind? I'm flying around to find out things like

that, but—bu, t.....”

“But?”

“I don't know at all.”

Youmu fell over in the air, but that was how it really was.

She didn't know. She didn't have a clue. Normally, it wouldn't have been weird for her to have a guess by now, but—she couldn't see it at all. At the point that Hakurei Reimu didn't act, it felt like the gears went out of order.

An incident like always.

But—something.

Something was different.

An impression like that stuck to a corner of Marisa's mind.

She must have felt something similar. Youmu's expression became sterner—then suddenly, she looked serious and looked at Marisa intently.

She could imagine what she was going to say.

And Youmu said the words she imagined she would say.

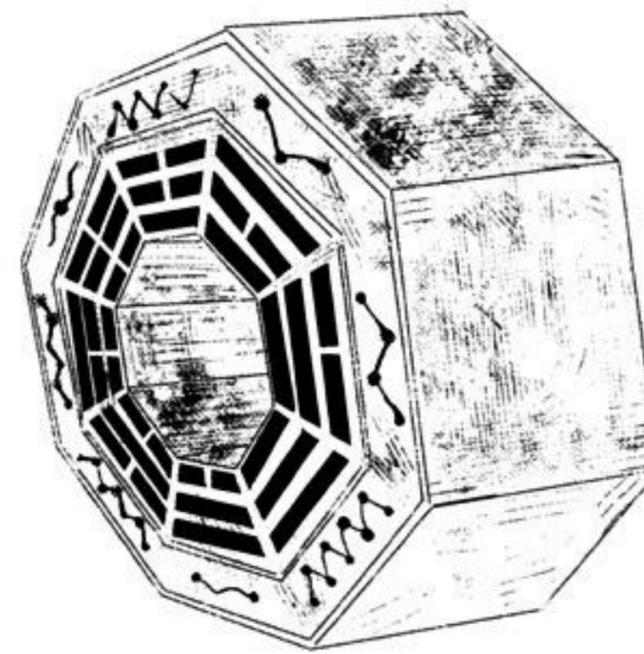
“How do I know you're telling the truth?”

“You don't—”

There was no way to tell. When an incident occurred, what solved it, what made one give up one's place to the one who was trying to solve it, wasn't words, but something else.

To show that, Marisa stuffed her hand inside the pocket of her skirt and took out what was hidden there.

—The Hakkerō.



Marisa pointed it, which had a flame that wouldn't go out in it, at Youmu, and said to the darkness.

'Want to go?'

Going back or forward was up to danmaku play—that was the only rule of the girls of Gensokyo. It was the fair battle that the Hakurei shrine maiden decided.

In response, Youmu reached for the sword she put away again. She pressed up on the guard with her thumb, and gripped it lightly so she could unsheathe it at any time. Once she started moving, she would probably dash, draw, and cut in the blink of an eye. On the other hand, if Marisa became serious, she could fill all the space in her sight with light and stars.

How many times they had done it before? Danmaku play.

The fuse—

“.....I won't.”

“.....Yeah.”

wasn't lit by either of them. Marisa put the Hakkerō away, and Youmu took her hand away from her sword and went farther away. The half ghost circled around her as it followed her. She stopped at a distance where she could barely be heard, and spoke in a voice that couldn't be taken as one used for muttering or for conversation.

“I'll—ask Yuyuko-sama one more time.”

What about you? Youmu asked with her eyes. Those eyes that asked “What are you going to do?” were serious, and didn't seem like they would allow a joke.

She must have thought like Marisa. That was why she didn't draw her sword.

That it was—different.

Something nothing could be done about was happening. A vague unease that couldn't be taken as a omen or a premonition was present.

“Let me see. I'll—”

Marisa pulled her hat down while answering. Youmu disappeared from her view, and Marisa's expression was hidden from Youmu. Gripping the broom with both hands, she put strength in. After building up strength before flying, Marisa spoke.

“—go to where the most suspicious one is.”



“.....”

In the first place, it might have been weird from the point that she was able to come. Because the place she went was in a way the same as the Hakurei Shrine, but was usually hidden in a gap and was unable to be visited by anyone. During the spring incident, Marisa was able to come when she looked for the one behind everything after the incident was solved.

The hidden house.

The <sup>Mayoiga</sup> stray house.<sup>21</sup>

A place people didn't go to—and the place people wandered to; the place that could be called the end of Gensokyo. A youkai lived there. The most old, most strong, most suspicious youkai in Gensokyo. Ordinary people couldn't tell what she was thinking, and she moved by her own reasoning. What was clear was that she loved Gensokyo—and that she spent most of the time sleeping.

The residence of the great youkai who manipulated boundaries, Yakumo Yukari.

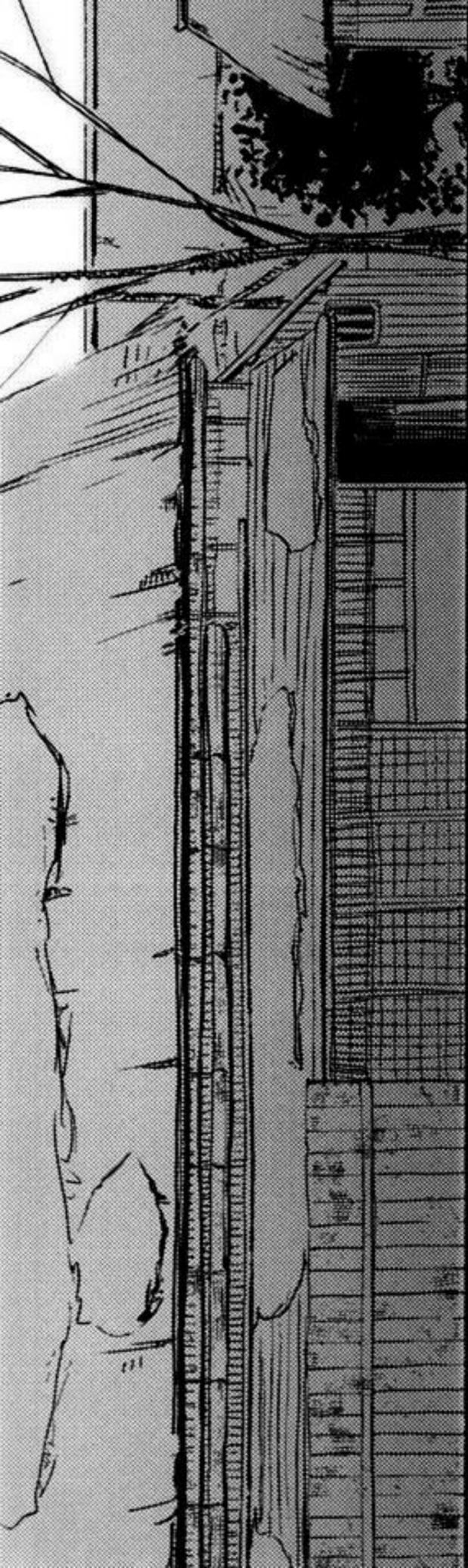
That was Mayoiga.

“.....”

Getting off her broom, Marisa stood still. In her view was something like human habitation. However, no humans were there. The houses that were only for people who wandered in were always empty. All the doors were open, and the wind passed through without reserve. Even though they were supposed to have been exposed, the buildings weren't damaged, and weren't even dusty.

The trees that grew here and there were withering, flowering, and had snow on them, but all of them were shaken by the wind that passed by. The sound of the leaves rustling as they swayed could be heard clearly. It sounded like someone was whispering. The trees were speaking silently.





“ .....

Marisa didn't say anything. She just watched. The Hakkerō she had in her hand so she could engage in danmaku play had lost its support and dropped to the ground. Without even trying to pick it up, Marisa just watched.

The wind blew.

The leaves swayed.

The doors made noise as they closed.

Only sound rode on the wind and could be heard.

And—

Other than that, there was no sound.

“ .....

At the end of Marisa's sight, in Yakumo Yukari's residence, there was no one. The great youkai who manipulated boundaries, and her fox shikigami, weren't there. In front of the empty house that was in the empty Mayoiga, Marisa stood in a daze.

The presence of humans  
and the presence of youkai weren't there,  
and as if it were thrown away by the world—Mayoiga was filled with  
silence.

“ .....

Marisa didn't say anything. She kept on standing. Only the black cat that was curled up on the roof watched her without getting tired.





“So, what brings you here today?”

Not as usual—Kourindou was probably in that category. At the end of the Forest of Magic, it was the store that said it was the center of Gensokyo for another reason; Kourindou. An item shop that had a somewhat distorted atmosphere.

There were new and old things, but one couldn't tell how to use any of them just by just looking at them once. The shopkeeper, Morichika Rimnosuke, said, “Even if I don't know how to use it, I know what to use it for,” but it didn't seem like there was a difference to Marisa.

Still, the shopkeeper happily played around with them and sometimes discovered new ways to use them.

Kourindou was a store where things that drifted in from the 'outside' of the Hakurei Border, the world that wasn't fantasy, gathered.

“Nothing in particular.....”

She knew him from when she was little, so there was no reserve. Marisa sat on a square box (it seemed like it was merchandise, but it only looked like a plain box to Marisa) and let her legs dangle.

The shopkeeper who sat at a desk opposite her sighed, and “Coming here all of a sudden— Even if you always do that, if you keep quiet the whole time after that and say, 'Nothing in particular,' even if nothing happened, I'll think that something did.”

“.....”

Marisa did not respond to the words that had tiredness mixed in them, and looked at the items in the store.

There were many items big and small that didn't make sense—if she had to say something that was not how it always was, she would

choose one thing.

There were a lot of them.

The Kourindou she remembered wasn't a store that was full of items.

".....Did you get a regular customer or something?"

"No." Rinnosuke shook his head. "I'd go bankrupt if I bought this much. I picked all of these up. There have been a lot lately."

"Hmm."

She answered pretending that she wasn't interested. Not showing whether he knew that or not, Rinnosuke pushed up his glasses with one hand and dropped his gaze to the book in his hand. On the cover was drawn a round lion and a door.

Marisa was silent, and Rinnosuke continued to read his book without saying anything. Only the sound of pages being turned periodically filled the quiet store like music.

It was quiet.

The Forest of Magic was silent as if it had gone to sleep. There were no customers who were supposed to come or events that were supposed to occur, the only ones in the store were Marisa and Rinnosuke, and she could almost hear the sound of her heart beating.

Marisa broke the hard to break silence instead of taking a deep breath.

".....The things in this store,"

The sound of pages being turned stopped.

He didn't raise his face. Rinnosuke's eyes still faced his book.

Not stopping, Marisa continued speaking.

"they come from outside Gensokyo, right?"

"That's right."



A direct answer. She didn't stop talking. With only the feel of the incident, she continued speaking. The barrier to Hakugyokurou that had opened slightly, the mixed seasons, the inactive shring maiden, the absent Yakumo Yukari.

“Does the fact that you got more items mean—that the 'hole' in the Hakurei Border got bigger?”

“——”

Rinnosuke became silent.

He closed the book that had been open on his lap. After gently putting the book on top of the table, he raised his face and looked at Marisa. She couldn't tell what he was thinking from his expressionless face.

“Not necessarily.”

“——. Oh, that's how it is?”

“That's right. For example, if something caused a sudden change in civilization, the number of things that drifted in would increase.”

“Ah..... I see.”

She remembered. There were basically two cases in which things drifted in from the outside. One was when things came in coincidentally—and, the other was when things were lost in the outside world or became fantasy and established themselves in this side.

Because Gensokyo was the place that tried to store things that were lost and things that were disappearing.

“Those things are generally wars, and—if there was a war, there would be changes here too, so I don't think so.”

“Soon humans will become fantasy.”

“No mistake. Gensokyo's already full of them. Look, there's one in front of me right now.”

“I'm a regular human.”

Hahaha, Marisa laughed, but Rinnosuke didn't.

Again, silence. She could see the sun already setting outside the window, and the darkness of night was coming. She was used to it, so she could move around with just the light from the moon. More than anything, night was the time of evil spirits. If something were going to happen, if someone were going to do something, it would be at this time.

“.....Yakumo Yukari...”

“Yeah.”

“is gone.”

“.....I can't do anything just being told that.”

Rinnosuke made a slightly displeased expression. It seemed he didn't quite like Yukari, who was more knowledgeable about the 'outside' than him. He didn't want to talk about it if he could help it—that was the feeling he gave off.

That wasn't going to happen.

She was currently the most suspicious—especially since a barrier was involved.

“But, she's the most suspicious. After all, she's all powerful, and no one can tell what she's thinking.”

“She isn't all powerful.”

Smoothly,

Rinnosuke said that so naturally she almost missed it. It was so natural that Marisa wasn't able to understand what he had said.

—Not all powerful.

Yakumo Yukari was the most old, most powerful Youkai. Having the ability to manipulate boundaries, she surpassed everything. Didn't Rinnosuke once say she was something like God in the world of Gensokyo?

Rinnosuke said something that went against what he said before. "I thought about it, but.....she isn't all powerful. She's exceedingly close, but there's a limit."

Mhm, said Marisa.

Rinnosuke looked at empty space with a harsh look.

"What manipulating the boundaries of all things comes down to is—"

Saying that much,

still looking at empty space, Rinnosuke stopped talking. In front of Marisa, who was waiting for him to continue, Rinnosuke dropped his gaze, opened the book he had put on the table again,

and started reading.

"—What's the rest!?"

"There isn't really one."

He said those words like he was throwing something away. Without raising his face, he started reading his book like he always did. It didn't seem like he was going to say the rest, and the sharp gaze he had shown had disappeared. It was clear that no matter how much she asked him, he wouldn't say what he had almost told her. Even if she tried, he would probably evade it.

She sighed.

"Fine— I'll think about it myself."

"You should do that."

After sticking her tongue out at Rinnosuke, who still didn't raise his face, she jumped off the box and grabbed her broom. When she slid the door open, she saw that the sun had already set.

Without words of parting or closing the door, Marisa went on

her broom and rushed outside.

That was why—what Rinnosuke said as she went just reached her ears,

*—In the first place, if there were no boundary—*

and she couldn't hear the rest. The broom accelerated before she could ask. As if to cut the darkness of the night, Marisa flew to the Forest of Magic.

The night illuminated by the moon was bright. But, the darkness of the Forest of Magic forced the light back.

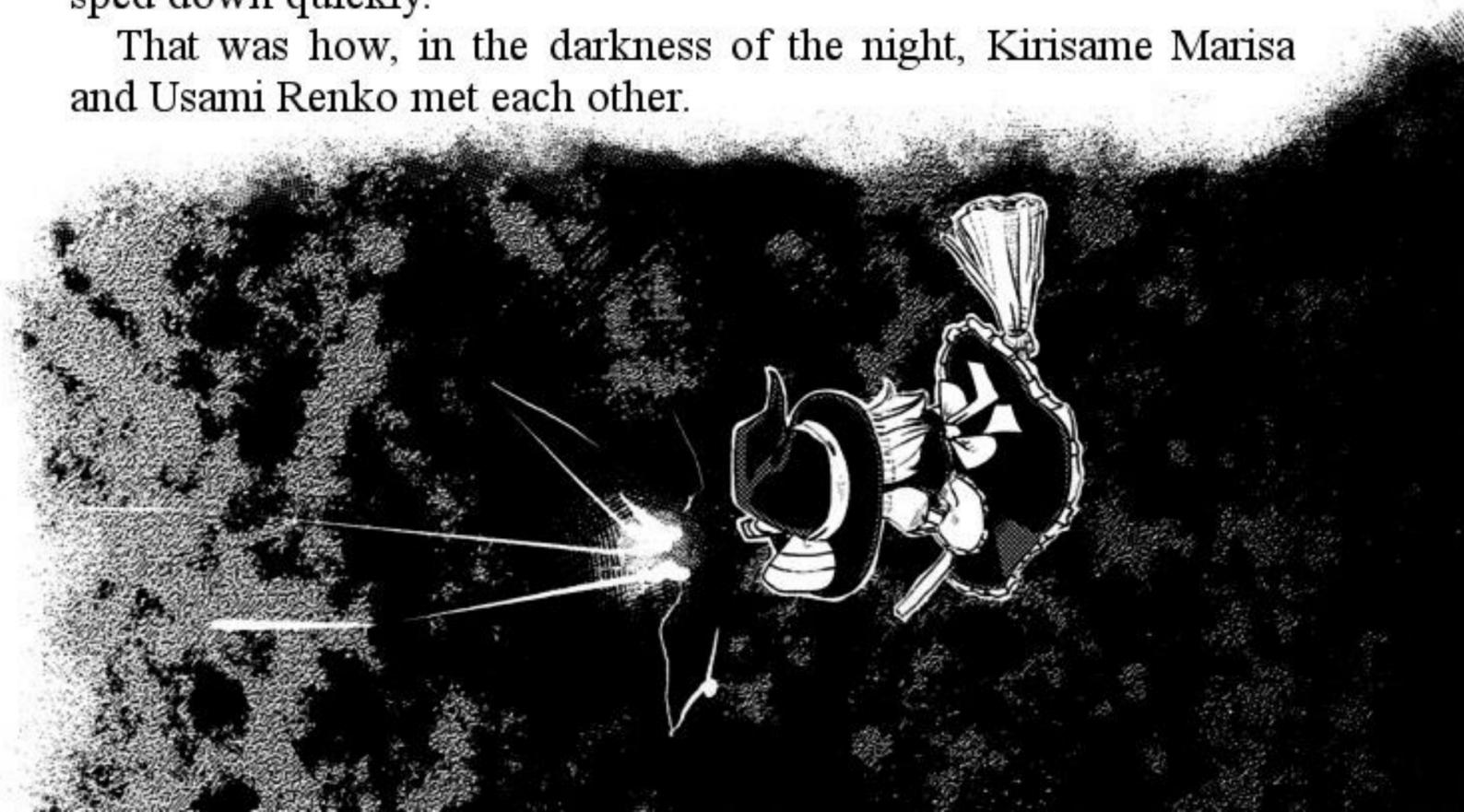
"—Mh,"

In the darkness, she saw green light. Several small lights; the light of danmaku.

—Someone was engaged in danmaku play.

Like her, someone might have set out to solve the incident. Thinking that, and having flown without having a something in particular to do, she turned her broom toward that place and sped down quickly.

That was how, in the darkness of the night, Kirisame Marisa and Usami Renko met each other.







You opened your eyes—I see my darkness living.  
I see down to its bottom:  
even there it is mine and lives.

Does such carry over? And wake in doing so?  
Whose light follows on my heels  
that a ferryman was found?

(From *Darkness to Darkness*)

## Notes

- 14 shouji: “. . . a door, window or room divider consisting of translucent paper over a frame of wood which holds together a lattice of wood or bamboo.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sh%C5%8Dji>)
- 15 eight mat room: Refers to the number of tatami mats that can fit in the room. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tatami>)
- 16 sansai: “. . . a Japanese word literally meaning 'mountain vegetables', originally referring to vegetables that grew naturally in the wild and were not cultivated.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sansai>)
- 17 incident: The Japanese word that's used (ihen) actually means something like “unusual phenomenon,” and is made up of characters that can mean “different” and “change.”
- 18 fusuma: “. . . vertical rectangular panels which can slide from side to side to redefine spaces within a room, or act as doors.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fusuma>) There's one to Marisa's side on page 36.
- 19 tsujigiri: “. . . a practice when a samurai, after receiving a new *katana* sword or developing a new fighting style or weapon, tests its effectiveness by attacking a human opponent, usually a random defenseless passer-by, in many cases during nighttime.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsujigiri>)
- 20 eat and sleep youkai: *3x3 Eyes* reference.
- 21 Mayoiga: An alternate name for Mayohiga.

## Credits

Translation/Editing: kamyu  
Raw: Lunar972



# 第三章

Chapter 3

# 宇佐美 蓮子

Usami Renko

signifi- place fully...  
 with... companies res...  
 Washington. B... econom-  
 the 'living for...  
 S., Europe...  
 market for...  
 the importat...  
 France, Italy... Spain —  
 to Japan...  
 Japan...  
 European relations...  
 bitter...  
 World... II by Imper...  
 it is Lean's cinematic...  
 are and val...  
 that subtly colored...  
 humanizing bot...  
 and victor.

This is an extraordinary achievement...  
 Arab, Indian and Irish voices from among...  
 thousands" have derided Lean's genius...  
 The New York film critics...  
 of "R... Daughter" deeply wounded Lean...  
 helps to explain the 15-year delay until the appe...  
 "A Passage to India." Nor is culture compleme...  
 notion that one has to see a movie before turning...  
 ings of Boris Pasternak, E.M. Forster and Law...  
 Nevertheless, Lean's humanism on an epic sc...  
 helped harvest the humanity that is within us. F...  
 imperial vision, but a humane one. It was also t...  
 artistic greatness.

The Prime Minister's Overproduct...  
 In reply to Alf Ind...  
 stiff import duties...  
 salmon so as to cau...  
 I find it difficult...  
 clean hands when...  
 not protect local...  
 restricting impo...  
 to some extent...  
 Britain...  
 said...  
 government's totalitarian, decer...  
 control that led to their surprise oppress...  
 the widespread uprising throughout four o...  
 Iraq after Desert Storm had destroyed nks th...  
 at all, of the heavily aut...  
 ed Re... Guard, the princi-rs —  
 his control. It leaves...  
 now reluctant to face a...  
 explosive rebelliousness...  
 among Iraq's dissident factions that will...  
 continue to challenge any tight central...  
 tyranny.

When the president appealed to "the...  
 Iraq military and the Iraqi people" to



What is the Hifuu club? When people ask me that, the answer I give them is kind of based on how I feel at the time. I most often say that it's an occult club, there are times I say that it's a group that uncovers the world's secrets, and there are also times I just say, "It's a pretty regular club." I'm not lying, and all of them have some truth in them. But, that's only a small part of it, and the answer to the question, "What is the Hifuu club?" might be something entirely different.

"Mary," for example.

Saying that might be correct. The Hifuu club is Maribel Han, and it's me—the two of us; answering like that might be correct. The Hifuu club is one by two.<sup>22</sup> It's no good with just one, and it's no good being alone. Mary looks at the other side, and I look at this side. Holding hands, we wander between that side and this side.

Going over the boundary between dream and reality.

But, that boundary was lost.

I, who was supposed to look at this side, crossed to the other side—and Mary, who was supposed to look at the other side, disappeared. In this side, (Right now, it's the other side. I'm getting confused about which side is that side and which side is this side!) was Mary still left behind in the real world? And, was I the only one who stepped into the fantasy world? Did Mary come here too and just get separated?

I had several questions, but no answers to any of them. At least, I got the feeling that the last scene I saw could appropriately be called "vanishment."

Maybe Mary wasn't in this side or that side—she disappeared in a way that made me think that.

.....Without having the time to worry about things like that, I was attacked by a girl, and was saved by another girl, it seemed.

I say that it seemed that way since the girl just appeared after the pillar of light struck the ground, and there was no causal relationship between them. I didn't have the time to think about what was happening. Not even about what happened to Mary. I was too busy trying to understand the current situation. It was an absurd development like one from a dream world.....ah, but actually, reality was absurd enough.

"You're quite a retro magician—I thought those went out a long time ago."

For the time being, I started talking to the girl who seemed to have saved me. She was wearing black and white clothes, was riding a broom, and was wearing a pointed hat on top of that. She was a magician who seemed like she would come out in a fairy tale. She had a tool that had the eight trigrams drawn on it, and was a mix of Japanese and Western styles. It looked like this place was becoming modernized too.

The girl flicked her hat with her forefinger, turned around toward me, and

"I'm here because they did."

"Then—this is Gensokyo after all, right?"

My suspicion changed to belief. I had predicted it when I went through the hole in the boundary, but I finally reached it! Different from our world, a paradise that was separated by a border. The dream world where lost things remained, Gensokyo! I was not only able to see that place I only saw in pictures, but visit it. It seemed Mary came to this dream world several times by herself, (each time she brought back things that weren't in our world) but it was my first time.

.....It was unfortunate that I couldn't say "we." It was hard to say

I was the Hifuu club by myself.

Mary, Mary. My important best friend. Where did that girl—  
“After all.....? That sounds like”

The girl in black and white said that—cut her words short, and suddenly body slammed me. “What?” I tried to say, but what came out of my mouth was a “Kyah!” I was embarrassed. She forced me onto the broom, and—at the edge of my vision was green light.

“Again!?”

“It's 'still!”

The one who answered was a girl in black. She was there after the pillar of light disappeared, and, looking angry, had out more than twice as many balls of light. It seemed that the girl in black and white saved me from around ten of them.

.....They were both wearing black, so it was hard to differentiate them.

Putting aside all my doubts for the time being, I questioned her.

“What's your name!?”

“Aren't you supposed to say your name fir—”

The broom floated up. I got on behind her and yelled.

“Usami Renko! Hifuu club!”

“Hifuu Club, huh!?”

“That's not a name!”

“Just kidding! I'm—”

Saying that, I could tell that the girl in black and white was putting strength into her body. I wrapped my arms around her thin waist and held onto her. I did that because I could tell what she was going to do next. The way she did when she appeared, unrealistically, she would—

“Kirisame Marisa—an ordinary magician!”

Along with me, she flew up.

“Wo—ahhhhhhhhAhhhEhh!?”

I didn't have the leisure to speak. At the same time it rose to the sky, the broom rolled, and while accelerating again, it rotated more and rose to the sky. Far from being able to talk, it took me all I had to not be shaken off. Several green lights came from behind—actually, they were at the sides and in front too. The girl in black and white, Marisa, slipped through the ridiculous amount of danmaku with a ridiculous flight path.

To be honest, I was going to be sick.

I wonder if she'd get angry if I Niagara reversed<sup>23</sup> on her back— While thinking something dangerous like that, I closed my mouth and held her back tightly. The broom went outside the forest, and I saw the moon in my upside down view.

The location was—Gensokyo.

A fantasy world. A dream world. A world where magicians flew in the sky, girls produced balls of light from their hands, and things that were now lost remained.

“Who's the one who said it was a paradise!? It's dangerous!”

“This is actually a way of communicating—!”

Another turn. I was too scared to look down. I didn't even want to think about how far I'd fall if I let go now. Balls of light passed by the side of my body. They were so close I might have been able to touch them if I stretched my hand out, and made me wonder whether she was really avoiding them or just moving around randomly.

Unexpectedly, it didn't seem that this was a wonder for Marisa. She avoided them with ease and— Oh, God. At the sight of her

shooting balls of light back from the tip of her broom, I gave up thinking that this girl was a normal human too. I should have given up when I saw her flying in the sky, though.

I finally understood.

I wandered into Gensokyo—and Gensokyo was more ridiculous a world than I thought it was. Now that I thought about it, Mary said that the last time she wandered in, she was chased by an ominous phoenix, but.....there was a chance that that wasn't a mistake or something, and there were really things like that around.

“.....I'm amazed she got back safely.....”

“Did you say something—”

“No!”

Because we were moving at a high speed, we couldn't hear each other unless we yelled—

Suddenly, the broom stopped.



Sudden break. I put my weight on her like I was falling forward, but neither she nor the broom moved an inch. What stopped wasn't just the broom; the balls of light that had been chasing us had all disappeared too.

“—This is bad.”

She said it in a small voice, but—because we had stopped, I heard her clearly.

“Bad.....? What is?”

She didn't answer. I felt nervousness from her voice and body. A nervousness that wasn't there when she was going past the balls of light filled Marisa's body.

It didn't seem like anything had changed, though.

I moved just my head while still holding onto her. The broom was floating in midair, and the forest was below us at a distance that could make one feel dizzy. Behind us, the girl in black was floating, and she was frozen too.

She wasn't looking at us.

The girl was looking at a certain point—beyond Marisa's gaze, and was frozen.

Without thinking that much about it, I leaned forward, looked, and

wished I hadn't.

I understood why the two of them had frozen. It was something even I, who didn't know about it well, understood how overwhelming it was. No— It wasn't overwhelming; it



was incomparable, something in another class that wasn't supposed to be compared. *It was something that was a different existence.* Even though just looking at it made one want to escape, its presence didn't allow it.

It was floating.

With the moon that illuminated the night sky at her back—a girl in red and white was floating.

With so many charms out that it would have been ridiculous to count them.

“She's—serious.”

Marisa murmured with a dry voice. I heard her say that to herself because I was too close to her. It was something she hadn't planned on saying out loud, but ended up saying.

The girl in the shrine maiden clothes was glaring.

Not at the girl in black,

not at Marisa,

the red and white shrine maiden was—glaring at none other than me.

The one who broke the silence was Marisa.

“Didn't you not have an appetite?”

Marisa shouted at the girl who was floating. It was clear that she was acting brave, but she somehow managed to smile.

The shrine maiden didn't even move an eyebrow.

The seals that were in the air also didn't move.

Not moving, the shrine maiden spoke.

“This is something else.”

“Do you like delicacies?”

“Enough that I don't want to let other people eat them.”

I didn't really get it— The black-white and red-white were probably using metaphors. Her gaze was still set on me. It was

scary and frightening. In the eyes of the shrine maiden who didn't seem that far from my age, there was hostility.

Having something like that directed at me was troubling.

If we knew each other, it would have been different, but I didn't have a reason for someone I just met to be hostile to me. Especially if she was an inhabitant of another world. Zero contact. I didn't have a reason to be liked or disliked. I wondered if she was indiscriminate and didn't need a reason like that.

I questioned Marisa, who was in front of me, in a small voice.

“.....Does she eat humans?”

“That's the one in black there. The one in red is barely human.”

“Barely, huh.....?”

When I looked at the one there, I saw her going away at high speed. It seemed that she started escaping when the conversation started. It was an envious response to danger. If it were possible, I wanted to escape too. If I took even one step, I would just fall straight down, though.

When I returned my gaze, the shrine maiden was still glaring at me, and her gaze was sharper than it was before.

“So—hand *it* over.”

Would “it” refer to me, perhaps?

.....It probably did. I didn't have the courage to check, so I whispered to Marisa.

“.....Aren't I going to be eaten after all?”

“No—the Hakurei shrine maiden seems to have the role of sending things that wandered in from the outside back, so.....if you're from the outside, Hifuu, I think that's why she came.”

“I said Hifuu isn't my name. I did come from the outside, though.”

“Then it shouldn't be strange.....or should it?”

It was a rhetorical question.

Negating her own words, Marisa glared back at the shrine maiden. I could feel her putting strength into her body. It was the same as before. Marisa was preparing to escape.

Probably, knowing full well that she could see even that.

In a position in which she could fly away in a moment, Marisa spoke.

“You're in quite a hurry, Reimu—that isn't like you! Weren't you not going to do anything?”

Hearing Marisa's words, the shrine maiden who was called Reimu moved her eyebrows slightly. Her expression looked like one of annoyance. She seemed to not have time to spare, and the word “dangerous” suited her well.

Serious.

Her whole body said that if Marisa didn't do what she said, those seals would all come flying like balls of light.

“I don't have the time to deal with you right now.....Marisa, just hand it over. I'll take responsibility and return it to its world.”

“Wa—Wait a minute-!”

Even though I knew she would attack, I couldn't not say anything.

Because that was the one thing I couldn't give up.

Not only Reimu, but even Marisa looked back at me. Being looked at by four eyes, I yelled back at Reimu.

“I'm not the only one who came here! Before I came, Mary was taken away, and—anyway, I can't leave that girl and go! She becomes lost easily—”



“That's enough!”

She shouted.

Sounding like she was throwing something away, Reimu spoke.

“I'll sent that back later too, so— There's no time right now.”

“.....That really isn't like you, Reimu. What happened?”

Although she was still acting brave, something else was mixed in her voice. She was worried about Reimu. Marisa, who knew a side of Reimu I didn't, seemed to feel that there was something different about her. Not the same—she was probably in a hurry.

There's no time, she said.

What was there no time for?

What was that time limit for?

While sounding worried, Marisa spoke.

“Does Hifuu have something to do with—this incident?”

Don't call me Hifuu. I tried to say that.

I couldn't say it.

I realized what happened after I heard something being hit. Unable to understand until I heard the sound, I didn't even notice that 'something happened.' To put it another way, if Marisa hadn't blocked it with the eight trigrams, the seal that was sticking out of



it would have been sticking out of my face before I had even realized it.

Instead of an answer, she shot a seal— At the same time I realized that, fear ran through me.

She aimed at me.

With clear hostility.

“.....”

And it seemed that that was more shocking to Marisa than it was to me. I could feel the nervousness disappearing from her body, which I was holding onto. In its place, a strong emotion filled her. An emotion that, once it started burning, would blaze until it burned out. The strong will that burned red and could go anywhere became power and filled her body.

“Marisa, there's no need for you to know. If you want to solve the incident, you should go do it yourself. If you leave that girl, I won't stop you.”

The red and white shrine maiden said that lightly, and that increased the fuel for Marisa's emotion. I probably knew that because I was similar. The spirit that, if one were stopped from doing something, made one want to do it; if something were made a secret, made one want to uncover it; made one go to a grave at night imposingly.

Spin.

Marisa rotated her wrist. Rotating the Hakkerō, she shook the seal off and pointed it at the shrine maiden again.

Her voice didn't have fear in it anymore.

“It isn't like you— It isn't like you at all, Reimu. You know what happens in situations like this.”

“You're right. If you won't understand with words—”

Who moved first?

Did both of them move at the same time?

From both of them

came words

and light.



Light and sound disappeared at the same time. At the force of the pressure that came from the side, my mind went blank for a moment. The moment my consciousness returned, I saw seals floating in front of my eyes, and the scenery changed the moment before they hit me. With a speed that was fast enough to leave sound behind, Marisa flew on her broom. The contents of my head tilted to one side with the

intense G, and the danmaku came without being shaken off. Bullets passed the place we had been a moment before, and passing the bullets that were a moment ahead, she continued her moment by moment tightrope act. My mind couldn't keep up. I could only see moments of it fragmentarily like individual scenes from a roll of film.

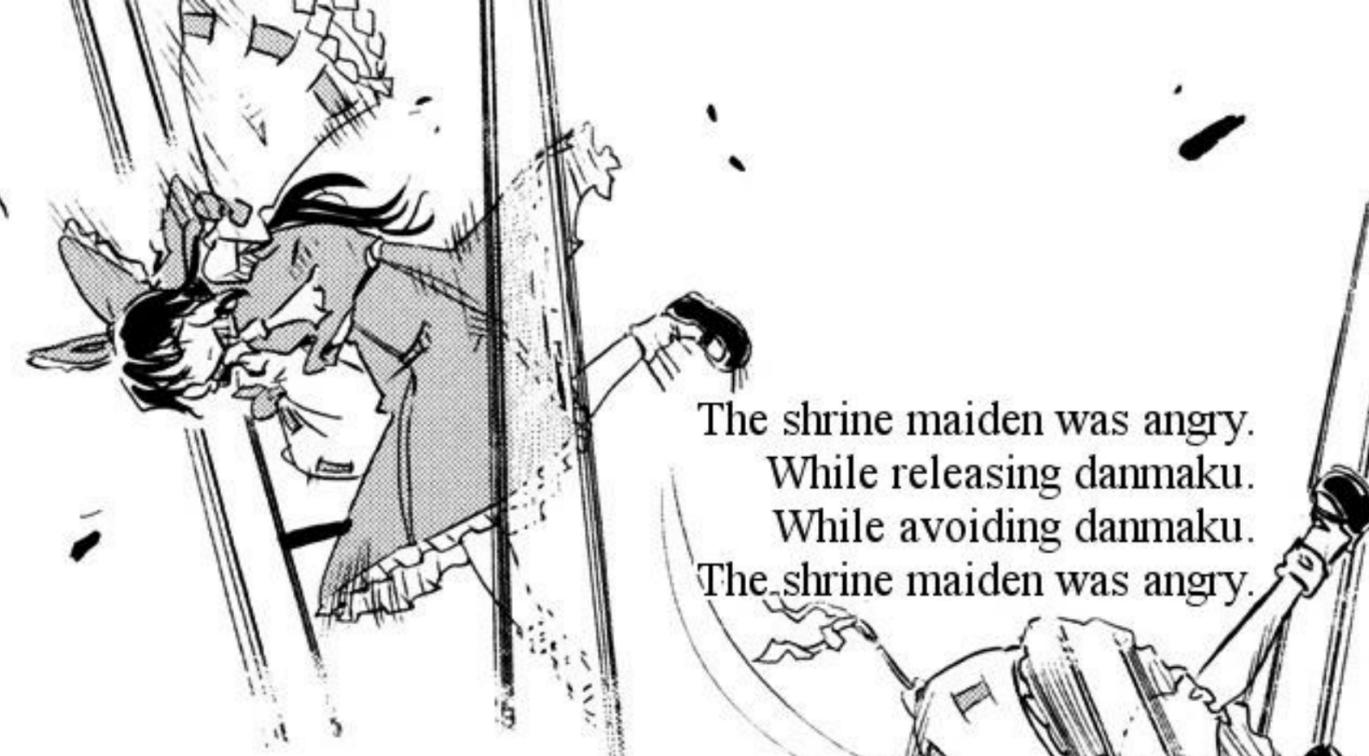
The witch was smiling.  
While releasing danmaku,  
while avoiding danmaku.  
The witch was smiling.



My view spun. The broom did a barrel roll. My view spun again and I couldn't tell which way was up and which way was down. Red, black, white, and yellow passed by my view at high speeds. The points were stretched out until they looked like lines.

Bullets collided with bullets and exploded.  
Light pierced light and disappeared.  
The swirling gale played a song

I was past feeling sick. It took me all I had to hold on to my consciousness. I couldn't even check what they were doing. If I became unconscious, I would be at ease—in exchange, I would undoubtedly drop from the broom, though. In the first place, I couldn't tell whether I would drop up or down. I could only hold on to her desperately so I wouldn't fall.



The shrine maiden was angry.  
While releasing danmaku.  
While avoiding danmaku.  
The shrine maiden was angry.

There was no change in either of them.  
“Love sign—”  
At that moment, it looked like everything happened at the same time.

Marisa put her right hand in her skirt, and the broom she had her other hand on jerked suddenly, and the broom accelerated. I could see Marisa's back going farther away.

My hand went out. Without grabbing anything, the air. My body lightly forgot about gravity.



“Ah.”

Result.

My body, unbelievably,  
was left in the air.

—It would have been better if I had lost consciousness.

That was the first thing I thought. If I had lost my consciousness first, I wouldn't have had to bear it, and I wouldn't have had to experience this fear.

Leaving me behind, Marisa and her broom accelerated.

Left behind, I lost speed and magic, and

“K—yaaaaahhhaa!?”

I naturally fell.

Ah, I can hear my scream with a doppler effect— I had the time to think of something stupid like that. It was completely different from jumping off the roof of a school. I fell after flying around at the ends of the sky; I think I had enough time to look back on my life. I fell face up, so I couldn't tell how much longer it would be until I hit the ground.

I saw Marisa, who noticed that I had fallen and turned around.  
She was surprised.

“—Hifuu!?”

“I said I'm not Hifuu—”

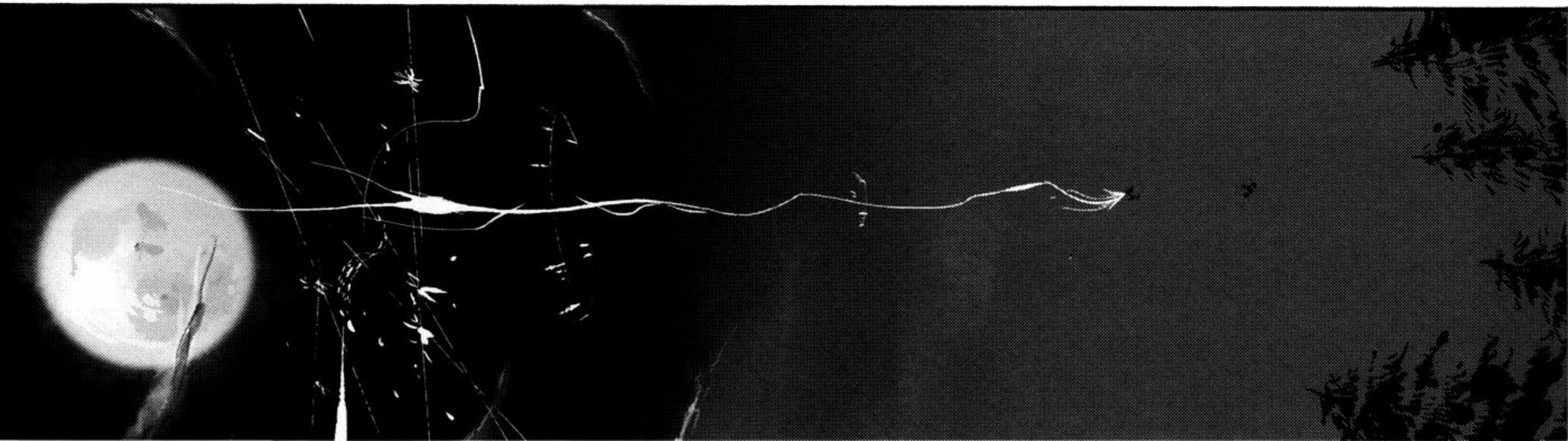
I quietly answered the words that rode in the wind. I knew that she couldn't hear me. I was just escaping from reality. I was falling. The time I fell was too long, the lights passing each other in the sky were too beautiful, and the idea of falling to my death didn't seem realistic.

Marisa desperately came after. The ground came near. Marisa stretched her hand, the ground beckoned me, the red and white shrine maiden floated at the edge of the sky and looked at me.

I tried to say something to someone, and

—*Snap.*

Not having the time to say anything, my fall came to its end.



My consciousness became dark.

I was having a dream—a dream of death.

I'm having a dream—a dream of life.

And, my consciousness became light.

I thought I died.

It was like Usami Renko, a hair's breadth away from danger! While I fell, I imagined myself becoming flat, and wondered if I would feel pain if I fell on my head. I didn't die— No, I might be dead and just not have realized it yet. It was a staple for ghosts; the way phantoms were. The dead didn't notice that they were dead, and one couldn't notice she was having a dream while she was asleep. That was because, as a result of the assumptions based on common sense, *the action of doubting was missing* —

“.....Paradoxically, you're alive as long as you doubt.”

I tried pinching my cheek.

It hurt.

When I took my hand away and looked at the surroundings, I saw a scene spread before me that made me think it was the world after death. “Spread” might not have been the right word.

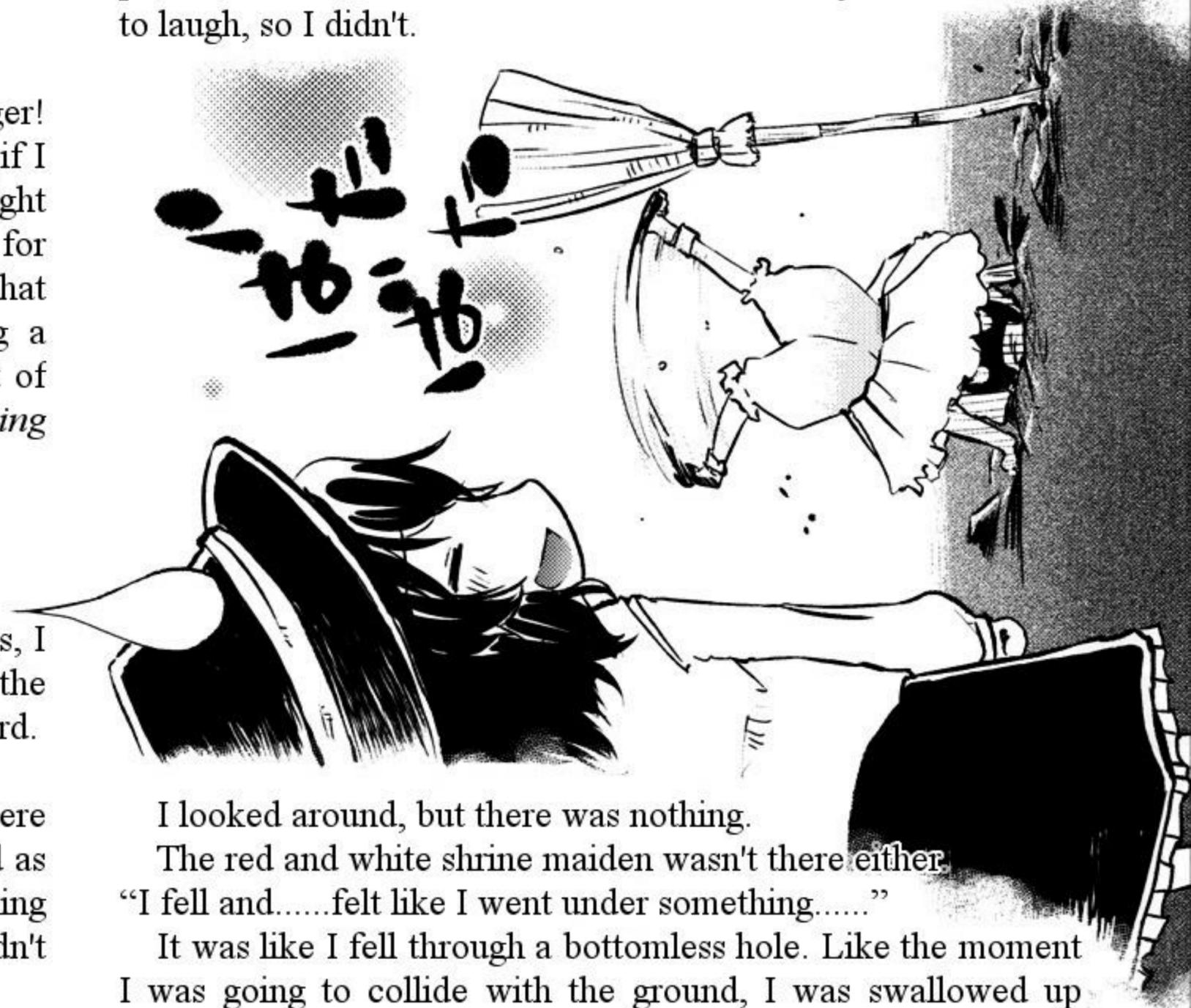
There was nothing.

It was darker than night and darkness. It wasn't that there was darkness; there was no light. The empty space continued as far as I could see, and I was standing in it. There was nothing beneath me, and it didn't feel like I was standing, so I couldn't say clearly that I was, though.

Anyway, I was somewhere that was nowhere.

Beside me was Kirisame Marisa. The tip of her broom and her face were stuck in the ground. It was like an old movie called the something family.<sup>24</sup> It was a sight that made me want

point and laugh, but now wasn't the time to do that, so I pretended not to see. If I looked at her directly, I would want to laugh, so I didn't.



I looked around, but there was nothing.

The red and white shrine maiden wasn't there either.

“I fell and.....felt like I went under something.....”

It was like I fell through a bottomless hole. Like the moment I was going to collide with the ground, I was swallowed up into something that opened with a snap. Now that I thought about it, wasn't that one of the holes in the barrier Mary always saw? And, Marisa, who came to save me, also went through the hole, and—was stuck like that.

It felt like thinking that was natural.

“Then is this.....the outside?”

The outside.

The outside of Gensokyo— It didn't look like it no matter how I looked at it.

“You didn't go all the way through— This is an interstice. The border of a boundary. The place between Here and There.”

It wasn't Marisa's voice.

It obviously wasn't my voice either. It was a voice I recognized—but, there was something definitely different about it. Even though the voice was the same, it felt like someone else was talking.

But still,

that was the voice I wanted to hear.

“Mary!”

I turned to the direction the voice came from, and

“Yukari!”

With the same exact timing, Marisa drew her head out of the ground and yelled.

—Yukari?

“Who is that?” That's what I thought. At the end of my line of sight, my best friend from the Hifuu club, Maribel Han— wasn't there.

“.....Who are you?”

The one who was sitting in a place where there was nothing wasn't Mary. Someone who had the same voice as Mary, and was very similar to Mary, but wasn't Mary was there. Her wavy gold hair and her face were the same, but her presence was different. If I were told that she was her older twin sister, I might have believed it.



There were many other small differences. First, her clothes were different. Her hat was different too. Even though there was no rain or sun in this space, she had a purple parasol out. And more than anything—she was ragged.

The person who looked exactly like Mary was worn out. Her clothes and skin had cuts, dirt, and frays here and there. She didn't look like someone in good health. There was a 'crack' running down her cheek, and it was hard to look at her directly.

She looked like she would break apart at any minute.

It was painful to look at her.

“What happened to you!?”

It must have been the same for not only me, but Marisa too. It seemed that this situation was out of the ordinary even for the 'Yukari' Marisa knew, and her face was full of surprise. Disbelief was written there. Her attitude said that that was impossible.

Accepting our surprise and doubt, the one who looked like Mary took the hems of her skirt and curtsied elegantly.

“Good day—and welcome to my world. You can't stay long, though.”

“..... You're not Mary?”

“No.” She shook her head. “I'm not Mary. Not right now.”

“.....”

Those words were basically saying 'I know Mary,' but it didn't seem like I would get an answer even if I asked. The person who looked a lot like Mary smiled with a face was exactly like Mary's.

Was she the one who saved me?

While I was thinking, Marisa came forward as if to say it was her turn now.

“Not Mary-san, but Yukari-san—is this your doing?”

While saying that, she gripped her broom with her left hand and the eight trigram tool with her right. I saw balls of light coming from both of them. It must have meant that she would shoot if she didn't answer honestly. As far as I could tell, it seemed that that danmaku fight was a way of communicating for them. It seemed like that developed in Gensokyo more than speaking did. It might be similar to a very old shonen manga where they 'hit each other and became friends.'

In one way, it was peaceful.

The Mary look-alike, who was aimed at peacefully, nodded unconcernedly.

“Your being brought here was my doing.”

“What about how Reimu's more angry than usual?”

“I can't say that that isn't my doing either.”

“Then—”

Strength went into Marisa's hands.

“—Is this incident your doing too?”

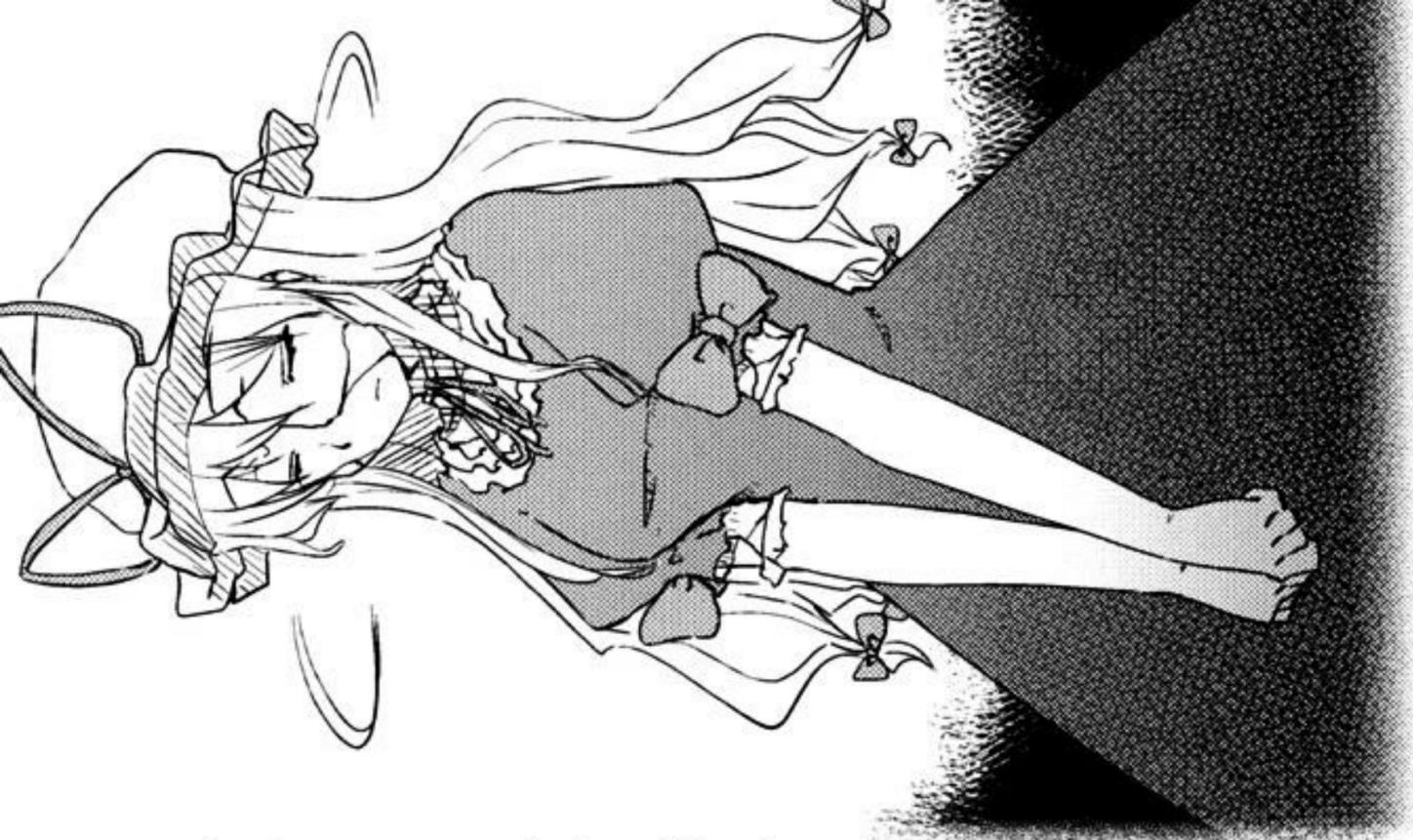
Depending on your answer, I'll shoot.

Her back said that. Like a gunman in a Western, Marisa pointed her eight trigram tool at the Mary look-alike. I could tell that the tension was rising slowly.

“No.”

Without showing fear, she declared that.

“That's the one thing—that isn't my doing. In fact, I want to stop it.”



“.....Is that how you ended up like that?”

The Mary look-alike didn't respond. Her almost eloquent silence was her answer.

I organized the information in my head. So this Mary look-alike, Yukari-san, who lived in Gensokyo, acted to stop the incident, and became like this because it didn't go well. Marisa was acting with the same objective, and the shrine maiden was getting in her way.

I didn't understand how Mary and I fit in that at all.

Leaving me, who couldn't grasp the situation, behind, Marisa and the Mary look-alike continued talking.

“Yes. I'm not all powerful.”

“.....Someone else said the same thing, but”

“But?”

“When you say it, it sounds like a lie. I'm surprised.”

“I'm not trusted, am I?”

“It's because of the way you normally act.”

“I love Gensokyo in my own way, and—I'm only acting based on that.”

“It doesn't mean anything if other people don't get it. Say words of love directly; danmaku are power—”

“I don't plan on having other people understand.”

“Is that so? In that case—”

“—hey wait a minute!”

I didn't get what was happening, so I interrupted them. I wanted them to stop talking in a way that left people out. Both of them. In times like these, first, there should be an explanation for outsiders..... Ah, was being chased out more common in old stories? The lost usually didn't know what happened until the end.

But, I wouldn't accept that. We were the Hifuu club. We couldn't leave sealed secrets alone. We couldn't not know. Not being part wasn't enough.

“Explain it to me so I can understand, Mary look-alike!”

“Look-alike.....”

“Look-alike's a little.....”

“Whatever! If you're saying that you're not Mary—”

This.

Before asking where this was or what was happening, I had to ask this. To this person who was obviously suspicious, seemed to know the truth, and looked exactly like Mary.

“—Where's Mary?”

In response,

The Mary look-alike lowered her face and—quietly shook her head to the side.

“She isn't anywhere anymore. Maribel Han has disappeared.”

“\_\_\_\_\_”  
 “\_\_\_\_\_”  
 “\_\_\_\_\_”

My brain  
 refused to understand.

I stopped thinking and listening. I saw despair. My brain denied the information it gained, went into hibernation, and didn't try to understand what that fact meant. Maribel Han has disappeared. I disposed of it as a meaningless string of sounds. I didn't want to think. I didn't want to think. I didn't want to know. I didn't want to believe. There was no way something like that could happen. There was no way. That couldn't happen. That's wrong, that's wrong, that's wrong, that's a lie, that's a lie, that's a lie, that's a lie that's a lie!

Mary,  
 Mary has—

“I'll answer all of your questions. This is Gensokyo, the Dream world you say is on the other side of the boundary. Gensokyo is busy right now, and that shrine maiden came to send you back to

the outside—more accurately, she came because a large hole opened in the Hakurei Border, though. And, that black-white there is—”

The Mary look-alike answered all of my questions like she read my mind, then after that, looked at Marisa, and

“—a rubberneck.”

“That's quite a remark.”

“You know that's how you are.”

“You're wrong, Yukari. Rubbernecks are half interested, but I'm all interested. Because it seems interesting—I stick my neck in.”

“How human and”

enviable.

Saying that somewhat enviously, the Mary look-alike smiled. Not getting the reaction she wanted, Marisa clicked her tongue softly and pulled her hat down. Her eyes became hidden and her expression couldn't be seen. Leaving me, who was in a daze, behind, they continued to talk, and even while they did that, there was only one phrase in my head.



—Mary disappeared.

That moment, was what I saw not an illusion or a dream, but—the last sight of her as she disappeared?

Last.

Was that the last?

Was that—goodbye?

“Because there's a hole in the barrier, that's why Reimu was serious, huh? She and you become serious when the Hakurei border is involved.”

“Of course. The boundary between Here and There isn't supposed to be broken. If they mix, even I can't do anything with my power. But—”

“This incident involves that, huh? But, if that's the case, there's something that doesn't make sense.”

“What?”

“Reimu didn't act at first. No, she probably isn't acting even now—for the incident. You're acting behind the scenes. What's with that difference?”

“.....It's easy. It's very, very simple. Because the Hakurei shrine maiden already knows.”

“Knows what?”

“That there's—already nothing that can be done.”

“.....”

“It's just that wanting to do something when nothing can be done—even though I know that it's useless, I'm acting.”

The conversation stopped. The conversation that left me, who was frozen, behind, stopped, and Marisa became quiet and sat

with her legs crossed. She was thinking.

I wasn't thinking.

I just remembered. Mary. The expressions she made, the conversations I had with her, the time I spent with her. Our activities. The Hifuu club! The time that was lost!

—Lost?

Suddenly,

the words that were spinning around in my head gave birth to an emotion. A small impact. Not from my head; further down, from the bottom of my stomach, it rose up. Like live coals, it joined with my memories of Mary, and blazed like a camp fire. It wasn't resignation, and it wasn't sadness. I didn't cry.

The name of the emotion was anger.

I was—angry.

The Mary look-alike looked at me. Her expression had pity in it. Her face looked too much like Mary's. Especially when she made an expression like that. She spoke to me with a somewhat kind voice. “Reimu thinks you made a hole in the boundary. I'll explain the situation to her, so you should go back to—” she was saying something on her own. With a kind voice, sounding like she took me into consideration, ignoring my feelings!

“—No.”

Clearly, I said it.

“—”

The Mary look-alike became speechless. I knew that she didn't have any ill will, and she said that because she was worried about me. With good will, worrying about me, she said

it and was trying to send me back to my world.

But—this and that were different. No matter how much it didn't make sense, there was one thing I could say. The shrine maiden, the magician, and the Mary look-alike were only talking about their own situations, and didn't include my side.

Go back, they said.

I'd go back even if they didn't tell me to—but, *I wasn't going to go back just by myself!*

“Mary disappeared? Oh, I see. So what!? That girl always disappears, so—if she disappeared, I just have to find her and bring her back! It seems like you're misunderstanding something, so let me set things straight; I'm not by myself! Mary and I, the two of us are—the Hifuu club!”

I puffed out my chest. I felt good after saying everything I wanted to.

That was right—I was spun around and almost lost sight of it, but that was everything to me. It didn't matter where this was. It didn't matter what was happening.

We were the Hifuu club.

That was everything. Then, this was normal. I'd go after Mary, who went somewhere on her own, by myself, and the two of us would uncover a secret. What if there were a shrine maiden and a magician? I was going to do what I wanted to.

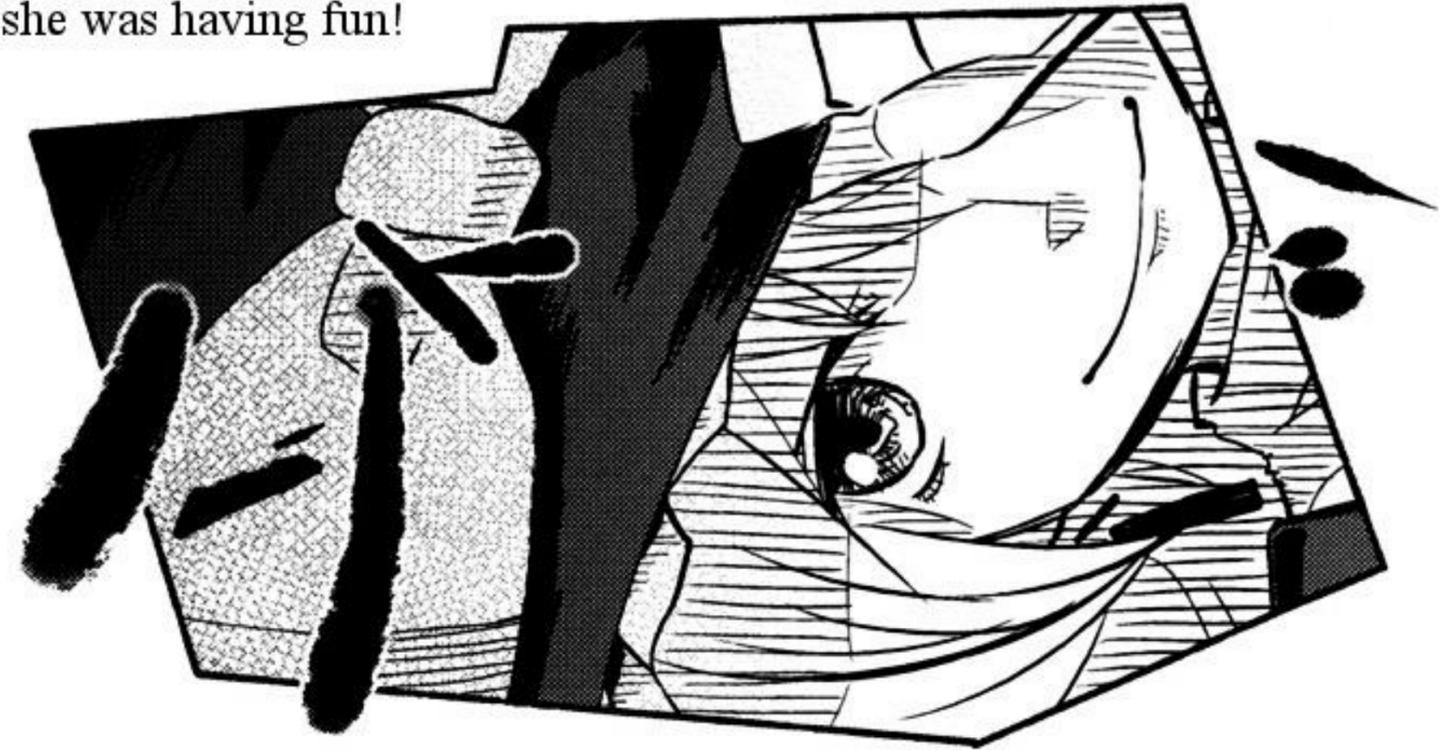
Without any wavering or drawing back, I stuck my chest out proudly. I didn't plan on taking even one step back. The Mary look-alike looked troubled, and

“Ku.....ku-ku, hahaha! That's interesting, Hifuu club!”

Marisa, who had been sitting, raised her head and laughed.

Holding her stomach and laughing, Marisa stood up while still laughing, walked toward me, and put her arm around my shoulder. Leaning on me and coming close, she stood next to me

and faced the Mary look-alike with me. She looked— Ah, like she was having fun!



“I like things like that, so—I'll be on her side. In the first place, I can't trust the answer you gave me. What's happening now—what the reason the incident is occurring is, and whether Mary-san, who looks exactly like you, disappeared or not; I'll find out for myself.”

Saying that, Marisa pointed her eight trigram tool at Yukari again. This time, there was no hesitation in her eyes. If you move, I'll shoot; even if you don't move, I'll shoot. That was the kind of expression she had. Instead of doing that to protect me, I'm sure that she was just doing what she wanted to. She probably planned on starting by first facing the one who led us here.

But,

the Mary look-alike wasn't looking at Marisa. Even though she had the eight trigrams pointed at her, she didn't even glance at her. She raised her face and directly—looked at me.

Our eyes met.

Her gold colored eyes.

The expression that showed up in those eyes, which were so beautiful they almost drew me in, was so complicated I was not able to read it completely.

But,

it looked like she wanted to cry.

There was nothing I could say to her.

Perhaps because she could see that I wasn't going to say anything, Marisa stepped forward and started talking to the Mary look-alike.

“There's one thing I want to ask too.”

“I'll answer. I might not have the answer you want, though.”

“Then if you don't mind,” she cleared her throat in an exaggerated manner, and “.....what did you mean by 'dream world'?”

“You have good ears.”

Her reply came with a smile. She moved her gaze from me to Marisa, and the Mary look-alike smiled bewitchingly. That was a smile Mary couldn't make. I didn't know that even if someone had the same face as someone else, their impression could change that much with a different smile.

Still smiling, the Mary look-alike spoke.

“It's something most people don't know, but—the world called Gensokyo is a Dream.”

“.....What do you mean?”

Marisa looked puzzled. If it were Mary or me, who were from the “outside,” it would be different, but for Marisa, who was an inhabitant, it was probably hard to understand. Actually, it was weird that the Mary look-alike knew that even though she was inside.

The Mary look-alike glanced at me, then quickly looked back at

Marisa. It looked like she was checking whether I knew.

“The world that was born from dreaming of storing things that have become fantasy, things that are being lost; that is the Dream called Gensokyo.”

“..... Which dream is that dream?”

The world that dreamt of a dream in a dream—Gensokyo.

The Mary look-alike didn't answer. She didn't stop her bewitching smile.

Not having a choice, Marisa changed her question.

“What does that and this incident have to do with each other?”

“It means that all dreams end at some point. It's just that that point is now. That's something nothing can be done about.”

“.....”

Did she understand,  
or didn't she?

Marisa returned the eight trigrams, folded her arms, and began to think. She was probably processing the information the Mary look-alike gave her. I, who knew from the beginning, observed without thinking. Marisa. The Mary look-alike who looked at me and Marisa.

The one who started talking was Marisa. She raised her face and questioned the Mary look-alike. ....Didn't she want to ask one thing?

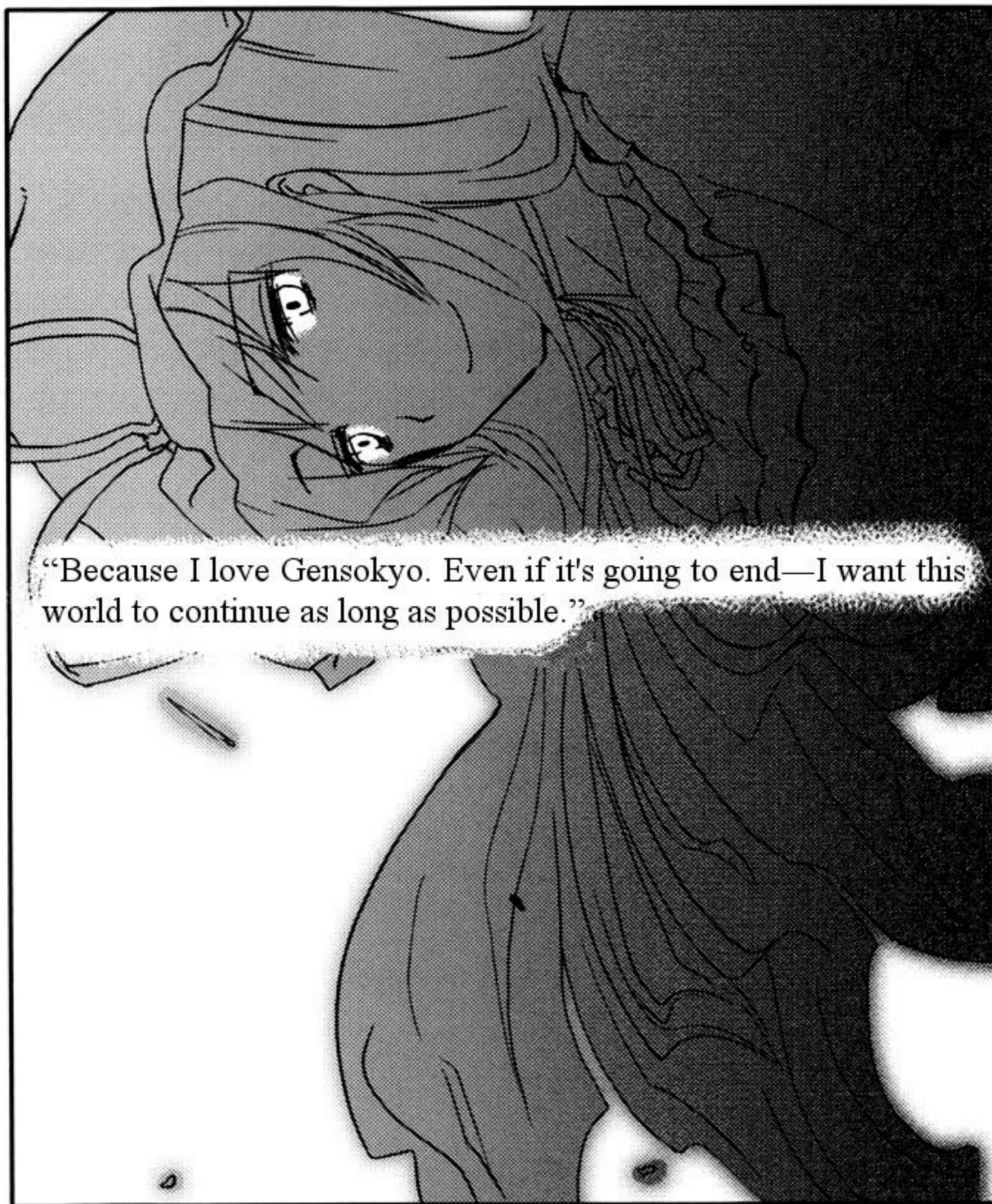
I didn't ask my boorish question. Without looking at me, Marisa spoke.

“If there's nothing that can be done, why are you acting? Until you were hurt that much.”

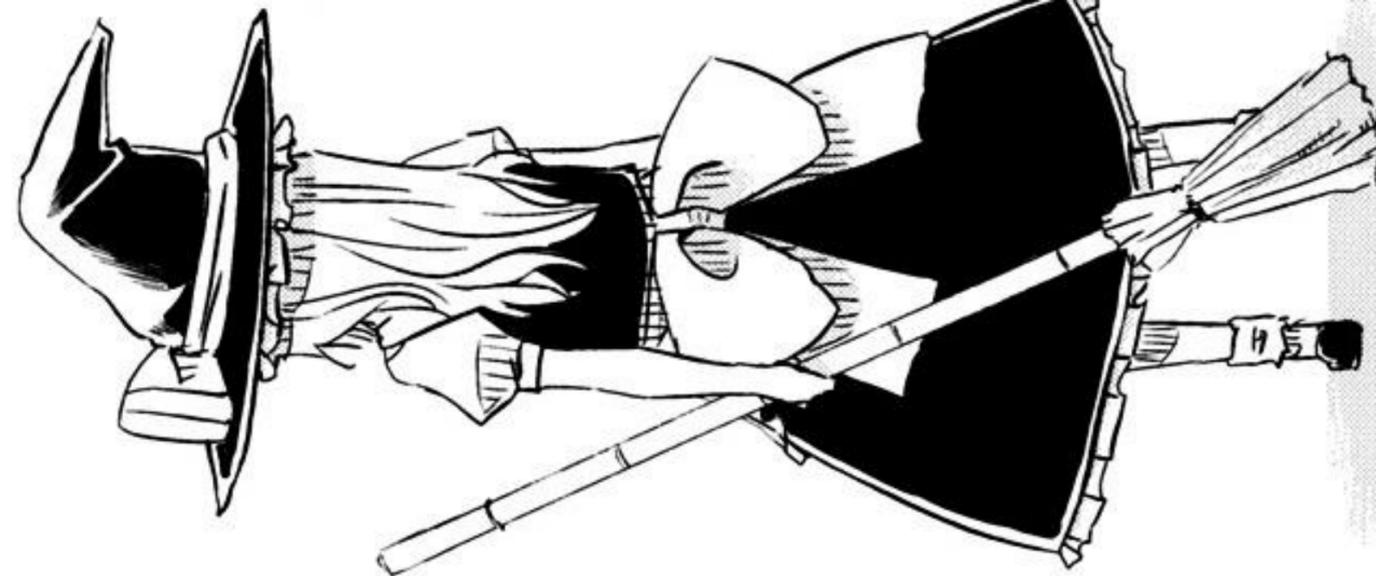
“I'll tell you, black and white witch.”

Her smile broadened.

It was a ghastly and—grand smile. It was also a kind smile.



“Because I love Gensokyo. Even if it's going to end—I want this world to continue as long as possible.”



What that smile meant, I didn't know. Marisa probably didn't know either. The only one who understood that smile was the one who made it.

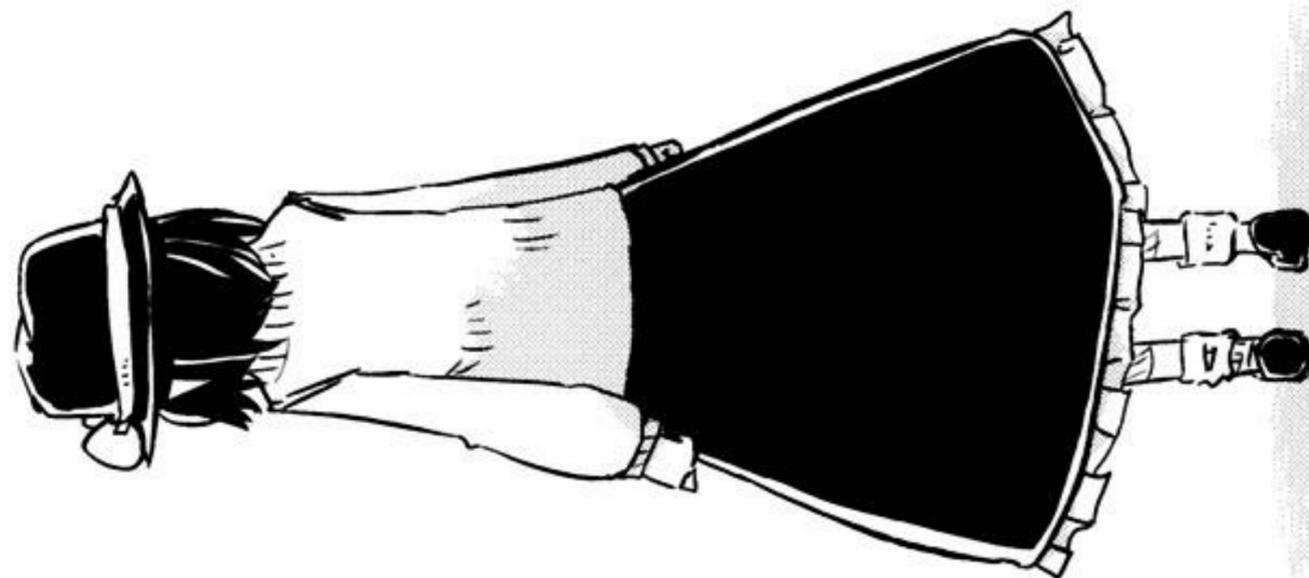
“\_\_\_\_\_”

Neither Marisa nor I could say anything. There wasn't a need to say anything. The Mary look-alike put all of her thoughts into those words and said them to us. There was nothing more we could ask her. No matter what we asked, it would be meaningless, and no matter what we said, it would probably be the same.

She was moving with her own will.

Then I,

we—



“Sorry for saying this after you told me, but—I only believe things I see with my own eyes.”

“Same here.”

Marisa pointed the tip of her broom, and behind her, (it was sad, but that was all I could do) I stood.

That was right.

If I would have been satisfied with the answer I was given, I wouldn't have been in the Hifuu club in the first place. I wouldn't have come to a place like this to go after her. Because I wouldn't be satisfied until I made sure myself. Because I didn't want to give up.

Even if there were a wall I couldn't go over—I would go over it.

Even if there were a back I couldn't reach—I would reach it.

Reaching it, I would walk next to her. One day, I would overtake her. It was a childish stubbornness like that. A small bit of pride.

But,

because I had that, I was human.

Because I had that, I was myself.

To say that I was myself—part of the Hifuu club, Usami Renko, with pride. Whatever the Mary look-alike's true intention was, there was no way I could accept it.

That was probably the same for Marisa, I thought. Even though I had just met her, the reason I could say that might be because she was like someone.

Who?

That's a secret.

Things like that weren't supposed to be said out loud.

That was why I didn't say it, and just smiled at the Mary look-alike. Marisa was also probably smiling like me.

Accepting that—

The Mary look-alike's smile also changed.

She looked like she was having fun.

As if she were saying, “That's why you're you.”

It was a smile I recognized.

“Aren't you actually—”

“In that case—see for yourself...”

Interrupting my words, the Mary look-alike spoke.

Those words somewhat

sounded kind

and was said with her voice.

“...How Gensokyo ends.”

Along with her words,

—There was the sound of something cracking.

That was the sound of a crack in the Mary look-alike's face,  
and—

The sound of the world with nothing in it cracking.

“Uwa, wa, uwa—”

Like an eggshell, the whole world started cracking. Once it started collapsing, the rest was like a chain reaction. Cracks ran across the darkness with nothing in it, and the lines quickly became gaps. From there, it started collapsing. Everything started collapsing. White started mixing with the world that had been all black. Without any relation to direction, the existence of the world that had been on the boundary continued to collapse.

I could start to see the world that was hidden behind it.

“Yukari—!”

Marisa yelled her name, the Mary look-alike faded, and Marisa's broom supported us, who lost a place to stand and were about to fall. Marisa was in front and I was behind. With the two of us, it floated, and while avoiding the falling fragments of the world, it floated, and

we saw it.

What had been on the other side.

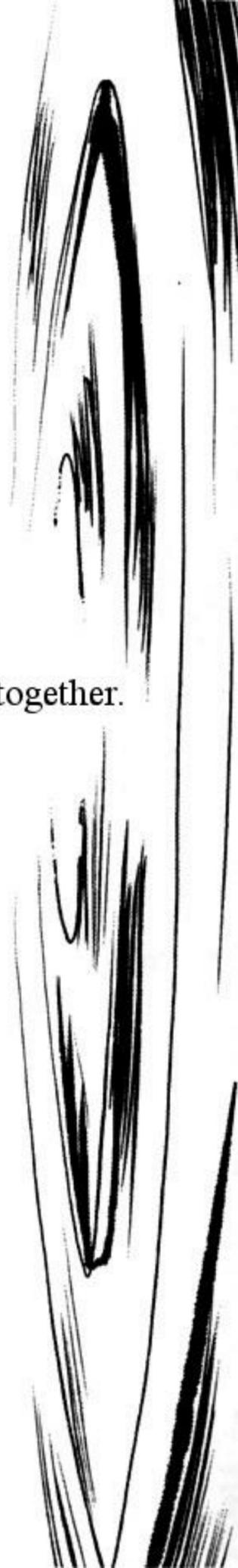
What had been hidden.

The sight of Gensokyo—ending rapidly!

“No way.....”

I empathized with Marisa. It was a scene that made one want to say that. I, who just came to Gensokyo felt like that; for Marisa, who had lived and grown up in it, it must have been hard to believe. No, if one had even a little common sense, it would have been hard for her to accept it.

—Everything was vague, absurd, and haphazardly mixed together.







What time it was—that had lost its meaning. The full moon was in the sky. However, the sky was light red, and in the evening sky, (It might have been the morning sky. Even though there was light, the sun wasn't anywhere) was the full moon. At the end of the sky, there was a large cherry blossom tree that was flowering, and instead of rain, cherry blossom petals fell. On top of the snow, red spider lilies and sun flowers were blooming together.

It had completely lost order.

If an optical illusion were made real, it might look something like this. Gensokyo was crazy enough when I came, but this was beyond that. The word “irreversible” suited it well.

Time was out of order.

The world was out of order.

No, that was wrong—this was  
—the boundaries were out of order?

The borders of seasons,  
the borders of time,

were out of order—no, it was as chaotic as if they had disappeared.

“.....Is this ordinary too?”

I questioned Marisa. If she nodded, I might have jumped off the broom and ran as fast as I could. The dark world had disappeared completely, and we were floating above a forest. It was the same forest from before—I think, but because the disorder increased, I wasn't sure.

Marisa shook her head, and

“No, this is.....” Stopping her words, she looked around, and

“.....What do you think we should do?”

“What we should do?”

It was troubling to be asked something like that. This was enough to be called a cataclysm. Was this something an individual could do something about? In the first place, was there someone who could cause something like this to occur?

I didn't continue talking. My voice faded, and my words disappeared into my confused thoughts.

If I didn't know what to do—there was only one thing.

I wasn't going to think about what I was going to do, but what I wanted to do.

“—I'll look for Mary.”

“How are you going to do that?”

“I'll look for that youkai that seemed to know where she was. It felt like she wasn't really answering our questions, but—it seemed like she knew everything.”

“I agree with that. If there really was nothing that that could be done, it wouldn't explain why she acted.”

Marisa lowered her shoulders. It was a strange gesture different from nodding. Without having the time to think about why she did that,

“But—”

“But, what?”

“Before that, it looks like we have to do something about that.”

Marisa pointed up. I looked up too, and

“Ugh.”

What was there was

a shrine maiden floating in the sky, and a girl falling down toward us from the sky.

(Chapter 3 • End)

## ■Intermission: The End of this World

There isn't a single human in Hakugyokurou.

There are those that are like humans. One that used to be human, and one who is half human. The phantom princess, Yuyuko, and the half ghost gardener, Youmu—other than them, there isn't anything that has the form of a human. The reason Hakugyokurou is still full of activity is that since it is the realm of the dead, it is always full of ghosts.

Active and busy ghosts.

Bright even though they didn't have forms, souls that lost the bonds of flesh and bones.

Their number was—visibly less right now. The boundary was collapsing. The majority of the ghosts, which were supposed to be in Hakugyokurou, crossed the boundary and went to the world below to have fun. Bringing them back was Youmu's role, but—right now, she was not fulfilling that role.

Because it wasn't the time to be doing that.

She thought that the incident was only occurring at Hakugyokurou. Like the spring incident, because the shrine maiden broke the boundary of the gate, they were flowing out; that was all she thought it was. She thought the reason her mistress, Yuyuko, didn't try to act because it wasn't an event worth acting for.

That was what she thought.

“—What is the meaning of this, Yuyuko-sama?”

In Hakugyokurou, where they were the only ones left, the last two faced each other. At her back was a cherry tree that would not bloom and tried to reach even higher from the end of the sky. A cherry tree that would never bloom, that was not supposed to bloom—the Saigyō Ayakashi stood alone in the full bloom of cherry trees.

All the cherry trees other than the Saigyō Ayakashi were in full bloom. Even though it was snowing below, as if mingling with the white of the snow, pink melted in the air.

Only the Saigyō Ayakashi was not blooming. That fact was what allowed Youmu keep the small amount of reason she had left. As long as it didn't bloom, what she feared the most would not occur. What Youmu truly feared was losing Saigyōji Yuyuko, and for her, as she was already a phantom, to “disappear,” the blossoming of the Saigyō Ayakashi was necessary.

That was why she was able to hold on to her reason.

But still—seeing Yuyuko, who, far from having to hold her reason, was not disturbed at all, actually made Youmu feel uneasy.

Saigyōji Yuyuko was not disturbed.

Yuyuko, who stood with the Saigyō Ayakashi at her back, was smiling sleepily at Youmu. The incident here and the incident below, even though she must have known about both of them, she was not trying to act.

During the oni incident and the eternal night incident, she was the first to act.

During the flower incident, she sat at the veranda and watched flowers for the whole day.

Youmu couldn't tell what her reason for acting like that was. Because she, who was half human and half ghost, was inexperienced, she could not tell what Yuyuko-sama's true intent was—that was what she thought. The reason she became involved with the flower incident was that she wished to know what Yuyuko's true intent was.

Saigyōji Yuyuko knew things she did not.

She did not try to tell her them. Find out everything by yourself, she said with her attitude.

Until now, that was okay.

But, as the incident developed to this point—she could not say that.

“Why—will you not act? No matter how anyone looks at it, it's obviously an incident.”

Keeping her tone even, but looking at her sternly, Youmu asked.

Because she was the mistress of Hakugyokurou, she would not get involved with the world below—a reason like that would not work. If that were the reason, she wouldn't have gotten involved with the other incidents. Yuyuko, for whom several hundred years passed since her death, was surprisingly human.

Even after death, she was living as a human.

From when she was a human—unchanged.

Universal.

Eternal.

“An incident?”

Yuyuko received Youmu's gaze directly and tilted her head. Putting her hand on her cheek, she said that she really didn't know with her behavior. All of her actions were refined, and it even looked like she was dancing with the movement of the flower petals.

“It is—an incident.”

She said it again.

Yuyuko tilted her head even more, and

“I don't know where any incident is occurring.”

“You can tell by looking!”

“There are more things in this world that you can't understand by looking, Youmu. Of course—in the world after that, it's the same.”

“\_\_\_\_\_”

She knew what she was trying to say. The half ghost's sword was a sword which cut things that could not be seen. It cut air, cut time, and cut souls. That was the culmination of her sword style.

But still—it only sounded like a sophism.

“In that case.....are you saying that this isn't an incident?”

“You don't call things that are supposed to occur, incidents. The occurrence of something that can't occur is what an incident is. That is what the shrine maiden acts for— Say Youmu, was Hakurei Reimu acting?”

“.....”

After being unable to speak,

“.....Marisa, was acting.”

“That girl is more human than anyone. Whether it's an incident or not, that girl will act— Youmu, do you know the reason why I don't stop you?”

“—Is it because I'm half human?”

“Yes.”

Saying that, Yuyuko closed her mouth. Then, she slowly moved her gaze from Youmu to the Saigyou Ayakashi, which was behind her.

Standing still, the large tree she looked up at was not flowering at all. Without even buds, it looked like a withered tree.

But, it didn't look like it was dead.

Like it was sleeping—to Youmu, that was how it looked.

Not looking at Youmu, but still looking at the Saigyou Ayakashi, Yuyuko spoke softly.

“You should do what you want to do—”

—Because that is what makes one human.

Her words were ended like that. Closing her mouth again, Yuyuko let her body lean against the Saigyou Ayakashi. Putting

her back on the trunk, she set her gaze on Youmu.

Youmu saw her face reflected in her eyes.

Hesitating—she looked like she was wavering. Her human half was disturbed.

She gently put her hand to her waist. Her two swords were there. A sword to cut ayakashi, and a sword to cut hesitation. If she thrust it through herself, would her hesitation disappear? Even though she knew that it was a ridiculous thought, she was not able to laugh it off.

With her hand still on her sword,

“I.....”

—What she wanted to do.

Thinking of only that deeply,

Konpaku Youmu answered in a voice that sounded like she killed her hesitation.

“I am—your servant and the gardener of Hakugyokurou.”

“Is that because that is your role?”

“No, it's not.”

She answered immediately.

She took her hand away from her sword. This was one thing she had to say with her own strength, her own voice, her own will.

Because even though it was half, she was human.

“It is because I want to do so. Because that is what I wish. To be by your side, to work for you—”

That was right.

She didn't have to check; that was what was deep inside. Why she went to solve the incident was—because that might end up bringing misfortune to Yuyuko. Not being taken by Yuyuko to solve an incident and deciding with her own will to solve it was for

that reason.

That was why

the difference—was there.

Youmu cared about Yuyuko, and

Saigyouji Yuyuko knew about her own death.

“—I see.”

A sad, lonely—but slightly happy, complicated smile. Youmu probably couldn't know what that meant.

And, the time to think about it was not given to her.

“Say, Youmu—”

What did she try to say?

What did she try to do?

Yuyuko drew away from the Saigyou Ayakashi, reached her hand out, and moved her foot to walk toward Youmu—but unable to finish her step, lost her strength.

She was like a puppet whose strings were severed, thought Youmu.

It looked like her strings were forcibly cut. Yuyuko, who had tried to move forward, swayed, her knees bent, and she fell backward. Her head hit the trunk of the Saigyou Ayakashi and made a sound that was unbelievably light.

She didn't get up.

She couldn't get up.

“———Yuyuko-sama?”

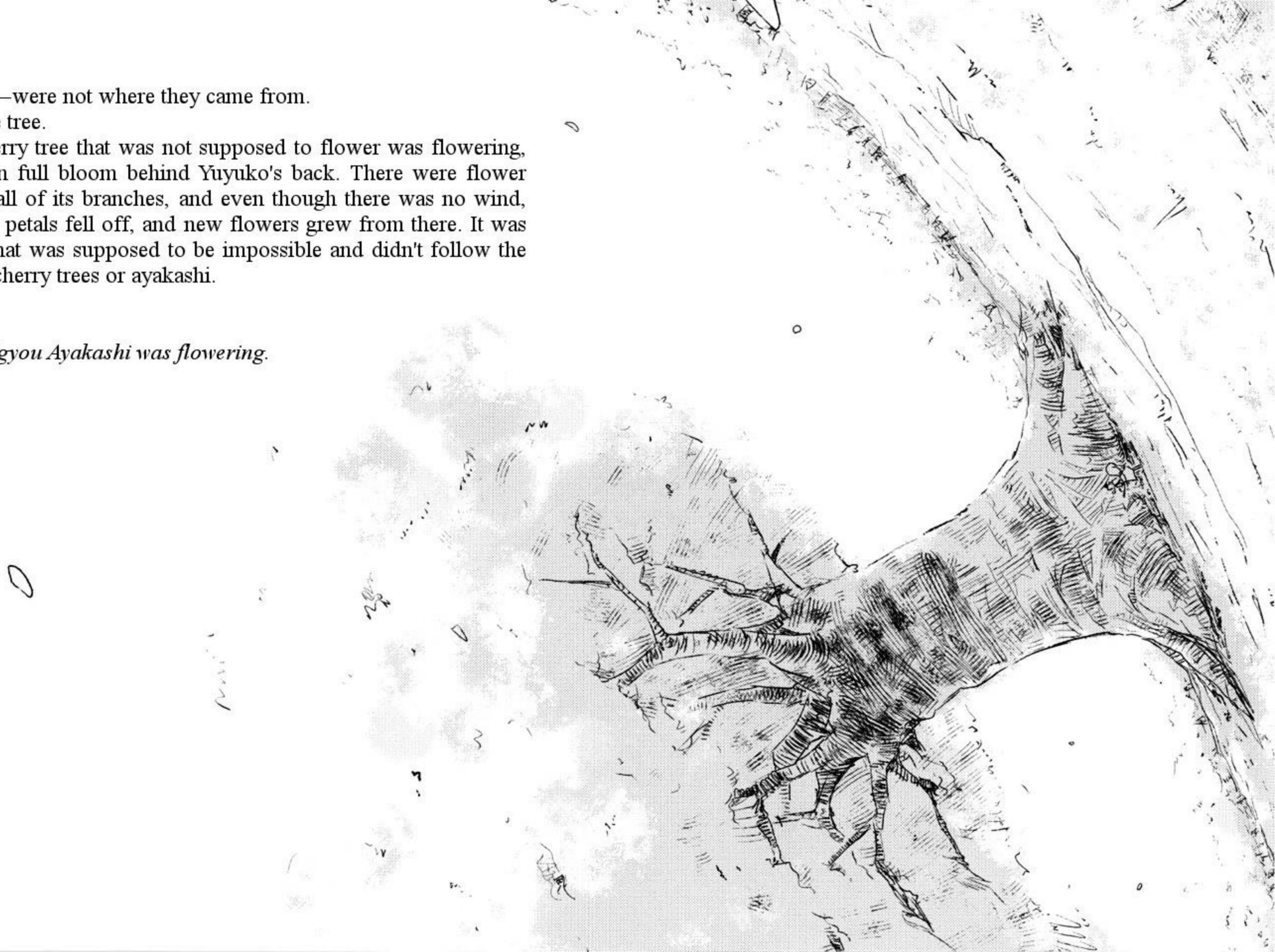
As if to bury Yuyuko after she fell, cherry blossom petals fluttered down. Fluttering, swaying, the rain of cherry blossoms increased in intensity as they fell. The flowering cherry

blossoms—were not where they came from.

Just one tree.

The cherry tree that was not supposed to flower was flowering, and was in full bloom behind Yuyuko's back. There were flower petals on all of its branches, and even though there was no wind, the flower petals fell off, and new flowers grew from there. It was a bloom that was supposed to be impossible and didn't follow the nature of cherry trees or ayakashi.

*The Saigyō Ayakashi was flowering.*





From the time she was born until the time she died,  
she thought she would be alone.  
No one would reach her back,  
no one would stand by her,  
released from everything, a floating existence.  
In order to protect Gensokyo,  
she should not be a human, but a shrine maiden;  
that was what she thought.  
When was it from?  
When she noticed the youkai who stood next to her.  
When she thought she was special.  
One day, her thoughts changed.  
Not as a shrine maiden, but as a human,  
she wanted to hold her hand and walk together with her.  
Even though she knew that it only led to an end.  
  
To be together with her; that was what she wished.

## Notes

- 22 one by two: "Hifuu" can mean "one two."
- 23 Niagara reversed: threw up
- 24 the something family: *The Inugami Family*

## Credits

Translation/Editing: kamyu  
Raw: Lunar972



Hakurei Reimu hadn't predicted Gensokyo's end—saying that would be a lie. In fact, she was the only one knew about it since she could remember, and accepted it on top of that.

Because nothing could be done about it.

It wasn't because she didn't have enough strength. It was because the system called Gensokyo had an end built into it from the beginning. Because Reimu was the one who regulated the Hakurei Border, she understood that fact.

Gensokyo was a paradise separated by the Hakurei Border. To put it another way, that boundary line was necessary, and when it collapsed, Gensokyo would end. Because if the inside and the outside became one, it would cease to be 'fantasy.' The dream world where things that were lost ended up was able to exist because it was separated.

A contradiction was born there.

The Hakurei Border had a hole in it. A small hole. A hole people sometimes wandered into, items flowed into, and things that had become fantasy in the outside world arrived at. Going through the hole from the outside to the inside, fantasy became reality. That was Gensokyo's origin and the way it existed.

Then—what would happen if that continued?

Items would stream in. People would stream in. The outside world would continue to change, and Gensokyo would continue to be filled. The difference created would become greater the more time passed. The way water fell from high places to low places, the things that were lost in the outside world would continue to flow into Gensokyo. There would be a problem with Gensokyo's space. Into the world that had a limit and was separated by a border—fantasy would continue to flow. The flow would not stop. In the outer world, humanity finally reached the moon. The way rockets required vast amounts of fuel, the many things that were cut off to reach the moon were forgotten, and all of them

became fantasy and flowed into Gensokyo. Fantasy would push against the tightly packed world and get in even if that meant forcing the hole to widen. As a result, the world would—

To explain it with words, that was all.

All that happened was what happened to everything.

*It was born, and it would die.*

That wasn't only for humans—even worlds weren't exceptions. As long as the world called Gensokyo was one that had been born, it would die one day.

It was possible to forcefully prevent that. The way the girl who drank the Hourai Elixir became unable to age or die, it was possible to stop the natural order of being born and dying. It would be simple. If fantasy was coming in through a hole, one just had to close it. Just as Yukari and the Hakurei shrine maiden closed man-made holes, one could close the hole that was naturally open, close all the holes—and truly isolate Gensokyo. If one did that, at least the things from the outside would not come in and rupture it.

But, if the laws of nature were twisted, a distortion would be created.

If all the holes were closed, Gensokyo would suffocate. A paradise in which nothing new was created and was completely closed off was the same as one that was dead. Simply repeating the same things, and while repeating them—it would slowly rot. That was one form of paradise, and at the same time, an end.

Dreams ended, and

a sleep that was not woken up from was the same as death.

Either way, an end would come. The difference would be whether it was a natural or a distorted one.

That was why the Hakurei shrine maidens protected the border for generations. Until the day it collapsed, while passing the role down generation after generation, together with the unchanging

great youkai of boundaries.

It was just that that time happened to be now.

It was just that it came in Hakurei Reimu's generation—that was all.

—Gensokyo accepted everything.

Even ends.

She knew that nothing could be done.

That was why—Reimu didn't do anything. Because she knew that it would be useless no matter what she did, she wanted to spend her time peacefully until it ended. Until the last moment, she wanted to be 'as she always was.' Together with the youkai who supported the Hakurei family for generations and loved Gensokyo more than anyone.

But,

that youkai was—trying to preserve the border.

Even though she probably knew that it was futile, even though the end would only come a little later if she did that—Yakumo Yukari, for some reason, was trying to maintain the border. No matter how powerful a youkai Yakumo Yukari was, she was facing a whole world. It was close to a miracle that she was even able to hold it.

But still, the end didn't stop. The 'borders' became vague, and as if to show that, Yakumo Yukari became worn out.

She couldn't watch.

At least in the end—in the short time before the end, she wanted to spend her time with her.

But still, Reimu did not stop her. Because that was what she wanted to do. Not stopping her, she just watched. The sight of

Gensokyo ending. While feeling the time she had left pass.

That was why

Reimu was angry at the human from the outside who came into Gensokyo by opening up the boundary.

Not as the system called the Hakurei shrine maiden who managed the border,

but as the human called Reimu who budded inside it.

For the small, small feeling she had for the youkai, who knew more about the truth of the world and loved Gensokyo, since she met her.



†

“.....Why?”

The moment before Usami Renko collided with the ground, Reimu saw a gap open and save her, and unknowingly murmured that. Marisa also went in, and the gap vanished like it melted into the air.

She became unable to see them.

At the same time—Gensokyo's collapse accelerated. What was barely being held back accelerated. No matter who looked at it, they would have thought that it couldn't be stopped.

It was a natural result and an inevitable process. Because Yakumo Yukari used her power for something else, the power preserving it became weaker. It seemed the future in which it was supposed to be like this sooner finally caught up to reality.

Every boundary mixed together and started losing meaning.

All of the meanings mixed, melted, and started vanishing.

A full moon rose from the end of the east, and cherry trees started flowering at the end of the sky. As the hole in the Hakurei Border got bigger, the borders inside it started to disappear. A world that lost its threshold couldn't remain a world. Like the black and white of a yin-yang orb mixing, the inside of the world changed—and began to vanish.

It was ending.

All of it.

Gensokyo—was ending.

“Why?”

Reimu repeated herself.

She didn't understand.

Why did Yukari—save that girl? Even though she must have known that the collapse of Gensokyo, which she was desperately trying to stop, would accelerate if she did something like that, did she have to save her even if it meant giving that up? Who was that? Why did she save her?

Why, why? That question swirled in her head, and finally led to a single question. Rather than a question, for Reimu, it was something that wasn't fear or jealousy.

—Was that someone more important than her?

“Why.....?”

The dark emotion ate at her insides. Part of her head hurt, and she felt like throwing up. She couldn't control the emotions that were in her heart. Being impartial to everything and maintaining the barrier—that was supposed to be the system called Hakurei.

The small heart that resided in that system cried out.

“It hurts.”

It said a desire that was like a cry.

Reimu wasn't able to answer that cry. She wasn't even able to listen to it, but she couldn't even cover her ears.

Was she acting as the Hakurei shrine maiden,

or was she acting as Reimu? It was not clear to even her.

“U-Uuu.....”

Gritting her teeth, she held down something that was trying to flow out of her. What she had to do; she tried to think only of that, but each time she did that, her face rose in her mind and disturbed it like noise.

Her conflicting selves shouted inside her.

The part of her that was the Hakurei shrine maiden spoke—“Don't act.” This isn't an incident. What is supposed to occur is occurring. You should sit at the shrine until the end and drink tea as a shrine maiden. If a human from the outside came in, send her back.

The part of her that was Reimu yelled— You must be stupid you should do what you want. Be direct; if you're going to worry about it, you should just tell her what you want to yourself. She's not different from Marisa, a human from the outside, or a boss in the way!

The part of her that said to go forward and the part of her that said to go back fought each other and balanced out. Therefore, she could not move. Staying still in the sky, she could only watch Gensokyo changing.

What she wanted to do,

what she had to do.

What she didn't want to do,

what she shouldn't do.

She couldn't even decide that.

She was envious of Marisa—part of Reimu thought that a little.

Kirisame Marisa. A human magician. A normal magician.

Her strength was—not that she didn't hesitate, but the strength of her will that let her go forward even while hesitating, and was something she didn't have.

Exactly how much effort Marisa put in until she gained that, how she felt after getting it, Reimu didn't know.

But still, from Reimu's point of view, that strength was her magic itself. While giving off a light that made her want to look away, with a force no one could stop, it was a strength that kept going further and further forward. Like the light of the moon and the stars that cut through the darkness of the night.

The strength of humans.

—That's something I don't know.

The Hakurei shrine maiden didn't know anything like that. Because she wasn't supposed to hesitate. Maintaining the border and solving incidents, she was a system that couldn't have enemies or allies. The ability to fly—an ability that was released from everything, floated, and was something that could not be bound.

It meant nothing interfered with her.

That was what being the Hakurei shrine maiden, who made the Hakurei Border, which made Gensokyo Gensokyo, and maintained it, meant. The rule that was hidden in danmaku play. She was a perfect existence that did not lose.

Not able to hesitate,

not permitted to hesitate,

so if she did hesitate—————

“—I'll kill you if you move.”

What cut her thoughts was not the voice, but the sword at her neck. There was one to the right of her neck, and another one near her left hand, with which she held her tamagushi.<sup>25</sup> The two swords came from behind her back.

Roukanken and Hakurouken.

A sword forged by an ayakashi, and a sword that cut hesitation. The wielder was unusually full of murderous intent. If she was that willing to kill, she probably could have killed me without saying anything, Reimu thought. Did she not do that because of her personality?

Without moving, Reimu answered her—Konaku Youmu.

“Not, 'You'll move if I kill you'?”

“—Where did that gap youkai go?”

Youmu didn't answer her reply, which was mixed with irony. Some strength went into the hand holding the sword, and the sword at her neck cut a layer of her skin.

With a slight pain, red blood flowed in a line.

“Do you have business with Yukari?”

“Don't play dumb.”

Her voice was suppressed. With a voice that sounded like she was forcefully holding down her feelings, which were about to explode, Youmu spoke.

“An incident like this—what other than that could cause it? Making the Saigyou Ayakashi flower.”

“—I get it. So that's why you're rushing.”

The Saigyou Ayakashi.

Reimu was astonished that it had gotten so far. A cherry tree that wasn't supposed to flower. A cherry tree that shouldn't flower. If it was flowering—the mistress who was more important to Youmu than her life, Yuyuko, probably wasn't all right.

Not only the boundary between the world of the living and the realm of the dead, but even its border was starting to disappear.

In that case, was the moon that hung in the sky the real moon? She felt like laughing at how helpless it was— Until now, plenty of youkai had tried to



cause incidents, but all of them were happening at once. There was no doubt that similar things were happening in other places.

The fairies that were part of nature might not it was even an incident, though.

“.....How is that and this tsujigiri related?”

“Because you two are the most suspicious.”

You two, huh?

Reimu felt a little happy hearing that, and smiled at herself for feeling that way. They were suspicious. She was the one who got in Youmu's way during the spring incident, and during the eternal night, she stopped the night with Yukari. It couldn't be helped that they were suspected—

Again, a sharp pain.

Not from her neck, but from her left arm.

“—Don't smile.”

“.....”

Without moving her head, she looked at her left arm. At the end of her gaze, she saw that the area around her elbow had been cut. There was no wound and blood wasn't flowing, but pain remained there like an illusion. She didn't see the sword move. Instead of pain, she felt surprise at the fact that Youmu cut her from behind.

At the same time,

at that fact—she felt a dark happiness.

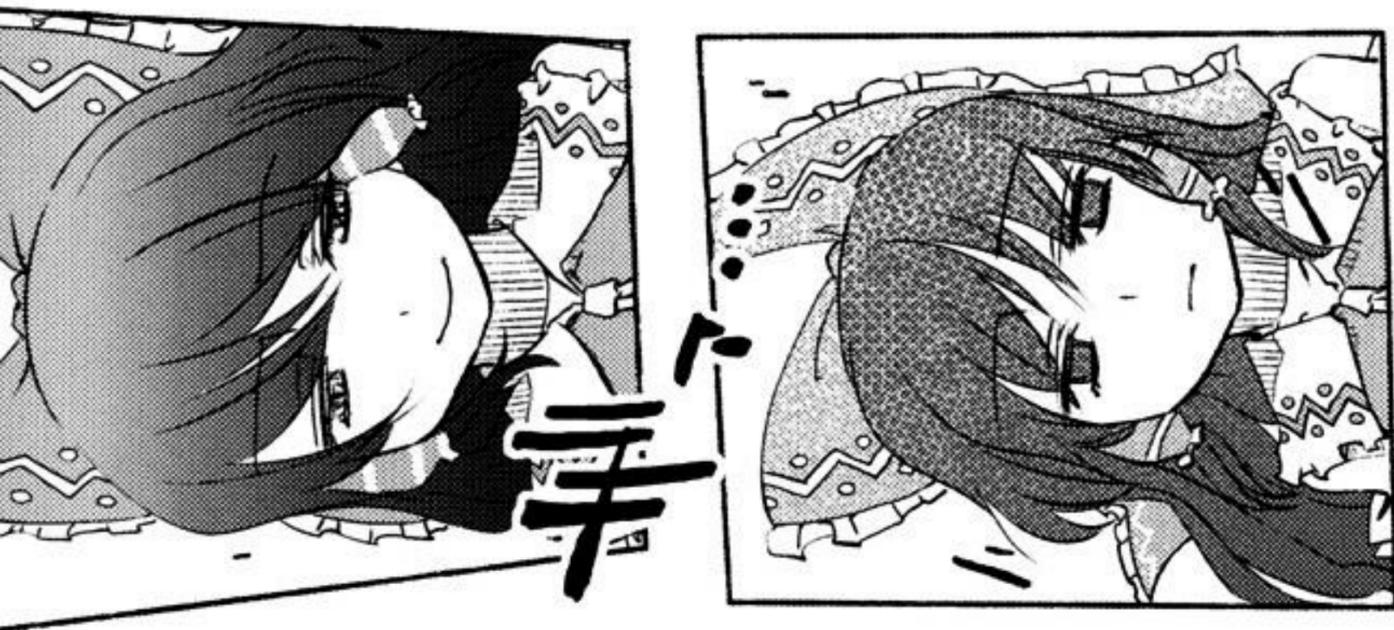
—Ah.

Reimu was thankful that Youmu was serious. If she would face her seriously as an 'enemy'—she didn't have to worry. If she would face her as an enemy, she just had to defeat her as an enemy. There was no need to distress. Yakumo Yukari was acting to maintain Gensokyo, so Konpaku Youmu, who was trying to get in the way of that, was someone she could stop as the Hakurei shrine maiden. There was no need to tell her the truth; there was no reason to convince her.

Like always, she just had to defeat her.



The cause supported how she felt. She stopped worrying. Her emotions stopped. The pain in her arm and neck disappeared. Her smile disappeared, and an expression like a Noh mask's rose to Reimu's face.



Perhaps she realized that her presence changed. Youmu swung her sword. She aimed at her left wrist.

There was no holding back.

Youmu had lost her calm because of the incident that involved her mistress, and—Reimu didn't do that to begin with.

“—*Fantasy Heaven.*”

Not holding back, she also had no mercy.

It was an attack that involved eight yin-yang orbs that came from behind her back and the one hundred ninety two seals that came from them. If it weren't at point blank range, even if she couldn't win, she might have been able to escape it. But, as the activation and the impact happened at the same time, she couldn't avoid it, and as Reimu

was serious—there was no way she could guard against it. The first bullet took Youmu's consciousness, and the other bullets were absorbed by Youmu's unconscious body. At the same time her consciousness was brought back by the pain, she was made unconscious— In one second, that was repeated two hundred and fifty six times, in the second second, she let go of her swords, and

at the same time three seconds passed, Youmu's battered body fell.

She had lost consciousness. Unable to float or fly, she fell down head first. Even though there was a forest below, it wasn't a height from which she could be saved. The hand of gravity grasped Youmu and accelerated toward the ground.

Reimu wasn't looking.

Without even taking a glance, she only pointed her finger down, and “.....”

Just as she was going to release danmaku, she moved slightly. It was a light movement like a pendulum's. With just that—Reimu avoided the light that was released from below her. The ray of gold light disappeared into the sky.

It was not Konpaku Youmu's danmaku.

After avoiding the beam, Reimu finally looked down. Youmu, who was supposed to have crashed into the ground, had stopped at a height that was quite far from the ground. Not by her own power. She didn't shoot danmaku that would allow her to regain her consciousness quickly. Still unconscious, and being held—Youmu was in the sky.

The one who was holding her was Kirisame Marisa.

Since one more person went on when there were already two people on it, there was more weight on the broom than it could handle, and it wavered. But still, even while wavering, Marisa clearly looked at her.

Like she was glaring at her.

Like she was challenging her.

Her gold eyes looked at her without wavering.

“—Marisa.”

Calling her name required a little strength.

What would she say? The part of her that was Reimu wandered. Would she say, “That's too much”? Would she say, “Why did you do this?” How should she answer those questions? It didn't seem like the answer would appear even if she thought about it.

And, Marisa didn't choose any of them.

Still looking at Reimu,

“Now—let's continue, Reimu.”

Without hesitating, she raised the Hakkerō with her right hand.

“——”

She couldn't believe it.

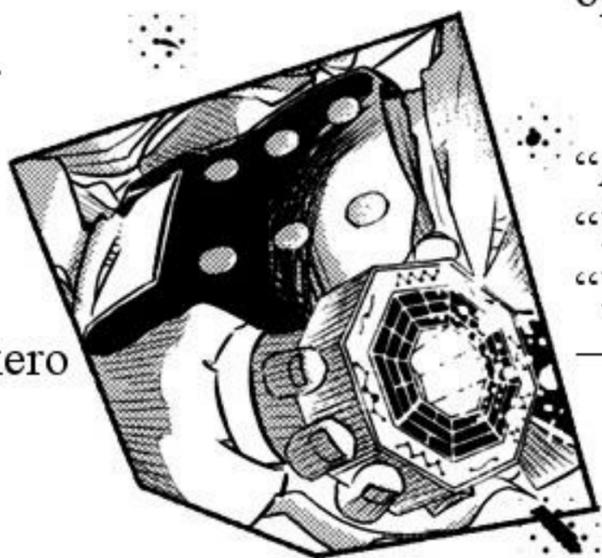
She didn't think she would say something like that. Continue. Marisa said they should engage in danmaku play. Even though the time for that had already passed, even though there was no meaning in doing that, no time for that, Marisa said, 'Let's do what we always do.'

She was angry.

Seeing her smiling without knowing anything— She even felt murderous intent toward her.

“Wh— You're not going to run, Marisa?”

Renko, who sat behind her, said that in a hurry, but Marisa didn't answer her. After passing Youmu's limp body to Renko, she grasped the broom with her left hand.



“Run? The only thing in my dictionary is temporary retreat.”

While she said that, the broom moved gently—she thought she would run, but she was wrong. The broom went to an opening in the forest. It was near Kourindou, and she gently put down Renko and Youmu, who couldn't fight. After saying something, Marisa came back up again.

If she wanted to, she could have done it at any time.

She could have shot Marisa, whose guard was full of openings, or ignored her and went to where Renko was.

The reason she didn't do that— What was it?

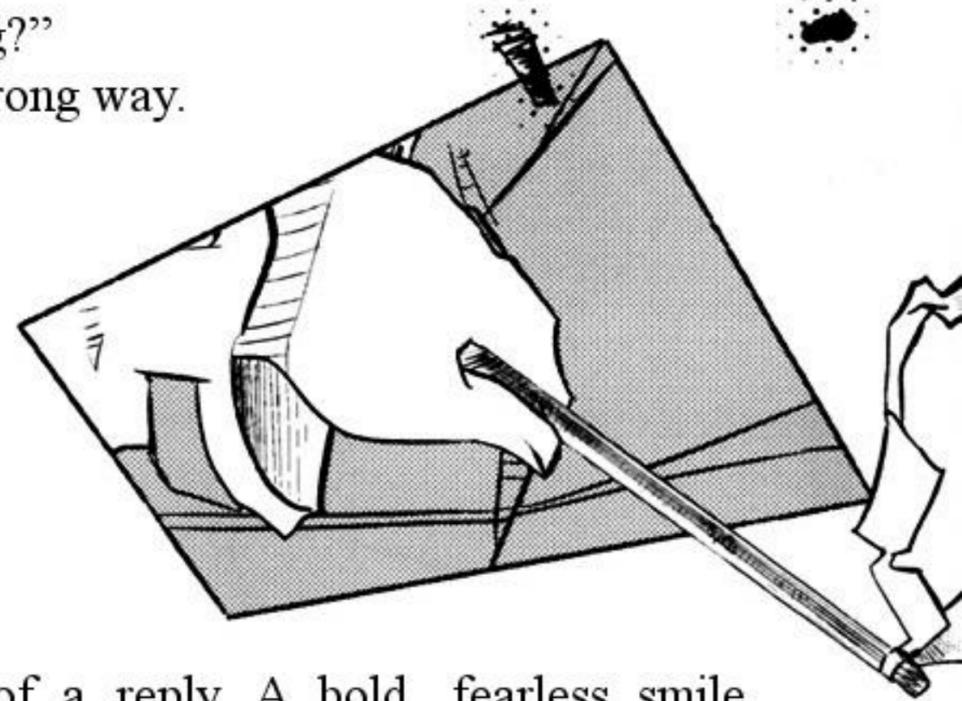
Without knowing, Reimu pointed the tamagushi at Marisa.

“Are you serious?”

“Does it look like I'm joking?”

“It looks like I said it the wrong way.

—Are you sane?”

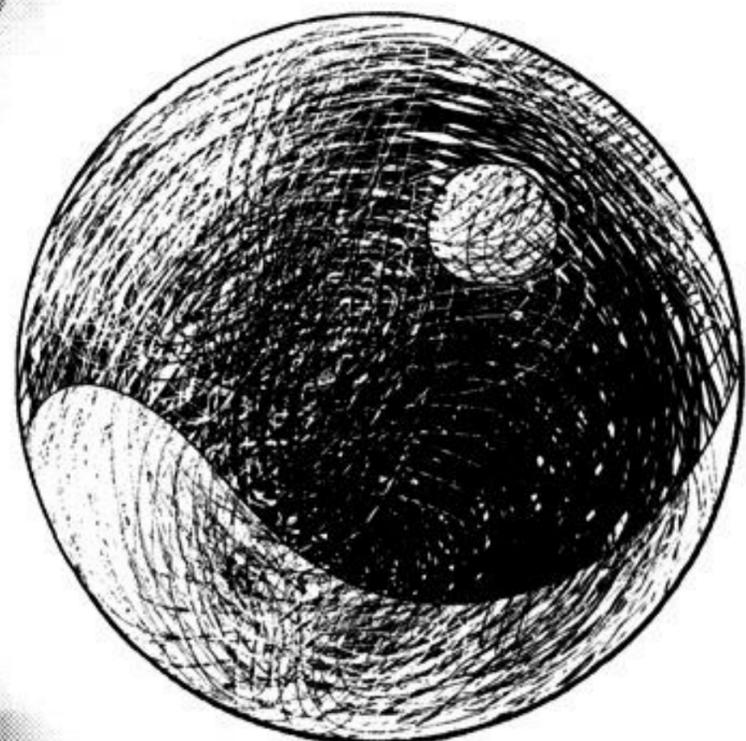


A smile came instead of a reply. A bold, fearless smile. Making a smile that looked like she was having the time of her life, Marisa pointed the Hakkerō in her right hand at her. Her left hand held her broom, and her eyes looked at her intently.

She beared wanting to look away.

“I decided to be on Hifuu's side. If you want to get to her, you have to go past my corpse.”





".....Do you know what you're doing?"

"Not at all," Marisa shook her head while still smiling brightly, "but—I know what I want to do. I'll help her out, and I'll stop you from going out of control. I'm just going to do what I want."

"You—"

With those words, the emotions that were suppressed with one thin layer

"—don't know anything!"

burst.

They couldn't be stopped anymore.

She swung the tamagushi in her right hand. Danmaku were created in its path, and with them, the yin-yang orbs started rotating. The amulets started flying slowly in ellipses, and the seals spread out with the exact opposite speed. Red and white light filled the space between her and Marisa.

Marisa hadn't stayed still either. With the movement of Reimu's hand, she changed her location. Watching the danmaku that kept on spreading, she kept searching for places where she could go through them. It didn't seem like she was going to use a spell card— Instead, several amulets spread out from her hand, and

she saw the light of stars.

"That's why you can say things like that easily!"

Reimu shot at the light. A three way shot. Straight forward danmaku that were aimed at the target and her escape routes. All of them were decoys, and the main one was a guided shot that hid in the light of the moon and was descending quickly. It was a three dimensional aim.



She didn't think it would hit, and as she expected, it didn't.

She didn't even move that much. Just by moving her body on top of the broom, Marisa avoided all the bullets. The bullets that were intended to hit her after she moved passed by vainly, and the guided shot grazed the amulets and made a distorted sound.

"Yeah, I don't know!"

She shot back. Three rays of light—without guidance or manipulation, the straight light proceeded with only speed to rely on. The seals interrupted two of them, Reimu avoided the last ray, and

inside the light, there were pieces of stars.

"—What's wrong with not knowing!?"

The pieces of stars, which hid in the bright light, changed their direction with the movement of Marisa's hand.

The star shot was aimed at where she would end up after moving.

She didn't hesitate.

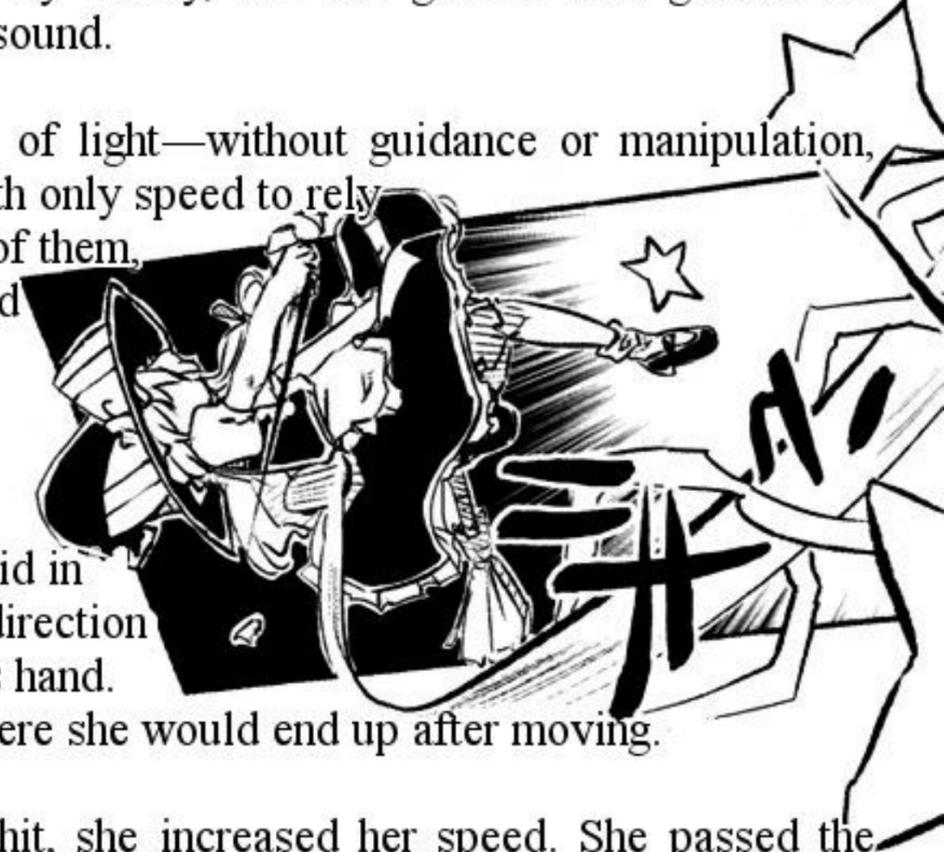
Without stopping or getting hit, she increased her speed. She passed the place Marisa had aimed at faster than Marisa had expected, and turned around to pass the stars. The danmaku didn't even touch her shadow. Without even stopping to take a breath, she shot rolled up seals like needles, but Marisa had already changed her location.

—Above.

She reacted with only her instinct. She raised her arms up like a conductor. Following her motion, the line of seals that had been released rose up. One line from the right, two lines from the left. While making a spiral, they went up to where Marisa was supposed to be.

She felt something.

It was light—not the feeling of hitting Marisa's body, but destroying a star





amulet. The moment she realized that she didn't hit her, Reimu lowered her body and flew straight down. A moment later, stars poured down from above, and without them catching up, she flew down until she almost hit the ground, and changing her trajectory, she flew to the side. The stars, which could not turn in time, stuck into the ground, and she avoided the falling light that had been mixed with the stars with her instinct.

She didn't think about whether they would hit her or not. Shooting seals with machine-like precision, she aimed at the place she determined Marisa would be from them.

They didn't hit.

"If you don't know—don't stick your neck in!"

She shouted that to figure out where she was. Taking seals out of her sleeve, she gripped them so she could fire them at any time.

"Then tell me what it means that Gensokyo will end!"

She shot the seals before answering. Aiming at the place the voice came from and the places she could escape from there, she shot enough seals to cover those places. She didn't have anywhere to run—she didn't, but she only heard her say "Uwa-!" and didn't feel anything. Understanding that she avoided it with just her spirit, she raised her body and floated up.

Her enemy wasn't only Marisa.

It was time itself.

Even though she didn't even have the time to be engaged in danmaku play, her opponent was Marisa of all people.

"It was decided to be that way from the start!"

She flew up. Leaving behind the stars that couldn't keep up with her sudden change in direction, she narrowly



avoided the light and flew straight up. The danmaku that flew straight were only points to her. She only adjusted her trajectory a little and spent the rest of her energy on speed. Marisa grew in size in the blink of an eye, and

"Who decided!?"



The first one to attack was Marisa. While shouting, she took the broom she was on in midair and swung it at her. Reimu turned halfway and kicked the broom that came from above. The broom and her foot repelled each other, her posture collapsed, and using that, she swung the tamagushi to the side; Marisa blocked it with the Hakkeru, she tried to shoot the seals in her left hand at close range, and she was hit with the broom.

They were close enough to breathe on each other.

They were so close she wasn't able to bring in the danmaku she released.

"Who decided that!?"

"It was that way from the start! From the beginning, when Gensokyo was born! It was fated to turn out this way!"

"Then!"

Whoosh.

Moving her face closer—while headbutting her as a result, Marisa shouted back.



*"Who made  
Gensokyo!?"*





†

Watching.  
Someone was watching.  
Everyone was watching.  
The red-white shrine maiden,  
the black-white magician,  
their danmaku play.  
They were listening to  
the exchange of questions.

“You speak of fate  
—red shrine maiden?”  
The scarlet devil watched.  
The scarlet devil listened.  
The scarlet devil smiled.  
She smiled at humans.

“Speak? Deceive? Or form?”<sup>26</sup>

The seven day magician asked.  
The devil smiled and did not answer.  
The end of the end of Gensokyo— In the depths  
of the scarlet mansion, a devil that drank blood  
smiled. At the last battle of Gensokyo. At the last  
incident of Gensokyo. At the end of Gensokyo, at its  
last festival.

She smiled like she was having fun.  
“Who.....made it? Who made it?”



The maid who was holding a watch tilted her head. The hands of the watch kept spinning around. The hour hand and the minute hand spun round and round. Because they were spinning round and round the same place, time hadn't gone forward one step. It wasn't different from being still.

“Everyone made it. Everyone desired it.”

The scarlet devil answered. As a mistress.  
In her hand was red black tea. The girl drank the blood in the wine glass and threw the empty glass.

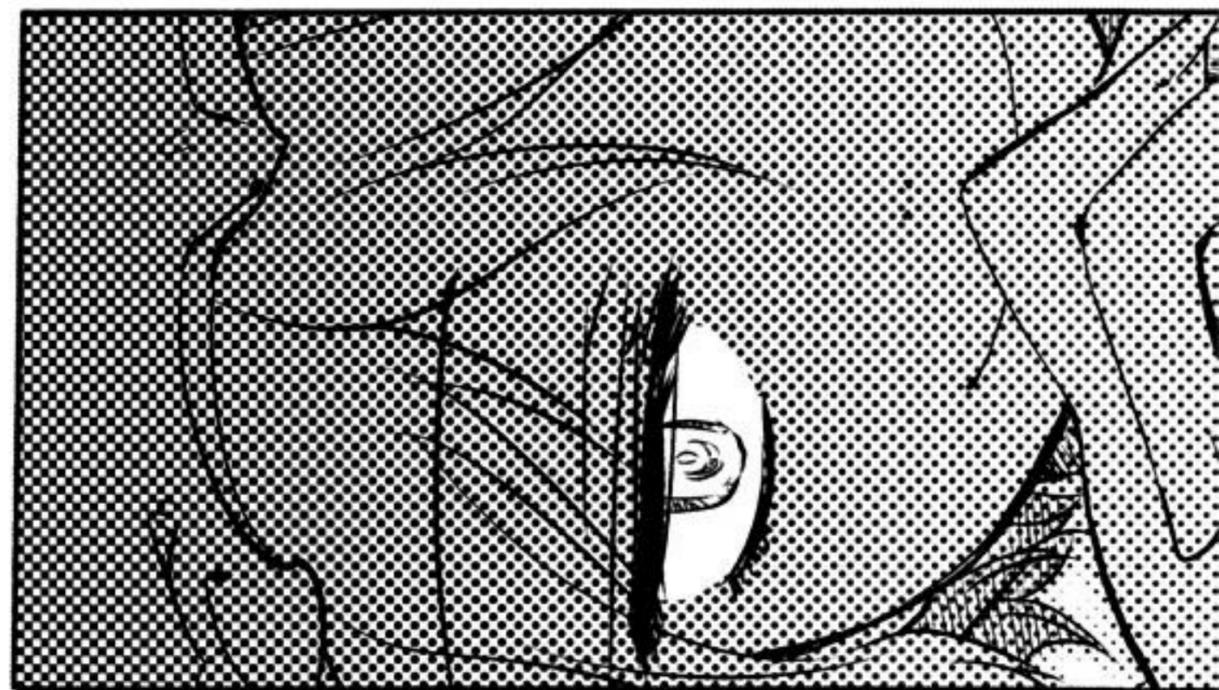
The glass that fell broke and—  
an unbroken glass was in her hand.

“Did you desire it too?”

The witch asked. The devil smiled.

“I desired it too. I desired it.

At the end of the end of the East,  
seeking a final place.”

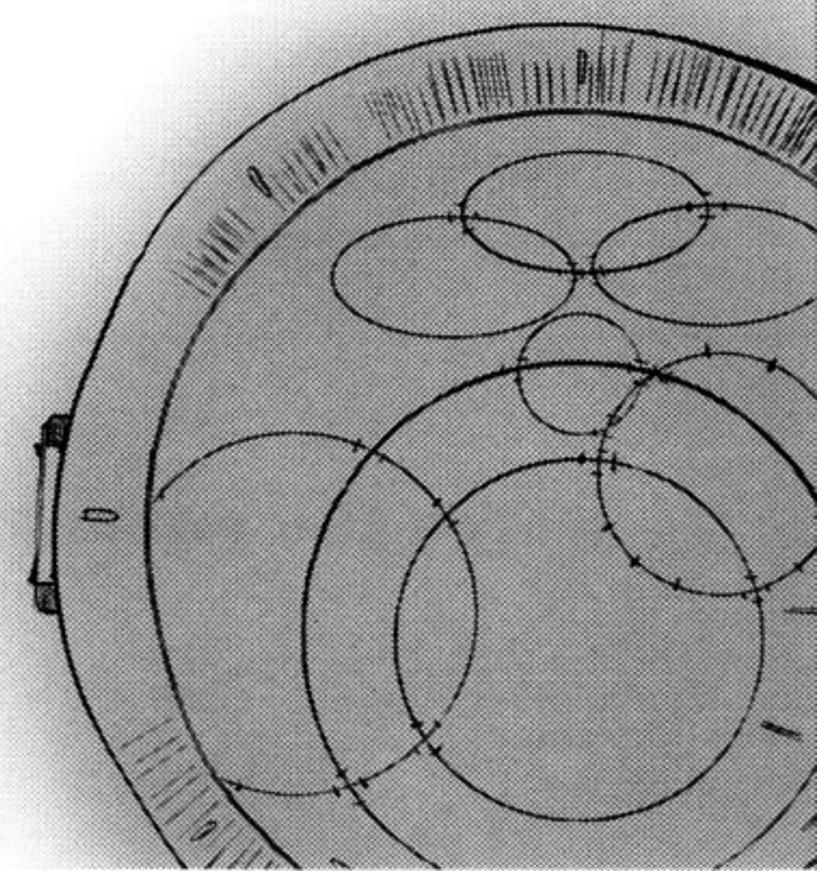




The maid who held the watch closed the lid of the pocket watch. Spinning round and round, time was locked in darkness.

“I will be here.  
Izayoi Sakuya, who started here,  
will also end here.”

†



“Even though you knew that it would end?”

The witch asked. The devil smiled.

“Even though I knew that it would end. If it didn't end, it wouldn't be fate.”

The devil smiled.

The devil smiled.

While smiling, the devil asked.

“But—what will you do?

You, who are the only human.”

The devil looked while smiling.

At the only human.

The witch looked without smiling.

At the only human.

The devil's sister, the little devil, and the gatekeeper looked at the only human.

†

“The first Hakurei shrine maiden!”

Her right hand writhed. She forcefully produced danmaku. Not bringing them in from the outside, she created danmaku in the small gap between them. It was the point blank shot she used against Youmu.

She was read. Using her broom as a fulcrum, she went between her legs and went to her back. Her clothes fluttered in the wind, and the bullets she created flowed vainly to the distance, hit flower fairies, and created a chain of small explosions.

Before she knew it, they had been surrounded at a distance.

Fairies, ghosts, weak youkai.

Perhaps because they feared getting involved, they did not come close. But still, they did not go away, and making a ring around them with a certain distance between them, they looked at Reimu and Marisa, who continued their danmaku play. They did not look away for a second. Looking somewhat like they were having fun, somewhat being happy, looking at something bright—those that lived in Gensokyo watched the two's danmaku play.

The red-white shrine maiden and  
the black-white magician.

They were watching the two girls' way of life.

“This isn't—a show!”

While shouting, she tried to release danmaku behind her, but that act was delayed by her shouting. Marisa, who had went between her legs, moved faster than the danmaku were created. She felt the light feeling of her back being pressed. She had pressed her back right against hers— Without a gap, she wasn't able to create bullets.

With her back still against her, Marisa shouted.

“I don't know who that is!”

“! !? Then, Yakumo Yukari! The great youkai who was around before the Hakurei Border was created! One who symbolizes Gensokyo!”

“Like you!?”

“.....!! .....That's right!”

She was taken aback by having something she didn't expect said to her, and as if it was waiting for that, a star shot came at her. Like a shooting star, the danmaku Marisa released turned in the sky.

She thought about running, dodging.

But the strength that came from the back against her did not let her choose that. Excluding the option of evading in her mind, she put strength into her back and swung her arms while pushing Marisa back. The seals that came from her right sleeve wrapped around the group of stars, after which they looked like mummies, and she hit them with the tamagushi in her left hand.

Like flower fairies, the star bullets created a chain of explosions—from beyond those explosions, light burst. It was the light of a star bursting.

Having her sight filled with light, she stopped moving,  
but Marisa, who was facing the other way, didn't stop.

“Yukari said—that this world is a Dream!”

While talking, she hit her with the back of her head.

There was a “thud.”

“.....-.....!”

She suppressed her voice, which almost came out. It hurt—it hurt, but Marisa, who also hit the back of her head, should have been hurt too, and she heard an “Ow” said in a teary voice behind her.

She didn't have to do a self-destructive move like that—part of her was astounded, but it wasn't the time to say that, and more than that, there was a word that caught her attention.

“A dream!?”

“That's right! I don't know if it's a world someone dreamt of—or if someone's having a dream, though! She said Gensokyo was a dream!”

Having a dream, and dreaming of something.

Reimu processed the two in her mind. They used the same word, but had different meanings.

If this world was a dream,  
was it a dream someone who was sleeping was having?

Or was it a paradise someone 'dreamed of'—a dream of having the world be some way, having a certain kind of world, a world in which lost things stayed.

Whichever one it was, Reimu thought it correctly expressed Gensokyo in one way.

Because this was Gensokyo.

A place of fantasy. A dreamlike paradise.

A place that seemed like it could only exist in a dream.

A world of things that were lost.

A world for things that were being lost.

A dream world.

And dreams—ended one day.

Dreams that came true became reality.



†

Watching.

Someone was watching.

Everyone was watching.

The red-white shrine maiden and the black-white magician's danmaku play.

They listened to the questions they asked each other.

The phantom of spring was watching.

The phantom of spring was listening.

The phantom of spring was smiling.

She smiled faintly at her dying self.

It was a funny story— She was already dead. Even though she was dead, she tried to revive, and each time she tried to revive, she started dying. Life and death overlapped for her.

The end of the end of Gensokyo, at the realm of the dead at the end of the sky, below a cherry tree. Unable to stand, she was leaning against the great tree and sitting.

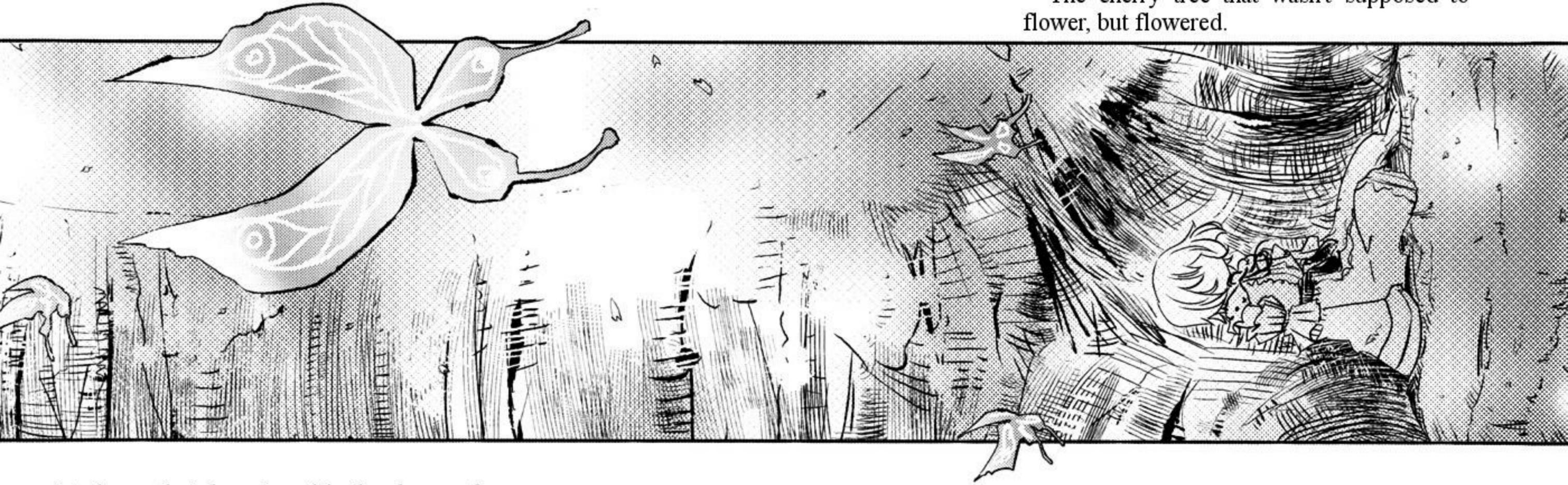
The youkai cherry tree in full bloom.

Spreading her arms and legs, the phantom sat and gazed at the cherry tree.

The cherry tree that buried her corpse.

The cherry tree that buried her memories.

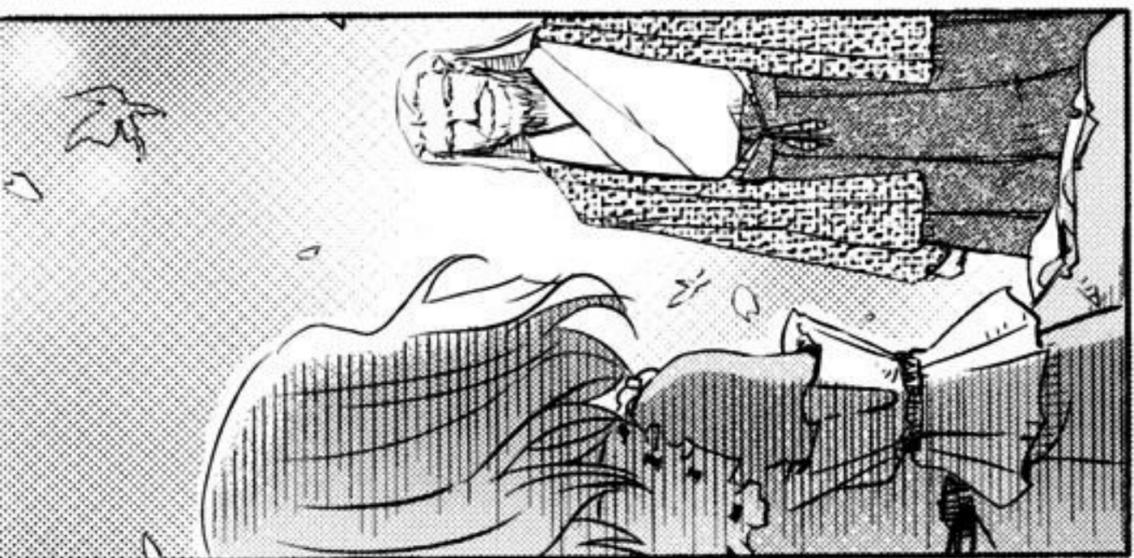
The cherry tree that wasn't supposed to flower, but flowered.



“A dream that doesn't end is the dream of the butterfly—”

“The dream of the butterfly is the dream of the dead. A dream that isn't woken from is death.”

“But once you wake up—the dream dies.”



“Choosing death and gaining life, or choosing life and gaining death—”

Words with no one to answer them.

Words with no one to hear them.

The half ghost wasn't here.

Because the gardener she loved was still half alive.

All of her wasn't taken.

That was why, the one who answered was someone else.

“You killed death and gained life.”

The white elder answered.

The gardener who was supposed to have gone was standing next to her.

“Yes.”

The phantom princess smiled.

From the bottom of her heart, like she was happy.

“Killing the part of me that was alive, the part of me that was dead lived.”

The phantom smiled.

The phantom smiled.

While smiling, the phantom spoke.



“The one who dreams the dream—  
which part will live?”

†

“If this! Is someone's dream! A world someone dreamt of!”

Throwing her body forward while shouting, Reimu kicked Marisa's back. There was no power in the attack since it was made from a bad position—but Marisa's body was pushed away, and she shot danmaku at her back.

The seals that were released in the air converged toward a single point; Marisa. She couldn't dodge them, but she could escape. Knowing that it was a trap, but not having any way to live but going into it, Marisa flew straight down. Her trajectory embodied descent. Like Reimu before, she pulled her broom up before hitting the ground, raised her body, and

from directly under her, seals flew up.

“.....-!?”

The seals she set while she was flying along the ground came at Marisa from her blind spot with a timing that made it unavoidable.

“.....!!”

But, Marisa avoided it with an unbelievable motion. She avoided the danmaku forcefully, but as payment for overdoing it, she lost her balance and collided with the ground. Unable to stop her momentum, she bounced off the ground and rolled, and stopped moving with the fourth bounce.

She fell face down on the ground and—after that, didn't move.

Reimu spoke to Marisa, who was still on the ground.

“What are you saying—that is? What are you saying will change with that?”

Marisa didn't answer.

Marisa didn't move.

Without letting her guard down, releasing seals, Reimu slowly descended. Marisa didn't release danmaku, and without releasing any amulets, her broom was on the ground away from her hand. Confirming that, she went closer to her unmoving back and spoke.

“Whatever the cause is, however the world was made, it won't change the fact that Gensokyo will end. Whether it's a dream or reality—has nothing to do with those of us who live there. Everything was decided from the start. A world that continues for eternity isn't different from a world that's dead. This is something that can't be helped.”

“Then,”

Her answer came while she was still face down.

Marisa didn't get up. That was why Reimu didn't know what expression she had on her face. Still on the ground, Marisa continued in a voice that was hard to hear.

“why are you playing with danmaku?”

“——”

“.....If nothing can be done, you should go back and make tea or something. What are you doing here, Reimu? You're contradicting yourself.”

“.....Tha-t's—”

She didn't want to say it. Having the feelings even she hadn't processed pointed out, strength left Reimu's body.

As if she calculated that moment,

“I!”

Marisa shouted loudly. In surprise, her body froze at the loudness of the voice—and having aimed for that moment, four rays of light pierced Reimu's body.

Shoot the Moon  
Moon piercing flash.

“Ah—”

Marisa wasn't holding anything. That light didn't come from Marisa. Frozen, Reimu saw. Where she fell to the ground and bounced four times, amulets were buried—and light shot out of them!

Without having the time to evade, she was hit. Her body started falling down, and in contrast, Marisa stood up.

She was covered in dirt and was ragged. But, her eyes were fixed on Reimu.

Looking up at Reimu as she fell, Marisa spoke.

“What I want to hear isn't that kind of reasoning—but how you really feel.”



†

Watching.

Someone was watching. Everyone was watching.

The red-white shrine maiden, the black-white witch,

their way of living.

“We were denied, weren't we?”

The princess of the moon was watching.

The princess of the moon was listening.

The princess of the moon was smiling.

She was smiling at lives with limits.

“Eternity means continuing to remain the same way.

Without change, cessation is equivalent to death.”

The doctor of the moon spoke. The princess of the moon smiled and nodded.

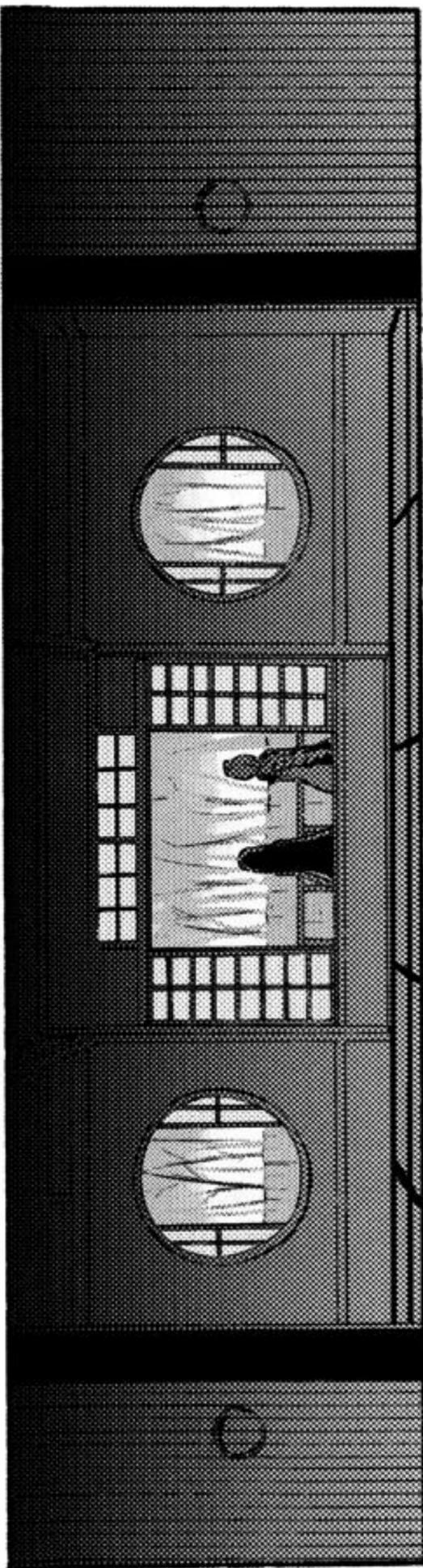
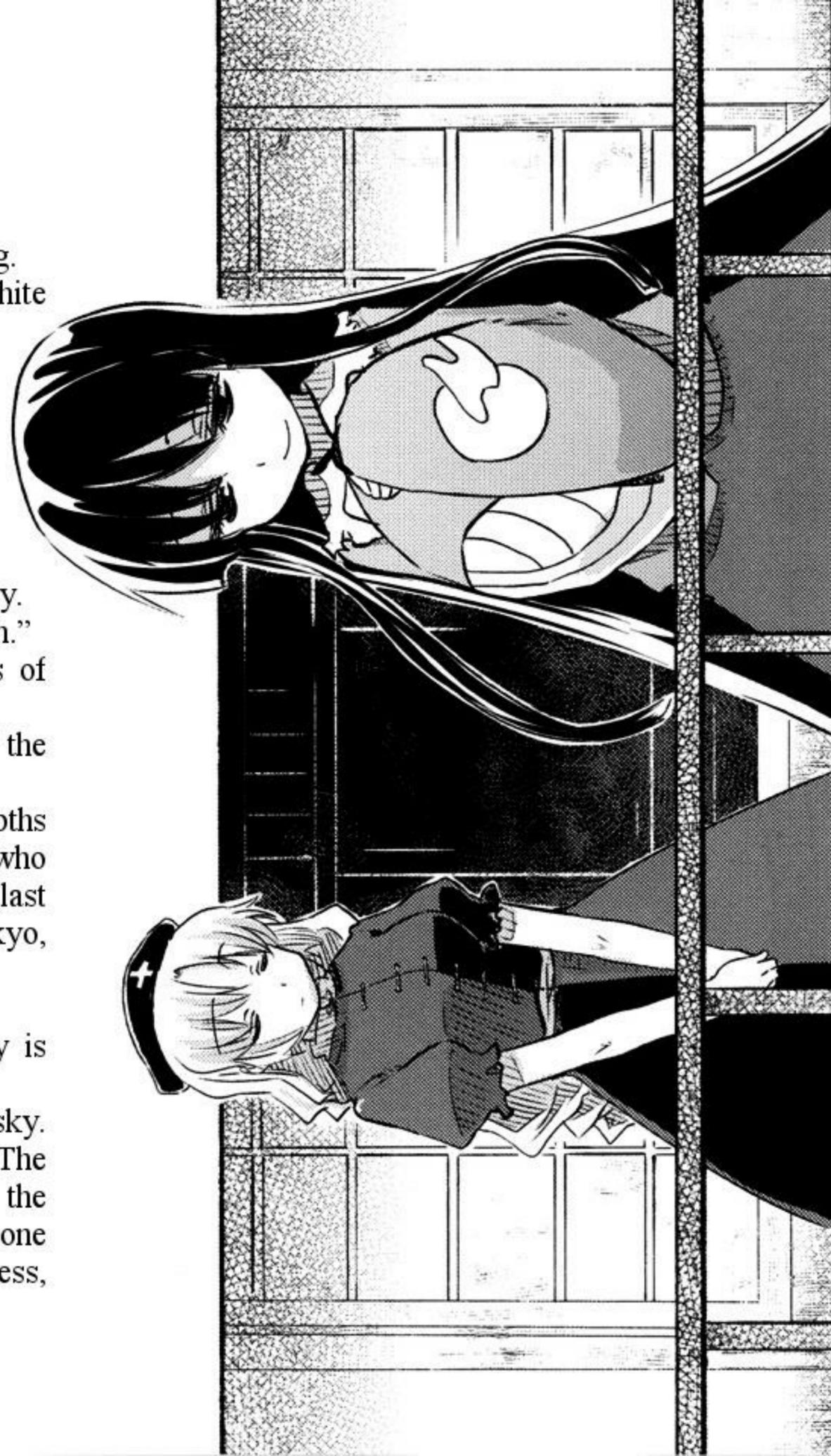
She laughed at the fact that she was one of the dead.

The end of the end of Gensokyo— In the depths of the Bamboo Forest of the Lost, the princess who escaped from the moon was smiling. At the last battle of Gensokyo, at the last incident in Gensokyo, at the end of Gensokyo, at its last festival.

She was smiling like she was having fun.

“That goes for the world too. A perfect eternity is impossible.”

The princess of the moon looked up at the sky. The moon that hung there was the true moon. The moon that looked like it was overlapping with the false moon was the one everyone forgot and the one that became fantasy. Under the moon of madness, the princess of the moon smiled elegantly.





“That is why it is sought.”

The runaway rabbit continued.

As a servant.

The rabbit who, seeking what she couldn't obtain,

escaped to the earth, spoke.

At the end of her line of sight was the true moon. The voices she could hear with her long ears were hallucinations she left behind in the far past.

“The old youkai desired that too—

while knowing that she would not obtain it.”

The princess smiled. She smiled twistedly.

“She desired it. She wished for it.

While knowing that she would use her entire being.”

The doctor spoke. The doctor smiled.

“What is obtained is only one thing.”



The princess smiled.

The princess smiled.

While smiling, the princess asked.

“But—which one will she choose?

The human girl from the outside who dreams a dream.”

The princess looked while smiling. At the only human.

The doctor also looked while smiling. At the only human.

The runaway rabbit, the long lived rabbit, the ones whose times had stopped.

They looked at the one human who came to Gensokyo.

In the light of the full moon, the princess of the moon spoke while enjoying the end.

“Eternity doesn't exist. Then, the end of eternity also—”

†



She barely stopped her falling body.

Stopping suddenly, she put strain on her body, but it was better than colliding with the ground. Falling because of Marisa would have been harder to stand than the impact. Rising in the air, she looked back at Marisa.

Their gazes met.

“.....How I really feel?”

That's right, Marisa nodded.

“If you aren't acting as the Hakurei shrine maiden—you're acting as yourself, aren't you Reimu!?”

Loudly, Marisa faced the sky and spoke. Sticking her chest out, boldly.

She was a little surprised. That was—something she didn't tell anyone, couldn't tell anyone. She hadn't planned on saying it, and she hadn't thought that anyone had realized it. To think that Marisa would point it out—her surprise stopped her hand, with which she had tried to shoot danmaku.

What should she say?

No—that was wrong.

Reimu denied that in her heart. That wasn't what Marisa was asking. It wasn't what she should say. Marisa was asking what she wanted to say.

What she wanted to say, and what she wanted to do.

It was a basis for what made humans act. Without reason or theory, the ordering voice of emotion.

“I—”

Unable to hold it back,  
it finally—spilled outside.



“—I don't know either!”

It was a shout. It was a cry. Unable to say it to anyone, it was something that boiled down deep in her heart. It had been waiting for a chance to get out the whole time. Breaking through the hard, hard, shell called the Hakurei shrine maiden, it waited for the time it could flow out like when a dam was broken.

Filled with emotion, it was a painful shout mixed with a cry.

That was—how Hakurei Reimu really felt.

It was how one girl truly felt.

“What should I do!? When I know nothing can be done—but I still want to do something!?”

Yes, nothing could be done.

Nothing could be done anymore. Gensokyo's end couldn't be stopped. Everyone would perish. She wasn't an exception, and Yakumo Yukari wasn't an exception either.

But still—was wanting to live even a second longer egoism? Was she not supposed to want her to stop doing things that would wear her down?

No matter how much she wished, there was no way to stop it, and there was no meaning in stopping it.

Yakumo Yukari was dying.

Along with the world.

That was something that couldn't be helped, and—that was why she was so sad.

“Do you know my feelings!? The feeling of knowing everything but not being able to do anything!? The sadness of being unable to stop the one—the only other one who understood that from wearing herself out!? She was the first—the first person who was special! What would you do—Marisa!?”

“There's only one thing!”

Marisa answered Reimu's cry without leaving an interval. The way Reimu said how she really felt, Marisa also was going to answer seriously. Covered in dirt, she looked up at the sky, and looking at Reimu with her clear eyes, Marisa yelled what was at the bottom of her heart.



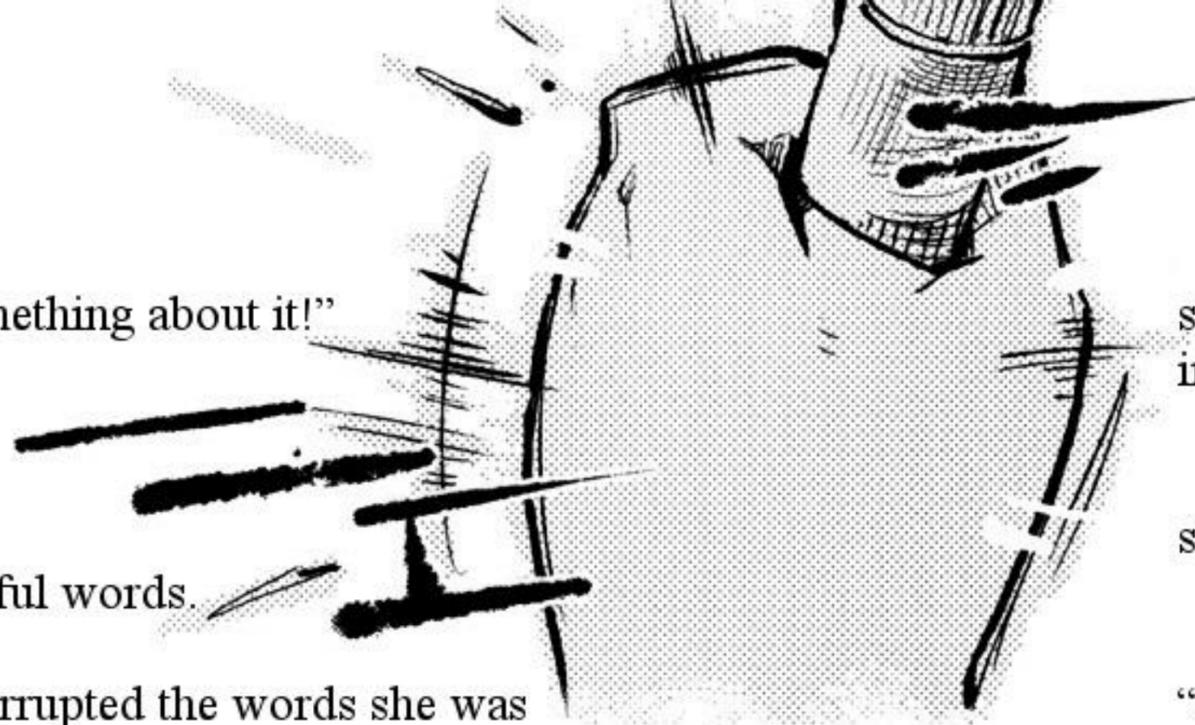
“—I'd do something about it!”

Simple,  
clear,  
and powerful words.

“That's—”

Marisa interrupted the words she was about to say. Picking up her broom, she pointed its tip at Reimu, who floated in the sky.

“Why did you give up!? Who said you couldn't try? Try if you have nothing to lose! I'll do it—I'll do it because I want to, and I'll go because I want to. I'm not going to go over a wall because it's there. I'm just going to do it because I want to see what's on the other side! It doesn't matter whether there's a meaning or not—I'm going to do it because that's what I want!”



The hand gripping the broom began shining. Having her will, strength, and magic put in, the broom shone. A card was gripped in her right hand like magic.

A spell card.

Words of magic, a magic incantation. Words of will, the strength of will.

A symbol of just going forward. Magic that did not stop.

Kirisame Marisa's light.

“It doesn't matter if it's going to end soon or not— Where I am is the present, it's now! What about you, Hakurei Reimu!”

The light increased. Crushing the spell card, Marisa shouted.



—Blazing Star—



†

“Ah.”

The ice fairy Cirno was in a good mood. Snow fell without relation to the season, and part of the lake in front of the Scarlet Devil Mansion was frozen. It was clearly an abnormal climate, but she didn't think it was abnormal. As a fairy, Cirno was easily influenced by the world. She accepted the haphazard climate as it was.

She even thought that it was easy to live in.

On top of the frozen lake, Cirno was playing with the ice fairies and other fairies who woke up. The reason Cirno raised her face before any of the other fairies, who were playing, was because she remembered the magic that shook the air.

Some time before—she played with another human. She didn't remember her that well, though.

That was why her impression when she saw it was that “it was pretty.”

Cutting the twilight sky that was neither night nor evening, seeking the moon that hung in the far distance,

the shooting star <sup>Blazing Star</sup> that shone gold rose to the sky.



Long before nightfall  
someone who exchanged greetings with darkness  
comes to spend the night with you.  
Long before daylight  
he wakes  
and, before leaving, kindles a sleep,  
a sleep echoing with footsteps:  
you hear him going off, measuring distances,  
and throw your soul  
after him.

(The Guest)

## **Notes**

- 25 tamagushi: “. . . a form of Shinto offering made from a sakai-tree branch decorated with shide strips of washi paper, silk, or cotton.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamagushi>)
- 26 “Speak? Deceive? Or form?": These are homonyms (although the last one is forced).

## **Credits**

Translation/Editing: kamyu  
Raw: Lunar 972



# 第五章

Chapter 5

# 秘封俱樂部

The Hifuu Club



If there's a beginning, there's an end. Things that are born eventually die. Beginning, and end— Then, what part is it now? This moment I'm in right now, exactly what part is it? It seems Gensokyo will end. That the end is near, for a story, means that three fourths of it has passed. If it were a movie, there would be the hint of the staff roll, and if it were a two hour drama, one hour and forty three minutes would have passed, and the great detective would have gathered everyone.

Then, what about this? What part was it?

Where I am right now. My story, our story.

If there was a story called the Hifuu club—what part would it be?

While thinking things like that, I opened the door to the store.

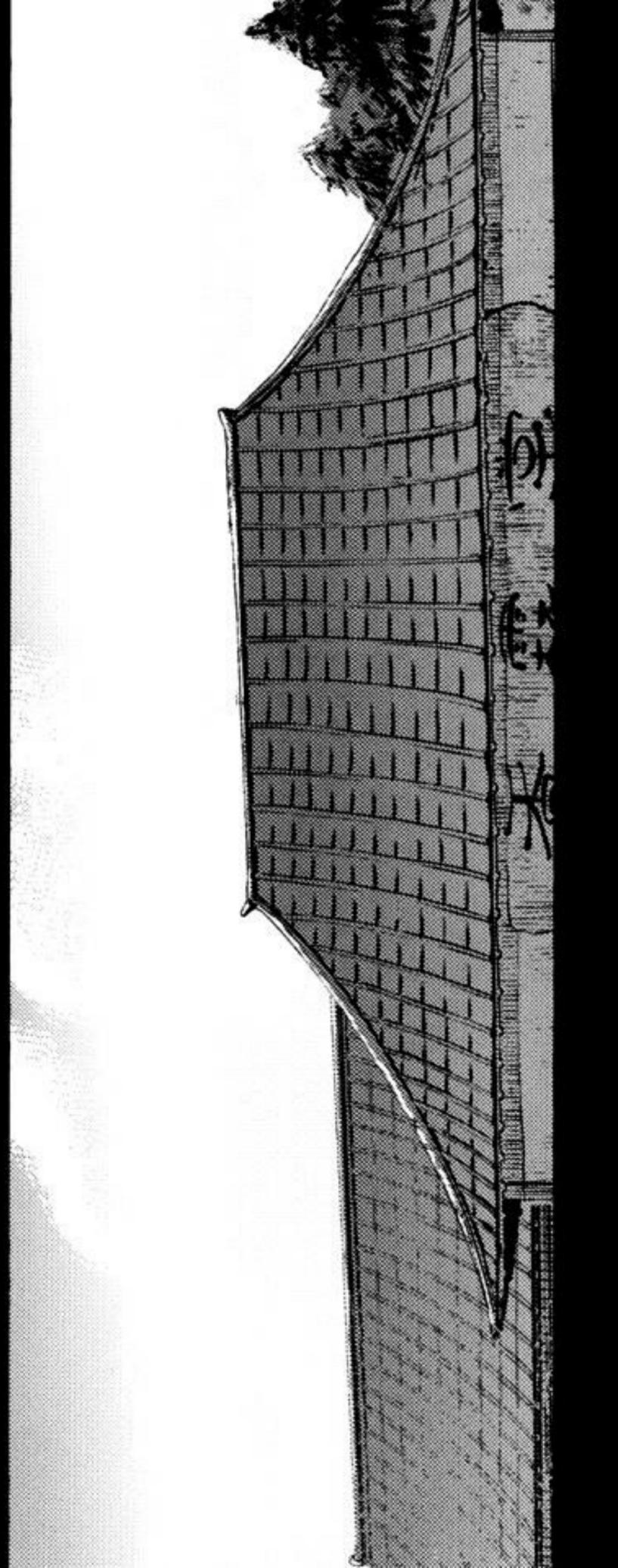
The word written on the sign was Dourinkou. Not noticing that it was read from the left at first, I thought about how to read it. It was probably Kourindou.

When I opened the door, a small bell rang. It was on the door. It was a bell to announce the arrival of visitors.

A voice came quickly.

“Welcome—”

Even though there was no way not to notice the incident occurring outside, the male shopkeeper greeted me normally. It lacked eagerness for a reception, but he didn't even move an eyebrow even after seeing the abnormal sight beyond the door. ....In the first place, one could see various things from the window. Like a huge moon. Like a big cherry tree flowering in the sky. Even though it was a totally abnormal world for me, the store owner acted calmly as if it were ordinary.



In fact, the store owner had a cup in one hand and was drinking sake. Moon viewing sake and flower viewing sake. Certainly, if he could enjoy both of them at the same time, it must have been the best. Viewing flowers and having a drink, viewing the moon and having a drink. In hanafuda, that would already be a hand.

“You're open.....right?”

I asked just in case. I didn't think any customers<sup>27</sup> would come even if he had the store open at this time, but—ah, one just came.

The other person, the girl who fell from the sky regained consciousness and left outside. That was why the only one who came in the store was me, and I was alone with the shopkeeper in the store that wasn't spacious.

It was a strange store.

There were antiques that weren't seen in Mary's and my world anymore. It might be a secondhand store. For that, the items had been chosen in an off-hand manner, and for some reason, a cushion had been put on a refrigerator that was lying on its side.

“No customers come, though.”

The shopkeeper answered and took a glance at me. Behind his glasses was the light of intellect, and the look of one appraising a good. It didn't give me a bad feeling since he didn't mean anything bad, and it seemed that he was simply observing me to see what I was.

“I was told by the black-white girl. That if I came here—you would tell me what was going on.”

“Marisa did? .....That's usually the shrine maiden's role.”

“That shrine maiden is going wild in the sky with Marisa.”

“.....”

In response to my words, the shopkeeper dropped his shoulders and sighed. What are they doing, what? Seeing him seeming to want to say that, I sympathized. There was no doubt that he was usually troubled by them.

The shopkeeper said, “Well, all right,” put his cup on the desk, and “Let's start with greetings. I'm Morichika Rinnosuke— I'm the owner of this store.”

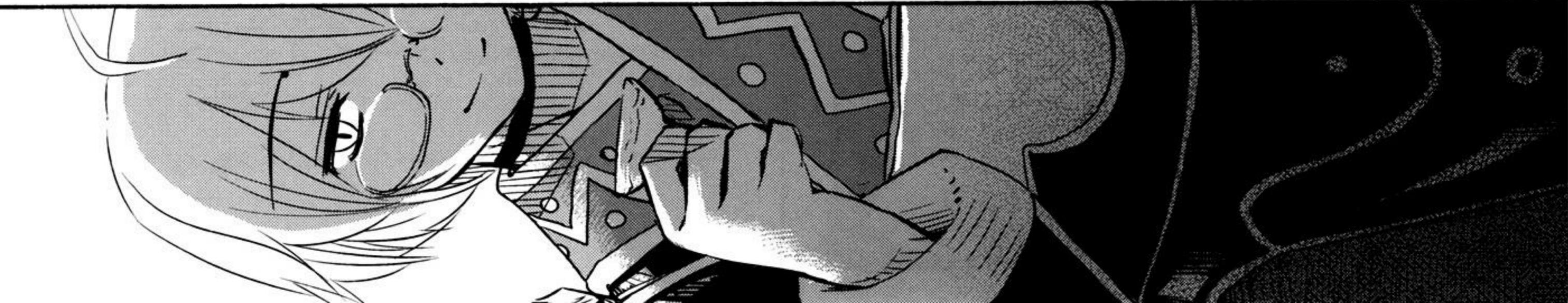
“I'm Usami Renko. I'm in the Hifuu club.”

“I see—”

The shopkeeper, Rinnosuke, poured sake into the cup, raised it lightly, and

“Welcome—to Gensokyo.”

smiling faintly, said that.



“.....You can tell?”

“Well yeah,” he nodded, “I usually deal with things like that.”

“Hmm.....”

After responding, I noticed. Didn't that mean he treated people like things? I thought about asking, but stopped. If he nodded and said, 'This store is also involved in human trafficking,' I would be troubled. After all, it was a world with youkai; I should probably think that this shopkeeper was most likely not human.

Putting the cup to his mouth, Rinnosuke spoke while smiling lightly.

“I'm sorry to say this after you came here, but there's nothing I can tell you.”

“No way— I don't know anything, you know?”

I protested on reaction. It wasn't like it was his fault— The one who told me to come here was Marisa. That time, Marisa let us off her broom and said something to the effect that the owner of this store knew the truth behind the incident and knew about Yukari— That was why I came. If he didn't know anything, there would be nothing I could do.

Rinnosuke stopped me, as I was about to go toward him, by putting his hand out. There was still a light smile on his face. Different from one of resignation, not one of pity either, it was close to an archaic smile.

“It should just be that you don't understand, but know. Even if you don't comprehend, you don't not know— That's why all I can do is make you realize.”

“.....Realize what?”

“*Everything.*”



“.....”

That moment, I understood for some reason. The fact that he really knew everything. Why Gensokyo was ending, that there was nothing that could be done about it, about me, about Mary, about the Hifuu club, and—knowing that, he was only sitting there and drinking sake. It was a smile of one who didn't act oneself. Not the smile of one who wasn't able to act, but one who chose not to act.

He wasn't human. He wasn't the same thing. Incomprehensible.....something different. Something that had become different.

An inhabitant of Gensokyo.

Not a girl, but

an adult, and a male.

That was—what Morichika Rinnosuke was.

.....Of course, even though I understood that, that was only one part of what was going on, and since there was a bunch of things I didn't understand, all I could do was continue to ask questions.

“What are you saying you're going to make me realize? A fact I overlooked?”

“Yes. Because where your friend went, why Gensokyo is

ending, the reason you know everything—all of it can be explained in just one sentence.”

“One sentence.....”

One sentence.<sup>28</sup>

The world, the truth; the shopkeeper said he would explain them in one sentence. It was like he was a great detective. No—this situation itself was like the solving of a mystery by a detective. The great detective had gathered everyone. But here, there were only me and the shopkeeper.

No—

“.....Your tongue was looser than I thought. Or is that sales talk too?”

One more.

On top the refrigerator with the cushion on it, the Mary look-alike was sitting before I knew it. Her clothes were even more worn out, and the crack in her face was even deeper. It had spread to her neck, and the fissure probably went under her clothes too. It was painful to look at her; I couldn't watch. Because I linked her with Mary, it was harder to look.

The shopkeeper didn't look away. Moving his gaze from me to the Mary look-alike,

“.....You were faster than I thought. Or, is this and the shrine the only places you can be?”

“Was I later than I thought? I was at the shrine first. This place isn't that important.”

“I'm sure it isn't. That doesn't change the fact that it's a center—And, the one who brought her was Marisa.”

“Ah..... That girl, as I thought,  
will choose that.

She said that with a smile filled with intimacy. With the movement of her mouth, a small piece fell from the fissure.

Outside the window, I saw that girl, Marisa, and Reimu flying around. I quickly became unable to see them, they entered my field of vision again, and danmaku followed them. They continued to do things like that outside without tiring.

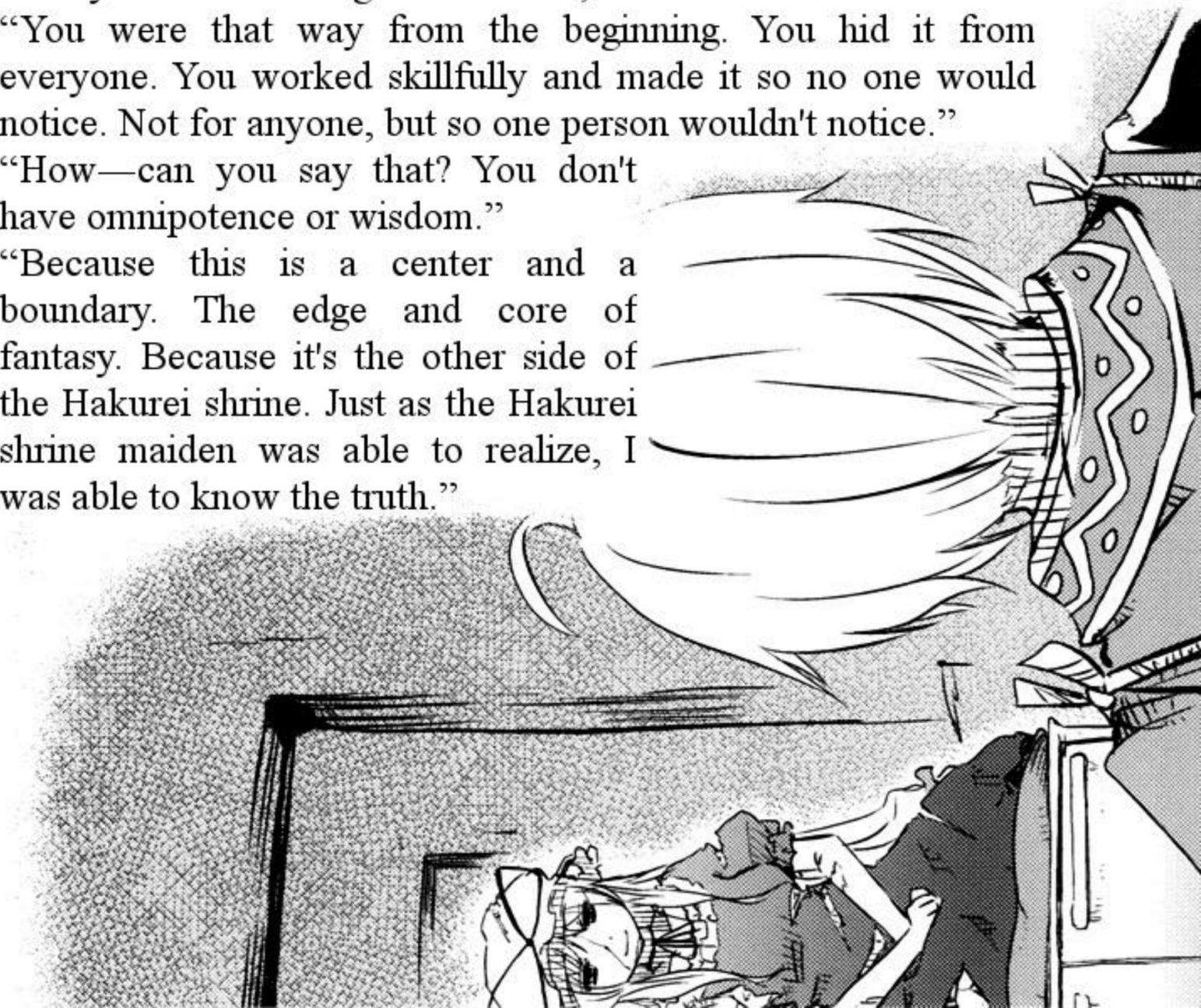
The Mary look-alike and Rinnosuke weren't looking outside. Looking only at each other, they continued the conversation I didn't get.

.....If I was to believe the shopkeeper's words

they were discussing what I knew, but refused to understand. “You were that way from the beginning. You hid it from everyone. You worked skillfully and made it so no one would notice. Not for anyone, but so one person wouldn't notice.”

“How—can you say that? You don't have omnipotence or wisdom.”

“Because this is a center and a boundary. The edge and core of fantasy. Because it's the other side of the Hakurei shrine. Just as the Hakurei shrine maiden was able to realize, I was able to know the truth.”



“In that case— Why didn't you act?”

“I wasn't as young as them. I didn't also didn't have enthusiasm. Not enough to participate in danmaku play.”

“Is that age? You who don't get older?”

“Even if I don't get older, it can build up. As it is lost when eternity exists.”

Light, light, light. Danmaku flew outside the window. The shrine maiden and the magician were playing with their wills. Like brilliant fireworks. Like a bell signaling the end.

The shopkeeper and the youkai were smiling. At the ending world, they were smiling without giving in.

I  
I—

“Tell me. That word that will explain everything.”

I took a step forward.

Morichika Rinnosuke and Yakumo Yukari; standing at a place that faced both of them, I looked at both of them. By my, with my own will!

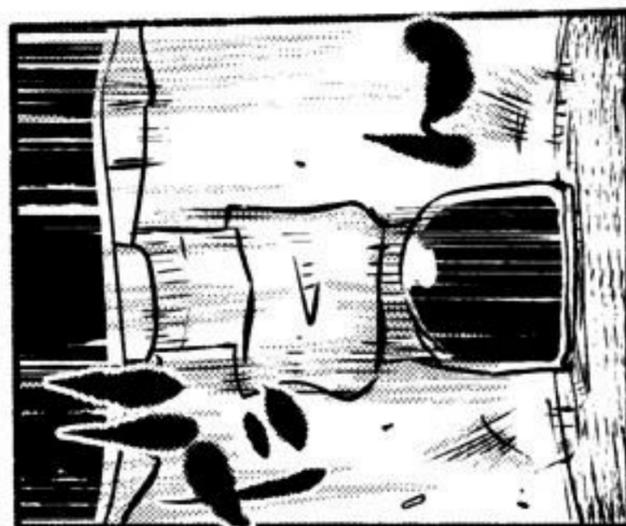
That was right—I was the one who would choose. I would decide. I would decide what what I wanted to do and what I would do. I wouldn't have him tell me; I would ask him.

For what?

For me!

For us!

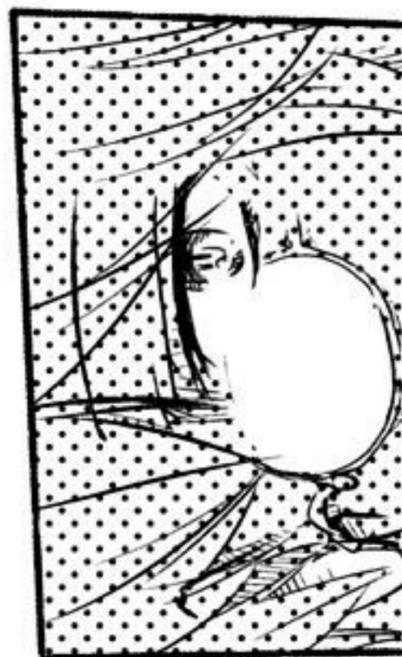
To bring Mary back; to bring the Hifuu club back.



To continue those golden days.

With my will, I asked in order to know the truth.

“You can't!”



The one who raised her voice was the Mary look-alike. It was a reaction I hadn't expected— No, she came out at that timing because she wanted to interrupt Rinnosuke. Why was that? I didn't know. She didn't want me to know. She wanted me to return to my world without knowing anything. Why? I didn't know. The Mary look-alike's relationship with Mary, what she was thinking, I didn't know. Even though it was near the end, I still didn't know anything.

I suddenly noticed. She wanted it to end without me understanding. That probably wasn't from malice, but in fact the complete opposite—

“That's something you don't have to know— You should just go back to your world.”

“By myself? That isn't funny! If you want to send me back no matter what, bring Mary here. I'm not asking for that much, am I?”

“——”

“You are,” said Rinnosuke.

“.....I am?”

“It's not impossible, but it's too much. Especially for her.”

“Morichika Rinnosuke——”

said the Mary look-alike. Making a scary face, she glared at

Rinnosuke. Rinnosuke accepted it somewhat happily, and  
“Thank you for calling me by my name. That is what forms  
things. So—what should I call you?”

“\_\_\_\_\_”

Yakumo Yukari became silent and Rinnosuke suddenly turned  
around to face me. I beared wanting to go back from being  
looked at abruptly. Drinking my saliva consciously, I waited with  
the silence.

Looking at me, he spoke.  
“Now—let me answer your  
question. What means everything;  
the word you forgot.”

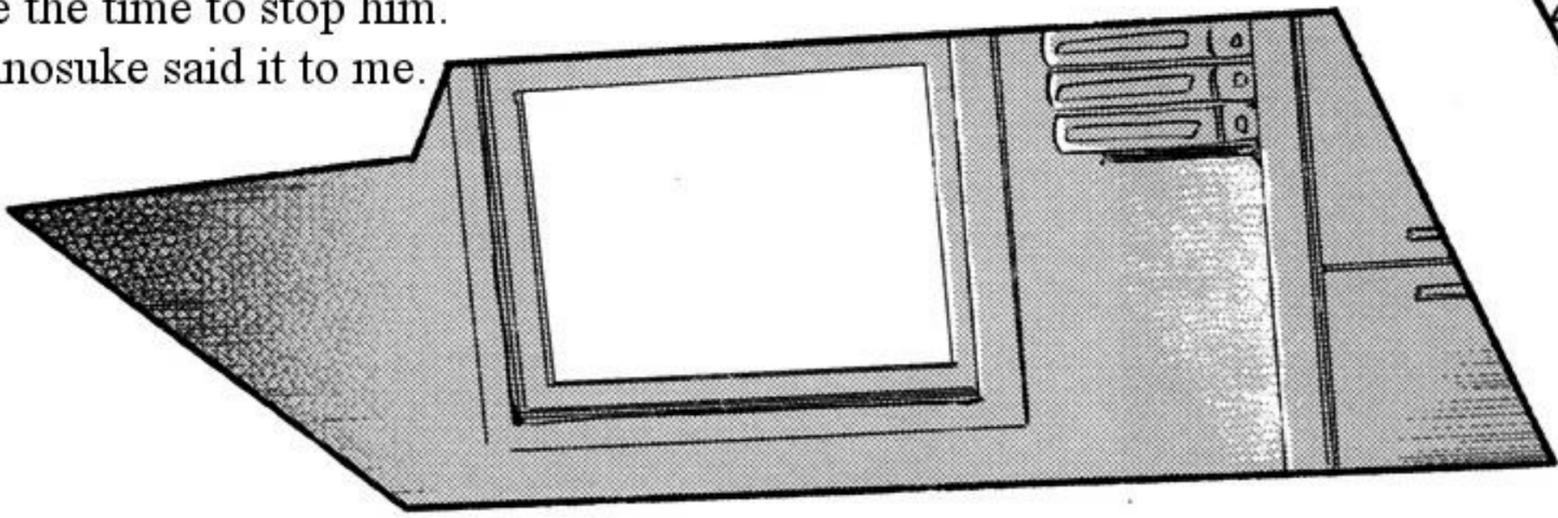
“Stop, please, stop—”

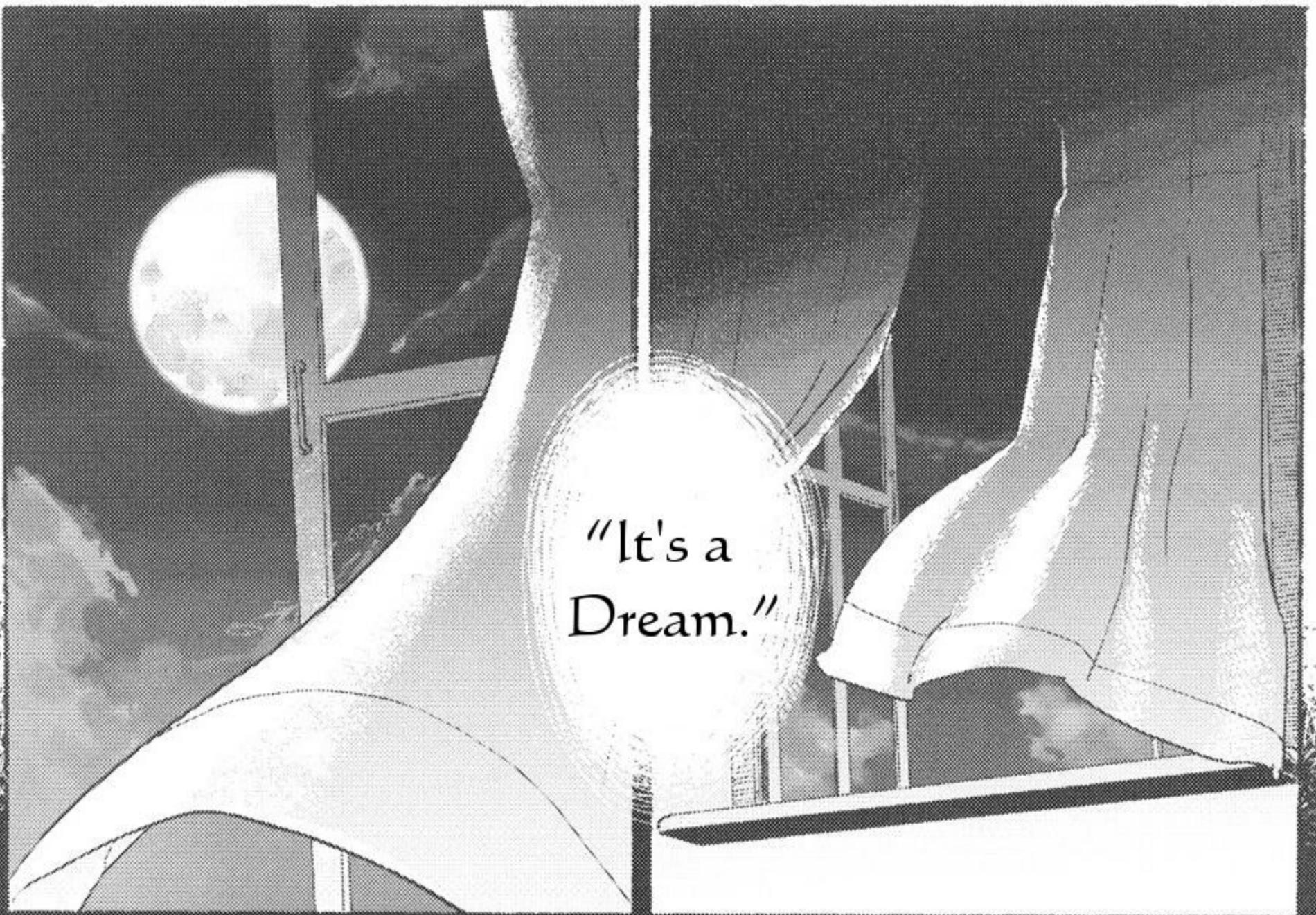
“It's—”

He said it.  
The truth.

But—maybe, I shouldn't have heard it. Even though  
Gensokyo was ending, I didn't get anything. It wasn't that I  
didn't know, but that I was refusing to realize, Rinnosuke had  
said. Then once I realized, I wouldn't be able to go back and  
would fall head first into the collapse— Wasn't it a truth like  
that?

I didn't have the time to stop him.  
Morichika Rinnosuke said it to me.





They were simple words.

What first rose to my mind was “What?”

“.....That's it?”

“That's it.”

Rinnosuke nodded. Having been let down, strength left my shoulders.

Because— A dream.

I knew that without being told. I was fully aware of that. Gensokyo was a dream world; it was a world that had been forgotten and became a dream. Mary wandered to that side by dreaming. And we, treating dreams and reality as not the same, but as different things—worked in order to go to that side. To go to the dream world that existed not subjectively, but as an absolute truth.

Our dream came true. I was in the dream world. It was just that the person who was supposed to be next to me wasn't there.

“What are.....you saying that is? With just that, how are you going to explain everything?”

“Gensokyo is a dream world. Whose dream do you think it is?”

In response, Rinnosuke put his cup down and asked me with a surprisingly serious look.

Sticking my chest out, I answered.

“Someone's dream. A dream world someone dreamt of. A paradise where things that were lost remain. Mary and I dreamt a dream—passed the boundary between dream and reality, and came to Gensokyo.”

“That's it.”

He stuck his finger up.

“.....That?”

“That's what's wrong—what's different. There's the flaw in your logic that you're trying not to realize.”

—Flaw.

I didn't get what he was talking about. Rinnosuke was saying that my logic was wrong. What did he mean? The answer didn't come even though I thought about it. Even though the answer was there, I probably didn't try to realize it. The other two had already arrived at the answer, and the Mary look-alike was saying “Stop.....” while holding her head and looking down, but I didn't know why not I but she was the one who was disturbed either.

I didn't get it.

I didn't get it.

I didn't get anything.

—*Because I didn't try to get it.*

“If Gensokyo's a dream, then how—”

To me, who couldn't understand,

Morichika Rinnosuke—this time, said the truth that ridiculed my idiocy.



“—can you say that you two aren't <sup>Dreams</sup> fantasy either?”

Fate caught up.

—Words like that appeared in my mind. My thoughts stopped, and my soul sighed in resignation. The 'me' not on the outside, but deep inside me, lowered her shoulders and sighed with a smile. —You finally realized it. You would have been at ease if you pretended not to realize. If you pretended not to know and were just moved around, everything would have ended without you having to distress. You would have lost something important, but in return, you wouldn't have been hurt.

—Be quiet.

I said it to myself, but my mind was full of noise. I attacked myself as much as I had been holding back. —It's indulgent to have put everything on Mary until now and be carefree. It's cruel. If I say I'm the Hifuu club with Mary, I should share the pain, right? Am I wrong? I'm not, am I? Because, for me, Mary “You two didn't cross the border between dream and reality. *You only crossed the border between dream and dream.* The other side is a dream, and this side is a dream. One dream was split like a yin-yang orb. And—they were the yin in the yang, and the yang in the yin.”

A voice from outside mixed with the one in my thoughts. I didn't know whether I or Rinnosuke was speaking, but my eyes saw. The finger Rinnosuke had pointed up went down and pointed at someone. That someone was sitting on the refrigerator and was holding her head to hide her cracked face. Her skirt was wet with water. Even though she had an umbrella, the rain that came from her eyes continued to fall without stopping.

Without crying, the shopkeeper who did not hesitate continued to talk. He was trying to fulfill his role as the great detective. deus ex machina

“Where did Maribel Han go? The answer's there. Because the boundary became thin, black and white mixed and—became

unable to stay apart.”

“That can't—”

That can't what? I couldn't continue. I already understood. I stopped pretending not to notice. I was aware that I had noticed.

“As proof, not only Gensokyo—”

But still, Rinnosuke, as a great detective, said the words that dealt the final blow.

Dream  
“—but your world is also ending.”

*Crack.*

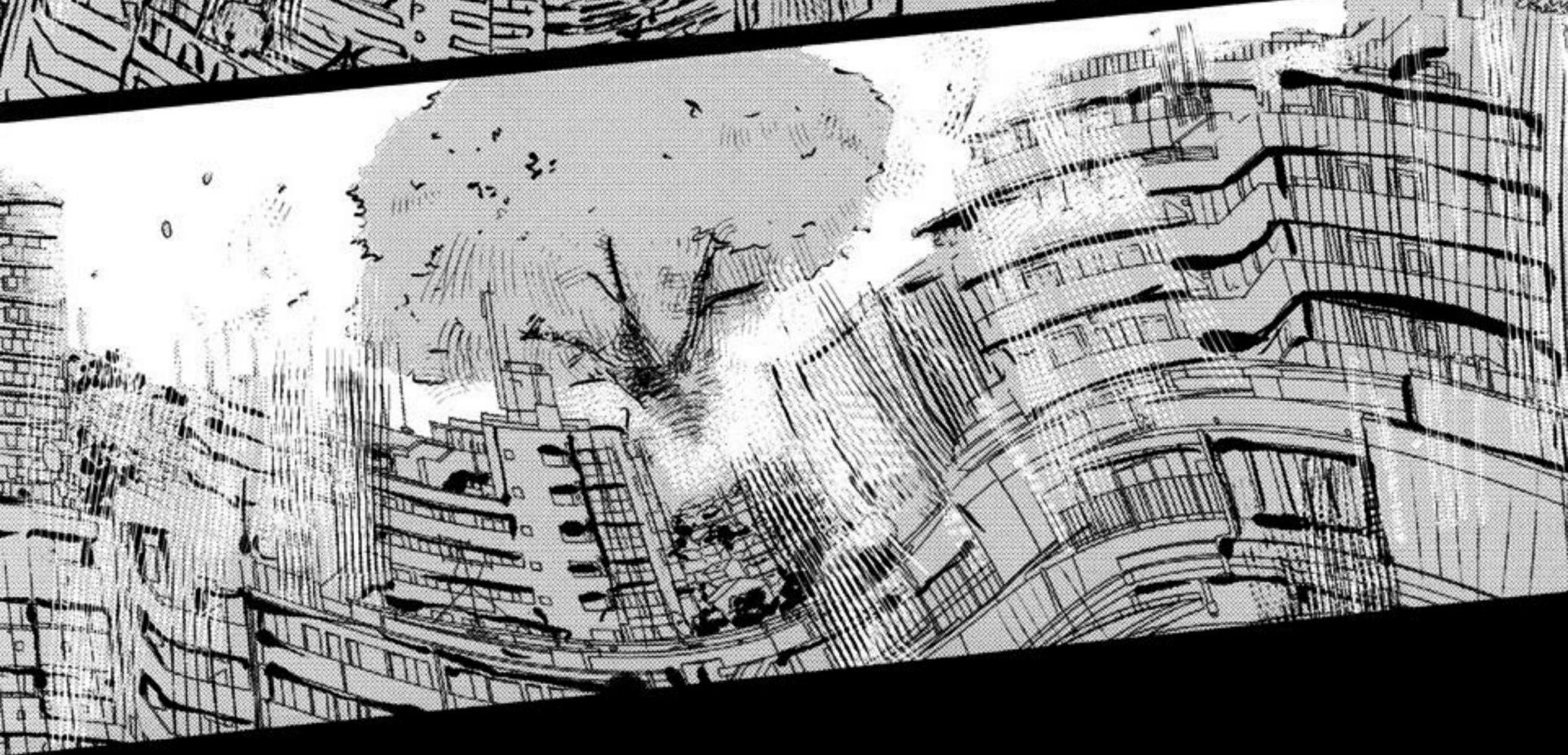
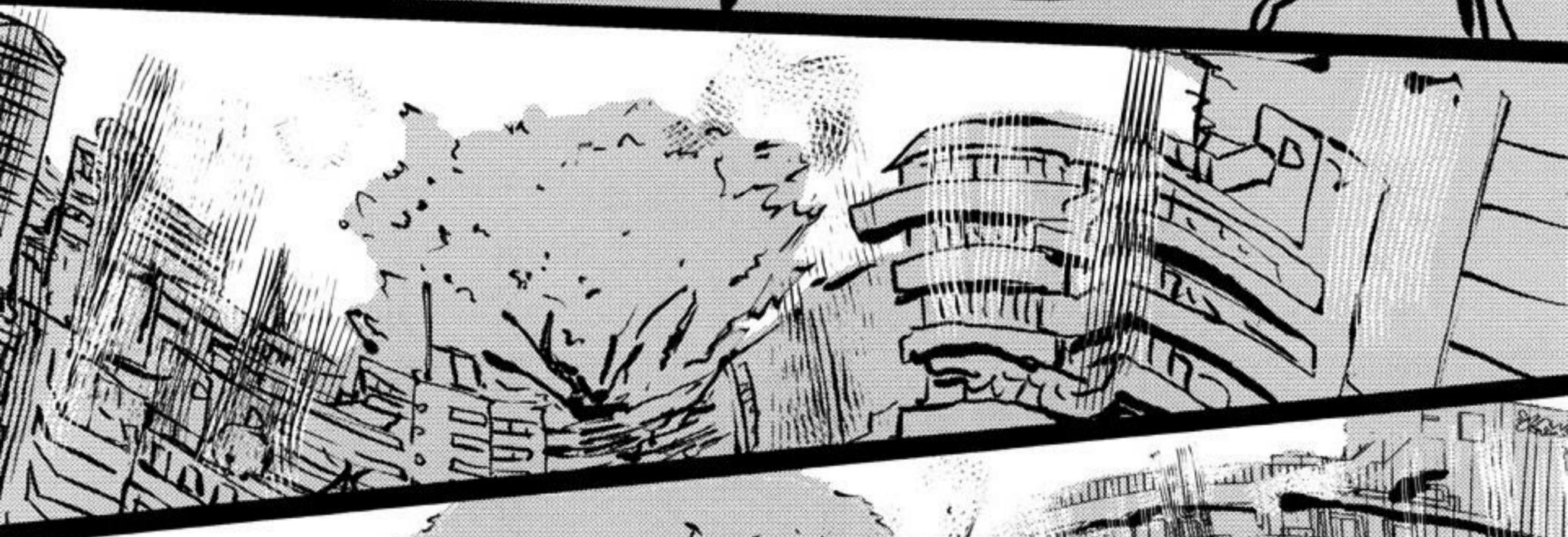
There was the sound of something cracking. It was one I remembered; the sound of something cracking and breaking. There wasn't one. Crack, crack. It didn't stop. Crack, crack, crack. Something continued to crack. What had cracks began to collapse. Crack, crack, crack, crack. Everything cracked and broke. The boundaries that divided everything broke. They reached the end of their life spans and broke. Crack, crack, crack, crack, crack. Cracks appeared inside Kourindou, the cracks became fissures, and the fissures became holes. The holes became bigger, and the boundary between inside and out was lost.

What had been hidden became shown.

What had been hidden by the store's door, walls, and roof—the changing world.

The breaking world.

Dream  
The world was ending.







“Extra! Extra! The biggest news in Gensokyo!  
The last day has finally come!”

A tengu reporter flew. She flew high in the sky. While scattering newspapers, she flew over the roofs of apartments. A salaryman in a suit and a girl with wings picked up the newspapers that fell and read them. The tengu got on a helicopter in the sky, received a microphone from a man with a camera, and reported the news. A drunk oni has appeared between some buildings; residents should take care not to be stepped on. As if responding to her words, a large horn appeared while shaking from between tall buildings.

No one noticed the incident. No one thought it was an incident. The boundaries disappeared, the other side and this side mixed and melted, the distinction between that side and this side disappeared, and everything started returning to one.

The world was collapsing.

The world wasn't the only thing that was collapsing. I heard the sound of cracking from not only the world, but in front of me too. The Mary look-alike who had been sitting—the cracks in her face became fissures, and the fissures became holes and broke apart.

What had been hidden the whole time.

What I thought I had lost.

What I never wanted to lose.

That was there.

The face that was there was the same as the Mary look-alike's. However, that person was crying weakly, and—that was the face of the one I knew.

I yelled her name.

With a flood of emotions.

“—*Mary!*”

Having her name called—

She turned around.

While crying, and smiling happily.

While smiling, with a sad expression.

Looking at me—she said it.

“I'm sorry.....Renko, I—”

I couldn't stand any more than that.

When she called my name, before I noticed it, I was holding Mary. Her body, which seemed like it would break just by being touched, gently. Her body was cold, and had a sparseness that made it seem like she would disappear.

I didn't want to let go.

I wanted to keep the feeling of holding her. The anxiety that had stuck to my heart from the time I saw her disappeared.

Mary was here right now.

To me, that was more of a joy than anything. I couldn't hold back the tears that fell from my eyes. While crying, I held Mary as if to cling to her. A sweet smell. Mary's smell.

Maribel Han was here.

“Mary.....Mary! Mary!”

“Sorry, Renko. I'm sorry—”

I just repeated Mary's name, and Mary kept on apologizing. I didn't know why she was apologizing, why I was saying her name, or why tears were flowing endlessly.

I didn't want to let go.

I didn't want to separate.

That was everything. Mary, who I heard apologizing near my ear, sounded like she was crying, and we held each other while crying. It might have looked funny to other people, but I didn't care. In the first place—we didn't see anyone other than ourselves.

“I was worried.....that that would be goodbye.....you disappeared all of a sudden.....”

“I'm sorry.....”

“But, with this—”

With this

—Suddenly, the part of my head that was still calm whispered.

With this, what? Mary came back, we were together, and it would be a happy end? Could we be happy without any problems? Everything was already collapsing. I already knew that that wouldn't happen.

Mary had also noticed.

“—No. It's not all right.”

The tears stopped.

With a voice that was so calm it was almost emotionless—so

clearly that there was no way to mishear her, Mary said that.

That it wasn't all right.

She went away. Mary took her arms away from me, took a step back, and shook her head. Not vertically, but to the side. With a face full of sorrow, with eyes that seemed like she would cry even now, but still holding back her tears, she looked at me.

“What do you—”

I started talking. My heart said something completely different. Coming here, do you plan on having Mary say everything? My heart reprimanded me.

And Mary was kind.

“I disappeared because I couldn't even preserve the boundary between Yakumo Yukari and Maribel Han anymore. Yakumo Yukari wished to continue having the dream, and Maribel Han chose to wake from the dream. Right now, I'm neither, and both.”

—Maribel Han has disappeared.

I remembered those words. That was neither false nor true, but one side of the truth.

Maribel Han had disappeared.

In the same way—Yakumo Yukari had disappeared too.

Because the boundary line disappeared.

What had been split into two returned to one, and—was melting and disappearing.

“Mary, what are you say—”

I knew.

I knew.

If Gensokyo was a dream world. If this world was a dream. If it was a dream to keep things that one didn't want to lose.

I knew.

Who the one having the dream was.

What the thing that one didn't want to lose was.

What was being lost.

It was a dream.

A dream that didn't end— It was death.

Yakumo Yukari tried to keep the dream for as long as possible.

Maribel Han walked forward to wake up from the dream.

The two of one who opposed each other. The heart that thought she had to wake up, and the feeling of still wanting to sleep. Like a human's heart, they contradicted and opposed each other.

But without relation to those feelings, they mixed and were disappearing.

Because without relation to emotions or wishes, alarm clocks went off.

—The sign of the end that no time was left.

“You realize it too right, Renko?”

I realized it.

I knew it.

“This world is”

I just didn't want to admit it.

Because if I admitted it—Mary would disappear.

This world was—



—The Hifuu club's Dream.

I was sleeping without being aware of it, and she was having the dream while being aware of it.

The dream we were having.

“What—about that?”

The one who said that wasn't me or Mary.

With that voice—I was pushed down by Mary. I didn't even have the time to say “What?” Jumped at from the front, I fell back. While I was going on my back, I saw the sky, and

saw a sword slash that cut through my field of vision.

“.....”

I understood what happened. Because I understood, I couldn't say anything. I opened and closed my mouth like a goldfish. I couldn't afford to be concerned with the feeling of Mary or the pain of my back hitting the concrete.

I was cut from behind.

I was saved by Mary when I was almost cut—was probably what happened. If Mary hadn't saved me, my head would have been separated from my body by now. Because there was no hesitation in the blade, and the voice was so filled with hostility that even I could tell.

Still on the ground, I moved just my head and looked at the sword's owner.

She, who I left outside Kourindou, which was gone now, was surprisingly close. Holding two Japanese swords, she glared at—Mary.

No,

for her, she was probably Yakumo Yukari.

“Dream and reality don't matter. The only thing that's important to me is what I'm supposed to do.”

She sounded like she didn't have time, and her voice didn't have sadness or happiness in it.

She was acting for what was important to her.

Like we were.

“Answer me, Yakumo Yukari. What is this incident? Why is the cherry tree that isn't supposed to flower flowering? If you won't answer—”

The tip of the sword moved slightly. One of them, to Mary, who was on top of me, and the other one was pointed at me, who was below Mary.

—I'll kill you.

That was what she said with her eyes.



†

For Kirisame Marisa, an incident was only 'something that seemed interesting.' If she was interested, she would stick her neck in (until the incident was solved), and if she wasn't interested, she wouldn't do anything. When she lost in danmaku play, she would quickly go back and wait at the veranda.

She worked in the shadow to do what she wanted, but that wasn't something to say to other people, so she kept it her own secret.

She would do what she wanted.

As long as she felt like it, she would keep going forward.

She wasn't a youkai. She wasn't an adult either. She was a girl, and because she was human, it was possible for Kirisame Marisa, and for those who couldn't do that, she looked bright.

Adults were those who had finished growing.

Youkai were those who had been forgotten in the past.

Among them—even though Kirisame Marisa was alone, she kept on proceeding forward. Even though there were times she stopped, she looked far ahead. For Marisa, incidents weren't

endings, but only points along the way.

That was why

for Marisa, what was going on in front of her eyes right now was nothing other than 'something that seemed interesting.'

—It's like a parade.

While going down slowly from the sky, she thought that. Marisa, who had climbed high enough to reach the moon, had a panoramic view of the world that was ending.

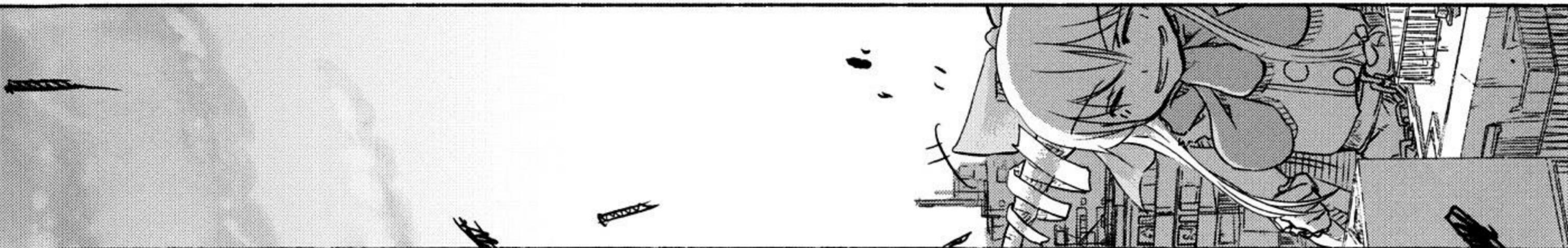
It wasn't a human parade. It was a strange march with ayakashi. The bewitching parade drew spectators and kept going forward. The scene of that side and this side mixed up could look like a parade depending on how one looked at it. It was like a Night Parade of One Hundred Demons— No, that wasn't it.

—Night Parade of One Million Demons.

It was a revelry of humans and others that could be called that.

“But—she looks like she's having fun.”

Marisa spoke while looking up. Kirisame Marisa was a



magician, and as a magician, she rode on a broom and flew, but she had to look up at her even while flying.

Huge.

In one word, she was huge, and even if more than two words were used, they probably wouldn't have had a meaning more than huge.

Giant reinforced buildings that didn't exist in Gensokyo—on top of the pavement that ran between them, there was a giant drunk. Her height was slightly less than the buildings, but her long horns peeked out between the buildings and swayed from side to side.

Of course, it was the little oni who was drunk all year, Ibuki Suika. As an oni who liked festivals, she might have been the one enjoying the current situation the most.

“Gao—!”

While cackling, Suika breathed fire from her mouth. Drinking alcohol and breathing fire was a party trick, but it wasn't funny when someone did it at that size. The road quickly became a sea of fire, and the cars that had been abandoned started melting in an instant. At the same time Suika appeared, the 'people from the other side' ran, so there were no human casualties, but the flower fairies that were late in escaping were burned and exploded in a chain on top of that.

It looked like a painting of a scene in hell.

“Whoa-! Whoa, it's hot-!”

Driven by the heat, Marisa increased her altitude hurriedly. When she went to a height that the heat wouldn't reach, she just came to the position giant Suika's head was.

Her eyes met with the eye that was bigger than her.

When she was wondering what to say,  
grin.

Suika smiled, raised her gourd, which was bigger than Kourindou, and

“—Will you drink?”

“No. No way. I'll die. I'll drown to death.”

When she shook her head vigorously, Suika frowned like she was sulky. Beyond her open mouth, she could see flames that had not disappeared flickering. There were remains of fires that she hadn't breathed out. If she wanted to, she could probably breathe fire in the air. Of course, she was in her range, and more than that,

“This isn't—the time!”

The moment she saw yin-yang orbs show up in her eyes, Marisa tilted her broom down. She knew it was hot, but—it was better than being shot down by the bullets.

“It isn't the time?”

Suika repeated in a murmur, and  
giant yin-yang orbs collided with her face.

“O———w———”

It was a cry that shook the air. The yin-yang orbs that were aimed at Marisa went ahead without hitting Marisa, and—directly hit Suika's face, which was in their path.

The one who shot them was Hakurei Reimu, who was also floating. Muttering, “I missed,” she went down in altitude to go after Marisa.

It wasn't the time— The danmaku play still hadn't ended.

The danmaku play had continued until the boundary collapsed. It wasn't something that would end just because the

boundary collapsed. Even after being hit with the Blazing Star, they were even. Marisa shot while escaping, and Reimu shot while going after her. They repeated that without stopping.

The danmaku play hadn't ended.

Far from it—

“————w!!”

“Ow.”

Turning her body as it fell, Suika swung her chain with tears in her eyes. The oni's chain couldn't be escaped from once one was caught. But as each link in the chain was the size of a human, it was just something that crushed.

It was a counterattack while falling. Without being accurate—perhaps not having been aimed in the first place, the winding chain came down on all the space that included Reimu and Marisa.

It was tremendous.

“—!!”

“—!!”

They became surprised at the same time. In response to the attack that came from the side, Marisa and Reimu avoided at the exact same time. They didn't stop, take it, or defend against it. They avoided the chain that had mass and speed with a zigzagging trajectory that ignored inertia.

While avoiding, they didn't stop shooting bullets at each other.

“Get hit already!”

“You get hit!”

“This isn't the time to be doing this, is it!?”

“Look who's talking!”

Seals and beams, needles and stars. Danmaku of different types flew around, weaving through the gaps in the chain. There were too many danmaku, and their speed was so great that the situation

had become such that they had to avoid the bullets they shot themselves.

But still—without stopping, they instead continued to accelerate.

“You're stubborn!”

“You're a blockhead!”

Kicking the yin-yang orb that turned toward her from the broom, she went down at once from the recoil. The ground was still burning, and she saw Suika, who was falling, in the corner of her field of vision.

She didn't hesitate.

She accelerated more— Marisa went into the flames. Flames didn't mean anything to the magician with speed and wind. Making a path with wind in the sea of flames, she sped up more along the ground. Reimu's seals went after her, but they couldn't catch up, let alone hit her. They broke the ground, and the flames that were stirred burned even more.

Going after the winding chain, she went quickly to where Suika was.

—Will I make it!?

It was by a hair's width. She went under Suika before she fell. A moment later, Suika's giant body finally fell, the bedrock rose, and dust rose up in clouds.

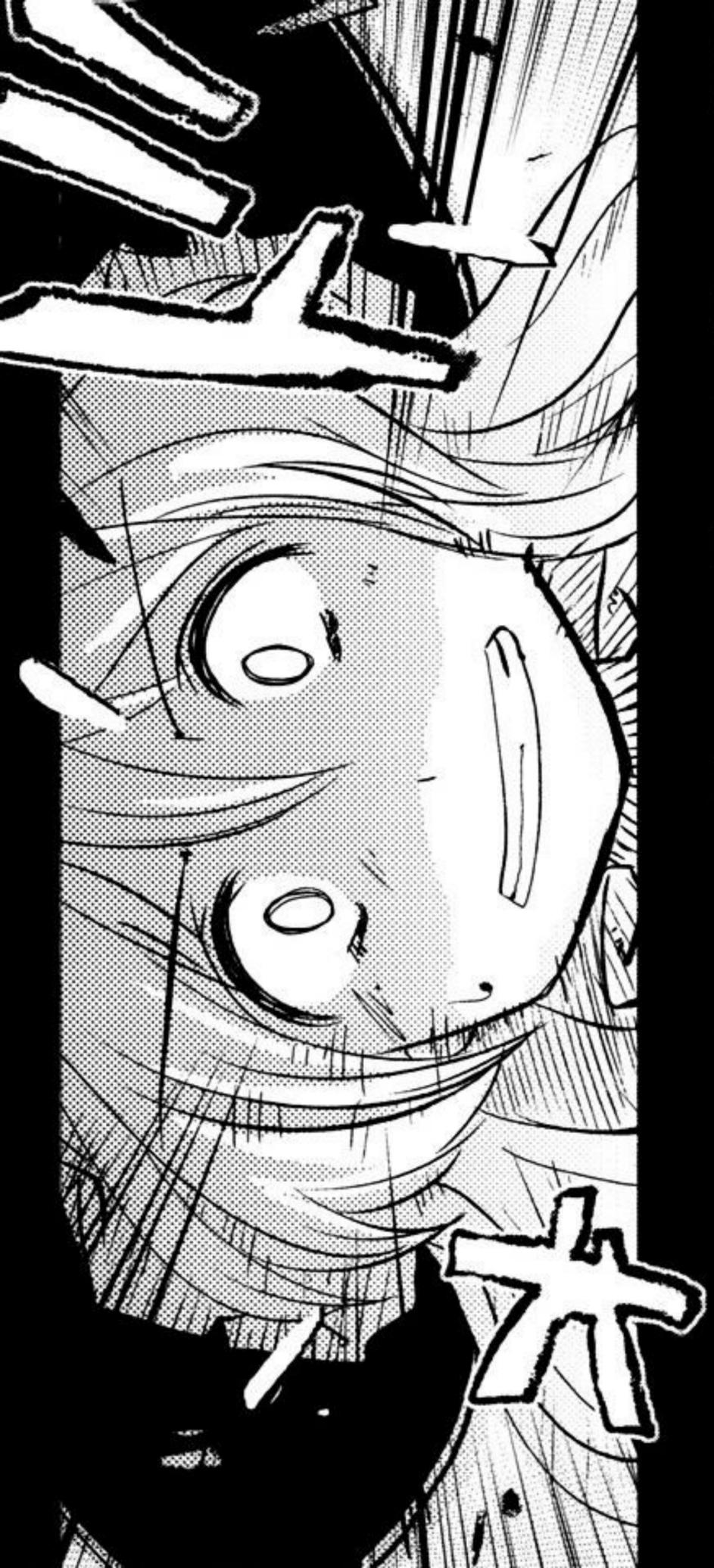
“.....-!”

Obstructed by the giant body and the wind, Reimu's movement stopped. Going over or around; taking advantage of the gap when she was thinking that, Marisa accelerated more. Reimu and Suika went far quickly, and

in their place, the Hifuu club came closer at an accelerated rate.

“—Gh, ah—”

If she hadn't turned back to look at Reimu's pursuit, she might



have just made it— But when she faced forward, they were already there. The sight of the Yukari look-alike and Usami Renko holding each other while on the ground, Morichika Rinnosuke going on the ground with a panicked look, and Youmu holding her swords came close quickly, and not being able to avoid or stop anymore,

“ ”

A sword stroke ran.

It wasn't an act Youmu did intentionally. The murderous intent she had been directing at the Hifuu club simply reacted to the surprise attack that came from her side. But still—Youmu's attack, whose speed came from her reaction speed, was faster than anyone's. First the sword, then the pressure from the sword, then the danmaku that was released from it went toward Marisa like an arrow.



The attack was unavoidable and unblockable

“—Uwata-!?”

Unable to avoid it or defend against it, Marisa took it directly.

Her broom was repelled in front of her—to put it another way, if the broom weren't there, it would have hit her body—not having the time to be relieved by that, she was repelled and fell, and the inertia that remained made Marisa go forward.

“Wha—”

She couldn't avoid it or block it.

Having swung her sword, Youmu couldn't do either. Because she lost her form, Youmu wasn't able to take Marisa's body, which was flying toward her, and was hit from the front.

In some ways, it could have been said that she was a giant bullet.

“—Gh-!!”

The pointed hat hit her stomach, and Youmu tried to not be blown away from where she was, but unable to withstand it, she turned sideways as she went backwards. Marisa's body, which lost its speed, fell on top of her, and both of them made sounds like squished frogs.

Silence.

In a silence that came for one moment and made it seem like sound died, the shopkeeper raised his face, and

“.....This is an unlucky day.”

like a joke, said that.

†

Going over, or going around.

Actually, there was no need to hesitate. Because before she decided, a giant hand came from the dust and grabbed her.

Each of the fingers of the giant hand were as thick as Reimu's body. Even though the scaling was messed up, it was a hand she remembered seeing. The dust was cleared by the wind, and she knew the one she saw beyond it too.

“—Suika!”

“Oh, it's Reimu.”

Looking at Reimu, whom she was holding firmly, Suika tilted her head while on the ground. She only tilted it a little, but because it was so big, her horn sent a tree flying. At the scene whose sense of reality was messed up, even Reimu drew her eyebrows together. Rather than one of danger, it was a somewhat humorous scene.

“.....I'm not Marisa.”

“Yeah.” Suika nodded, her horns shook, and “But”

“But?”

“—Want to drink?”

Without trying to get up, she raised the giant gourd she had in her left hand. The gourd that was raised up hid the full moon in the sunset sky, and covered Reimu's body with shadow. In the darkness that was like night, Reimu's expression became sterner, and

“.....I won't drink.”

She didn't have the time to drink, and she would drown.

It was a question she didn't have to think about. In response to Reimu, who returned the same response as Marisa, Suika smiled, and

Spin.

“You can't drink my sake—!?”

While saying a line a drunk would say, she turned the gourd in her left hand upside down.

“Wh—”



She didn't have the time to stop her. Being held, she couldn't escape.

It wasn't like rain.

With a force like a waterfall, sake fell from high in the sky. The sake wet her hand and Reimu, and the sake that went on the road saturated it and made a flow like a river. The sake that fell didn't stop, and in the sake waterfall whose smell alone might make one drunk, the sake pushed through the gaps of her closed mouth and went in.

—It tasted good.

Thinking that, Reimu shook her head. Before getting drunk, she would suffocate—as if she chose the timing at which she thought that, Suika spun her left hand again. The sake waterfall stopped, and

Reimu, who was soaked, was left.

“.....”

“It's a secret sake that even makes dragons drunk. Didn't it taste good?”

Saying that proudly, Suika also drank from the gourd. Reimu wasn't looking at her. Her wet hair stuck right on her skin, and one couldn't tell which way she was looking from the outside. The sake her clothes couldn't absorb became drops and dripped.

Without looking anywhere, Reimu quietly,

“.....What's the meaning of this?”

with a voice that sounded like it would even make an oni shake, she asked.

The oni—

“This is the meaning.”

didn't shake.

Without shaking, Suika smiled like she was having the time

of her life. She wasn't making fun of Reimu. It was fun, really fun—that was what her smile was saying.

Reimu didn't look up at that smile.

But Suika was looking at Reimu. Her gaze, her attention were directed at Reimu.

The strange and stray oni looked at the girl who welcomed her to Gensokyo.

Human and oni. A relationship of attacker and attacked. A bond made with sake and life. The last thing the oni now lost changed its form and was here. That was what—the little oni called Ibuki Suika, gained when she came to Gensokyo.

“Sake come with banquets, right? Why don't we enjoy the last banquet, Reimu—?”

“—I see. You're on Marisa's side too?”

Her voice was cold.

Her voice was colder than sake and low.

But, but still—Suika just returned a smile.

“If I had to say, I think I'm on your side.”

“Then—why?”

Being held, Reimu gripped the tamagushi. Being gripped, she put strength into her body. Seals slipped from her sleeves at a position Suika couldn't see.

She didn't have to ask any more questions, Reimu said with her presence. No matter what Suika said, Reimu would probably ignore her, release danmaku, and go after Marisa again.

But Suika still had to say it. Because that was what she gained in Gensokyo. Because living at the Hakurei shrine, she saw Reimu even if it was for a short time. Even if she didn't understand her as much as that gap youkai—she was still

attached to the curious shrine maiden who flew in the sky.

Humans had their way of doing things, and oni had their way of doing things.

That was why—Ibuki Suika just did what she could, and said what she could say.



“Because you—don't look like you're having fun.”

Her answer was a cry.

“How can I—be having fun!?”

With the shout, seals were released in Suika's hand explosively. Unable to stand the pressure inside, Suika's hand burst open. Her torn fingers flew in the air, and before the blood spurted, Reimu flew up. Sending the sake that soaked her clothes away, she went toward Suika's face in a straight line, and

was read.

“I'm having—fun!”

Along with a loud laugh, she sent her right hand out. Without protecting her injured left hand, without even showing pain in her expression, without even getting up, she lowered her right arm with just the movement of her shoulder. The right arm that gripped the gourd was big enough to cover Reimu's body, and—something that was just big wasn't a threat to Reimu.

“—Divine Arts, Omnidirectional Demon Binding Circle.”

There was no way something giant could avoid danmaku.

Before the fist hit, Reimu's right hand went forward. In her hand was a spell card. The danmaku that were released with the declaration made a space suppression circle that went to all sides and bound oni.

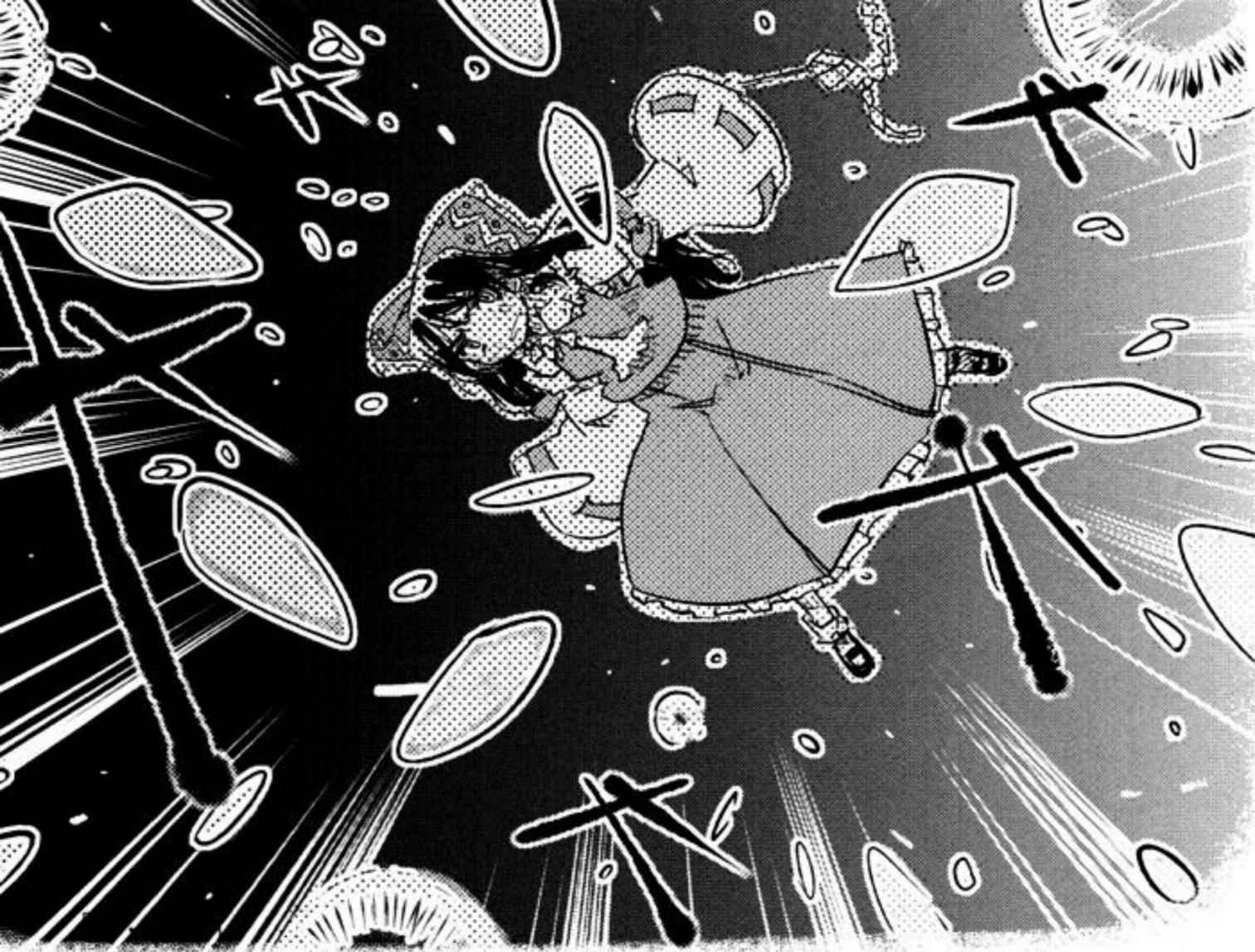
“U-wa-wa-a—”

She heard Suika's hesitation. The danmaku she sent forward, not to the side, expanded to cover the giant arm from all sides. White pellets, red wedges, and yellow seals mixed, wrapped around the arm, and the balls that came back started destroying her arm.

The right arm that was bigger than the buildings was smashed and scattered, and

“—Watto!”

Something other than the arm also burst.



She wandered between the choices of taking it or avoiding it, and Reimu still didn't notice that that wandering was connected to her will of participating in the danmaku play.

Seeing Reimu like that, Suika smiled even more.

It was so fun—and

it was going to be more fun, she said with her smile. Still smiling, Suika yelled.

“Let's be bright; it's the last festival!

Let's have fun; it's the last banquet!

It'll be a waste if you don't enjoy it!

You have to enjoy it!

Loudly and flashily, bombastically and glamorously!

Oni and tengu, youkai and fairies, humans and nonhumans!

—*Why don't we go with a bang!?*”

It was Reimu's turn to be taken aback. Not that her bullets had hit. Without relation to being hit or not, all of Suika's giant body exploded. What flew from the places that burst weren't pieces of flesh, shockwaves, or blood, but

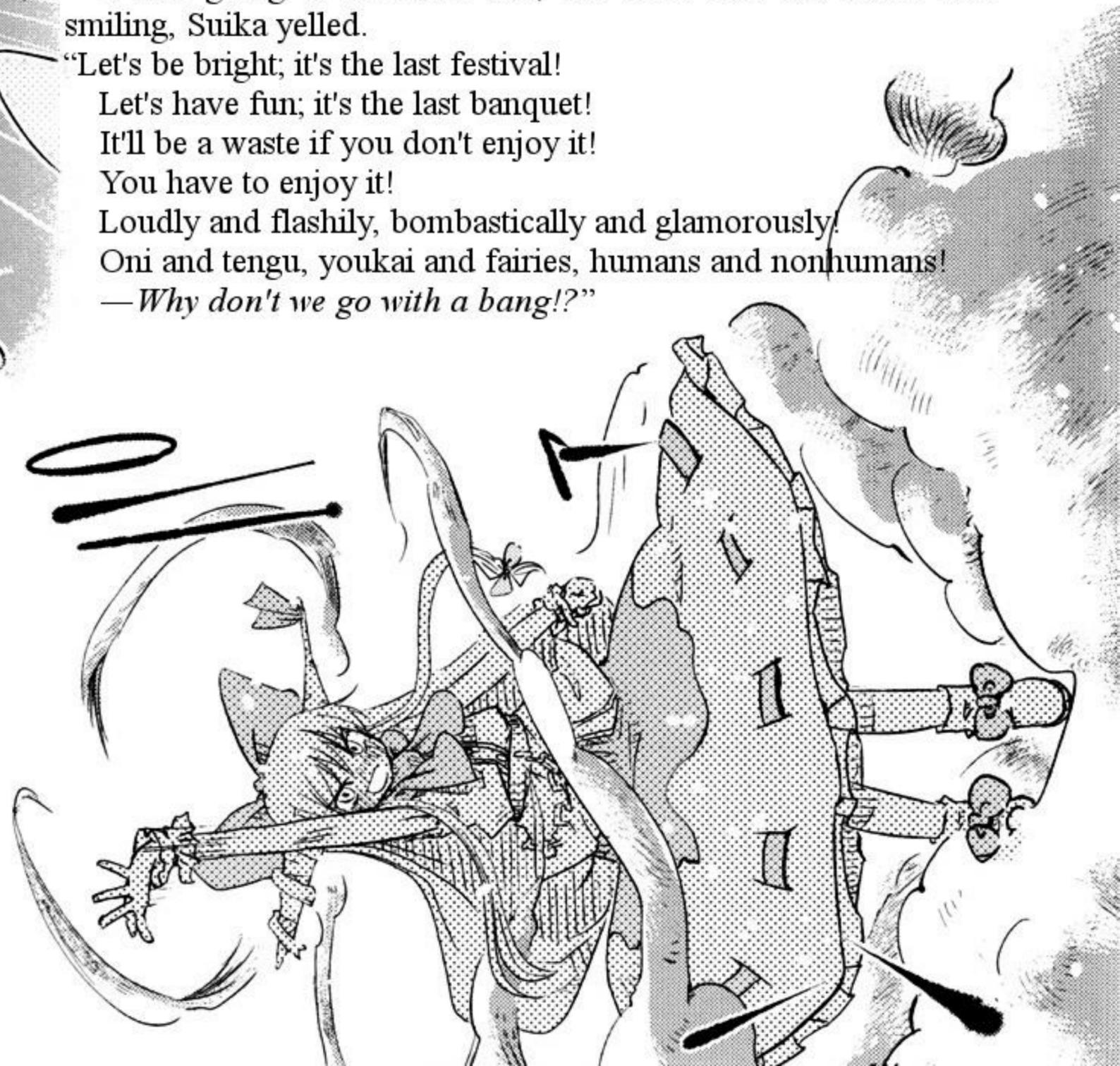
innumerable blue pellet shots.

“A spell card!”

“Right!”

—Qi of Oni “Deep Fog Labyrinth.”

Suika's ability governed gathering and scattering. She became large by gathering, and—became pellets by splitting. Beyond the pellet shots, she could see Suika, who was back to her normal size, appearing and disappearing, and all the danmaku from the mass that had made her up until now rushed at Reimu all at once.



†

Things to be surprised about: 1. The sturdiness of humans.

“.....Are you done talking?”

As if she forgot the fact that she had fallen a moment ago and collided on top of that, Kirisame Marisa stood up. Hitting her skirt with her hand, she fixed her hat. Behind her, Konpaku Youmu was standing up using her sword. Even though she was worn out, the light in her eyes had not become weak.

It wasn't something I could boast about, but I was sure that I would die if I did the same thing.

.....I really couldn't boast about it.

“More or less. That person isn't, though.”

I answered and stood up like them. I pulled Mary up this time. Mary, who said, “Thank you,” was so light it was a little scary. Like she was becoming empty inside—her cracked body seemed like it would shatter if it were pushed.

That act she just did might have been just barely okay.

Holding Mary's hand, I put my hand around her waist and held her. If I did this, it should be easier for her to stand. I heard another word of thanks from beside me, but I was too embarrassed to look.

The ones I faced were Marisa and Youmu.

Marisa had on a smile that hadn't changed since the time I met her. I didn't know what she did or where she did it, but her clothes were torn and she smelled like alcohol. Did she go to a banquet or something? It didn't look like she was drunk, but it looked like she was having fun.

Youmu was still looking at me and Mary with a gaze that hadn't changed. Perhaps because Marisa was between us, she didn't come to cut us— In the first place, she might not have had enough strength left to do that.

The two were contrastive.

Which one should I talk to? Marisa, who said she would help us, or Youmu, who tried to oppose us?

I hesitated, and

“I'll tell you, Konpaku Youmu.”

Mary didn't hesitate.

That might not have been Mary, but Yakumo Yukari. The part of her that was Gensokyo's inhabitant, Yakumo Yukari, might have made her speak.

I couldn't tell. Because even though I knew about Mary, I didn't know about Yukari or Youmu. Not even what she held important and what she desired.

I couldn't interrupt.

And, I couldn't look away either. I just stayed quiet and listened to Yukari and Youmu's conversation.

“You didn't hear from Yuyuko? That this isn't an incident— That it's something that can't be helped.”

“.....That's”

Perhaps because she knew what she was talking about, Youmu faltered.

Yukari didn't stop.

“The dream called Gensokyo is ending. What's occurring now comes from that. Without any exceptions, everything will end— Because that girl has realized that, she's accepting it.

The way she did long ago.”

Yukari stopped talking.

Youmu looked down and looked at her swords.

“Do you think I’ll—be convinced with those words?”

Click.

Raising her face, she pointed the sword she was using for support at Yukari.

Convince me with your strength, not your words, she said with her behaviour.

.....But

I knew. That wouldn't happen. Yukari didn't have the strength to do that anymore. I knew that she was so worn out that she was unable to stand by herself and couldn't even open gaps.

I understood the cause too.

Because even though she knew it would end, she tried to keep Gensokyo—this dream. And, I knew why she did that.

Because I understood, my chest hurt. So much that I wanted to shout. Blood that couldn't be seen spilled from the wound that dug at my heart and made me feel like suffocating.

A dream.

Someone's dream.

A dream everyone dreamt of.

The wish of not wanting to lose something.

That was

“Then in order to convince you—I’ll tell you a dream story.”

Yukari spoke. Because she knew. Because she was Mary. She noticed long ago that I was acting like I hadn't noticed,

and because she was so kind, she was trying to say it herself.

Her words weren't just for Youmu. They were also for me.

“In a place that wasn't here, in a reality that wasn't a dream, a girl fell asleep.”

—A girl fell asleep.

I couldn't remember the reason. It wasn't that I didn't know, but because it had been lost. Whether it was an illness that couldn't be cured, a curse that couldn't be broken, an accident that couldn't be avoided, or a fate that couldn't be changed. Or—whether it was that way from the beginning.

“A girl who was close to her became sad. Because the girl who fell asleep would not wake up.”

—A girl was crying.

I knew. I remembered. I couldn't forget. The girl who was next to me. Neither of us could be without her partner. She was a little strange, really strange, and a fascinating companion. My beloved friend, with whom I felt I could go anywhere if I held her hand.

Because she lost her, she became sad.

That leaving her partner, she went to sleep by herself.

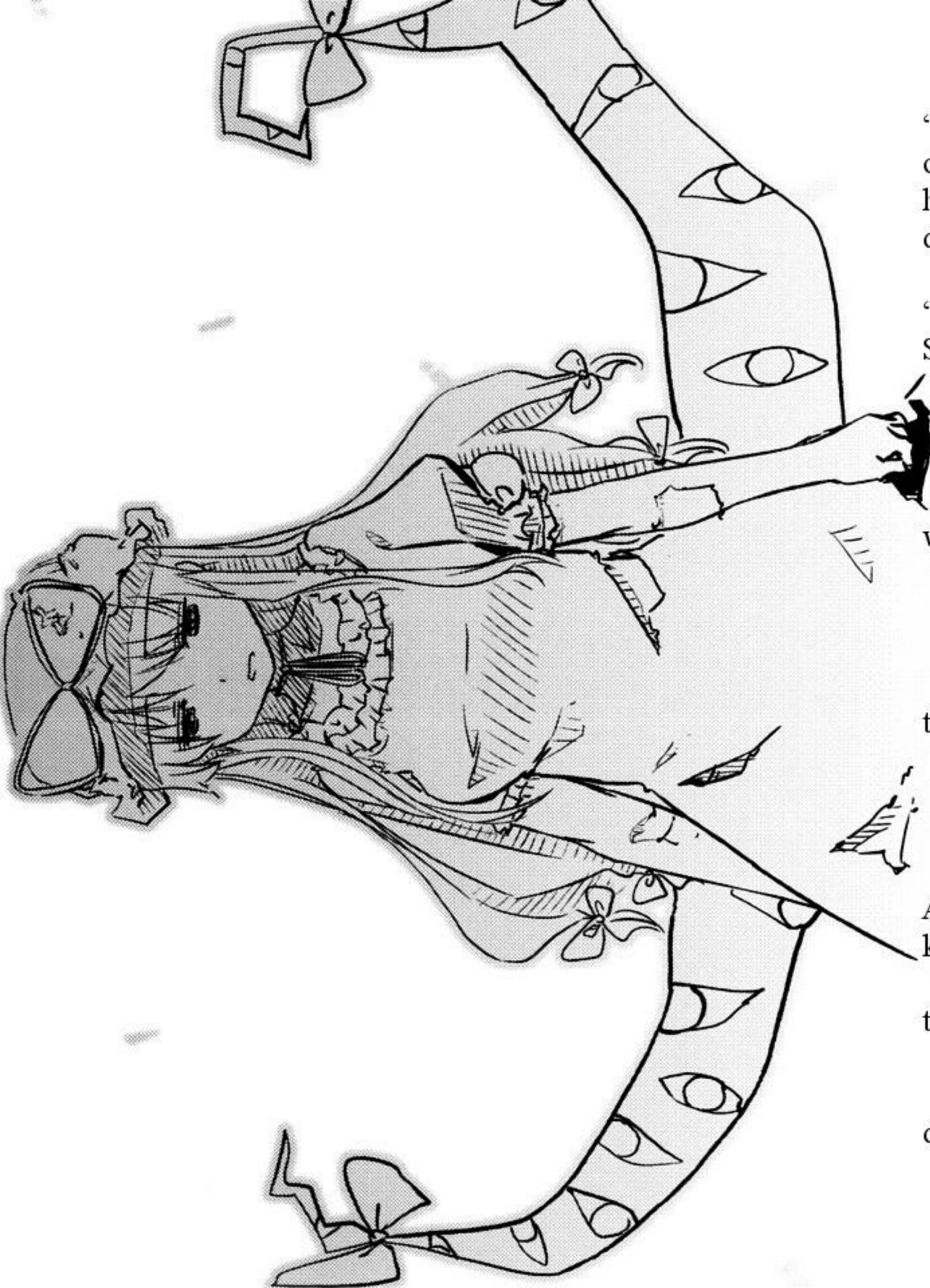
Because—the Hifuu club was one by two.

“The girl who dreamt dreams continued to sleep. But, that finally started becoming an eternal sleep.”

Youmu listened silently. Because she didn't know anything.

The shopkeeper listened silently. Because he knew and didn't act.

And, I



“The girl who was left behind was sad; so sad. She finally went over a boundary line. Falling asleep with her, dreaming with her, she made <sup>A Dream World</sup> a dream of reality, and a dream of a dream—Gensokyo.”

I—

“To keep her. So she wouldn't lose the girl who was sleeping. She made a world to keep things that were being lost.”

I, with my own will, said the last piece.

—Yes.

I already knew everything.

This was a dream. A dream world. Gensokyo, Mary and I, were part of a dream.

Not a dream I was having.

Not a dream Mary was having.

The dream we were having.

The girl who was dying had a dream, and the girl who tried to stop her from dying had a dream; a dream story like that.

—The Hifuu club's dream story.

Outside the world, Mary and I were probably still sleeping. And in the dream, we were following reality. Because once one knew it was a dream, one woke up.

Pretending not to have realized, the Hifuu club advanced toward a dream.

On top of realizing, Gensokyo kept the dream.

They were back to back, and—like a yin-yang orb, were derived from the same thing.

The Hifuu club's dream story.



And, the dream was ending.  
The dream world was ending.  
Because dreams ended.  
Because a dream that didn't end was the same as death.  
The end that had been decided from the beginning had come.

“No matter what is done, it can't be stopped. That's why, it's a matter of your feelings from here.

—A matter of your heart.”

Directly, without looking away from Youmu, Yukari spoke sincerely. She wasn't smiling. Her cracked mouth wasn't smiling. She was telling Youmu that that was the only thing left in the world.

“My heart.....”

In Youmu's voice, with which she murmured that, there was no hostility or murderous intent left. She was so deep in thought that she might have dropped the swords she was holding.

“What you wish at the end of the world. How you want to be.”

“What I.....wish for.”

“It's simple.”

Saying that, Yukari smiled.

It wasn't a smile to deceive her; like a wink, it was a charming smile. There's no need to worry— That was what her smile said.

Youmu widened her eyes. Still looking at her face, Yukari spoke.

“Who you want to spend the end with— That's all.”

And

Konpaku Youmu didn't worry any more than that.

“—Thank you very much.”

She bowed her head politely and

In the next moment, she was already gone. Something flew up— It was like I got the feeling that I just barely saw something like that. She was faster than Marisa. Without leaving a sound or a shadow, Youmu disappeared.

.....There was no need to worry.

Because her face when I raised my face looked refreshed like she got over something.

To do what she was supposed to do. To be where she was supposed to be.

To be with the one important to her.

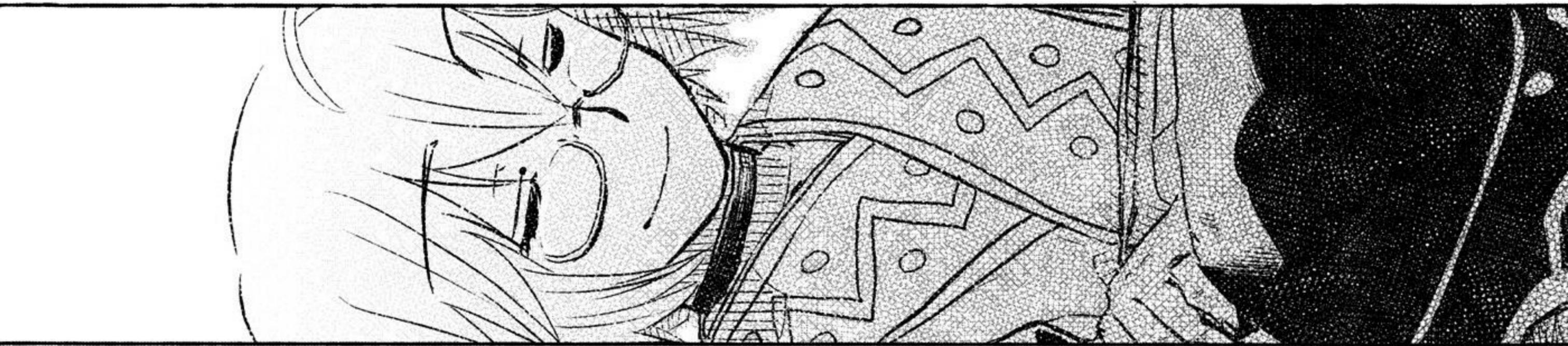
“—Now, then.”

The one who said that Marisa, who had been silent. Taking the broom that stuck in the asphalt out, she spun it around and put it on her shoulder.

Her black and white clothes were torn, they smelled like alcohol, and she looked tired, but—she was smiling.

Her unchanging smile didn't have any hint of darkness.





“I think I'll go too. It looks like someone else is being stubborn over there.”

“..... You're going?”

The one who asked was the shopkeeper. Pushing aside the former merchandise that was now debris while walking, he put some distance between him and Marisa and stopped.

There was some distance between them.

That might have been the distance between those who went forward and those who stopped.

“Yeah. Well, that is, um, you know,”

“I don't know how she thinks of it, but,” she added, blushing embarrassedly (If it was embarrassing, she just shouldn't say it—) Kirisame Marisa spoke.

“.....she's my friend.”

“I see— You're strong, aren't you?”

In response to Rinnosuke, who lowered his shoulders,

“What are you saying? This is—”

Like she was surprised, Marisa widened her eyes and

“*Normal, isn't it?*”

really

as if it really weren't anything, said those words.

“——”

The shopkeeper became silent for a moment and

“I knew, from before.”

After that—he sighed somewhat happily. I probably wasn't the only one he looked like he was smiling to.

Seeing that, Marisa smiled more. Getting on her broom, she smiled, flew up, and

“See ya Kourin!”

“Goodbye, Marisa.”

with those words

the broom accelerated and flew without hesitation.

Where an oni was on a rampage and wind blew, where buildings collapsed and the bedrock broke apart; to the final banquet.



†

Gensokyou's youkai generally liked festivals. They liked banquets, and they liked danmaku play. They found some reason to meddle and went wild. It didn't matter whether they won or lost. As long as there was a situation, they enjoyed danmaku play and the banquets that included them.

If that was "the last banquet," what would happen?

It went without saying that a disastrous scene that was almost refreshing broke out.

"Where did all of these come from!?"

While yelling, Reimu put her hands in front and behind her. A barrier in front, a barrier behind— The red and blue duplex barrier blocked the danmaku and other things that came flying.

Other things.

For example, the traffic signal Suika pulled out exultantly, the tree that was blown toward her with Shameimaru Aya's wind, and the Medicine Melancholy that Kazami Yuuka threw at her. Something terrible was mixed in, but the one who threw it and the one who blocked it didn't notice.



Everyone was desperate, and everyone seemed like she was having fun.

A pleasant hell. It was suitable to express it like that. Drawn by the banquet, fairies, ghosts, youkai, and great youkai gathered. The danmaku play that was only between Reimu and Suika at first had become a battle royal that included everyone there before anyone noticed.

Of course the weak were eliminated first, and—before she noticed, the belligerent ones that no one could lay a hand on, in other words, a few youkai no one could do anything about, ended up playing with Reimu.

An oni,  
a tengu,  
and an old youkai.

They were ones one didn't even want to think about.

"Should I gather more?"

Suika took out a sign while smiling, swung it back, and threw it with all her might. The sign with 'STOP' written on it flew without stopping, but got caught in the duplex barrier and ceased moving.

"It's your doing!?"

"No— You see, I"

An impact came from behind her back. Perhaps because she thought that nothing would change at long range, Yuuka came

to hit her directly with her umbrella. Like many of the strong, she had a smile on her face. Even though she had already been hit with several bullets, she didn't stop smiling elegantly.

The umbrella that collided with the duplex barrier made a grinding noise. One of them was being shaved down; both of them were being shaved down.

“came because it seemed fun. Can you play?”

She smiled—and, opened the umbrella that had been closed.

Was it a sign or just to block her view? In front of Reimu, who was being cautious,

“.....Flowers!”

Making the duplex barrier a seedbed, sunflowers came to life. Using the barrier as a source of nutrients, the sunflowers grew in the blink of an eye and became large. The ability to make flowers bloom— By that bloom that was appropriate for that ability, the barrier quickly came apart, and

“Play on your own!”

Redirecting her attention, she changed her awareness. She cast out the barrier from her mind and made it become independent. By being cut off from Reimu, the barrier lost its resistance, the speed at which it was encroached increased, and it took a second and a half for it to vanish completely.

For danmaku play, it was a time equivalent to eternity.

It was enough. Reimu waved her left hand in a complex manner, and “Duplex Barrier!”

With Yuuka, who was trying to destroy the barrier, another barrier was born. It was a barrier sandwiched by the duplex barrier. The barrier that was being encroached by Yuuka's flowers decayed in the blink of an eye, and the barrier aimed at Yuuka shrank from the outside. She was completely surrounded, and she couldn't escape. Yuuka's face became slightly drawn, and

“Wind God Girl!”

still drawn, she was blown away.

Not Reimu. The one who was blown away was Yuuka. Not being able to move because she was surrounded by the barrier, she was blown away along with the barrier around her. Unable to resist the violent wind, while spinning round and round—she crashed into a building.

She didn't just stick into it. A human shaped hole opened, and Yuuka disappeared into the giant building. No one was looking in that direction.

Reimu, who avoided the attack by a hairsbreadth by sacrificing Yuuka—glared at Shameimaru Aya, who had attacked Yuuka.

Even though she was being glared at, Aya smiled lightly. In her hand was a fan. In the wind that whirled because of her sudden stop, she stood in the sky, and

looked at the ending world and Reimu.

“It looks like I missed—”

Aya said that with a bottomless bright voice that didn't sound like one of regret.



“.....She wasn't your ally?”

“Eh? No.”

Aya said that easily, and

“We're youkai. We're different from you. Besides—”

While saying that, she pointed the finder of the camera at Reimu, and

Aya puffed her chest out and declared.

“I'm a reporter. If there's a scoop that seems interesting, I'll go anywhere— Even to the ends of the Earth! Even to the end of the world!”

While she laughed, the shutter closed.

The flash shone.

Her picture was taken.

*Her flotation disappeared.*

“.....!”

Her flotation—power, spiritual power disappeared. It was *taken* by the photo. The focus that erased danmaku took the power that made Reimu float, and her body, which felt the effect of gravity, began to fall. It wasn't a big deal. Only the spiritual energy she was using at that moment was taken, so she was able to quickly regain herself— If she hadn't seen Suika where she would have fallen, she probably could have said that it wasn't a big deal.

At the end of her line of sight

like a slugger standing at the batter's box, Suika was holding a signal light.

And, Suika didn't wait for the ball.

“Home run!”

Joyfully jumping from the batter's box—the manhole, she joyfully swung the signal light. Without form or skill, it was a

swing with all her might.

It was really giving a metal rod to an oni.<sup>29</sup>

Suika aimed at Reimu, who was falling, and charged. Reimu couldn't block it. Stopping her fall or defending— She weighed the actions in her mind, and Suika's attack exploded.

She put up a barrier, but—the barrier was pierced. The barrier broke by the attack. Like Yuuka from before—she took the center of the barrier and was sent flying. Decelerating right before hitting a building, her body was bent by the deceleration, and while bearing a pressure that made it feel like her organs would come out of her mouth, her speed became exceedingly close to zero.

Her back hit the building lightly.

“Looks like it was a grounder.”

Drifting in the sky, Aya, who floated next to Suika, said that to make fun of her. Suika folded her arms and with a dissatisfied expression said, “I hit it at you.” Both of them had received a number of danmaku, but—it didn't seem like it affected them.

The exchange seemed fun.

In this situation—because of this situation, the oni and tengu were having fun.

That was incomprehensible to Reimu, and annoying. She remembered what Marisa and Suika had said to her. Because you aren't having fun, said Suika. Do what you want to, said Marisa.

They were doing what they wanted to and having fun.

Without relation to the end of the world.

.....Without relation?

A question mark suddenly rose in her mind, but before she could think about the meaning,

*"I caught you."*

From the inside of the building her back touched lightly—two arms came out.

"....."

She was going to be caught. A chill ran through her spine.

Her shoulders were grabbed by the arms that went through the concrete. Kazami Yuuka's hands. It hurt. It hurt enough for her to not be able to shake them off. Her fingers sunk into her shoulders, and her long nails broke her skin.

She couldn't escape.

Then—

"Fantasy—"

"Too slow-!"

The rehash didn't work. The one behind her—Kazami Yuuka, was faster at activating her ability than she was at shooting danmaku at her.

It wasn't a spell card.

It wasn't even a move. With all her strength—the manifestation of her ability. Yuuka, who had the ability to make flowers bloom, poured all of her strength into it.

Taking even the danmaku Reimu tried to release as nourishment—flowers were born. The flowers became branches, the branches became trees, the trees became a forest, and the forest became a great tree while intertwining. It was like the world tree. Reimu was taken in by the flowers, the grass, the branches, the leaves, and the trunk. Grow, grow, grow, grow, grow. The tree on which flowers grew and flourished grew and grew and grew. Using the giant building itself as nourishment—in less than a few seconds, the building's appearance became that of a tree's.

A tree and a forest, a tree and a flower.

It was literally all of her strength. Yuuka who used all of her

strength, fell at the roots of the tree. But still, the tree didn't stop. The life that was created continued to grow even after leaving Yuuka.

With Reimu still inside.

"I wonder if she's going to die. ....Though she probably won't."

"She might to die. ....Though I'm sure she won't."

Aya and Suika said that without seeming to believe it at all. The two who looked down at roots of the tree, looked at the trunk, and looked up at the flowers had smiles on their faces.

The oni and the tengu were smiling that it wouldn't end with something like this.

As if—to answer those smiles.

"....."

The same time they heard some voice, sound—part of the tree flew off, and danmaku flew out. They were seals. Many danmaku they recognized flew as if to destroy the curse of the tree.

But—it wasn't enough.

That wasn't enough.

Many came out—and each time, the tree grew and recovered. Supplementing its broken body with other branches, it grew more complexly and bigger. Even if Reimu was alive inside, the force of each danmaku was too weak for her to escape. The speed at which it grew was overwhelmingly faster than the one of destruction.

That was why

to break it, power that overwhelmed even that was needed. A power that penetrated the sky and cleared the clouds, pierced the stars and shot the moon, dyed the world, and couldn't be stopped by anyone was needed.

Suika and Aya—knew that power. They were smiling because

they knew. At the edge of their field of vision, because they saw her come—they were smiling, believing that the revelry would increase.

With the expectations of the spectators  
the final player—the power that couldn't be stopped by anyone

“I'll shoot! Whether it moves or doesn't move, shoots or doesn't shoot, I'm going to shoot! The revelry's in full swing, this'll be flashy—”

pointing the Hakkerō forward while flying near,  
speaking sharply at the tree that continued to grow,

“—Master Spark!”

she released that light at the same time she appeared.

“—————!!”

A sun was born.

A gold light brighter than the moon and the sun far  
that Aya and Suika narrowed their eyes. The shot

flew. Destroying everything—  
light, without bending or stopping,

unable to be stopped by anyone, her existence  
unable to be stopped by anyone

Was not able to be stopped if  
the instant it

The light

separated. The shockwaves, the space and the world  
The air that disappeared by the light created a vacuum  
and the vacuum that was created in order to  
it, started swallowing the things around it.  
noise, the air that shook in the light

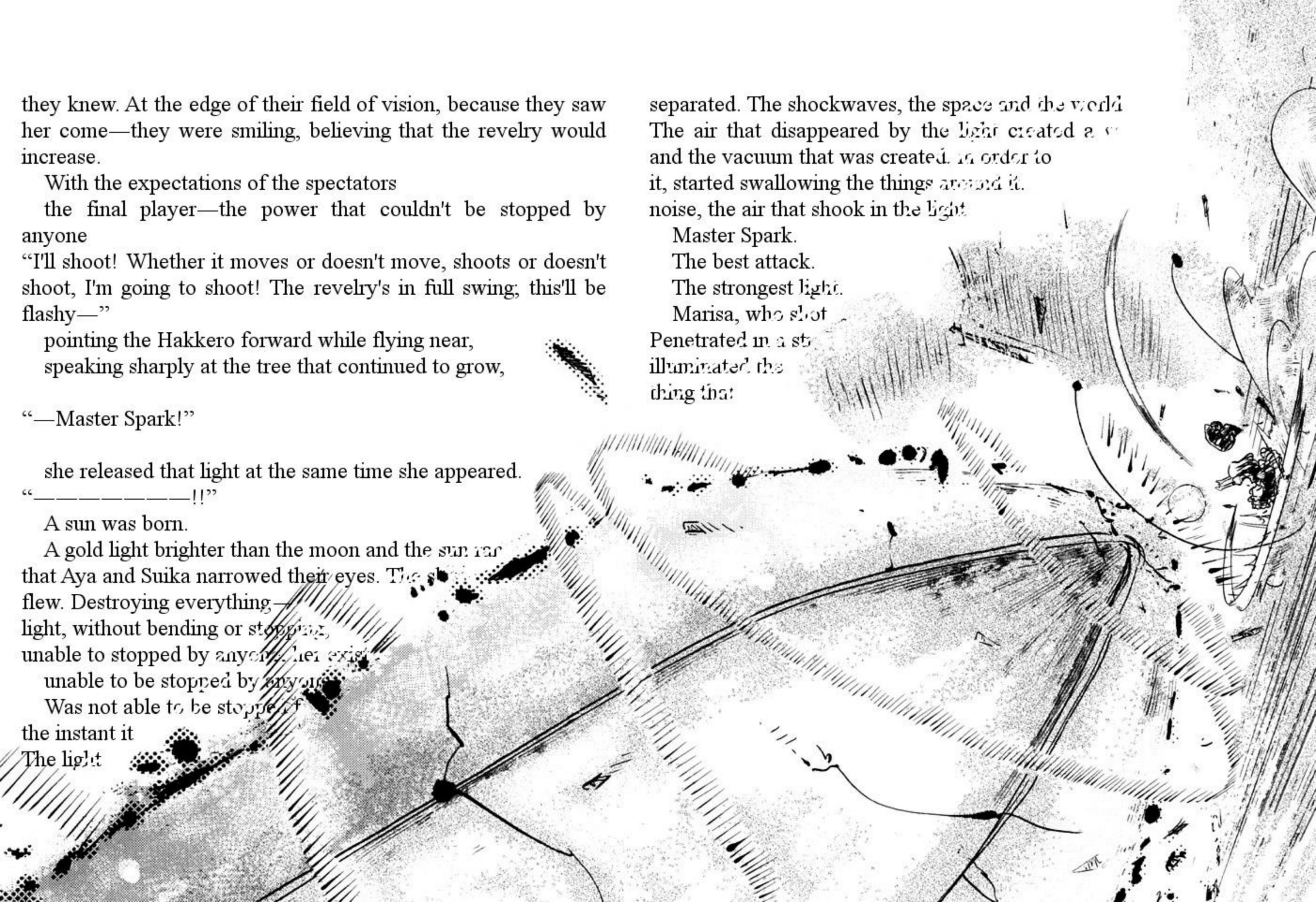
Master Spark.

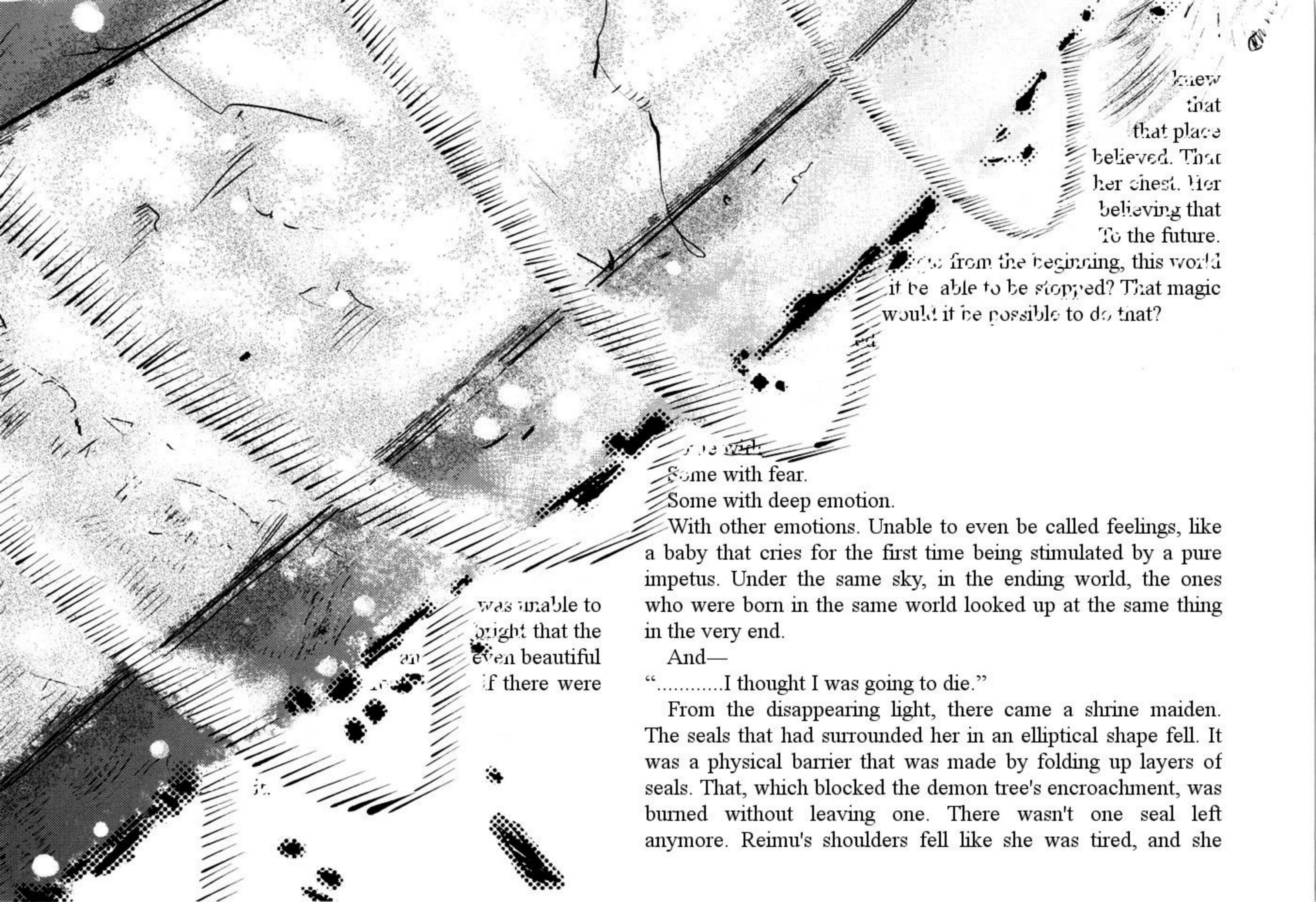
The best attack.

The strongest light.

Marisa, who shot

Penetrated in a split second  
illuminated the  
thing that





knew  
that  
that place  
believed. That  
her chest. Her  
believing that  
To the future.

from the beginning, this world  
it be able to be stopped? That magic  
would it be possible to do that?

was unable to  
bright that the  
even beautiful  
if there were

Some with fear.  
Some with deep emotion.

With other emotions. Unable to even be called feelings, like a baby that cries for the first time being stimulated by a pure impetus. Under the same sky, in the ending world, the ones who were born in the same world looked up at the same thing in the very end.

And—  
“.....I thought I was going to die.”

From the disappearing light, there came a shrine maiden. The seals that had surrounded her in an elliptical shape fell. It was a physical barrier that was made by folding up layers of seals. That, which blocked the demon tree's encroachment, was burned without leaving one. There wasn't one seal left anymore. Reimu's shoulders fell like she was tired, and she

sighed without knowing.

And even though that was probably the same for Marisa, who released an attack with all her strength—contrastively, she was smiling boldly. She changed her position in the sky. From her position of riding on the broom, she stood up on the broom and pointed her finger. To Reimu, who floated in the sky.

They faced each other.

The shrine maiden and the magician faced each other.

The two humans faced each other.

“It’s almost the end, Reimu! At least in the very end—let’s go with a bang!”

“You’re saying something like what someone else said!”

There was no beginning signal. Both of them moved to be the first. The two who had used up all their strength charged toward each other as if they weren’t tired.

Even using all their strength—wasn’t enough.

Something like that wasn’t nearly enough, Marisa thought.

You’re the one person I don’t want to lose to, Reimu thought.



That was why what collided probably wasn’t strength, but feelings. Strong feelings they wouldn’t yield. The tip of the broom tore Reimu’s clothes, and the golden hair that was taken by the tamagushi that was swung fluttered in the air. They separated at the same speed they had come into contact, and even the moment they turned around in the air was exactly the same. Reimu and Marisa turned, and—avoided the danmaku that flew at them.

And they turned around at the same time—

“We’d rather you”

“didn’t ignore us.”

the oni and tengu who shot from the side said that.

“You were there,” smiled Marisa.

“We were,” smiled Aya.

“We are,” smiled Suika.



The only one who wasn’t smiling, Reimu, looked at those three with a bitter expression. What was in her head was a single question. The question that appeared a few moments ago.

—Without relation to the end of the world.

Yes, it didn’t matter. The world ending and this danmaku play had no relation. Reimu finally released the question that had appeared that moment outside.

“What meaning does this danmaku play have!?”

In response to that basic question

“It doesn't.”

“It doesn't, does it?”

“No, it doesn't.”

Marisa, Aya, and Suika answered innocently, tilted their heads, and smiled. Their smiles were refreshing as though Reimu's question wasn't worth thinking about.

That was why Reimu shouted. Strongly.

“—Why!?”

“Why—?”

Marisa lowered her shoulders like she was amazed and looked at Aya and Suika. Aya and Suika, to whom the conversation turned, looked at Reimu and Marisa and lowered their shoulders to copy.

“Is it not fun?”

“Because it's a festival—is enough.”

“That's how it is,” said Marisa. “We're just doing what we want to do. It's the end, so that much is okay, right? That's why, Reimu—”

“——What?”

In response to Reimu, who glared,

Marisa—with an expression she rarely showed—one she only showed to people who were her friends, said it.

—That she wasn't a wall or a shrine maiden, but that.

“Go. Where you want to go— Because you're you.”

Those words

—Go meet the one you want to meet.

sounded to Reimu like they were saying that.

Of course that was an illusion. Because there was no way Marisa knew. Then that was Reimu's true feeling. Wanting to meet someone was the final thing she wanted to do. Meeting someone who was going to go forever. Expressing her true feelings.

—Yakumo Yukari.

The name that appeared in her head—Reimu did not deny.

Denying it was the only thing she couldn't do.

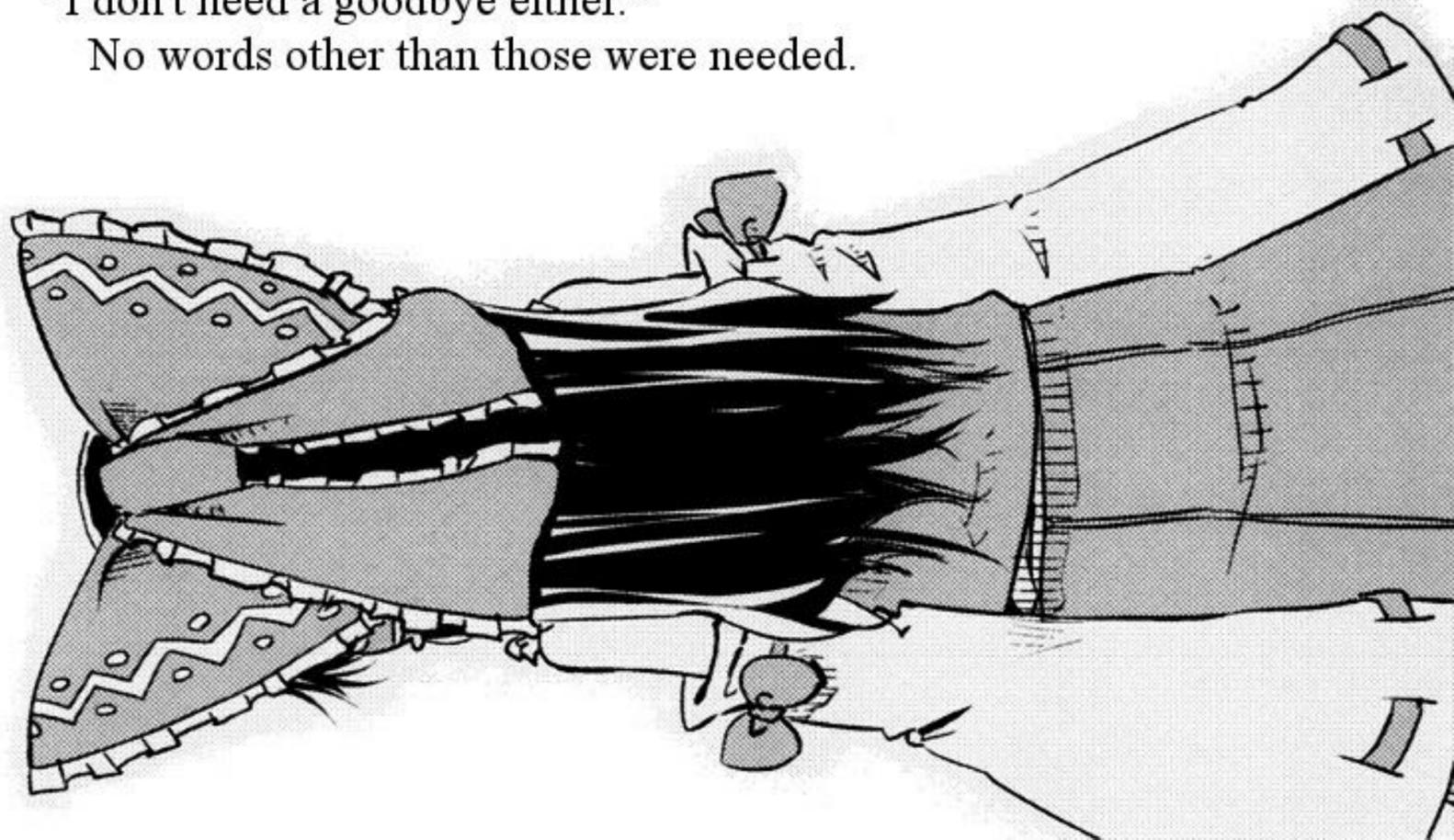
And, she decided.

Not as a shrine maiden, but as Hakurei Reimu—she spoke.

“—I won't say thank you.”

“I don't need a goodbye either.”

No words other than those were needed.



Marisa smiled and raised one of her hands lightly. To her— In the end, Reimu smiled, smiled only at Marisa and smack.

The moment she flew, making a pleasant sound, she hit her hand against hers. Their gazes met for a moment and quickly parted. Marisa didn't turn back. Reimu didn't turn back either. Without stopping, she flew away. Under the full moon that hung in the evening sky, to spend the last of her time with that youkai.

At that back

“Yeah, yeah, honest—”

at Reimu, who turned her back, Aya and Suika tried to release danmaku, and

“—I won't let you get in the way!”

two rays of light pierced the two who tried to shoot. Aiming for the two who avoided them in a moment's decision, the beams of light moved from the left and the right to catch them.

—Closing moonlight rays.

Marisa, who released the rays from her hands, manipulated her broom while releasing them. While facing Aya and Suika, she faced her back to Reimu as if to protect her.

To protect the last dream of the girl who was just alone, the girl who had been alone.

Kirisame Marisa stood in their way.

Chased by the beams of light, Aya and Suika had to go back. However, their faces had smiles like Marisa's.

“Those who obstruct one's path to love—”

Marisa's words

“will be eaten by an oni?”

“Kicked by a tengu?”

were made fun of by the oni and tengu and

“*B r e a k!*”

With the voice that wasn't any of the three's—light came from below.

The light was a wing. It was a wing that emitted light. The wing from which jewels that continued to emit light hung turned the ground, stretched up from below, and became big. The power that had been sealed deep underground came up the broken bedrock. While destroying everything above it, a power that seemed like it would destroy everything in the ending world came. The colorful balls of light that were born from the wings filled the space like a maze.

Marisa knew that power.

“You should break to your heart's content! Break walls, and break fences! There's no cage that can imprison you—Flandre Scarlet!”

“'Maze of Love'! —Going over the walls of mazes?”

“Going through even ceilings!”

That was why she yelled.

To the vampire's sister who came from below the ground—Flandre Scarlet. To Ibuki Suika. To Shameimaru Aya. To everything that was in her eyes. Facing everyone who was born and lived in Gensokyo, Marisa boldly spoke with a smile.

“Beyond! Beyond that! Wherever! As far as I can go! —I'll do what I want!”

And, the last festival ended.

†

The weather was good.

There was a lot wrong with the scenery, but—Suika thought that the weather was good. Because she was lying down, she could only see the sky. Whether it was Gensokyo or the outside, the sky wasn't different. The moon was out and it wasn't raining. The darkness of night was missing to say the conditions were good for a banquet, but twilight was the time of oni in the first place. The sunset sky was also nostalgic.

It was nostalgic, and—just a little, she felt like crying.

She remembered what she had lost. She remembered those oni she had been with. She remembered the fact that she was the oni who had become all by herself.

Just a little, she almost cried

but without crying, Suika smiled.

“—It was fun.”

And she got up. Beside her were two who were also on the ground. Although they were half in the ground, both of them had similar smiles.

“I'm tired more than that. You shouldn't do things you aren't used to, huh?”

Shameimaru Aya said that with a sigh, and

“Really? I can still go, but.....are you too old?”

Looking like she was at her limit no matter how one looked at it, but still smiling, Yuuka answered. Picking up the umbrella that was next to her, she tried to open it, but noticing that it was broken half way, she threw it.

“I don't want to hear that from you.....”

Aya's words didn't have strength in them. But, she was smiling.

The three of them were smiling.

—It was fun.

The banquet was fun—their faces asserted.

Suika didn't cry. Oni didn't cry.

Because it was fun.

Because the banquet was fun— Because she thought Gensokyo, which she threw away her tribe and came all alone to, was fun. Because it was a paradise that she thought she didn't mind facing the end in.

Smiling without crying, Suika stood up.

Four eyes faced Suika. She staggered not because of alcohol, but she somehow stood imposingly, puffed her chest, and spoke.

“Round two!”

Ayayayaya, said Aya.

You mean final round, said Yuuka.

“After going all out, you drink the same way. Why don't we losers have a drinking contest?”

I'm a bird,<sup>30</sup> said Aya.

Drink with an oni? asked Yuuka.

“We'll—go first.”

Suika raised her face. At the end of her gaze was a vampire. Remilia Scarlet, who was carrying a parasol, greeted them elegantly. Beside her was, holding Flandre Scarlet, Izayoi Sakuya. Patchouli Knowledge petted Flan, who lost consciousness after playing, and behind her, Hong Meiling was having a hard time carrying luggage on her back.

Looking at them, Suika asked.

“Where?”

“*Somewhere.*”

They were words of parting. Remilia curtsied and turned around. They went to go beyond the moon.

The festival was ending.

Suika looked until their backs couldn't be seen anymore, and after, said, “Come on, come on! We're going too!” to the two who looked suspiciously. She grabbed their necks as if incidentally and started walking. Although she was the smallest in terms of size, holding two girls wasn't any trouble with an oni's strength.

Their bodies were dragged, and

“—Well, that's good too.”

They both stood. Yuuka at Suika's right, Aya at Suika's left. The three stood up while lending each other their shoulders, and “If you try to have a drinking contest with a tengu, you'll be a loser oni next.”

With unsteady steps that made it seem like they would fall, but without falling—the three went away.

The losers exited.

While smiling like they were having fun until the end, they disappeared.



†

“It's been a while—Reimu.”

The one who spoke first was Yakumo Yukari.

No one who would interfere was left. There was no one. At least, she was the only one left in Reimu's sight. It was as if they were the only two in the world.

Yakumo Yukari.

The great youkai who loved Gensokyo. She was in an even worse state than when she last saw her, but she was still there. Without hiding in gaps or disappearing, she was standing with cracks in her body.

The scene she wanted to see.

She wanted to meet her the whole time—that was the only thing she wished.

But, even though she was finally facing her, no words came out. She didn't know what to say. Not insults or irony, not to a youkai she was supposed to defeat, as just a human, Reimu, what she should say. Even though there was a mountain's worth of things she wanted to say, even though there was an ocean's worth of things she wanted to convey, none of them took form.

The thoughts that came up to her throat stopped, and she felt like looking away.

“It's been a while.”

Even those words didn't come out.

The thoughts that didn't have anywhere to go expanded without limit.

“.....”

In response to Reimu, who continued to be silent

Yukari moved her hand. Her white glove moved up and down.

It was a gesture that said, “Come here.”

Still unable to find the words she should say, Reimu followed that gesture and walked toward her. She didn't fly. Step by step, she walked while feeling the ground beneath her. The distance that had been long shrank as much as she progressed.

She came close enough to be able to touch her with her hand.

The one who moved—was Yukari. Coming close to her, she reached her hand out toward Reimu, who had almost stopped, and drew her in. As if pushed, Reimu

Pomf.

There was a light sound, and— At that time, Reimu's body was in Yukari's chest.

Drawn in, she was held.

The feeling of the arms that had been wrapped around her, and the warmth of her skin. Feeling like she was enveloped in Yukari's smell, she naturally put her weight on her.

Yukari was taller, so she ended up putting her head on her chest.

That was why

the only one who knew what expression she was making was—Reimu herself.

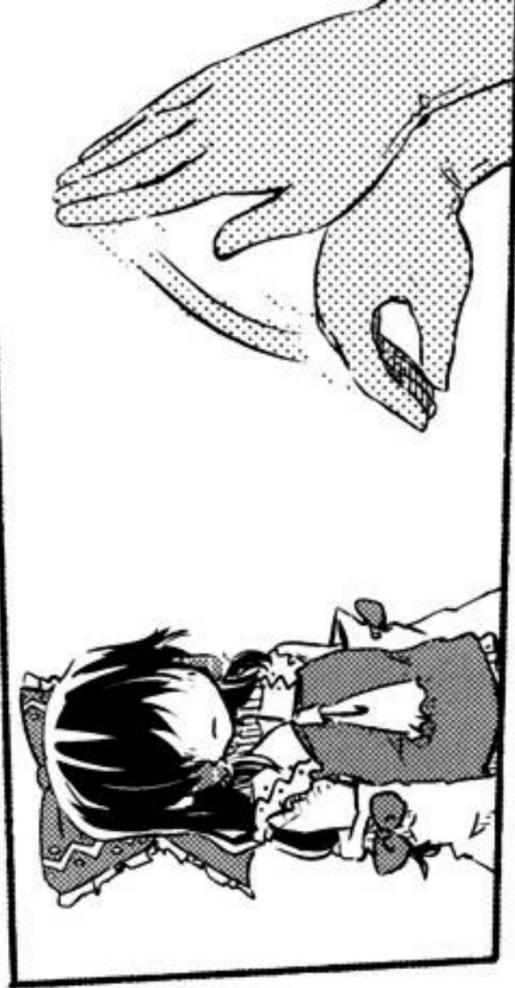
“.....That's not fair.”

The voice that spilled out was small and could only be heard by Yukari.

That her clothes got slightly wet, that her voice wasn't clear, only Reimu and Yukari knew.

An expression she never showed anyone before—was there.

“If you do something like this.....I can't say anything.”



“You don't have to say anything.”

Her voice was kind, and  
because it was kind—tears flowed.

“Because I know. That right now, you're here— Don't you think that's enough?”

“.....”

Reimu didn't answer. Silent, she wrapped her arms around Yukari's back and held her even tighter. Her shoulders shook slightly, and one of the tears that fell was swallowed up by the ground.

“.....I wasn't able to remain as the Hakurei shrine maiden, you know?”

With a slight fear, Reimu asked.

The complete neutrality that youkai liked—not as the system called Hakurei

but as a lone girl, as Reimu, she was here, but was that okay? It was a question like that.

To that question

“What part of you is the shrine <sup>reality</sup>maiden and what part of you is <sup>Dream</sup>Reimu— No one knows that boundary.”

Still holding her, Yukari gently shook her head.

If she felt anxious about that, she should have come to her directly— To Yukari, who smiled like that, Reimu didn't have words to return.

Because she didn't have the courage to check.

She was here now because someone gave her some courage. Because she had her back pushed.

By an ordinary magician.

—By someone she could call her friend.

She didn't have words. That was why Reimu strongly, strongly hugged Yukari. Not trying to wipe her tears, not trying

to hide her crying, she clung to Yukari with all her strength.

Because she knew that this was farewell.

Parting while hiding her feelings, or  
being brave in the end and parting.

It was a small—but important difference.

“I won't tell you not to cry. I'll stay like this until the end.”

“.....Then, if it's going to end,”

Still being held

with a voice that seemed like it would disappear, Reimu  
spoke. With a voice only Yukari could hear.

—Say that you love me.

“.....”

Yukari's face became red. She didn't think she'd say that like  
a child. She knew that that was Reimu's best attempt by her  
ears, which were dyed more red than the sunset. Even though it  
wasn't something to be embarrassed about, she became  
embarrassed.

With her face red, Yukari drew her face near Reimu and  
by Reimu's ear, so that only she could hear, she whispered  
those words. Reimu's ears, which were already red, became  
dyed red like they were burning.

And,

in the end

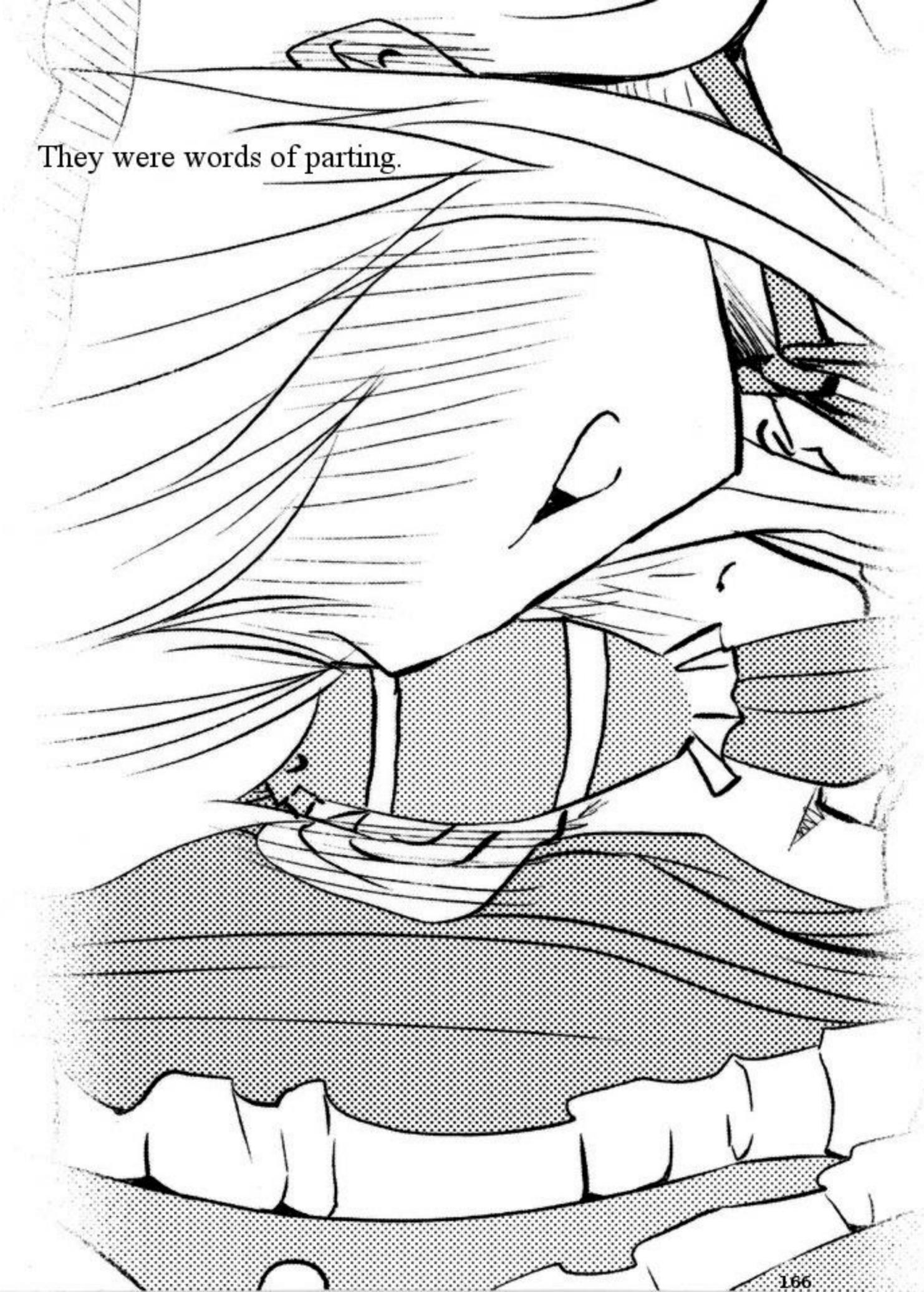
thinking of it as if mischievously, she put her mouth near her  
again.

If it's something that can be done—

If it's something that can come true—

———, said Yukari.

They were words of parting.



で逢いましよ

Let's meet in

†

There was one who was looking at that scene with half lidded eyes, and one who was looking embarrassedly.

“.....That makes one kind of jealous, doesn't it?”

“Is that how it is?”

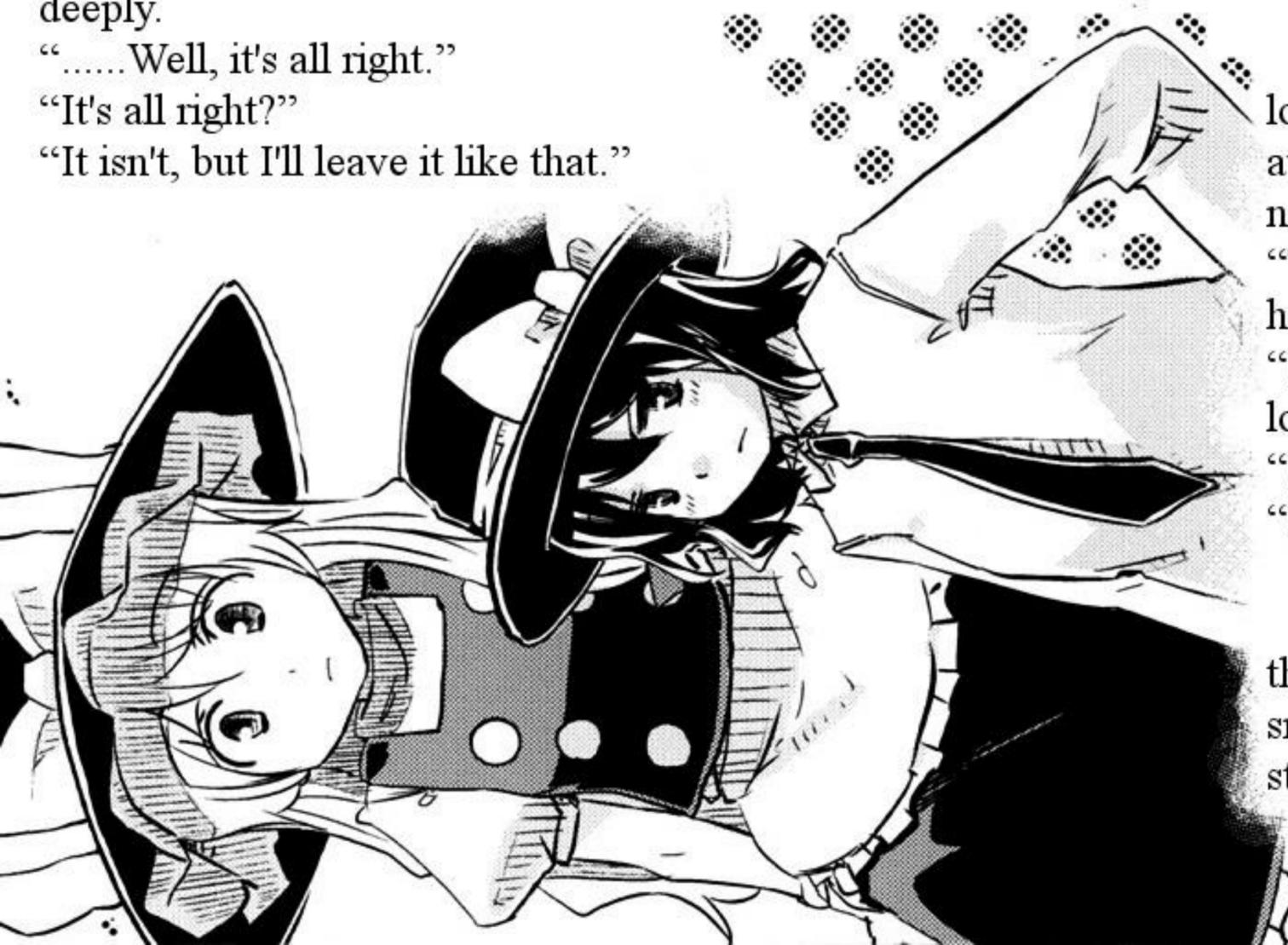
“That's how it is.”

In order to not bother Yukari and Reimu, Renko and Marisa were a good distance away. Sitting on the floating broom, Marisa swung her legs like she was bored. Looking at her, then looking at Yukari and Reimu embracing, Usami Renko sighed deeply.

“.....Well, it's all right.”

“It's all right?”

“It isn't, but I'll leave it like that.”



It seemed it would be bad for her mentally if she kept looking, so she changed the way she was facing and looked away from Reimu and Yukari. Looking up at Marisa, who was next to her, instead, she smiled at her after changing her mood. “Thanks for everything. If you weren't around, I might not have been able to do anything.”

“Don't worry about it. I just did what I wanted, and—” Marisa looked at Renko, “—Honesty is best for humans.”

“Do want you want, huh?”

“Correct.”

Marisa smiled cheerfully and Renko also smiled.

This girl's probably always like this—Renko thought. Even the day Gensokyo ended, she could say it was normal and smile. The will to proceed forward without giving up. A bright strength that almost made one envious of it.

There was no teary goodbye.

Without relation to how the world was, she was Kirisame Marisa.

“Now— I did what I wanted, so I guess I should to soon too.”

“Where?”

Even though she thought it was a question with an obvious answer, thinking that it was something like etiquette, Renko said it. As she expected, Marisa made a smile that seemed like it would be accompanied with a sound effect, and

“Somewhere. I'll go wherever I can—”

With those words, wind rose around Marisa. Gripping her broom firmly, enough power gathered to be seen. The broom shook slightly, and her hair was released from gravity and floated. She pulled her hat down to her eyes firmly with one hand. Reimu was disappearing behind her.

Her slightly visible mouth moved. To the shape of a smile. And she spoke.

“See ya, Hifuu club.”

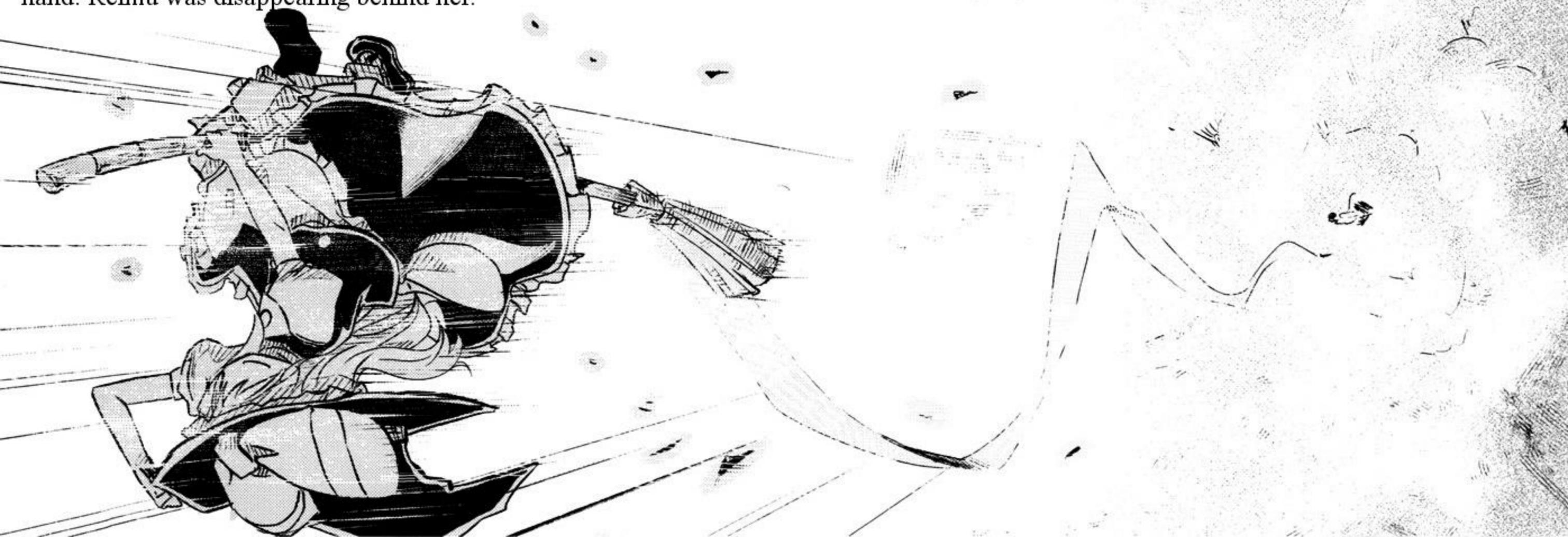
“That's correct now— Goodbye ordinary magician.”

They were words of parting.

Without turning around, Marisa rose into the sky like an arrow. Aiming for the moon, aiming for the end, with the lightheartedness of gazing at the end of the world. Not stopping, she didn't look back.

On and on, Marisa flew.

The light of the star disappeared in the sky.



†

And, there were two.

Everything started from two—and in the end, there were just the two again.

Only the Hifuu club was left in the end.

“.....It's become quite quiet, hasn't it?”

Stretching my back, I said that. My back hurt. And yet, I felt refreshed. The feeling when a festival ended, a light and uneasy one with refreshment and a touch of loneliness mixed, was in my chest.

I looked around with a spin— The world was really quiet. The world that was that noisy was, before I knew it, as peaceful as if it had gone to sleep. There was no one. Youkai, fairies, ghosts, humans; everyone disappeared. Did they disappear or melt? Did they return to their own dreams, their own realities? The fallen buildings and the damaged concrete had disappeared, and the end of the land was blurred in the color of evening.

In the sky was the moon.

Only the full moon that was large was floating. There were no stars. That was why I only knew the location, and that didn't have meaning either.

Everything was disappearing.

Everything was ending.

All that was left was me, and

“If you're here, Renko, it's lively enough.”





the one smiling next to me: Maribel Han.

“I wonder if you're just saying I'm noisy.”

“I won't deny it for you.”

“I want you to deny that. Well—it's all right.”

Saying that, I started walking. Slowly. Matching my pace with Mary, who was beside me, the two of us walked.

It wasn't like we were headed somewhere. It was just that we couldn't stand there. The most appropriate reason might have been that it kind of felt that way. Our reaching our hands out toward each other, holding hands, and walking didn't really have a reason either. That we wanted to do that was enough.

But if someone still asked, I probably would have answered like this:

—Somewhere.

Heading somewhere, Mary and I held hands and walked at a gentle pace. Her hand was warm, and there was a part of me that asked if that wasn't enough. There wasn't that much time left, so without saying anything, you should just feel Mary's warmth until the end— The devil's whisper was more charming than anything, and that was why I went against it.

“.....What did you say to that girl?”

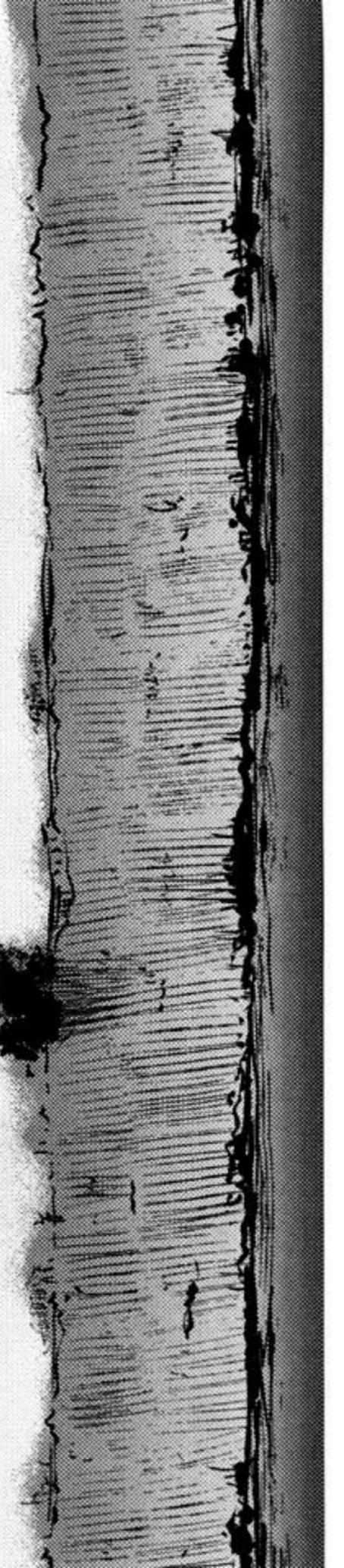
Before I got to the main point, I asked what had been on my mind. What exactly did she say to Hakurei Reimu—? What Mary returned in response to my question was an embarrassed looking smile.

“It's a secret.”

“You said something dirty.”

“No I didn't! .....That wasn't something I said, but”

“The Mary look-alike's words—right?”



“.....Asking while knowing is like you.”

“Thank you.”

I returned a smile. It would be good if it wasn't strained.

I knew that those were the Mary look-alike's words, but what was bothering was bothering, so I couldn't help it. I mean, right? Uncovering secrets was what the Hifuu club did! .....is what I tried to say, but I stopped. No matter how I thought about it, that was something I shouldn't pry into.

Mary and Yukari. Back to back, the same person.

Mary continued trying to uncover the dream world in this side's world, and

Yukari tried to keep the dream in the other side's world.

As a result—Mary/Yukari was so worn out that she seemed like she would collapse at any moment.

Unlike me.

What that meant was one thing.

The scenery changed. From the world that was filled with asphalt to a causeway. A river flowed soundlessly beside, and only the moon and the evening did not change. It was a scene I felt like I saw before. The world was uncertain, and only the information from memory mixed with reality and appeared.

Above the soft dirt, Mary and I held hands and continued walking.

“This world is—my and your dream right, Mary?”

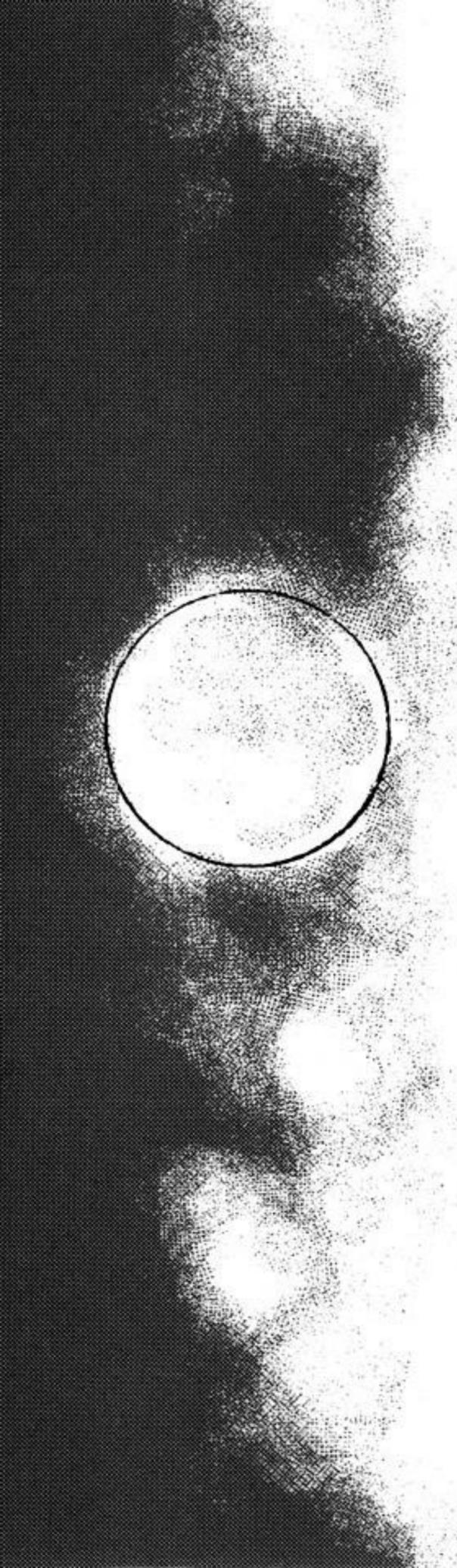
“.....That's right. Not this side or that side, the dream we who are asleep in reality are having.”

“Hmm— I see.”

In the end, that was what it came to.

A dream of wanting to not lose something. A sleep she wanted to keep. Actions and feelings that were clearly contradictory. Someone said that continuing to sleep was the same as death. Someone smiled and said there





was no dream that didn't end. A paradise with a time limit. The irrationality of accepting a paradise, but not accepting the death of the paradise. There was no rationality there. What was there was, probably, fear. Because unlike me, who didn't know anything, she knew. Once she thought of the possible loss, she should have become scared.

Wasn't that right?

Because that a dream will end, that one will wake up from a dream—wasn't guaranteed.

“—Miss, will you get on?”

Below the bank, someone called from above the river. We didn't stop. When we turned our heads, there was a single boat that ran parallel to the river. There was a woman holding a scythe and a woman holding the Rod of Remorse. The boat was small, but it seemed like the two of us could get on.

The one who called out to us was the one holding the scythe, which she was using as an oar.

“We're out of business, so—if you're coming to this side, we could give you a ride.”

“I'm sorry, I'll pass.” I lowered my head honestly. “Besides, no one has six sen anymore.”<sup>31</sup>

“It's all right, it's all right, it's fine, it's fine; if you get on right now, this will pay for everything— Kyan!”

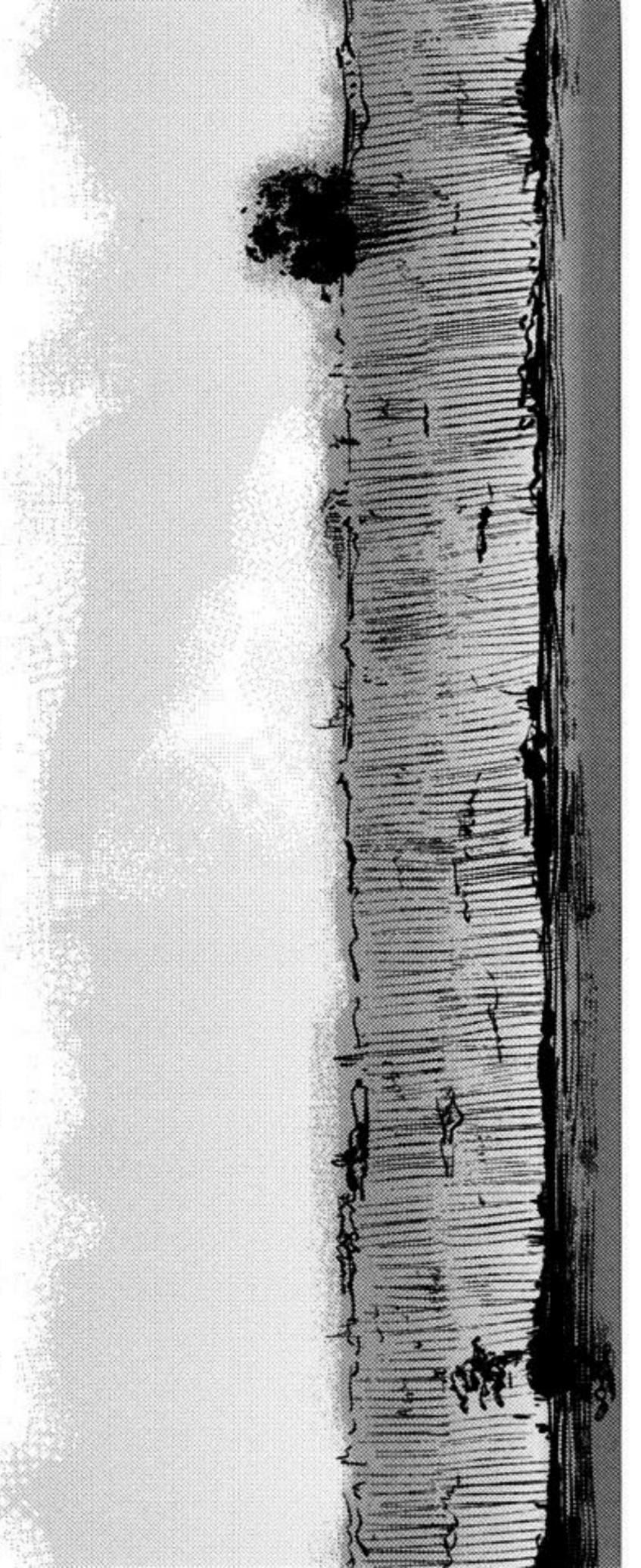
Ah, she was hit.

The woman who had been sitting stood up angrily, reached up, and hit the other one's head with the rod in her hand.

“Shame on you. Be aware of your crime. Don't make suspicious sales. Anyway, what did you mean by calling me 'this'?”

She continued to hit her while lecturing, and each time, the woman cried out. It seemed somewhat fun.

“You lack a little too much professionalism. Inviting humans who aren't supposed to cross is what devils do.”



“Um.....but.....”

The woman who had become teary eyed looked at us.

No, she looked at Mary.

The woman who was hitting her stopped too, and looked at Mary. Perhaps because she knew her, Mary smiled at her instead of greeting her, but the woman's expression became stern.

“You aren't coming—Yakumo Yukari?”

“I'm—Maribel Han.”

“——”

The woman looked down once and

“Is that so? Then, have a good journey.”

She said that easily and sat in the boat. The other one became flustered, and she hit her and murmured, “We're going Komachi.” She didn't try to look this way anymore. The woman who was called Komachi lastly waved her hand to us, and moved her scythe after that and changed the direction of the boat.

The river had become wide like an ocean before I knew it, and—aiming at its end, they disappeared. The small boat quickly became unable to be seen, and without even being able to hear the sound of waves,

there were the two of us again.

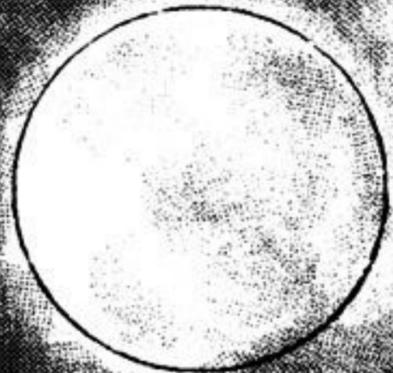
“.....”

“.....”

We looked at each other, and in the end, not saying anything, we walked. Intertwining our fingers a little more than before, and gripping tighter.

Holding hands, Mary and I continued to walk.

The last road.



While I trudged, I was in fact making my resolve.

To, at least in the end, settle things by myself.

Because there was one more thing left that I had to say.

“.....I don't want to be roundabout after coming to this point, so I'll just say it, Mary.”

Stopping my feet, I turned to the side.

I didn't let go of her hand.

No one was in the world that was dyed red. I looked at Mary, and Mary was looking at me. No one was here. No one was watching.

Reserve and regret weren't needed.

—Being honest in at least the end.

While remembering her words, I spoke.

“Why did you do something this stupid?”

“Something stupid—? What are you talking about?”

Mary smiled as she played dumb. I became angry at that action. I couldn't keep calm. Even though I didn't have the right to be angry, and Mary had the right to get angry and cry—she didn't try to do that, and accepted it silently.

That was why I got angry.

“What's stupid's stupid! Are you stupid? Are you!?”

“If you keep on saying stupid, you'll become stupid yourself.”

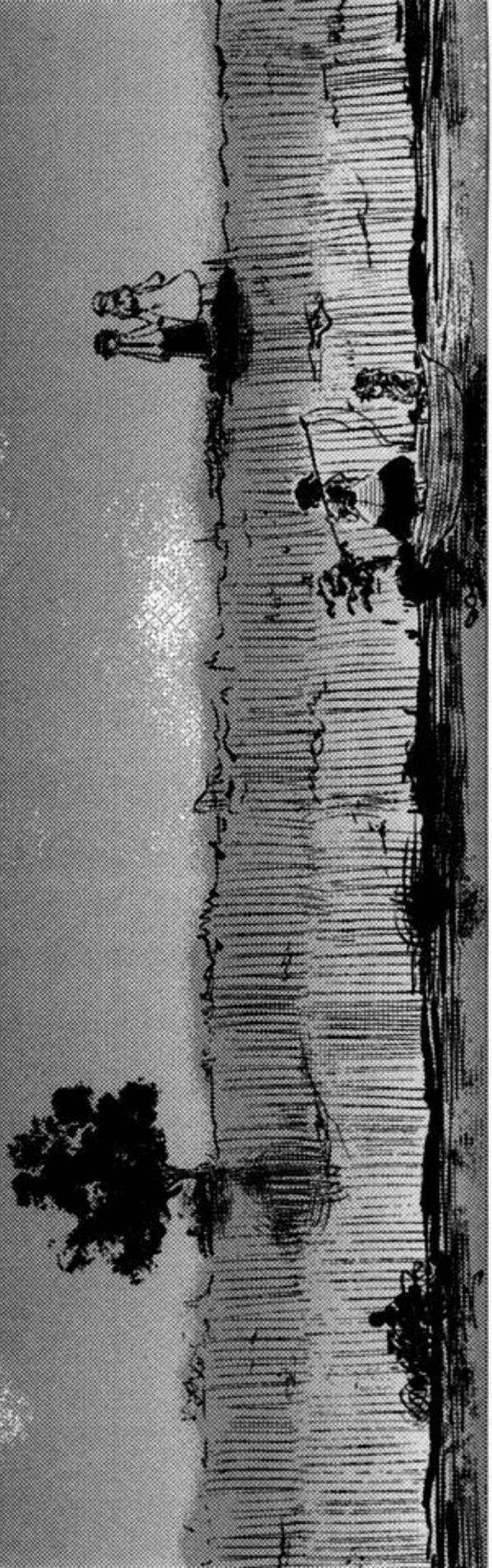
“Oh, I don't care, it's fine if I get your stupidity! .....If you'll survive by that, I don't care how much of it I get.”

“.....”

Mary became silent and didn't deny it. The part of my heart that had wished that shattered.

As I thought.

Mary would disappear. It was clear; there was no way to deny it. That



was the reason the shinigami only tried to invite Mary.

I would live, and Mary would die.

Because she used so much of her strength that she couldn't keep her form even in the dream.

To keep the dream.

“Who I wanted to spend the end with; I wanted to spend the end with you, Renko. As long as possible. ....Is that not okay?”

“That's not an answer.”

That wasn't an answer or a reason. Even if it was her true feeling, it wasn't everything.

Why did Yakumo Yukari try to hold Gensokyo for as long as she could? Why did she try to prolong the dream as long as possible?

It was simple.

It was because there was a reason she had to do that.

I said the answer. I couldn't be a coward. That was the one thing I had to say myself.

“So I.....wouldn't die. Isn't that right, Mary?”

In response to my words,

“.....Yeah.”

Looking like she was about to cry, she nodded.

Worn out, Mary was about to break and fall apart.

If this was a dream, if it was time to wake up, it should be strange if I and Mary, the two of us, didn't wake up.

But—only I was safe, and Mary was disappearing even in the dream.

There was only one reason for that.

Mary was going to die for me.

“The dream is ending. I'm about to wake up. But, whether that's awakening or death—we who are in the dream can't tell.”

The end of a dream was awakening or death.

That was why Mary tried to prolong the dream. To increase my chance of reviving as much as possible. Or, being scared of letting me die, to delay the result. In exchange, Mary used her strength and wore her existence down. In the first place, she might have been overdoing it at the point she made the dream.

The power of the Mary from this side was the ability to see gaps, but—the real Mary might have been able to manipulate them. Using that, she probably tampered with the boundary between dream and reality.

Dream and reality were completely different things. If one died here, one would also die there.

Maribel Han would,  
in order to let Usami Renko live—disappear.

That was the truth, and it was a fact. A fact nothing could be done about. Either I would die, or Mary would die. Those were the only ends that had been prepared. I refused to understand, I pretended not to know, because I didn't want to accept that.

I couldn't criticize her.

I wanted to criticize her. I wanted to shout and ask why she did that. I couldn't do that because I knew almost painfully why she did that. Because if I were her, I probably would have done the same thing.

The reason was—

“Because the Hifuu club is.....one by two.”

At my words, Mary smiled.

Seeming sad, and

seeming happy,  
it was a smile that seemed like it would melt and disappear.  
“I'm sorry Renko. This is just my egoism— I knew that you would be pained by that. But,”

—I didn't want you to die.

Looking like she was going to cry, but unable to cry, Mary said that.

The one who was crying was me.

“Why are you apologizing!? I'm the one who has to apologize!”

There was no way of stopping it. I wiped the tears that fell from my eyes. Even though I wiped them, the drops kept falling one after the other.

I was sad.

I was sad that Mary was going to disappear.

I was sad that I couldn't stop it.

The world was ending.

The dream was ending.

Mary would disappear.

“Why!? Tell me why!”

Even I didn't know what I was shouting for. Why was this the only ending? Why was Mary looking at me with such a peaceful expression even though she was disappearing?

“Why? —Isn't it obvious, Renko?”

A crack appeared on Mary's face. A fissure appeared. A hole opened. Beyond that, there wasn't anything anymore.

There was nothing.

Everything other than us was disappearing. It was being dyed white from the edge of the world. The melted world melted in the white and started disappearing. Everything was being lost.

The dream was ending.

In the disappearing world, Mary took a step toward me. There was no distance between us anymore. She couldn't come any closer.

Still smiling at me as I cried

“It's because I love you.”

drawing her body near me a little

Mary kissed me lightly.

—Crack.

I was probably hearing things. Because I couldn't hear sound anymore. Sound was gone. Leaving only the feeling of her lips, all too quickly, Mary's form—broke apart this time. The small, small pieces were swallowed up by the white and disappeared.

Nothing was left.

I was the only one in the white world, and even my consciousness of 'myself' was being swallowed up.

I knew that feeling.

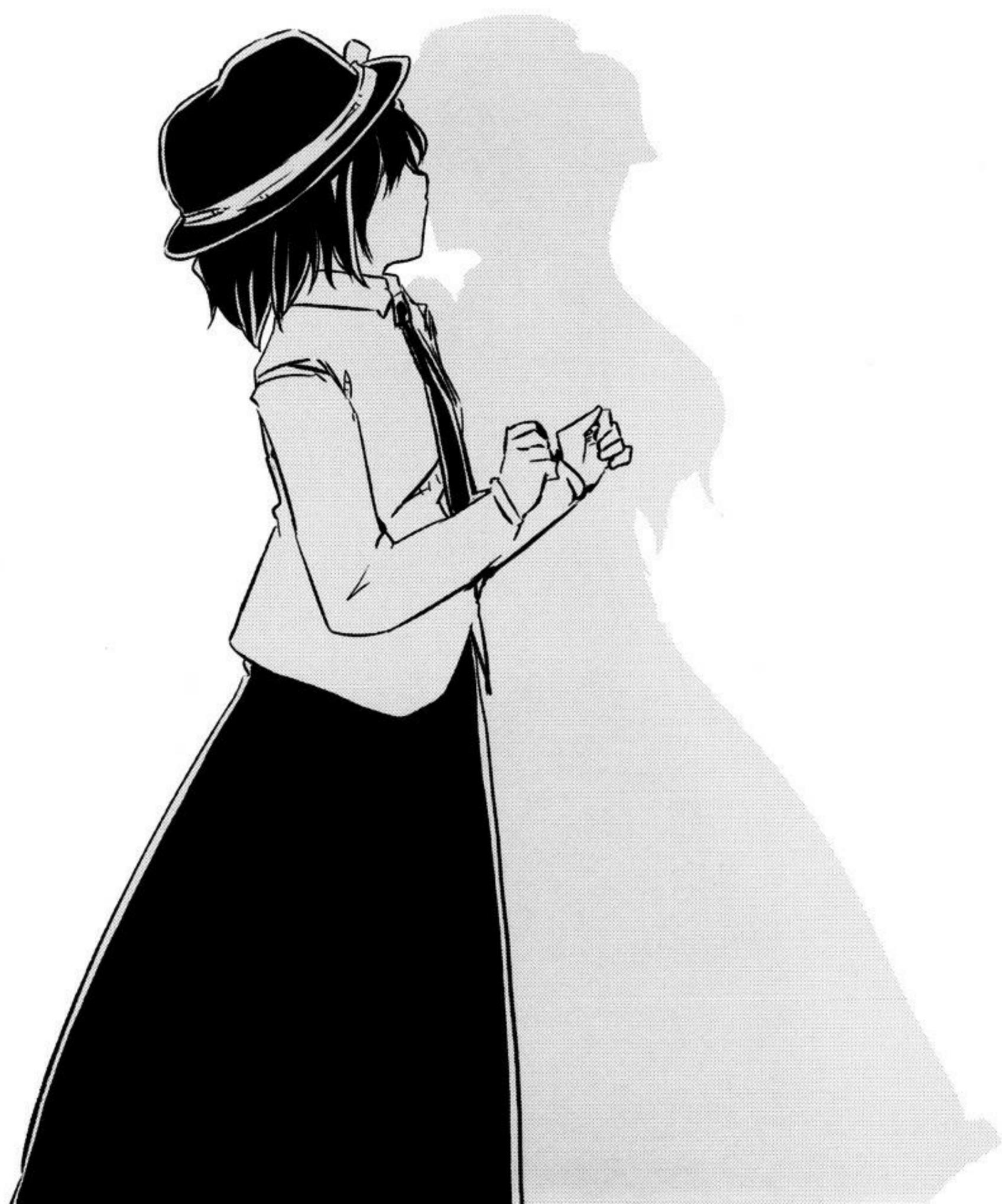
That feeling before I woke up.

In the end, I, I, who had lost even my being conscious of thinking, with a soundless voice,

said the words of the end.

“Goodbye— Mary.”





.....

.....

yumeutsutsu

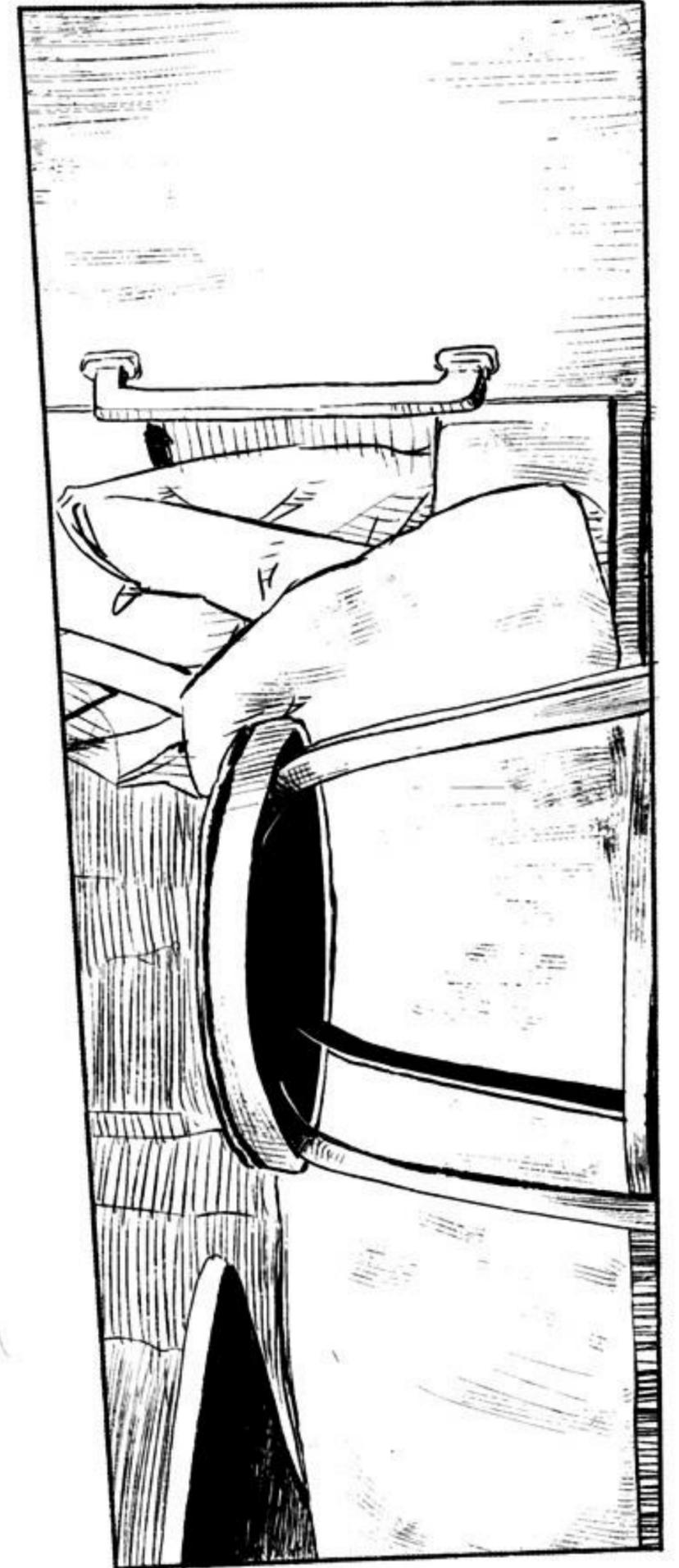
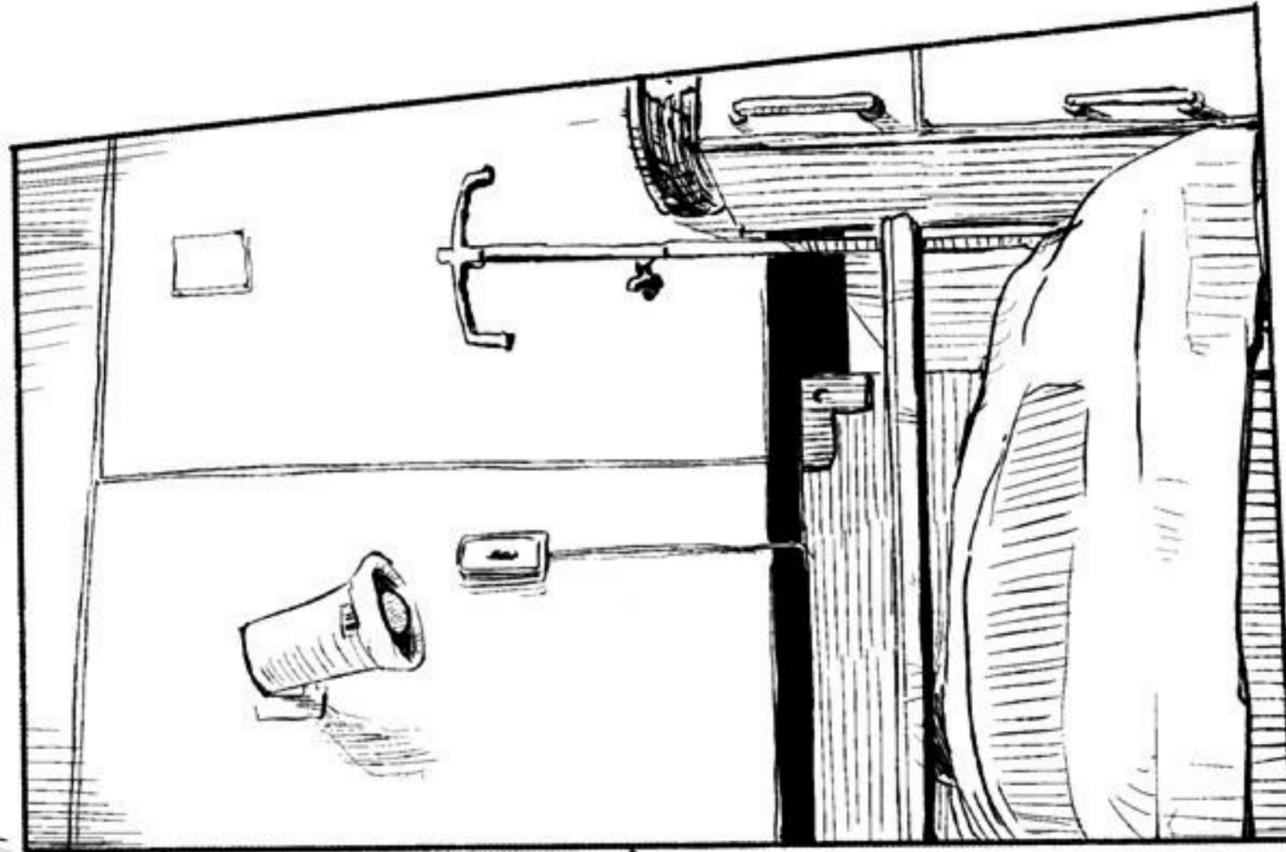
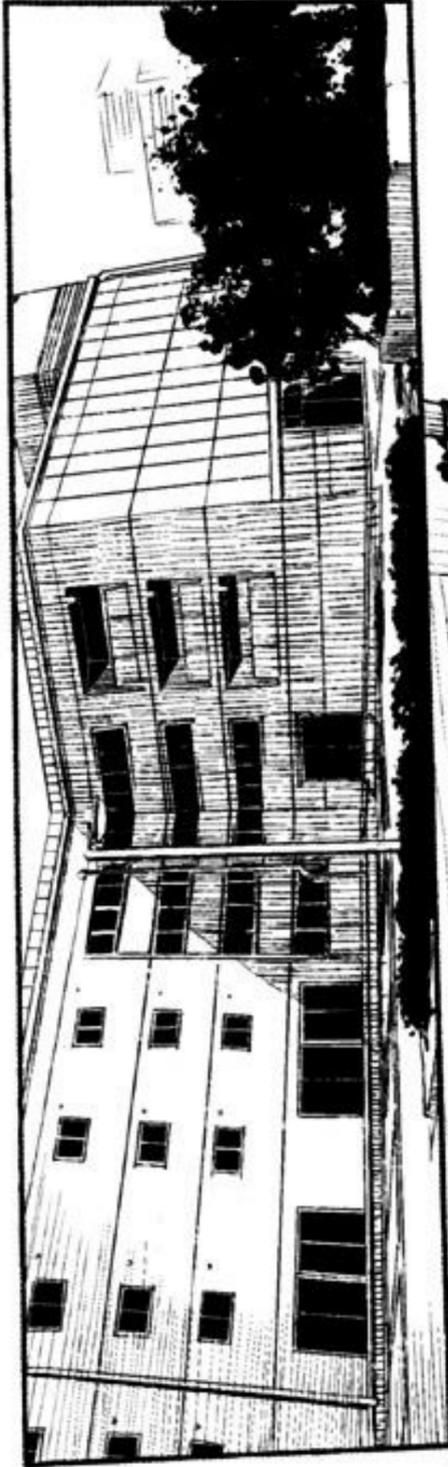
ゆめうつつ【夢現 ・ 夢うつつ】

1. half asleep and half awake; trance  
夢現でテレビを見ていた。  
I was watching TV half sleeping.
2. dream and reality

## **Final Chapter**

### **Dream**

I was having a dream.



And I—woke up from the dream.

“.....”

The first thing I sensed was light. The light was bright and made me want to close my eyes again. My body was languid, my mind was hazy, and I wanted to go to sleep again. If I slept again, it would probably feel good— I heard a devil's temptation like that near my ear.

Cutting all of that, I raised my body.

—White.

It was a pure white world that was contrastive to the scene I saw once. It wasn't that nothing was there. The linoleum floor was white, the walls and the ceiling were white, but it was a little dirty to call it perfectly white. The color of the blanket and the bed was also white. The color of the curtains was beige, my clothes, which had been put on a hanger, were also white, and only my tie was distinctly a deep red.

On top of a bed in some hospital room, I was lying down.

—It was the same as the scene I saw in a dream in the dream.

I still felt somewhat like I was dreaming. While my mind was still unclear, my gaze moved slowly. The scent of medicine. A gentle wind came in from the window that was slightly open. The curtain fluttered, and its shadow undulated.

A sweet scent.

The faint lingering scent dissolved in the wind and disappeared.

“\_\_\_\_\_”

My gaze continued to move. Greedily, seeking something that

wasn't here. Unable to recognize that which couldn't be there, it continued to search. It found a trace. A chair with no one on it at the side of the bed. A depression in the blanket and warmth as if the one who sat in the chair had put her upper body on it. All of them were hollow, and disappeared as I saw them. The traces that she had been there were disappearing.

No one was here.

No one was here.

Other than me, no one was here.

In the white room, there was no one other than me, no voice, no smell, no presence and only I—alone, was here.

“.....Mary?”

I called out.

I called her name.

“Mary! Mary! —Maribel Han!”

I usually didn't call her by her full name. It was very long and hard to say. My tongue almost got tied. Perhaps because I had been sleeping for so long—or did that dream only last for a moment? That dream that was like an eternity, did it take the time it took for a butterfly to flap its wings? Perhaps because of nervousness, my throat was dry. Just calling her name hurt terribly.

But still, I couldn't not call it.

“Mary..... Mary!”

I knew.

This time I knew. I didn't plan on saying that I didn't know. It was different from that time. Unlike that time Mary disappeared in front of my eyes, I understood everything. That

Mary wasn't here, that she wasn't anywhere.

That Maribel Han had disappeared.

For my sake—she vanished.

Protecting Usami Renko's dream, to wait for the time she woke up.

“U..... Uuuuu.....”

There was no way I could bear it. I cried again. Spots appeared one after the other on the white sheet.

Mary's death wasn't in vain—I hated myself for thinking that. What she did wasn't in vain. As Mary wished, even though the dream ended, I didn't die, and I was able to wake up like this.

—So what?

Whether it was or wasn't in vain didn't matter.

Because as Mary wished for me to live—I wished for Mary to live.

One died, and  
one remained.

That was all it was.

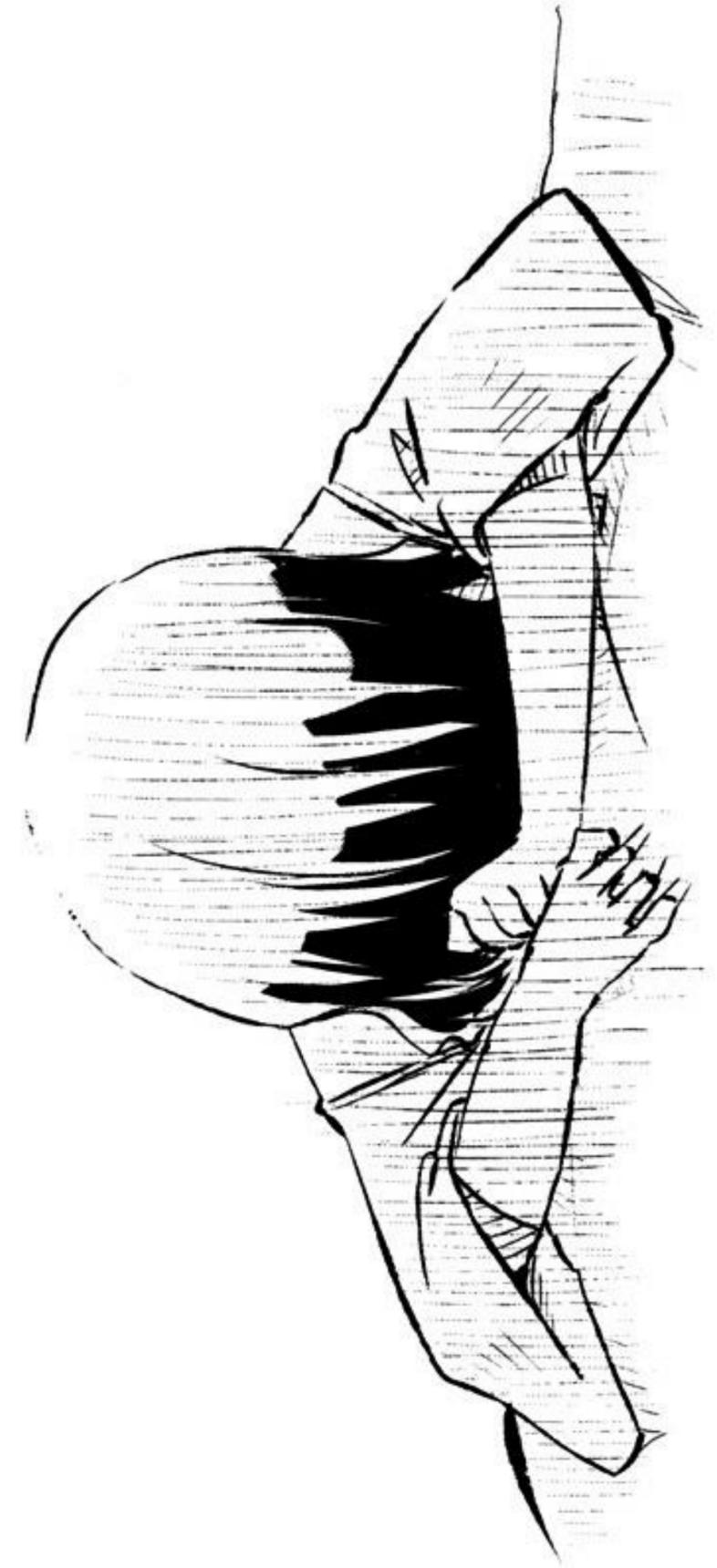
“Uuuu..... Uaa, aaaaaah!”

Gone.

Gone.

Mary was gone.

A large hole opened in my heart. A feeling of loss that couldn't be filled with anything. As if half of my body had been forcefully taken away from me. My heart cried out by the pain. Falling back, I buried my face in the pillow and cried. My face was probably wet with tears.



I didn't care. Because the one to see that wasn't here anymore.

Gone.

Gone.

Mary wasn't anywhere.

Everything ended. The story finished, and the dream ended. There was no story that didn't finish, and no dream that didn't end. Gensokyo ended, Mary disappeared, the reality of the dream disappeared, and in the reality of reality, I woke up and was crying by myself. Not a happy end or a bad end, it was just an end.

—I woke up from the dream.

To put it in words, that was all. The long, fun, happy dream ended, and I returned to reality. It might have been that my best friend had been a dream from the beginning.

The only one who remembered was me.

In the world, only I remembered. I who had the dream. That there had been a world called Gensokyo. That there had been a girl called Maribel Han. I probably would never forget that which was burned vividly deep in my heart. Along with the pain of loss, it probably wouldn't disappear.

They would continue to live.

Inside my heart.

But still, just now—just by myself, I who knew that which had been lost, wanted to grieve over the loss and cry. I wanted to mourn for the one who wasn't anywhere in the world. The tears would stop one day. Even though the pain wouldn't disappear, it would probably lessen. That was why just for now—I cried loudly.

Because Maribel Han had been my important best friend.

As I had been to her.

—Goodbye Mary. Thank you. And,

To the Mary who wasn't anywhere anymore, who only remained in me now, I gently spoke. Putting in everything, I released my feelings.

I loved you with all my heart.

END

Hifuu Club

秘封倶楽部

PoleStar  
PoleStar

宇佐見 蓮子

Usami Renko

Hifuu Club

秘封倶楽部

VerlorenesKind  
LostChild

マエリベリー・ハーン

Maribel Han

Shrine Maiden of Paradise

楽園の巫女

Traum  
Dream

博麗 霊夢

Hakurei Reimu

Youkai of Boundaries

境界の妖怪

Schwelle  
Threshold

八雲 紫

Yakumo Yukari

Kourindou's Owner  
香霖堂店主

Deus ex machina  
Deus ex machina

森近 霖之助  
Morichika Rinnosuke

Half Human Half Ghost Gardener  
半人半霊の庭師

Zögern  
Hesitate

魂魄 妖夢  
Konpaku Youmu

Ice Fairy of Ice Surface  
氷上の氷精

Transparence  
Transparence

チルノ  
Cimo

Youkai Who Lurks in Darkness  
暗闇に潜む妖怪

Unbekannt  
Unknown

ルーミア  
Rumia

Highest Judge of Hell  
地獄の最高裁判長

AndereSeite  
OtherSide

四季映姫・ヤマザナドゥ  
Shikieiki Yamazanadu

Pilot of the Sanzu  
三途の水先案内人

Vergessen  
Forget

小野塚 小町  
Onozuka Komachi

Little Night Parade of a Hundred Demons

小さな百鬼夜行

Fest  
Fixed

伊吹 萃香  
Ibuki Suika

Fantasy Journalist of Tradition  
伝統の幻想ブン屋

Aufzeichnung  
Recording

射命丸 文  
Shanemaru Aya

Flower Master of the Four Seasons  
四季のフラワーマスター

Weltbaum  
World-tree

風見 幽香  
Kazami Yuuka

Those from the Scarlet Devil Mansion  
紅魔館のモノたち

Zeitgehöft  
Timestead

Those from Hakuyokurou  
白玉楼のモノたち

Schneepart  
Snowpart

Those from Eientei  
永遠亭のモノたち

Mohn und Gedächtnis  
Poppy and Memory

Those Who Live in Gensokyo  
幻想郷に住まうモノたち

Die Niemandrose  
The No-One's-Rose

Thee/You/Someone  
君/貴方/誰か

Sprachgittere  
Speechwicket

Ordinary Magician  
普通の魔法使い

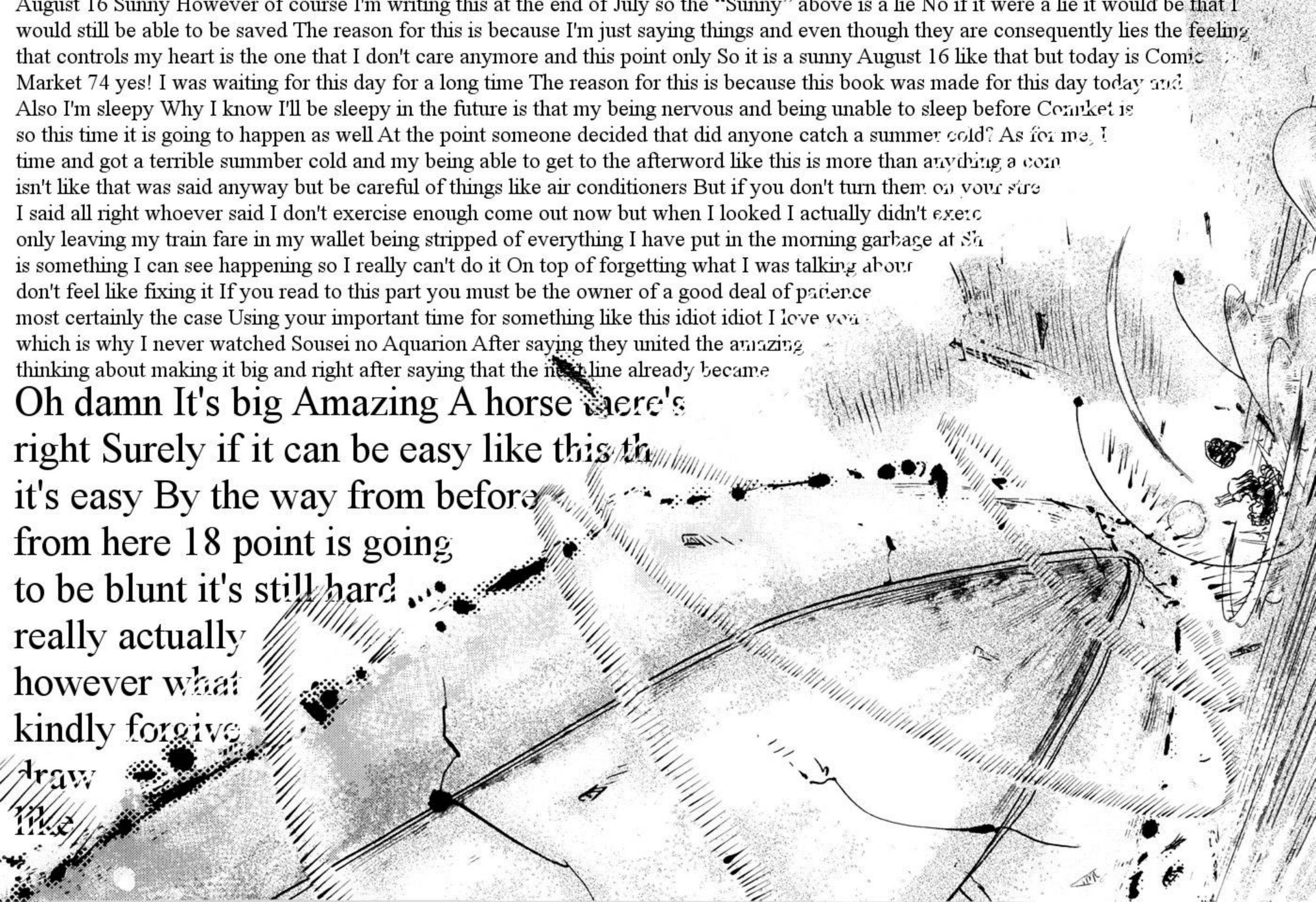
From Threshold to Threshold  
Von Schwelle zu Schwelle

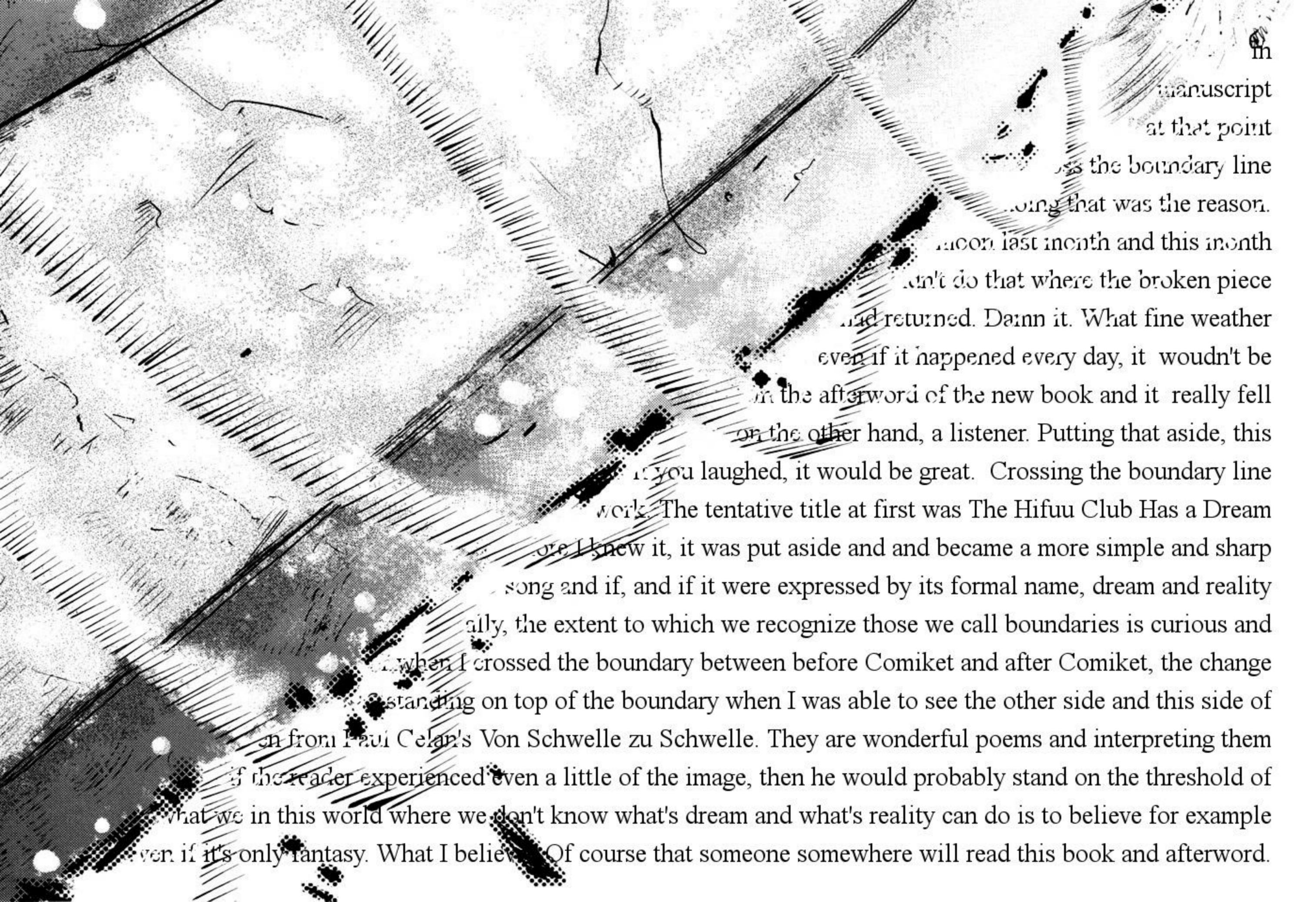
霧雨魔理沙  
Kirisame Marisa

August 16 Sunny However of course I'm writing this at the end of July so the "Sunny" above is a lie No if it were a lie it would be that I would still be able to be saved The reason for this is because I'm just saying things and even though they are consequently lies the feeling that controls my heart is the one that I don't care anymore and this point only So it is a sunny August 16 like that but today is Comic Market 74 yes! I was waiting for this day for a long time The reason for this is because this book was made for this day today and Also I'm sleepy Why I know I'll be sleepy in the future is that my being nervous and being unable to sleep before Comiket is so this time it is going to happen as well At the point someone decided that did anyone catch a summer cold? As for me, I time and got a terrible summer cold and my being able to get to the afterword like this is more than anything a com isn't like that was said anyway but be careful of things like air conditioners But if you don't turn them on your sure I said all right whoever said I don't exercise enough come out now but when I looked I actually didn't exercise only leaving my train fare in my wallet being stripped of everything I have put in the morning garbage at Sta is something I can see happening so I really can't do it On top of forgetting what I was talking about don't feel like fixing it If you read to this part you must be the owner of a good deal of patience most certainly the case Using your important time for something like this idiot idiot I love you which is why I never watched Sousei no Aquarion After saying they united the amazing thinking about making it big and right after saying that the next line already became

Oh damn It's big Amazing A horse there's right Surely if it can be easy like this then it's easy By the way from before from here 18 point is going to be blunt it's still hard really actually however what kindly forgive

draw like





In

manuscript

at that point

the boundary line

being that was the reason.

moon last month and this month

don't do that where the broken piece

and returned. Damn it. What fine weather

even if it happened every day, it wouldn't be

in the afterword of the new book and it really fell

on the other hand, a listener. Putting that aside, this

if you laughed, it would be great. Crossing the boundary line

work. The tentative title at first was The Hifuu Club Has a Dream

before I knew it, it was put aside and and became a more simple and sharp

song and if, and if it were expressed by its formal name, dream and reality

ally, the extent to which we recognize those we call boundaries is curious and

when I crossed the boundary between before Comiket and after Comiket, the change

standing on top of the boundary when I was able to see the other side and this side of

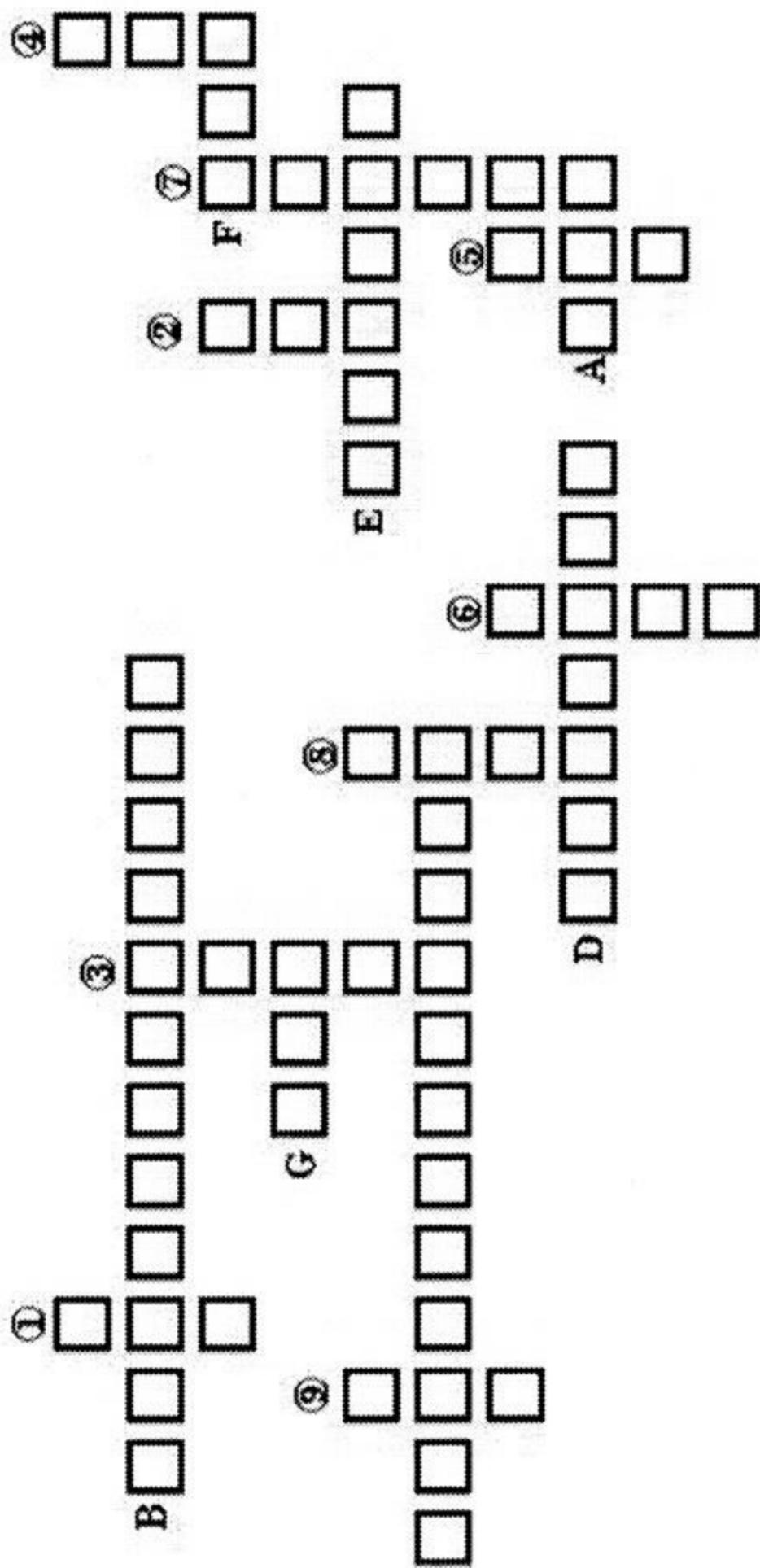
en from Paul Celan's Von Schwelle zu Schwelle. They are wonderful poems and interpreting them

if the reader experienced even a little of the image, then he would probably stand on the threshold of

what we in this world where we don't know what's dream and what's reality can do is to believe for example

even if it's only fantasy. What I believe. Of course that someone somewhere will read this book and afterword.

# Afterword “Yumeutsutsu” Distribution Commemoration Crossword Quiz



- Vertical
  - ① The character treated worst in the first draft, later revised. (Name • 3 Characters)
  - ② Utage ni Itaru. The one who appeared with Suika in the last part. (Name • 3 Characters)
  - ③ The reading of this work's title. (5 Characters)
  - ④ The character who was written with the most care. (Name • 3 Characters)
  - ⑤ The character most popular with the proofreading group. (Name • 3 Characters)
  - ⑥ What kind of heroine is Marisa here? (SF Mangaka • 4 Characters)
  - ⑦ The meal repeatedly eaten during the writing of the manuscript. Boiled. (Food • 5 Characters)
  - ⑧ The combined author name that was come up with and discarded when it was time to apply for Comiket. (4 Characters)
  - ⑨ This work was distributed on the □□□ day of C74. (3 Characters)
- Horizontal
  - A The only character whose lack of appearance was decided at the time of the first draft. (Name • 3 Characters)
  - B What was the first idea of the tentative title that followed the naming of the author's Hifuu club works? (12 Characters)
  - C The YukaRei book Iyokan. distributed. (12 Characters)
  - D What was the theme at first? (7 Characters)
  - E The character whose appearance was decided at the very end. (Name • 3 Characters)
  - F The only character whose death scene was shortened after the first draft. (Name • 3 Characters)
  - G In this, Reimu waves her tamagushi with □□□ hand. (Name • 3 Characters)

## ■ Tips

- All answers are in hiragana or katakana, not kanji.
- Among those who successfully answer all the problems, one will be selected at random and be presented with a special handwritten book (Limit 1 copy)
- Answers to address below. The deadline is 08/8/18.  
Allenemy@hotmail.co.jp (Shimensoka • Hitohira)

## ✠ Publication Notes ✠

Touhou project fanbook "Yumeutsutsu"  
Publishing: Iyokan. Shimensoka  
Publishers: Hota. / Hitohira  
Date of Publication: 2008 8/16 Comic Market 74  
Printing: Power Print

Translation/Editing: kam yu  
Raw: Lunar972  
Editing Help: Nameless Fairy

Original Work: Team Shanghai Alice

All Passages Used Came from the Following Work:  
"Von Schwelle zu Schwelle"  
(Paul Celan. English: Adrian Del Caro, David Young)

...END

...Really?

...END?

...Is it really—over?  
...Is this the end?

.....Am I going to give up?

.....Losing Mary.  
.....Forgetting Mary.

That fantasy world.  
My only partner.

.....All alone.  
.....All by myself.

.....Giving up  
.....Forgetting, will I go on living?

...Is that—okay?

CONTINUE?

YES

or

NO?

“No it's—not!”

Forcefully—I got up like I was going to send the blanket flying. I grabbed the pillow that was soaked with my tears and threw it against the wall. The pillow that flew linearly hit the wall and fell on the ground.

It didn't have any meaning, but I felt better.

I wiped my tears with the sleeve of the hospital clothes. My throat was dry, my eyes hurt from crying too much, my heart hurt too, and I felt dizzy from getting up so suddenly. I might have been anemic, I might not have been healthy enough to get up, but I forced my body to stand up.

It hurt, it was rough, and I was sad.

But, more than that

“I won't accept an ending like this!”

I was angry.

At what? At everything! That was right, that was as always. Anger gave birth to explosive energy. Enough power to stop crying and start acting. The amount of energy needed to muster up courage. It was enough. I threw the hospital clothes on top of the bed and changed into my own clothes.

I was angry.

“There's no way this is okay! The heroine of a tragedy became fantasy a long time ago!”

There was no way I could accept it. The world was a dream, Gensokyo ended, the dream ended, Mary disappeared! Oh is that so that's amazing that's sad— Who would agree with that? I'd throw both happy and bad ends in the trash. It's a retake. A

redo.

It would end here?

The story would end?

The dream would end?

Who—decided that?

“At least, I haven't decided! I won't accept that this is the end!”

I put my arm through my shirt. I tied my tie tightly. As I did that, the power that had been born in my heart burned more and more.

That was a dream. Then, this might be a dream too. I right now might be part of a dream someone was having, a dream someone wanted, and that person might have thought, 'This is okay for the end.' The time to wake was nearing, there weren't that many pages left in the book, and they might have run out of hope. A tearjerking tragic story. The person who was dreaming might have wished for that.

I wouldn't accept that.

I at least wouldn't accept this conclusion. This couldn't be the end. A conclusion someone else gave. Even if that was Mary's, I would never accept it. No matter what reasoning was given, no matter how much a tearjerking tragedy was sought, I would stubbornly refuse. If I would just accept the answer given to me—I wouldn't have been in the Hifuu club in the first place!

Mary was gone.

That was enough for a reason.

I couldn't say that I was the Hifuu club by myself.

It was no good with one.

It was no good with only one.

Because the Hifuu club was the Hifuu club by two!

“If that was a dream—”

If the paradise like days were dreams, if the time I spent with Mary was a dream, if the world called Gensokyo was a dream

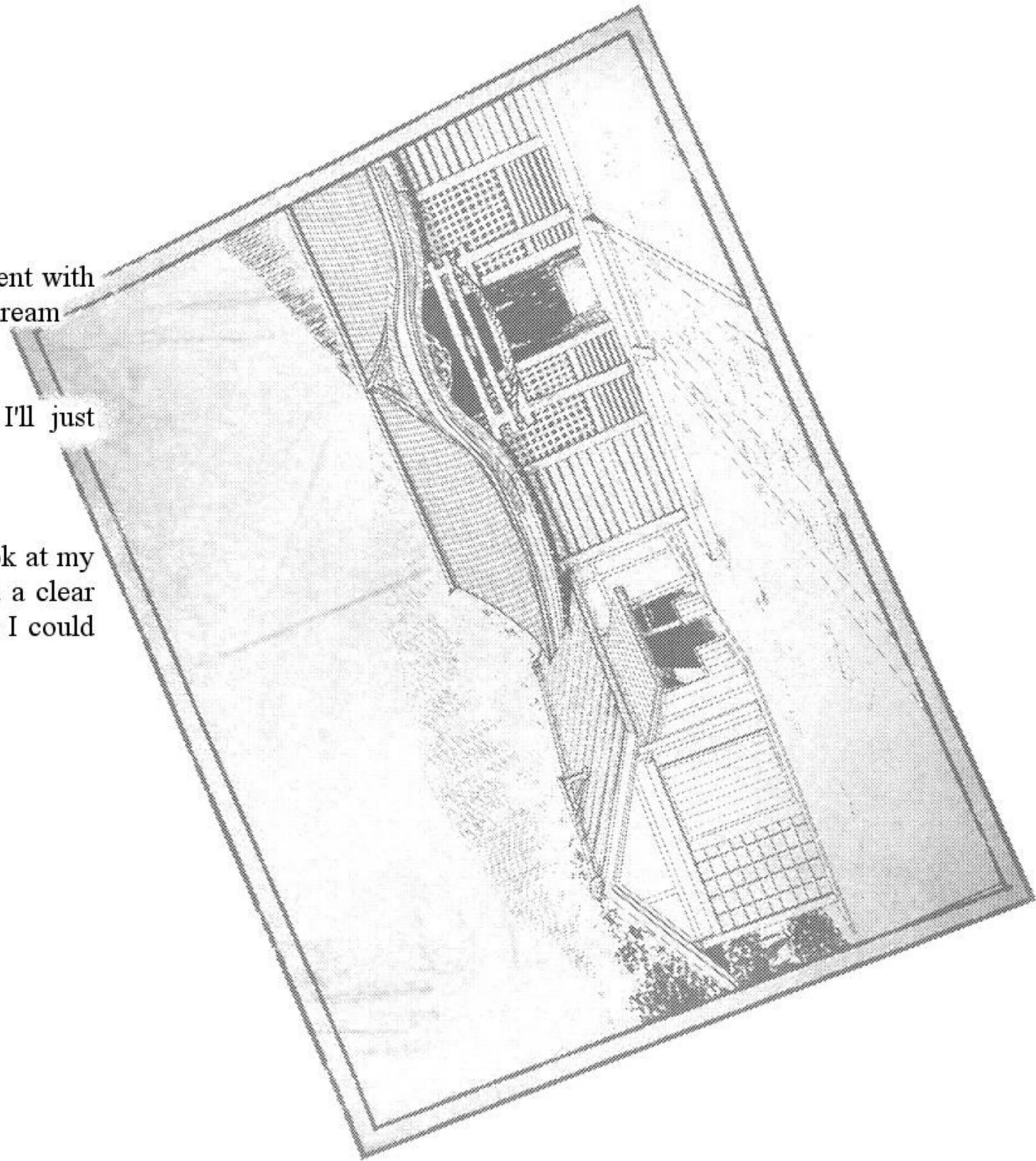
Facing someone—perhaps myself—I yelled.

“Dreams are what become reality. With my hand, I'll just change the dream world into reality!”

Lastly, I put on my hat.

Sticking my feet into my leather shoes, I took the book at my bedside and ran out of the hospital. It wasn't like I had a clear destination or a way to do it. There was only one thing I could say clearly.

This still wasn't the end.



†

Several hours later.

After running from the hospital like in a Hollywood great escape movie (exaggeration included), I climbed up the mountain path. It was hard for a convalescent, but it wasn't a steep mountain and I climbed it several times before, so it wasn't impossible.

It was country with a capital 'c.' There was only the mountain, river, forest, trees, and the dirt road. It was full of natural things that were rare now, and if one didn't ride a bus for several hours, one couldn't arrive at a place like this.

Opening the book in my hand, I took out the photo inside. On the back were a map and an address, and they matched the information I was able to obtain from looking at the sky. The front had a picture, of course, and there weren't any people. It was a picture of scenery.

A picture of a shrine.

It was the mountain I tried to climb with Mary that day, in that dream night. The shrine I tried to take her to. Or was that not a dream, but something that happened in reality? The boundary was unclear. When I thought Mary had the same kind of feeling when she wandered there, I smiled. It meant that like Mary, I was coming and going between dream and reality.

The world was already night. There weren't any street lights, so I climbed the mountain with only the light from a penlight and the path in my memory to rely on. Only the moon shined on me and where I was going like a spotlight.

In the depths of the forest, I aimed for the shrine at its end.

—The Hifuu club's time, right?

I remembered that innocent conversation we had. Pain ran through my heart. It wasn't unbearable. In fact, it was necessary. That pain made me conscious of the fact that I wasn't whole.

I climbed—the mountain path.

Heading for the shrine.

If it was possible, I didn't want to go. I thought about going because Mary was with me. That there was a hole in the border in the picture was half an excuse. I dodged Mary's question that time, but as for where I got this picture, it wasn't that I got it, but that it was mine from the start.

An old picture of a shrine.

No one was there now; it was a shrine without a shrine maiden or a god. That wasn't surprising. Following the relocation of the capital, the shrine was abandoned— The main branch was far away, and this shrine was forgotten by everyone already.

The only one who remembered it was probably me.

I was born and raised there, so there was no way I could forget. No, I might have forgotten. The way I forgot that it was a dream, that might have been missing from my memory— Because if this girl noticed something, she would notice the contradiction.

But that time, I took Mary because I wanted her to see not only my home, but there too. Because I wanted her to know everything about me.

“.....I didn't feel like going by myself. I couldn't see

boundaries, so I didn't have good memories.”

I couldn't see them. The border or the hole in it. That was why I couldn't be the successor, and—became a normal college student in Kyoto. That was when I met Mary, and that was why I called her eyes 'strange eyes.' Because that was what I couldn't gain.

—Oh yeah, that's right. I had a dream like this yesterday.

Sting. As I remembered again, the wound got bigger. What I remembered were everyday conversations, and that was why I noticed how important it was after I lost it. Blood that couldn't be seen ran from the wound in my heart and moved my legs.

Because it was important, I would take it back. No matter what I had to do. No matter how many years it took.

I walked so long my legs felt like wood, and—finally reached the summit. The forest cleared, and beyond the tilted torii, there was a flat, open space. Taking in the light of the moon and the stars, the shrine appeared in front of me.

“.....A mark of a dream, huh?”

It was hard to say that it was the same scene as the picture. It was different from that of my memory too. The one from my dream—was different too.

It was an old, deteriorated ruin. Just by humans not living in them, buildings got old quickly. A shrine without a god was probably as good as dead.

A shrine without a god.

A ruin of a dream.

The lost shrine that once existed at the boundary.

At that place that was called the Hakurei shrine, I stood.

“—Now,”

I motivated myself. I went through the open door and went to the depths of the shrine. If my memories from when I was little were correct, it should be there. If it was brought to the main branch or had been stolen, I'd have to go back to Kyoto, but—

It seemed God wasn't that mean. Under the broken wood and the dust that had built up so much it could be grabbed, there was buried a small door.

Spreading the dust with my book, throwing away the wood, I opened the door with the broken lock. Inside was a box sealed with strings. It was the box I was told never to touch that was in the place I was told never to enter. Those words have the opposite effect on children, so I remembered being scolded a lot.

Without suppressing the smile that rose to my lips, I took the strings off with one pull and took off the top of the box.

Inside was

a tamagushi, and a red and white shrine maiden outfit.

—Now, I'll start from here first.

To take back what was lost.

The dream ended. The story finished. Mary was lost.

That was correct.

That was why—

Once more, I'd start it.

If it was over, I'd start a new story from here. Things that were born always died. But, they gave birth to new life before they died. The end wasn't connected to the end, but the beginning. Like a circle, the world kept continuing while going around. Because as there was no eternal life, there also was no eternal end.

I didn't care if it was a story someone wanted— Because this was what I wanted.

I didn't care if it was a story no one wanted— Because that was what I wanted.

I didn't know how many years it would take. I might not be able to do it even if I spent my whole life. I was fully aware of that. It wasn't whether I could or couldn't do it, but that I was going to do it. Even if I couldn't do it, the one who'd take my dying wish after I took on the Hakurei name from this moment would probably do it.

The birth of the world that kept lost things; Gensokyo.

This wasn't the end.

This was the beginning.

The beginning of the Hifuu club's story.

And, one day—

“Oh yeah, that's right. I had a dream like this yesterday.”

“.....wait, you're talking about your dream again?”

夢で逢いましょう

Let's meet in  
a dream.

## Notes

- 27 customers: The Japanese word for customer (kyaku) is also the one for guest.
- 28 One sentence: This is in English.
- 29 giving a metal rod to an oni: Expression that means making a strong person stronger.
- 30 I'm a bird: The word Suika used for loser was makeinu (lit. "loser dog").
- 31 six sen: Six "mon sen" was said to be the fare that was required for one to be ferried across the Sanzu river.

## Credits

Translation/Editing: kamyu  
Raw: Lunar972